

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 306

“The November Pogrom”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Just weeks after the Munich Agreement seemed to avert another war and everyone breathed a sigh of relief, Germany erupted in a spasm of ugly anti-Semitic violence, demonstrating that peace was, in fact, not at hand.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 306. The November Pogrom.

Last time, I told you the story of Adolf Hitler creating the Sudetenland Crisis, then ratcheting up international tensions until British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain intervened to broker an agreement for the peaceful transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany. I closed the episode by saying the agreement would start to come apart almost as soon as it was signed.

And I certainly want to tell you that story today, but before we go there, I want to circle back to the immediate aftermath of the *Anschluss*, in March 1938. This is the same moment where the story of the Sudetenland Crisis begins. Adolf Hitler was flush with victory and eager to move on to the next confrontation. In the realm of international affairs, that next confrontation was the Sudetenland Crisis, but today I also want to consider the Nazi Party's new initiatives in domestic German affairs, specifically, the targeting of Jewish people in German society.

Legal and social pressure on Jewish Germans had been escalating ever since Hitler took power in 1933. Laws were enacted limiting the rights of Jewish Germans to work in certain fields or professions, or to gain a university education. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws stripped Jewish Germans of their German citizenship and forbade them to marry ethnic Germans. Please note that these laws also applied to Black and Romani people in Germany.

The persecutions eased up a bit in 1936, so as not to overshadow the Olympic Games, but the pressure renewed in 1937, chiefly economic pressure directed against Jewish-owned businesses. Nazis employed various means to squeeze Jewish businesses and force their owners to sell them

to ethnic Germans at a fraction of their value. A few Germans protested these underhanded tactics, but many more waited in line to snap up a good deal.

This process continued into 1938. In February, Jewish Germans were denied the right to claim their children as income tax deductions. In March, Jewish businesses were barred from bidding on government contracts and private Jewish organizations lost their status as legal entities. In April, a decree required all Jewish Germans to declare to the government all assets in excess of Rm 5,000. In July, yet another round of legal restrictions forbade Jewish Germans from real estate brokering or door-to-door sales, and Jewish physicians lost their licenses to practice medicine. In August, the German government issued a defined list of Jewish first names and required all Jewish Germans to adopt one of the names on the government list.

But perhaps even more ominous than any of these individual developments was the effect the *Anschluss* had on Nazi policy toward Jewish people. I refer specifically to that spontaneous outburst of violence and cruelty toward Jewish people by their fellow Austrians in Vienna, which I told you about two episodes ago. The violence broke out even as the Wehrmacht was marching into their country. The German Nazis told their Austrian counterparts to knock it off, which even as I say it, I find it hard to believe, but it's not as if Reinhard Heydrich and the Gestapo felt any sympathy toward persecuted Jewish Austrians, although maybe a few Nazis did, a little; it was fear of the international reaction. The Nazis wanted the rest of the world to see the *Anschluss* as a peaceful expression of the desire of Austrians to be a part of the German Reich. The attacks on Jewish Austrians muddled the message.

But in the end...nothing happened. The *Anschluss* was big news internationally, of course, but in this larger context, the violence against Jews in Austria was just a footnote, if even that.

The point was not lost on the Nazis. The world didn't care how they treated Jewish people. They were free to do as they wished.

The Austrian violence also demonstrated how adroit propaganda could be employed to blame the violence on the victims and excuse the Nazis. The Nazi leadership needed only to signal to its followers unofficially to go ahead with attacks on Jewish people, while the leaders themselves deplored the violence—officially—while also noting, more in sorrow than in anger, how difficult it was to restrain a public that was so fed up with the endless corruption and exploitation they suffered at the hands of Jewish people.

Neat trick, huh? And by “neat,” I mean of course, “disgusting.”

Joseph Goebbels, in his capacity as head of the Berlin branch of the Nazi Party, decided that Berlin needed to lead the way, and so he prodded local Party members to take action. On June 11, 1938, a Saturday, bands of men went around Berlin, painting the word *Jude* and Stars of David on the windows of Jewish shops, along with ugly caricatures. But this backfired when it did draw attention from the international community. Hitler was by this time already beginning

to put the screws to Czechoslovakia and did not appreciate the negative publicity. He told Goebbels to call it off.

The real goal of all this pressure on Jewish Germans was to force them to emigrate. In 1933, there were about 550,000 Jewish Germans living in the Reich, plus maybe 150,000 additional Jewish immigrants who had settled in Germany during and after the Great War. By 1938, most of those recent immigrants had been forced out, as had more than 150,000 Jewish Germans. But the *Anschluss* had added Austria's Jewish population, about 190,000, which from the Nazi point of view was a step backward, hence the desire to increase the pressure.

It's worth noting that there is a certain inconsistency with encouraging a group of people to emigrate from your country while at the same time impoverishing them. Emigration costs money. A lot of money.

There's also the question of where all these people are supposed to go. Nazi policies in Germany increased the number of people seeking to emigrate. There was also a rise in anti-Semitism in countries like Poland and Hungary and Romania, but there was no corresponding increase in the number of immigrants other nations were accepting.

US President Franklin Roosevelt pushed for an international conference on the question, which was held in July 1938 in the French spa town of Évian. The US did not participate directly in the conference and made no offer to increase its own immigration quotas. A representative from British Palestine named Golda Meir attended the conference but was not allowed to speak and the British government rejected pleas to increase Jewish immigration to Palestine. The only one of the 32 nations in attendance that did express a willingness to increase its immigration quotas was the Dominican Republic. The Soviet Union did not participate in the conference, but did enter into direct talks with Germany about Jewish emigration, but in the end no deal was reached and the USSR also closed its borders to Jewish emigrants.

All of this was a huge propaganda win for the Nazis, who could point out the hypocrisy that the same countries that criticized Germany's treatment of its Jewish citizens were unwilling to allow those same people to live in their countries. Zionist leader Chaim Weitzmann remarked that there were two kinds of countries in the world: countries where Jews could not live, and countries where Jews could not enter.

Palestine might seem like a possible destination for Jewish emigrants, and some Nazis advocated for this, but this idea made others in the Party uneasy, because Jewish Zionists were advocating for exactly the same thing, arguing that it would nurture and strengthen the Jewish people, and it felt a little strange to the Nazis to find themselves on the same side of this argument.

Some, including Adolf Hitler himself, suggested the island of Madagascar as an appropriate destination. This idea had been bouncing around in anti-Semitic circles since the 19th century. Back in the Twenties, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi Party newspaper, published an article

extolling Madagascar as a tropical paradise where Jewish people could live the good life. The article was likely written with tongue in cheek. The reality surely did not escape the Nazis that Madagascar was an undeveloped tropical land where urban Europeans would struggle just to stay alive. Maybe that was the point, but in the end, it was never more than just talk.

[music: Wagner, *Der fliegende Holländer*]

Most of the remaining Jewish foreign nationals living in Germany in the autumn of 1938, as the Sudetenland crisis was reaching its climax, were Polish citizens. With the Nazis stepping up their efforts to make life in Germany intolerable for Jewish people, it seemed inevitable that the German government would one day forcibly repatriate these people to Poland, likely sooner rather than later.

The Polish government in Warsaw, which had its own anti-Semitic streak, decided to act first. On October 6, just days after the Munich agreement was signed, and even as Poland was claiming its own piece of Czechoslovakia, the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs announced a new policy. All Polish citizens living outside the borders of Poland would be required to get a passport endorsement. As of October 30, any Polish passport without an endorsement stamp could not be used for entry into Poland and the passport holder would have their Polish citizenship revoked.

When the tens of thousands of Polish citizens living in Germany reported to their local Polish consulates to apply for their endorsement stamps, Jewish Poles quickly discovered that consular officials were resorting to various excuses to avoid endorsing their passports. They were at risk of being stripped of their rights as Polish citizens and stranded in Germany as stateless persons, unable to travel abroad and at the mercy, such as it was, of the German government.

In other words, Poland was trying to force Germany to accept tens of thousands of Jewish Poles as permanent residents. The German government was not at all pleased. On October 27, just three days before the deadline, the Gestapo began a mass roundup of Jewish Poles in Germany. They were all registered with the state and therefore easy enough to identify. They were taken into custody, their personal property seized, and they were sent to the Polish border to be deported.

Among the Polish citizens taken into custody that day were the family of Sendel and Riva Grynspan. Sendel and Riva were Jewish Polish citizens who had resided in Germany since before the Great War. They lived in the city of Hannover, in Lower Saxony, where Sendel operated a tailor shop. As Sendel later recalled, on the evening of the 27th, he and his wife, along with their 22-year-old daughter Esther and their 19-year-old son Mordechai, were herded into a police van with a number of other Jewish Poles, as if they were criminals, and transported to the train station as jeering crowds on the sidewalk called out *Juden raus!* (That is, “Jews get out!”)

Polish officials at the checkpoints along the border were unprepared for the sudden appearance the following morning of thousands of desperate, penniless Polish expatriates. At first, they simply let them pass. Then the word came down from Warsaw to close the border. Poland would not allow them in, Germany would not allow them back, leaving some 12,000 people trapped in a no-man's land along the border, without food, money, or shelter, with no place to go, in the cold, rainy weather of October in Eastern Europe.

As it happened, Sendel and Riva had another son, their youngest, 17-year-old Herschel, who was a troubled young man. The Grynszpans were Eastern European Jews, and like most, had little money or education and tended to be more religiously devout and less assimilated than native Jewish Germans. As the youngest, Herschel had lived all his life in a Germany where he experienced ever-rising prejudice from his ethnic German neighbors, while also never quite being fully accepted by his Jewish German neighbors. He became an angry and violent teenager, frequently lashing out with his fists against anti-Semitic provocations. He dropped out of school and enrolled in a yeshiva, a Jewish religious school.

His parents thought he should emigrate to Palestine. He applied when he was 15, but was told he was too young. So his parents sent him to Paris to live with his uncle and aunt, Abraham and Chawa Grynszpan until he was old enough. Herschel could not enter France legally, because he had no money, so he snuck across the border.

By 1938, he had been living in Paris for two years. He was seventeen years old, and not only was he in France illegally, but his visa to Germany had expired, as had his Polish passport. He couldn't take a job without risking deportation, so he had to depend on his uncle and aunt for support. Abraham and Chawa were also poor, and resented having to support an able-bodied young man. Herschel spoke often about how much he missed his family in Germany.

On November 3, Herschel received a post card from his sister, Esther, recounting what had happened to the family over the previous week, describing their plight at the border, and asking if Herschel could send them any money. Herschel asked his uncle for money to help his family; his uncle refused, saying he had no money to spare, especially with having to bear the burden of supporting an unemployed nephew. There was an argument. Herschel grabbed Fr300 and stalked out of the apartment.

The next day, he paid Fr235 for a revolver and a box of bullets and took the Métro to the German Embassy. His intended target was the German ambassador; as fate would have it, the ambassador was just leaving the embassy and passed Herschel as he entered, although Herschel didn't know who he was. Herschel told the receptionist that he was a German resident living in Paris and working as a spy for the German government. He had crucial intelligence and needed to deliver it to the ambassador immediately. When the receptionist told him the ambassador had just left, Herschel asked to see the most senior German diplomat available.

They sent him to the most junior German diplomat available, 29-year-old Ernst vom Rath, a career diplomat, son of an aristocratic family, and Nazi Party member. Rath asked to see this crucial intelligence. Herschel drew the pistol and fired five shots into Rath's abdomen.

Rath was critically injured and rushed to a hospital. Herschel made no attempt to escape; he waited patiently for the police and when they arrived, he confessed to the shooting, explaining that it was done to avenge the mistreatment of Jewish people in Germany. Paraphrasing Martin Luther, he said, "I could not do otherwise, may God forgive me."

In Berlin, *Führer* and Chancellor Adolf Hitler reacted to the news of the shooting in characteristic fashion, by exploding with rage, while Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels saw an opportunity both to score some propaganda points and ingratiate himself with the boss. The shooting in the Paris embassy got wide media coverage in Germany. The *Völkischer Beobachter* editorialized that it was intolerable that hundreds of thousands of Jewish people were living well and earning money within Germany, while their compatriots abroad were gunning down honest, hard-working German civil servants.

Hours after the shooting, Hitler ordered his personal physician to Paris to treat Rath, along with one of Germany's finest surgeons. Despite their efforts, 48 hours later, in the afternoon of November 9, Ernst vom Rath died of his wounds.

Hitler was in Munich to give a speech at banquet of Party leaders that evening, as he did every November 9 in commemoration of the 1923 *putsch*. Hitler carefully staged a little show in which a messenger brought him a telegram at the banquet with the news of Rath's death. Hitler reacted with shock and horror, pretending he hadn't already known, and rushed out of the hall, leaving Goebbels to give the speech in his place. Goebbels told the Party leaders to get the message out to the people to take their revenge, but not to let it be known that the Party was instigating the violence. It should appear as a spontaneous outburst.

Stormtroopers took to the streets in Munich at once, and soon afterward in cities across Germany, vandalizing Jewish-owned homes, businesses, and synagogues. From Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, the word went out to local police across Germany: do not interfere, except in cases of excessive violence, or to protect the persons and property of non-Jewish people. Property destruction was fine, but not theft. Police were told to seize records from vandalized businesses and synagogues for further investigation, and to arrest not the rioters, but as many Jewish people as they could get their hands on.

In city after city, stormtroopers and Party members gathered at synagogues, doused them with gasoline, and set them afire. Prayer books and hand-lettered Torah scrolls were tossed into the flames. Fire brigades stood by and watched, intervening only to prevent the spread of the flames to neighboring buildings. Jewish cemeteries were vandalized, their tombstones uprooted and their graves desecrated. Other mobs attacked Jewish businesses, smashing the storefront glass

and scattering merchandise into the streets, or forcing their way into Jewish homes to destroy the furniture and terrorize the families.

The evening of November 9, 1938, will go down in history as *Kristallnacht*, or Crystal Night, a name coined by Berliners, a reference to the thousands of shards of broken glass scattered across the streets, glinting in the warm light of dawn the following morning. A poetic name for a very unpoetic event; a more honest name would be “The November Pogrom,” as some in fact call it, an eruption of violence against Jewish people unlike anything seen since the fall of the Russian Empire.

Hundreds of synagogues across Germany were gutted, including historic buildings centuries old. A thousand more were damaged, as were many thousands of shops and homes.

Some 30,000 Jewish Germans were taken into custody and shipped to the concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen, where SS guards brutalized them. Inmates were denied food and water. Some were forced to run in circles until they collapsed; others were forced to stand at attention for hours, motionless, outdoors in the November cold.

The detainees were gradually released, most of them in exchange for pledges to leave Germany, and also to keep quiet about their treatment in the camps. The official death toll for *Kristallnacht* was 91, but that does not include the hundreds of suicides, nor people who died in SS custody, nor does it include the uncounted number of rapes.

The next morning, the German government issued a call to end the violence and portrayed the outburst as a spontaneous expression of German rage at the murder of Ernst vom Rath. Many Germans were quite uncomfortable with what had happened. Kaiser Wilhelm II—yes, I said Kaiser Wilhelm II—reacted to *Kristallnacht* by saying, “For the first time, I am ashamed to be a German.” The discomfort of many Germans was perhaps less about mistreatment of Jewish people than it was about the disorder, the lawlessness, and the senseless destruction of property, three things that deeply offend the German soul. Even Hermann Göring expressed his distaste at the wanton destruction.

The days that followed saw yet another batch of new laws aimed at restricting the rights of Jewish Germans. They were banned from theatres, concerts, and cinemas. Jewish children were expelled from the public schools. The insurance claims from the damage of that night amounted to some six million marks; the government confiscated these funds as well as levying a one billion mark reparations payment on the Jewish community in Germany, compensation for the death of Ernst vom Rath. The money was spent on German rearmament.

Jewish property owners were ordered to repair the damage done to their property at their own expense. In the months to come, Jewish Germans would be forced to transfer their businesses to ethnic Germans, pay 20% of their net worth to the government, and turn over all stocks, bonds,

jewelry, and works of art in their possession. The Nazis even forbade Jewish Germans to use libraries or hold drivers' licenses.

In essence, Jewish Germans had taken from them whatever might allow for anything like a normal life in Germany. Over the next nine months, more than 100,000 Jewish Germans would emigrate, most of them to other European countries, North America, British Palestine, or Japanese-occupied Shanghai; whoever would let them in. For a time, Shanghai was known as the only place in the world that had no limit on the entry of Jewish refugees, and about 14,000 German Jews ended up there.

Since forcing Jewish Germans to leave the country was a Nazi policy goal, you might think they'd ease the way for any Jewish German—or Romani German or Black German—to emigrate. But you'd only think that way because you are not a Nazi. A Nazi would want to torment the émigrés along the way, and so, would-be emigrants had to run a gantlet of bureaucratic obstacles, applications, licenses, and stiff fees to be paid out of their rapidly dwindling assets, before they were finally allowed to leave, generally penniless.

[music: Wagner, *Der fliegende Holländer*]

Despite German government efforts to play down the November Pogrom, or explain it away by referencing the murder of Ernst vom Rath, it received widespread coverage in foreign news media and sparked outrage and revulsion around the world. German historian Volker Ullrich, whose work I have been using in these episodes on Germany, says that at this moment, the Nazis crossed a bright red line. Germany had left the community of civilized nations. In 1938, there were still many people old enough to remember the widely condemned pogroms in the days Imperial Russia and the parallel was often cited.

US President Franklin Roosevelt expressed a similar sentiment: "I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization." The US recalled its ambassador to Germany. Another one would not be appointed until 1945. Roosevelt also issued an executive order allowing the 12,000 German citizens in the United States, many of whom were Jewish and on temporary visas, to remain in the country indefinitely. No one would be forced to return to Nazi Germany.

The United States and other countries were still reluctant to raise their immigration quotas, although a number, led by the United Kingdom, accepted thousands of Jewish German children. Other participating nations included France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. In the United States, New York Senator Robert Wagner and Representative Edith Rogers introduced bills in Congress to allow Jewish child refugees into the United States, but those bills never passed.

Whatever cachet fascism had had in the West as something fresh and modern was lost after *Kristallnacht*. The small but vocal and visible fascist movements in France and Britain and Canada and the United States saw a sudden collapse in interest and support.

The November Pogrom came just six weeks after the Munich Agreement. If you wonder how Neville Chamberlain could have done a deal with the Nazis, it's important to understand that the Nazis of September 1938 were not Nazis as we think of them today. They became the Nazis as we think of them today the night of the November Pogrom.

But the orgy of violence certainly cast the Munich Agreement in a new and unflattering light, making it look less like a work of masterful statesmanship and more like a refusal to acknowledge the obvious. And as I indicated at the top of the episode, the Munich Agreement was already fraying, even before *Kristallnacht*.

You'll recall that Germany's adherence to the Munich Agreement was made conditional on settlement of Poland's and Hungary's territorial claims against Czechoslovakia. The Polish government needed only a few hours to accept the implicit invitation Hitler had given them. Warsaw issued an ultimatum, demanding that Czechoslovakia withdraw from the disputed region of Cieszyn, in Silesia, which had a substantial population of ethnic Poles. You'll recall me mentioning in episode 179 how this was a sore spot in relations between the two countries since 1919. The Polish government had borrowed from Hitler's playbook and had been stirring up ethnic Polish unrest in the region.

From the Polish point of view, better Cieszyn be part of Poland than part of Germany. From the Nazi point of view, Polish and Hungarian claims on Czechoslovak territory were welcome, because they added credibility to Germany's own claimed grievances against Czechoslovakia. As I said back in episode 179, it was tremendously shortsighted of the Polish government to join in the bullying of Czechoslovakia, rather than stand with its neighbor against German expansionism. The Poles will realize the error of their ways soon enough.

Czechoslovakia had no choice but to concede Poland its claim, and in November, just before *Kristallnacht*, in an arbitration agreement signed in Vienna, Czechoslovakia conceded some Slovakian territory with a majority Magyar population to Hungary. And by that time, Adolf Hitler had already ordered the German military to draw up plans for an occupation of what was left of Czechoslovakia.

By early 1939, the German government was encouraging Slovak separatism in Czechoslovakia, while dragging its feet on a final confirmation of Czechoslovakia's new borders. The government in Prague, now very weak, had no choice but to give in to Slovakian demands for greater autonomy and more control over the military in Slovakia, and even to restyling the name of the country with a hyphen: Czecho-Slovakia.

On March 12, 1939, Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht to prepare to occupy the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. The next day, Father Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest, prime minister of autonomous Slovakia, and Nazi sympathizer, was summoned to Berlin, where Hitler gave him an ultimatum. The Wehrmacht was moving into Czechoslovakia the day after tomorrow. Either declare Slovakian independence tomorrow and enjoy the protection of the Reich, or else Germany would abandon Slovakia to its fate: to be reabsorbed into a Hungary that was now following Germany's lead in undoing the territorial losses imposed upon it after the Great War.

Tiso did as he was told. On March 14, the Slovakian parliament in Bratislava declared independence. Hours later, the President of what was left of Czechoslovakia—Emil Hacha, the man who had succeeded Edvard Beneš following Beneš' resignation following the Munich Agreement—requested a meeting with Adolf Hitler. Hitler agreed, and that very night, Hacha arrived by train from Prague. He was escorted into the Reich Chancellery after midnight.

Hacha had arrived hoping to negotiate at least some measure of autonomy for the Czech people. Hitler brushed off any attempt at a compromise. He told Hacha point blank that the Wehrmacht would be moving into Czech lands at dawn. What remained of Czechoslovakia would be made into a German protectorate. None of this was negotiable. Hacha had but one choice to make. If he wished, he could perform one final service to the Czech people by telephoning the war ministry in Prague and ordering them not to resist the German invasion. As a Chancellery employee worked to establish a telephone link to Prague, Hermann Göring described to Hacha in vivid detail the death and destruction the Luftwaffe would deal to the ancient City of a Hundred Spires if Hacha refused.

It was too much for the 68-year-old to bear. He lost consciousness and collapsed. Some think he had a heart attack. Undeterred, Hitler summoned his personal physician to inject Hacha with a drug to bring him back around. Hacha then made the phone call.

Hitler was overjoyed. With his characteristic modesty, he pronounced this “negotiation” the “greatest stroke of political genius of all time,” and declared, “I will go down in history as the greatest German ever.” He even insisted that two young women, secretaries who had stayed at the Chancellery overnight to support the talks, each give him a kiss on the cheek.

At 6:00 AM, the Wehrmacht crossed the border. At 9:00 AM, they were in Prague. That afternoon, Hitler himself arrived in the city by Mercedes limousine. The streets were quiet, a far cry from last year's jubilant crowds in Vienna. He was greeted not with acclaim, but with a heavy late-season snowstorm. Perhaps an omen.

That night, in Prague Castle, the seat of the President of Czechoslovakia, Hitler signed decrees creating the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He named his former foreign minister, Konstantin von Neurath, as Reich Protector. Neurath, as an old school Army officer and aristocrat, was seen as a relatively moderate figure, and his appointment thus meant to play down what had been done to Czechoslovakia. Emil Hacha would stay on as a figurehead President,

reduced to signing decrees handed to him by Neurath. Among these decrees would be the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Parliament, and the extension of the Nuremberg laws to Czech territory.

Hitler also declared Slovakia under German protection, even as the Wehrmacht marched into Bratislava.

He stayed overnight at Prague Castle and returned to Berlin on March 19, after swinging by Vienna and Linz. The very next day, March 20, Foreign Minister Ribbentrop met with his Lithuanian counterpart, who was visiting Berlin, and demanded immediate Lithuanian withdrawal from Klaipėda, the Lithuanian port known to Germans as Memel, which had been ceded to Lithuania in 1919, episode 182. The Lithuanian government had no choice but to give in, which they did on March 22. The next day, Hitler arrived in Memel aboard the German pocket battleship *Deutschland* and gave a speech in which he welcomed the town back into the German Reich.

Just days later, back in Berlin, Hitler had a discussion with Joseph Goebbels over how to solve the “question of Danzig.” Neither of them knew it at the time, but Nazi Germany had just gained the last scrap of territory it would be able to acquire without going to war.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia benefitted Germany considerably. It removed a potentially hostile nation that stood in the way of German economic and military expansion eastward, and south into the Balkans. Germany took control of the Škoda works, once the principal arms producer for Austria-Hungary and still one of Europe’s leading arms makers, along with enough weapons and supplies to equip twenty new Wehrmacht divisions. It also made Czechoslovakia’s mineral wealth available to the Reich: copper, nickel, zinc, aluminum.

April 20, 1939 was Adolf Hitler’s fiftieth birthday. The German government declared it a national holiday and pulled out all the stops in celebration.

When Hitler entered Prague on March 15, he confidently told his associates, “In a fortnight, no one will be talking about this anymore.” He could not have been more wrong. The occupation of Czechoslovakia was the foreign policy equivalent of *Kristallnacht*—a clear message to the world that Germany was no longer a civilized nation.

Britain and France both recalled their ambassadors from Berlin following the occupation. In a speech two days later, Neville Chamberlain called out Adolf Hitler for violating the same principle of self-determination he himself had repeatedly invoked. On March 31, he told the House of Commons that “in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist, His Majesty’s Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish government all support in their power.” The French government made a similar declaration.

Quite contrary to Hitler's confident prediction that this would all blow over in two weeks, Germany's diplomatic relationship to the world had fundamentally changed, but Hitler will fail to realize this and soon go back to the same old playbook in a confrontation with Poland, and lead his nation, and the world, into a catastrophe.

But that is a story for another episode. We'll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Neal for his kind donation, and thank you to Mason for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Neal and Mason help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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The holiday season is upon us once again, and as I do every year, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that donations and patronages to *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift—for me. And they're so easy to give. No worries about whether they're the right size or the right color, and you have my personal assurance they will be deeply appreciated and never be returned. As a patron, you have your choice of tiers, and donations are welcome in any amount. And if neither of those are in the budget, how about a rating and review at the iTunes store, or wherever fine podcasts are distributed. I promise you these are deeply appreciated as well. And there's also my story, "The Boy Who Didn't Know How to Recognize a King," available at the Amazon Kindle store for just 99 cents. If a few people bought that and read it, that would make me happy, too.

Speaking of holidays, it has been my custom for the past few years to produce a special Christmas episode of the podcast. I mean this as my Christmas gift to you, my listeners, and I will be releasing it next week. I hope you'll join me then, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take a step back from war and oppression and think about the state of science, and consider the growing gap between what the science is telling us, and what the political leaders are. The Certainty Principle, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Herschel Grynspan was held in a French prison for trial. International donations raised a large sum for his criminal defense and he engaged a leading anti-fascist lawyer. His lawyer investigated Ernst vom Rath and learned that Rath had been well known in the Paris gay scene, and seized on this at once. The Germans were holding up Rath, a young

aristocrat, a Nazi, a diplomat, as their hero. The lawyer suggested to Herschel that he claim to have been Rath's lover and to have killed him in a crime of passion, because a political assassination would get Grynszpan the guillotine for sure, whereas a murder of passion would be treated less severely because, after all, this is France.

Herschel declined the proffered defense strategy, but as it turned out, he was still awaiting trial when France capitulated to Germany in 1940. Afterward, the German government requested his extradition, which the new French government in Vichy agreed to, although there were no actual legal grounds for extraditing a non-German citizen to Germany to be prosecuted for a crime committed in France.

Grynszpan was taken to the German concentration camp at Sachsenhausen to await trial, but even in Nazi Germany, legal arguments over the validity of the extradition delayed matters. The Nazis wanted a show trial, but Grynszpan complicated matters further by now embracing the claim that he and Rath had been gay lovers, leaving the prosecution in an awkward position.

The trial was postponed, and never took place. Grynszpan's ultimate fate is unknown. He appears to have been alive as late as 1943 or 1944, but it's likely he was killed before the end of the war.

The Jewish Poles left in legal limbo remained in refugee camps along the German-Polish border until August of 1939, when Poland relented and allowed them admission. The war began soon after. The Grynszpan family escaped to the Soviet Union, where they lived during the war. Daughter Esther was killed there, but the rest of the family emigrated to Palestine after the war ended.

The year 1944 saw the premiere of an oratorio by British composer Michael Tippett about the events around the murder of Rath by Herschel Grynszpan. It is titled *A Child of Our Time*, and it incorporates African-American spirituals, including "Go down, Moses" and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" to represent the voices of the oppressed.

A Child of Our Time premiered in Israel in Tel Aviv in 1962. In the audience at that performance was Herschel's father, Sendel Grynszpan.

[music: Closing Theme]