

Prague

Capital of Czechoslovakia, and during World War II, the capital of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. During the early 1930s some 35,000 Jews lived in Prague. After Hitler rose to national power in Germany in 1933, many German Jews fled to Prague. Many more refugees arrived in Prague in 1938, after Hitler conquered Austria and the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. This increased the city's Jewish population to about 56,000. German troops invaded Prague in March 1939, and declared the entire western region of Czechoslovakia to be a German protectorate, called the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The word protectorate was actually a euphemistic term that meant that Bohemia and Moravia were totally subjugated to Germany. Soon after the occupation, Adolf Eichmann arrived to establish a branch of the *Zentralstelle Fuer Juedische Auswanderung* (Central Office for Jewish Emigration), whose goal was to "encourage" the Jews of the protectorate to leave the country.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, many of Prague's Jewish leaders were taken hostage. Despite this, Jewish organizations continued their work in secret. Prague's Palestine Office succeeding in helping some 19,000 Jews escape the country for Palestine by the end of 1939.

Between October 1941 and March 1945, the Nazis deported 46,067 Jews from Prague. Most were first sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, and then deported to their deaths at Auschwitz. The Nazis established a department that was responsible for the apartments and possessions of the deported Jews. The Germans needed 54 warehouses to store all the property they had pillaged from the Jews. In addition, they made a collection in Prague of thousands of religious and ritual items from the Jewish communities all around Prague. The Nazis intended to use this collection as the basis of a "Central Museum of the Extinguished Jewish Race." However, after the war it became part of the Jewish Museum of Prague. Today, the names of the Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia who were killed by the Nazis are displayed on the walls of Prague's Pinkas Synagogue. (see also Bohemia and Moravia, Protectorate of.)

