

Weissmandel, Michael Dov

(1903--1956), Slovakian rabbi and a leader of the Working Group (*Pracovna Skupina*), a semi-underground rescue organization.

From March--October 1942, the Germans deported about 58,000 Jews from Slovakia. The Working Group was established during the peak of the deportations as a rescue agency. Weissmandel and other Working Group leaders toiled night and day, devising ways to save Jewish lives. He begged for assistance from every possible source, in Slovakia and elsewhere.

In the summer of 1942 Weissmandel initiated the plan to bribe SS officer Dieter Wisliceny, Slovakia's advisor on Jewish affairs, in exchange for halting the deportation of Slovakian Jews to extermination camps. The Working Group paid Wisliceny between US \$40,000--\$50,000 in two installments. When the deportations did in fact stop, Weissmandel and the Working Group believed that it was because of their bribe.

The Working Group next decided to try and repeat their success with the rescue of Jews from all over occupied Europe. This was termed the Europa Plan. The group agreed to amass about two--three million US dollars, and to provide a down payment of \$200,000; but was unable to do so. In March 1944 Weissmandel wrote to friends in Budapest about making contact with Wisliceny, who by that time had been transferred to Hungary. However, just two months later, the Germans launched the deportation of Hungarian Jewry. By then, Weissmandel had changed his mind and advised his friends not to get involved with bribing the Nazi, but rather to try to escape and set up resistance.

In the spring of 1944 four Jewish escapees from Auschwitz told the Working Group about the mass exterminations going on there. Weissmandel broadcast this information to Jewish organizations abroad, the Slovak government, and the country's Catholic Church. He begged the Allies to bomb Auschwitz and the railways leading to it, but there was no response.

After the Slovak National Uprising was crushed in October 1944, the Germans resumed deportations from Slovakia. Weissmandel was sent to Auschwitz, but managed to escape en route. He eventually reached

Switzerland, and after the war, he settled in the United States. (see also Auschwitz Protocols and Auschwitz, Bombing of.)