

Silesia, Eastern Upper

Region of Poland annexed by Germany during World War II.

Soon after the Germans occupied Silesia, they began instituting anti-Jewish decrees, such as the confiscation of Jewish property, drafting Jews for forced labor, and making the Jews wear the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish). However, for the first years of the war, conditions in Silesia were not as bad as in other parts of Poland. Closed ghettos were not established until 1943 and food rations were more substantial.

The Germans set up a central *Judenrat* in early 1940 under the leadership of Moshe Merin. Merin believed that if the Jews worked in Nazi factories, they could avoid deportation. He also theorized that if he doomed some to death, others could be saved. Thus, he aided the Germans during deportations. During the summer of 1942 most of the small communities in Silesia were liquidated. By August, 25 percent of Silesia's urban Jews had been deported to Auschwitz.

In 1943 ghettos were established in the big cities. By that summer, most of the region's Jews had been deported, including Merin. In some cases, Jews rebelled during the liquidation of the ghettos. Some members of Zionist youth movements managed to hide from the Germans and escape to Slovakia, and from there to Hungary.