Edelstein, Jacob

(1903--1944), Chairman of the *Judenrat* in the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

When Germany took over Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, Edelstein, as the most prominent Zionist leader in Prague, was put in charge of emigration to Palestine. Soon, he also became the Jews' official spokesman in their dealings with the Germans.

Over the next two and a half years, Edelstein went on many trips abroad in search of ways to accelerate Jewish emigration. On each trip he met with Jewish community and Zionist leaders, whom he warned about the troubles to come. Throughout his travels, Edelstein had many opportunities to stay away from Nazi-occupied Bohemia and Moravia, but he always returned to Prague, to honor what he felt was his duty to his fellow Jews.

In October 1939 Edelstein was part of a group sent to an area in Poland called Nisko. This deportation was part of a German plan to resettle Jews in one area near Lublin (see also Nisko and Lublin Plan). However, the plan was unsuccessful, and some of the men were allowed to return home, among them Edelstein, who returned to Prague in November 1939.

In October 1941 the Germans established the Theresienstadt ghetto to detain the Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia until such time that they would be deported to the east. Edelstein did not know that Theresienstadt was really just a temporary holding place; he believed that the Nazis had been successfully convinced not to deport his country's Jews. Edelstein arrived at Theresienstadt in December 1941 and was named chairman of its Jewish Council. In this post, he focused on education and on making the ghetto an indispensable labor force for the Germans. Historians disagree about Edelstein's role at Theresienstadt. Some say that he cooperated with the Nazis or fault him for misunderstanding the situation at hand. Others consider him to have been a model human being who gave his life for his fellow Jews.

Edelstein was fired from the *Judenrat* in January 1943. In December he and his family were sent to Auschwitz, where they were executed. (see also Bohemia and Moravia, Protectorate of.)

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