

Bohemia and Moravia, Protectorate of

Western region of Czechoslovakia, occupied by German troops on March 15, 1939 and declared by Adolf Hitler to be a German "protectorate" (a euphemistic term for a subjugated state) belonging to the Reich. On the eve of the German occupation, 118,310 Jews lived in the region, whose capital was Prague.

Immediately after the occupation, a wave of arrests began, mostly of refugees from Germany, Czech public figures, and Jews. Fascist organizations began harassing Jews: synagogues were burnt down and Jews were rounded up and attacked in the streets. In June Adolf Eichmann arrived in PRAGUE to establish the Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle Fuer Juedische Auswanderung*), to encourage the Jews to leave the country. In fact, 26,629 Jews managed to emigrate, legally or not, before emigration was completely banned in October 1941.

Also in June, a decree was issued barring Jews in the protectorate from almost all economic activity, and much Jewish property was seized. Jewish businesses were "bought" by Germans using force and threats. In all, the Germans seized about a half-billion dollars worth of Jewish property in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

World War II broke out in September 1939; the Jews were immediately subjected to a brutal series of persecutions. Jews were fired from their jobs; they were denied certain ration items, such as sugar, tobacco, and clothing; and their freedom of movement was restricted. Many prominent Jews were taken hostage and sent to concentration camps. In October, the first deportation took place: 3,000 Jewish men were exiled to the Lublin area (see also Nisko and Lublin plan). Some managed to return home with reports of the atrocities being committed there. By November, Jewish children had been expelled from their schools and Jewish use of telephones and public transportation had been restricted. The Jews were forced to provide their own education, relief for the elderly and ill, and welfare programs. Paramount was language and job training so Jews could leave for other countries.

A *Judenrat*-like organization called the Jewish Religious Congregation of Prague (JRC) was soon established. Gradually, the JRC turned into the obedient puppet of the German authorities, charged with responsibilities such as seizing Jewish assets, assigning Jews to do force labor, and aiding deportees. In September 1941 the JRC was ordered to take a census of the Jewish population of the protectorate. They came up with 88,105 people, who were then forced to wear the Jewish badge and live totally separate from the rest of the population (see also badge, Jewish).

Reinhard Heydrich was appointed acting governor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1942. He immediately began to persecute the Jews in the protectorate. He decided to move all the Jews to Theresienstadt, in the hope that many of them would die there; the remaining Jews would then be deported to the east. However, first Heydrich sent five transports of Jews from Prague to Lodz and one transport from Brno to Minsk and Riga. Most of these Jews were ultimately murdered.

From November 1941 to March 1945, more than 73,000 Jews from the protectorate were sent to Theresienstadt. Between 1942 and 1944 approximately 60,000 of them were sent on to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Only 3,277 survived the war.

Czechoslovakia was liberated on May 5, 1945. At that time, only 2,803 Jews were left in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Of the 92,199 Jews living there before the deportations began, 78,154 died during the Holocaust and 14,045 survived.

Throughout the war, the Nazis collected many Jewish religious and cultural articles from communities in the protectorate. They intended to display them in a planned "Central Museum of the Extinguished Jewish Race." Instead, their pillage turned into the most valuable Judaica collection in Europe, now exhibited in the Jewish Museum of Prague.