

### Mayer, Saly

(1892-1950), Swiss Jewish leader and representative of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). From 1936--1942 Mayer served as president of the Federation of Swiss Jewish Communities; his responsibilities included working with the Swiss government on the issue of Jewish refugees in Switzerland. Many blamed him for Switzerland's prohibitive policy regarding Jewish immigration.

In 1940 Mayer volunteered to act as JDC representative in Switzerland. During his first two years in this position, Mayer had very little money at his disposal. His main responsibilities included getting information from occupied Europe and passing it on to the JDC headquarters in Portugal, and assisting Jewish refugees in Switzerland. When the United States entered the war in December 1941, Mayer devised a way to sidestep American restrictions on sending funds to occupied Europe. Thus, he received \$235,000 from the US in early 1942 and \$1,588,000 in late 1943. However, for the year and a half in between, he received no funds due to Swiss restrictions. He received another \$11,000,000 during the last year and a half of the war. However, these amounts were not nearly enough to help the Jews in occupied Europe.

During the summer of 1942, the Slovak working group, a semi-underground rescue committee, came to Mayer with a request for ransom money to save Slovak Jews. Soon, they began negotiations for a larger ransom; this was termed the europa plan. At first Mayer regarded these negotiations with suspicion, but he later changed his mind, and sent Swiss money to Slovakia. He also asked the Jewish Agency to provide money. In 1944 Rezso Kasztner, the Hungarian Jewish negotiator, asked Mayer to join his negotiations with the SS regarding the rescue of Hungarian Jews. Despite the JDC's refusal to participate, Mayer went ahead as the supposed representative of the US and Swiss authorities. From August 1944 to February 1945 Mayer conducted deft negotiations with SS-*Obersturmbannfuhrer* Kurt Becher, during which Heinrich Himmler apparently agreed to stop the deportation of the Jews of Budapest. However, many accused Mayer of not demanding enough for the Jews during these negotiations or involving other Jewish organizations in the talks.

