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The deportation of Slovak Jews begins

Discrimination against Jewish inhabitants is a dark chapter in the 20th century history of Slovakia, the external conditions for which were created by Nazi German dominance in Central Europe. Since 1939 various laws restricting Jews had been passed in Slovakia. With the gradual removal of Jews from public life, the government also started to intervene in Jewish property and ownership rights. Firstly a general revision of inn- and public bar-licences and the subsequently revision of all trade licences was carried out. A trustee could be appointed for larger industrial enterprises, stores and craft shops, while temporary custody could be imposed on an enterprise or store. The position of Jewish inhabitants became uncertain. They faced open persecution without any effective legal protection. The first Aryanising law entered into force on 1 June 1940, pursuant to which the district office and ministry of economy could revise and withdraw Jewish trade licences if it was in the 'public interest' or to 'remove an economically unhealthy impact.'. In the case of trade licence withdrawal, the liquidation of an enterprise or its aryanisation could be ordered – the forced sale of an enterprise to a non-Jewish qualified applicant. Some Slovak government representatives and financial representatives supported the idea to allow Jews legal emigration from Slovakia. But this plan failed due to a lack of finances. Until the summer of 1940 Slovakia was an important transfer country, with Jews passing through both legally and illegally mainly from Germany and the former Poland through Hungary to the Balkans.



The persecution of Jews accelerated after talks between Slovak and German government representatives in Salzburg on 27 to 28 July 1940. The positions of radicals were strengthened in the government. Vojtech Tuka became Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Prime Minister, and Alexander Mach became the Minister of the Interior. Germany was dissatisfied with the slow pace of resolving the Jewish issue in Slovakia. This was why Dieter Wisliceny, an associate of A. Eichman from the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), after the Salzburg negotiations was sent to Slovakia as an adviser for the solution of the Jewish issue. Wisliceny was of the opinion that Jews deprived of their property and rights should be deported from Slovakia. The government issued decrees on listing Jewish property and excluding Jews from all schools except elementary level. One of the greatest successes of Salzburg was the Authorisation Act, which gave the government full power to exclude Jews from Slovak economic and social life and for Jewish property to pass into the ownership of Aryans.





A principal breakthrough was the 30 January 1940 decree on Jewish enterprises, the Second Aryanisation Law. The Central Economic Office (ÚHÚ) acquired the right to order the closure of Jewish enterprises and their transfer to non-Jews. The entire legislative process against the Jews culminated in the issuance of Government Decree No. 198/1941 of 9 September 1941 on the legal position of Jews, which was also known as the Jewish Code. This decree was prepared according to the German Nuremberg Race Laws, and taking into account the six-years since the latter's adoption, the Jewish Code was much stricter. It contained 270 articles that determined the term 'Jew' on a racial basis, deprived Jews of their property and civil rights, completely isolated them from other inhabitants, restricted their free movement and forced all Jews over six years of age to wear a yellow star as identification. Marriage between Jews and non-Jews and between Jews and those of a Jewish mixed-background, was prohibited under threat of punishment. Privacy of correspondence was limited by mandatory identification of Jews' postal communications. The code included absurdities such as the prohibition of pictures, statues, busts of prominent national and state figures, gramophone records with national songs, state coat of arms, flags, binoculars and cameras. The code allowed a presidential exception to be sought, which protected against discriminatory measures. Slovak Catholic bishops, the Holy See and representatives of the Augsburg Confession Evangelical Church protested against the adoption of the Jewish Code. The code definitively resulted in the concentration of pauperised Jewish inhabitants. Guarded camps and centres were established, which were the future base for the deportation of Jews from Slovakia. Labour camps in Nováky, Sereď and Vyhne served as evidence of the economic utility of the Jews for the state.

The idea of deporting Jews was not new, but after the 23 and 24 October 1941 meeting of Slovak government representatives with Hitler and Himmler the concept acquired distinct features. On 20 January 1942 at a secret conference held in Wannsee near Berlin led by the chief of RSHA Reinhard Heydrich, the 'final solution' of the Jewish issue (holocaust) on a European scale was agreed, including the coordination of the required means. During German-Slovak negotiations about increasing Slovak manpower in Germany in 1942, the Slovak party refused to increase the number of Slovak workers in Germany, instead offering 20,000 Slovak Jews as compensation. Based on the command of Himmler, this manpower was not available to the German Ministry of Labour but rather to the RSHA.

Despite interventions by the Jews themselves, the Holy See and the college of bishops, deportations of Slovak Jews began on 25 March 1942 – when the first transport of women and girls left Poprad for Auschwitz concentration camp. Those deported could only take personally property up to 50 kg. The Slovak government paid a 'settlement fee' of 500 Reichmarks for each deported Jew. The deportations of Jews were illegal. Parliament adopted the law on Jewish deportation on 15 May 1942. Paradoxically, at the time of this law being adopted almost 40,000 Jews had been deported from Slovakia. Up until the process stopped in October 1942, an additional 20,000 Jews had been deported. The law on deporting Jews included exceptions. At this time of risk, some Slovak Jews sought salvage by escaping to Hungary, which was not deporting Jews at that time. The German importance of Jewish deportations from Slovakia was highlighted by Adolf Eichmann's visit to Bratislava at the end of May 1942. Eichmann agreed at a meeting with Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach on family transports, so that not only Jews accounted for the workforce. Eichmann guaranteed that the Germans would treat the deported Jews

fairly. At the beginning of summer 1942 there was shocking news that Slovak Jews were not being settled in new territories, as had been stated by German officials, but rather were being systematically used for slave labour and killed. On 20 October 1942 the last transport of Jews left Slovakia. A total of 57,628 Jews were deported from Slovakia from 25 March 1942 to 20 October 1942. Most died. The majority of Slovak Jews, approximately 24,000, died at Sobibor concentration camp on today's Polish-Ukrainian border. The rest were killed in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, and other concentration camps. According to official data, 21,519 Jews remained (of which 2,574 were in labour camps) in Slovakia as of 1 January 1943 after deportations ceased. If we add to that figure the Jews who were living in hiding, the number reached approximately 24,000 persons. After deportations stopped, The Slovak government faced increasing German pressure to renew deportations after they had ceased. This necessitated a commission being sent to examine the conditions under which the Jews lived in Slovakia. In spring 1944, Jews were arriving in Slovakia from Hungary where they had been harshly persecuted.

A fundamentally new situation arose in Slovakia after the arrival of the German army on 29 August 1944 and the subsequent uprising. During the difficult time of the presence of the German army and police in Slovakia, the chance of rescue for the Jews greatly diminished. Some moved to rebel areas where anti-Jewish laws were not valid. Those able to fight, totalling 1,566 persons, fought in partisan groups. At that time German military and security organisations used the term 'final solution' for the Jewish issue in Slovakia. The Jews were often liquidated during combat actions – approximately 1,000 died in such a way. The former labour camp in Sereď was changed into a strictly-run concentration camp from which transports were dispatched to German extermination camps. The Germans started deportations of Jews from Slovakia on 30 September 1944, from which date until the end of March 1945 approximately 13,500 Jews were deported of which around 10,000 died. Approximately 68,000 Jews from Slovakia died during 1942 to 1945 as part of the holocaust. Some Jews survived thanks to the immense self-sacrifice of some Slovaks. Approximately 44,000 Jews living in Southern Slovakia occupied by Hungary in 1938 were deported in 1944 to Nazi concentration camps. The total number of Jews killed from the entire territory of today's Slovakia, i.e. together with Southern Slovakia, was approximately 105,000, i.e. approx. 77 percent of the pre-war Jewish population.

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References: