

The Final Solution

By Walter S. Zapotoczny

The "Final Solution" of the Jewish Question refers to the German Nazis' plan to address the "Jewish problem" through systematic relocation and later extermination of Jews during World War II. The extermination of 6 million Jews in the Nazi Holocaust was the product of a complex labyrinth of social, political, economic and military courses of action, which coalesced in Hitler's Germany. Slowly, however, there has emerged an outline of events, decisions, motivations and realities, which permit at least an historical understanding of what took place between 1932 and 1945. It was the intent of the German Reich to eliminate Jews from their Europe.

Two historical schools of thought have emerged around the question of the origins of "The Final Solution" (German, *Endlösung*)- the decision to completely obliterate European Jewry. The debate has formed in terms of "internationalists" versus "functionalists." The "internationalists" have argued that it was Hitler's intention from the beginning (even before his rise to power) to exterminate the Jews and that the war with Russia was a pretext for that undertaking, at the very least, an integral part of it. Based on his avowed anti-Semitism as early as *Mein Kampf* (1923) and his early statements (1939) that Jews would be completely destroyed if they plunged Germany into another world war, these historians have taken the view that all decisions, political and military, were made with an eye to the ultimate extermination of the Jews. The other point of view, espoused by the "functionalists," has argued that the "Final Solution" was decided upon only after many failed attempts to force Jews to emigrate from Germany and that the closure of possible destinations by the rest of the world combined with the logistical problems of such a massive deportation "forced" the "Final Solution" into existence. Further, these scholars suggest, Hitler's style of leadership, his demand for total loyalty from his subordinates (*fuehrerprinzip*) and the paranoia they engendered, caused subordinate SS agencies to come up with the final solution in early 1942. Whichever school of thought is true, we know that the plans for the final solution were formulated at the Wannsee Conference.

On January, 20, 1942, Reinhard Heydrich, Himmler's second in command of the SS, convened the Wannsee Conference in Berlin with 15 top Nazi bureaucrats to coordinate the Final Solution in which the Nazis would attempt to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Europe, an estimated 11 million persons. Heydrich told the assembled senior civil servants of his appointment as Plenipotentiary for the Preparation of the Final Solution of the European Jewish Question. Heydrich went on to tell the conference that Goering had asked to see a 'draft project' of this 'final solution.' Heydrich told the conference attendees that in the course of the practical implementation of the 'final solution,' Europe would be combed from West to East. This conference set in motion the plan to eliminate the European Jews.

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