

## **Betrayal**

The Holocaust is one of the most horrific and well known events of the twentieth century. It was a time when extreme hatred and betrayal was seen, not only by ones country, but by the entire human race. There were very few people who were willing to open their arms to the millions of Jews whose extermination was inevitable. It is documented over and over again how so many Jews were betrayed by their neighbors and friends as they were grasping for their lives. If one cannot turn to one's own country for shelter, when such a wrongdoing is occurring, then logically the overall spectrum should correct this. As I was walking through the Holocaust Education Center these questions were running through my head. What happened to the rest of the world? Where was Canada? Where was the United States? Why did they not step in and save these innocent lives, when death to them was inevitable and known? It was then, at that moment, a few years ago that I truly began to understand that we, as a country, need to take some responsibility for what happened. and began to wonder if Canada had done the same thing since.

The Evian Conference took place in July of 1938 It was initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in order to discuss the Jewish refugee problem emerging from Germany. Representatives from 32 countries attended the conference in France which commenced on July 6<sup>th</sup> and continued until July 15<sup>th</sup>. As well as the various nations that attended the conference, 24 independent organizations each presented a plan of how to deal with this refugee issue. By the end of the conference, each of these 32 national representatives had full knowledge of what was happening under Hitler's rule, and still they did not give a statement towards what was occurring.

The first problem with this conference was that the attending countries did not take it seriously. The representative for the United States was simply a friend of the President, and as for Canada, we originally refused to attend. These political leaders were not looking out for the betterment of humanity but simply for an easy way out. They turned a blind eye to the extreme anti-Semitism that was taking place. Every country that attended this conference, except for the Dominican Republic, said that their country was already accepting as many Jews as they could absorb and although sympathy was shown, it was simple, nothing more could be done.

This conference informed Hitler that the rest of the world was not willing or able to do anything more for the Jewish population in Germany than what was already being done. This gave Hitler permission to do whatever he pleased to the Jews, since no other country wanted them or was willing to help them. They had been betrayed. The rest of the world condemned the Jews to the fate that they were given by the Nazis. The countries of this world turned their backs on the condemned and so share the blame with the Nazis.

It astounds me how similar the comment 'There is no more that can be done' is to what is now being said in regards to the genocide that is taking place as we speak in Darfur, Western Sudan. The United Nations has estimated that approximately 450,000 Sudanese have died from starvation or violence, and another 2.5 million have been displaced. These people are living through another Holocaust. Have we learned nothing? It is widely accepted that the Sudanese government is corrupt. They have been concealing evidence of this genocide for almost half a decade. They are slaughtering witnesses and are hiding mass graves. How is this different from what Hitler did? The

world did not know the extent of Hitler's cruelty and atrocities until after the Holocaust had ended. Once the world knew they pledged 'Never Again' to all those who had lost their lives and all who had survived. We simply did not pledge to the Jews, 'Never Again' but to all of humanity. The world vowed they would never betray another group again, and now it seems we have.

It was not until March of 2007 that the U N stated that intervention was necessary in Darfur, and this conflict has been occurring since February of 2003. It took the world over four years to simply make a statement that something had to be done. Similarly, Britain was the first country to declare war on Nazi Germany, it took them until September of 1939 to do this; the Holocaust had begun on January 30, 1933. This is a devastating pattern that we are showing, waiting until thousands of people have been needlessly murdered before intervention occurs. The world seems to turn a blind eye until it is almost too late.

The Holocaust was a time of great denial by the world, but is not the world again doing the same thing? Hundreds of innocent humans are dying everyday. Why is it quietly in the background of our lives then, and not being flashed in front of our eyes? If it is to be on the News every night, do you think that Canadians would demand intervention years ago. The government is supplying its citizens with select information, and that is what happened during the Holocaust. The German population was not told of what its leaders were doing to the Jews. As well, Canadians were not told by their government of the atrocities in Germany prior to and during the war.

I fear that the world did not learn a lesson from the Holocaust, and if we did, we have already forgotten it. The Holocaust is happening again. The perpetrators are

different, the victims are different, but it is the same tragedy. Our government stated during the Second World War, "One is too many", in regards to letting Jews into Canada during the genocide of the century. Canada has made its mistakes, but we must prevent another mistake from occurring. So I say, "One is too many" but not in regards to letting refugees into our country, but with respect to losing lives from human race.

We, as an educated group, are not stopping what has occurred to us for thousands of years, and even if we step in now and stop this genocide, we have waited too long. Too many have already lost their lives, and we have allowed it to happen. As Canadians we all must take responsibility for not pressing our government to step in. Individual people can make a difference as has been seen time and again, but it is when we all just say, "It's not me" and turn our backs that 6 million innocent men, women and children are slaughtered. As Jews it is necessary to make a very clear statement that we must take action. In the end, we were not wiped out because other countries did intervene. We must learn from the world's mistakes. They waited too long, so we must not. Often betrayal is not an action, but the act of doing nothing. We, as a country, must be very careful to be one of the few who do open our arms to those in need and when such a wrongdoing is being done we must be conscious enough to correct it.