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The Communist Party in Terezín, 1941-1945

Abstract

Since the Terezin (Theresienstadt) ghetto's establishment by the Nazis in November 1941, it housed a Communist resistance group. Numbering up to 200 people, the Communist cell attempted to work in strict secrecy and stay in touch with the Party headquarters in the Protectorate. In the interwar period, Prague became one of the red capitals of Europe. Many German and Austrian Communists escaped there after 1933-34, and numerous Czech and Slovak volunteers went to fight in the Spanish Civil War. However, the Terezín Communists, though frequently employing trope of internationalism (and expressly denying that Jews were a nation), consisted almost exclusively of people deported from the Czech lands.

In her talk, Prof. Hájková will look at how the cell's members negotiated their belonging as Jewish ghetto inmates and Communists. What did it mean to be Communist in Terezín? How did Communist affiliation transect other categories of the ghetto population--sex, age or class? How did the group relate to the much larger Zionist movement in the camp? Similarly to them, Communist ideology offered moral of support in the bleak time of occupation and deportations. For decades, the narrative of political resistance, above all by communists, was the dominant narrative of antifascism and the Second World War. In the past generation, it has been joined and largely replaced by the narrative of the Holocaust. In examining the Communist group in Terezín, Anna Hájková explores a connection point of both master narratives, contributing to our understanding of Jewishness, Holocaust, resistance, and Communist ideology.