

Working Group

(*Pracovna Skupina*, in German *Nebenregierung*), Jewish semi-underground group in Slovakia heroically dedicated to rescuing Jews from the Nazis. The group was active until the last deportation of Slovakian Jews, after the Slovak National Uprising failed in the autumn of 1944.

The Working Group was led by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann. It consisted mostly of members of the Jewish Center (*Ustredna Zidov*, UZ), and developed out of the Committee of Six. This committee was founded after the UZ received reports of imminent deportations. After unsuccessful attempts to garner support from Slovakian government officials and the Catholic Church, the deportations began, and the committee expanded into the Working Group.

The most famous Working Group effort was the bribing in 1942 of SS-*Sturmbannfuehrer* Dieter Wisliceny in exchange for halting the deportation of Slovakian Jews. The negotiations evolved into the Europa Plan, which aspired to rescue much of European Jewry. The Europa Plan occupied the Working Group from summer 1942--autumn 1943.

The group also called for the escape of Slovakian Jews to Hungary. Late in 1942 they joined the efforts of the Zionist youth movements and various Orthodox Jews to fund the escape of 6,000--8,000 Slovakian Jews. They also helped about 1,200 Polish Jews reach Hungary.

Another rescue activity run by the group included establishing and expanding Jewish labor camps at Sered, Vyhne, and Novaky. The plan was instituted in 1942 at the height of the deportations. These camps were run partly by Jews, and were to allow Jews to work instead of being deported and murdered. Although not all inmates were saved from deportation, most survived. About 4,000 Jews lived in these three camps until September 1944.

Finally, the Working Group also gathered and distributed information about the Jews who had been deported. In July 1942 messengers reported a high rate of death among deportees. The group then sent this information to their Western connections. They also found out about mass murders in Belzec, Treblinka, and Auschwitz, and broadcast that information. They begged their

contacts abroad to bomb Auschwitz and the railroad tracks leading to it, to no avail. (see also Jewish Center, Slovakia and Auschwitz, Bombing of.)