

## Slovakia

Country in east central Europe. Until 1918 Slovakia belonged to Hungary. Between the two world wars it belonged to the independent Czechoslovak republic. From 1939--1945 Slovakia was a satellite of Nazi Germany. After the war it again was a part of Czechoslovakia until that country's breakup in 1993. Since 1993 Slovakia has been an independent country. On the eve of World War II, there were 88,951 Jews in Slovakia.

In 1938 Slovak nationalists demanded more independence within the Czechoslovak republic; in October, Slovakia became an autonomous region. These antisemitic nationalists attacked Jews, looted their homes, and banished them to the no-man's land between Slovakia and Hungary.

In March 1939, Slovakia became an independent state. It was ruled by a totalitarian government called the Slovak People's Party, headed by the pro-Nazi Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso. Tiso was an extreme nationalist who called for Christian solidarity. When he came to power, Jews were subjected to more attacks, and new Jewish restrictions were put into effect. These were augmented in July 1940, when at a conference attended by Hitler and Tiso, it was decided to establish a Nazi regime in Slovakia and begin executing severe Anti-Jewish legislation. In August SS officer Dieter Wisliceny came to Slovakia to be an "advisor on Jewish affairs," and Jewish men were drafted into labor units of the Slovak army. In addition, the Central Economic Office was established to ban Jews from the economy and seize their property.

In September 1940 the government instituted the Jewish Center (*Ustredna Zidov, UZ*) to answer to the Central Economic Office and act as an intermediary between the government and the Jews. The UZ was slated to retrain Jews for physical work, promote Jewish emigration from Slovakia, and run Jewish schools and charities.

In the summer of 1941 the Slovaks entered the war as Germany's ally against the Soviet Union, and anti-Jewish legislation became even worse. Basing its laws on the racial Nuremberg laws, Slovakia banned Jews from many public places and forced them to wear the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish). Many Jews were sent to labor camps, and the Slovak

government decided to begin deporting Jews. From March to October 1942, about 58,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz, Majdanek, and the Lublin area. Their property was taken by the government and distributed to the Slovak people. From autumn 1942 until late summer 1944, there was a long lull in the transports.

In reaction to the deportations, members of the UZ created the Working Group. Led by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel

and Gisi Fleischmann, the group tried to stop the deportations in any way they could. They bribed Dieter Wisliceny with US \$40,000 to stop the transports. This lasted from 1942--1944, during which time the Working Group also attempted to negotiate the rescue of other European Jews, later to be called the Europa Plan. They also realized that if they helped establish labor camps in Slovakia itself, some Jews would be spared from deportation; three labor camps were soon built at novaky, sered, and Vyhne. The Working Group also helped some Slovak Jews escape over the border to Hungary. In addition, they tried to make contact with leaders in the West to let them know about the extermination of Europe's Jews, and beg their help.

In the summer of 1944, various nationalist groups decided to overthrow the Nazi government. The Slovak National Uprising lasted from August--October 1944. More than 2,000 Jews, belonging to Partisan groups and the Jewish armed cells that developed in labor camps, participated in the uprising. In October the Germans put down the revolt; as they occupied land, they arrested and deported about 13,000 Jews to Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, and Theresienstadt. Many hundreds of Jews were killed by the Germans in Slovakia itself.

In total, about 100,000 Slovak Jews (including those who had fled before the war) were murdered in the Holocaust. About 15,000 survived, including 4,000-5,000 who hid with the partisans or in cities and towns. After the war, most Slovak Jews immigrated to Israel. (see also Jewish Center, Slovakia.)