



Cracow

(in Polish, Krakow). City located in southern Poland. On the eve of World War II, 60,000 Jews lived in Cracow out of a total population of 250,000. During the first days of the war thousands of Jews fled from Cracow.

On September 6 1939, German troops occupied Cracow and immediately began persecuting the city's Jewish population. In late October, the Nazis made Cracow the capital of the *Generalgouvernement*; this made persecution even worse for Cracow's Jews. A Jewish committee was set up and declared to be a *Judenrat* on November 28. In early December the Nazis carried out a terror action, in which several synagogues were burnt down and much Jewish property was seized.

In May 1940, the Nazis commenced expelling Jews of Cracow to nearby towns, in an effort to make the capital of the *Generalgouvernement* "free of Jews." By March 1941, approximately 40,000 Jews had been kicked out of their homes, and only 11,000 remained. During the expulsions, the Nazis stripped the Jews of all their property. That same month, the German authorities established a ghetto in the southern part of Cracow. On March 20 the ghetto was sealed with a wall and a barbed-wire fence. The remaining Cracow Jews were forced inside, as were several thousand Jews from nearby communities. By late 1941, some 18,000 Jews were imprisoned in the ghetto. They were subjected to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. In addition, the Germans installed several factories within the ghetto in order to take advantage of the cheap Jewish manpower.

Within the ghetto, several Jewish organizations were created to improve the conditions. Outstanding among them were the Jewish Social Self-Help Society and the Federation of Associations for the Care of Orphans.

On March 19, 1942 the Germans initiated a terror operation, against the ghetto's intellectual class. During this *Intelligenz Aktion*, some 50 well-known Jews were deported to their deaths at Auschwitz. At the end of May, the Germans commenced deporting the remaining of the ghetto population to extermination camps. The *aktion* began on May 28, and was carried out by



the Gestapo, the regular police, and army units. During the operation, which lasted until June 8, 300 Jews were killed on the spot and 6,000 were deported to Belzec. Among them was the chairman of the *Judenrat*, Artur Rosenzweig, who had refused to collaborate with the Germans and was thus punished.

After the *aktion* the *Judenrat* was abolished and a "Kommissariat" was established instead. The area comprising the ghetto decreased by half, while there were still 12,000 Jews living there. In late October, following the Kommissariat's refusal to collaborate with the Germans, the authorities embarked upon a second *aktion*, during which they deported 7,000 Jews to Belzec and Auschwitz and shot 700 instantly. Following this *aktion* the Nazis further reduced the ghetto's area and divided the remaining part in two - one part for the working Jews, and the other for the rest of the prisoners.

In March 1943, the Germans transferred the 2,000 working Jews to the Plaszow camp, and proceeded to liquidate the rest of the ghetto -murdering 700 Jews on the spot and deporting 2,300 to Auschwitz. Only a few hundred of the Jews who had been transferred to Plaszow survived the war.

Throughout its existence, several resistance organizations were active in the Cracow Ghetto. In October 1942, many of the groups united under one underground organization, called the Jewish Fighting Organization. The organization's leaders decided that instead of launching an uprising inside the ghetto, where space was limited, they would move the fight to the Polish side of Cracow. The resistance managed to launch 10 operations outside the ghetto, most notably an attack on a cafe in the city center, where 11 Germans were killed and 13 wounded. In late 1943, two of the underground leaders, Shimshon and Tova Draenger, were caught in the apartment of a man who smuggled Jews to Hungary and are thought to have been executed by the Germans. The underground dissolved after their disappearance. (see also resistance, Jewish.)