

Merin, Moshe

(1906-1943), Chairman of the *Judenrat* in Eastern Upper Silesia, a part of Poland annexed to the Reich by the Germans.

Before the war, Merin was a Zionist activist in the town of Sosnowiec. In September 1939 the Germans invaded Poland. When they entered Sosnowiec, Merin presented himself as the leader of the local Jewish community. In January 1940 the Germans set up a *Judenrat* and named him chairman. The council was not only responsible for Sosnowiec, but also for 100,000 Jews living in 45 nearby communities.

Like all *Judenrat* chairmen, Merin was torn between serving the needs of his fellow Jews, and obeying the Nazis. However, he executed his responsibilities efficiently and was in close contact with his Nazi administrators. Merin controlled the Jewish Police and labor office, and used them to carry out the Nazis' orders to round up Jews from the entire area for forced labor.

By 1941 Merin's *Judenrat* had 1,200 employees working in various municipal departments. Most of the experienced community leaders left the *Judenrat*, while Merin's cronies took its top positions.

Merin was liked by some and hated by others of his constituents. Although he flamboyantly used his influence to get permission to travel, he also used it to keep his region's Jews out of Ghettos for a long time. In addition, most of the Jews in his area had jobs and better conditions than Jews elsewhere. On the other hand, Merin complied with German demands in May 1942 to deport the Jews of Eastern Upper Silesia to extermination camps. Merin believed that if he doomed some to death, others could be saved. He also thought that if the Jews worked in Nazi factories, they could avoid deportation.

Zionist youth group members opposed Merin's policies, and branded him a collaborator. In 1943 he turned two Zionists over to the Nazis. They also fought over using South American passports for protection, which Merin thought was dangerous.

Despite his cooperation with the Germans, Merin was sent to Auschwitz in June 1943. The rest of his region's Jews were deported soon after.