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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

## **"If Hitler Could See This, He Would Go Crazy"**

Report from the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace Summer Camp 1997 in Terezín  
by Volker Henneicke

For two weeks, we six Poles and five Germans worked and lived in Terezín. In the summer heat we prepared wood for a playground in town, cut down and removed the bark from the trees. The playground was adjacent to the new youth hostel, which has already been used by groups.

Terezín, or Theresienstadt, is a place marked by history. Two hundred years ago, a Habsburg Emperor built a fortress town here, not far from the confluence of the Eger and Elbe rivers, to protect Bohemian and Moravian towns from Prussian attacks. The "large fortress" served as a garrison, the "small fortress" as a military prison. These functions continued after the First World War in the newly created Czechoslovak state. From 1940 to 1945, the "small fortress" served as a prison for the Prague Gestapo. People active in the Resistance against the German occupation were arrested and held there. About 32,000 individuals passed through the prison during this period; 2,500 did not survive their imprisonment. While a memorial had already been built in the Small Fortress by 1947, a Jewish museum in the former ghetto in the Large Fortress did not open until 1991.

The Nazis had decided in 1941 to convert the Large Fortress into a ghetto for Jews from many

countries within the framework of their program for "a final solution of the Jewish question in Europe." In the town of Terezín, which has 1,700 inhabitants today, there were then nearly 58,000 people, crammed together from cellars to attics. A total of 150,000 Jewish men, women, and children passed through the ghetto before they were transported to killing centers such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, and Sobibor, where they were murdered; 119,000 did not survive. Today the town and the former ghetto are indistinguishable, since the former ghetto is the town. It is very difficult to separate the past from the present in this somewhat sleepy small town and to recognize it as the site of the prologue to mass murder. Only very few places explicitly evoke the past. These places are, to be sure, all the more remarkable. There is, for example, a small shed in a rear courtyard, where Hebrew inscriptions testify to its former use as a place of prayer. Or the tracks in front of the former Hamburg barracks, the building in which most ghetto residents spent their first and last night in Theresienstadt.

A high point of our summer camp was one day in Prague, during which we learned to understand former and current Jewish life there. The Pinkas synagogue was particularly impressive. The names of all Czech victims of the Holocaust are inscribed on its walls. In the afternoon, we had an opportunity to speak with one survivor of the Theresienstadt ghetto. "If Hitler could see this, he would go crazy," was the response to the question of how the survivor felt when he sat facing young Germans today.

Our supplementary program also included additional tours, films, and a visit to the Anne Frank exhibition, as well as an exhibit of paintings by the Czech artist Chad, who had been active in the Resistance and was shot during his imprisonment. One discussion among the participants was especially remarkable. It began with an exchange of mutual images and prejudices about Poland and Germany and then continued to a discussion about racism and its specific causes in both countries. In searching for the roots of racism, we discovered some common factors, especially economic ones, as well as differences stemming from historical factors.

On the last evening, we had a modest ceremony saying farewell to the memorial and the town, where people live a normal life today, just as in other Czech towns. Only the many groups of tourists and the ghetto museum make Terezín an unusual Bohemian village in its daily life.