

FROM THE YAD WASHEM ARCHIVES
VOL. III

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THE DESTRUCTION
OF SLOVAK JEWRY

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

1961

lized to work there. The letter continues "though the fallacy of this comparison is understood here (by the Slovaks in Bratislava), but is considered to be a most convincing argument for the Vatican. In fact the Slovak note will suffice to answer the protest of the Pope."¹¹⁴

The influence of the Vatican on the Slovak authorities was not insignificant, as proved by the following facts: When the first rumors spread about the fate of deported Jews (June 1942), the Nuncio appealed to the Slovak Government and due to his intervention Prime Minister Tuka requested permission from Wislicensky to send a Slovak delegation to the General Government, to inspect the situation of the deportees (see annex to Document No. 50).¹¹⁵

One year later, on April 7, 1943, when the Slovak Minister of the Interior, Mach, threatened further deportations of Jews, the Nuncio expressed to the Prime Minister of Slovakia, the Vatican's disapproval (see Document No. 65). On May 5, 1943, the Vatican sent another note of protest (see reply of the Slovak Government, Document No. 56), and the transports were not dispatched.

In this chain of interventions, which was rather complicated, the Apostolic Nuncio of Istanbul, Mgr. Angelo Roncalli, now Pope John XXIII, played a decisive role. The representative of the Jewish Agency on the Rescue Committee Ch. Barlas¹¹⁶ appealed to him after receiving desperate letters from the "Working Group" of Bratislava. He showed the Nuncio the letters and telegrams written in code and implored him to intervene with the Holy See and, if possible, exhort the priest of Slovakia for a benevolent and merciful treatment of the remaining Jews in that country. "So will it be, and so will God help us. His mercy," replied the Nuncio, in a whisper, his hand raised. Later when Barlas received news from Switzerland and Slovakia about the cancellation of the deportations, he called at the Nuncio's residence to thank him. Smilingly, the Nuncio answered that he knew about this turn of events but did not want to disclose it, before it would be confirmed "through your superb channels."¹¹⁷ Another protest by the Vatican is known during the Slovak national uprising in 1944, which too originated from the intervention of Nuncio Roncalli.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Files of the German Foreign Ministry, YW/AA-K-607 Inland II AB Pressburg 312/5 K-403510.

¹¹⁵ Compare IMT, vol. IV, p. 368.

¹¹⁶ Head of the Rescue Committee in Istanbul, established in Palestine in 1943 under the leadership of Yitzchak Grunbaum; it consisted of representatives of the political parties and of Youth Movements.

¹¹⁷ Chaim Barlas describes his meeting with the Nuncio in his article "John the XXIII and his attitude to Jews," *Davar*, November 4, 1939, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Ryan, *Attack of the Apostolic Delegation in Istanbul*, reported

In conclusion, it may be said that the five letters of protest delivered by the Vatican in the years 1941-1944 prove sufficiently that the Vatican objected to the deportation of Jews from Slovakia.¹¹⁹ But it cannot be denied that the question remains unsolved whether the former Pope Pius XII could not have acted more forcefully in a country with a Catholic priest as head of State, and clergymen members of Parliament, and with a large and influential Catholic majority of the population.

The Attempt to Ransom the Jews Remaining in Europe

During the cessation of the deportations, the "Working Group" approached Wislicensky to act as mediator between them and the SS-Chiefs in an attempt to save Jews remaining in Europe by payment of ransom.¹²⁰ This plan was proposed by Rabbi Michael Beer Weissmandel and became known as "Europa Plan". The secret files of the German Foreign Ministry contain no evidence about such negotiations. The facts reported here are based on the correspondence between the Bratislava "Working Group" and representatives of Jewish organizations in Switzerland and Istanbul, and on the memoirs of Rabbi Weissmandel, and testimony and statements made by Wislicensky (see Documents No. 96-102). Most letters were addressed by Gisi Fleischmann to Saly Mayer, the representative of the JDC in Switzerland, who was expected to provide the financial means to carry out the plan. "The letters of rabbis" in Heiber¹²¹ also appealed to other Jewish leaders to help provide the ransom necessary to save their brethren from extermination. From the negotiations conducted with Wislicensky it appears that the SS-Chiefs would have agreed to put the plan into effect for two or three million dollars. There is reason to assume that the go-between, Wislicensky, was eager that the negotiations succeed. He himself was not an enthusiastic

to Ludwig Kastner, delegate of the Institute for Emigrants and Refugees, in a letter of October 10, 1944, in the name of the Nuncio, that following his telegraphic recommendation on behalf of the Jews of Slovakia, the Nuncio had received the following reply from the Papal Secretariat of State: "Desired steps taken immediately: Holy See will continue to do all it can on behalf of members of Jewish race in Slovakia", dated September 21, 1944. See microfilm, Rescue Dep of WJC, files relating Slovakia, YW/JM/1698.

¹¹⁹ I. Stanek, in his book "Zrada a pad", analyzes at great length the relations of the Vatican to the independent Slovak State and denies the intervention of the Vatican with the Slovak Government against the deportation of Jews. Compare I. Stanek, *loc. cit.*, p. 182.

¹²⁰ According to the request of Wislicensky the Altreich and the Proccorate were not included.