

Ján Hlavinka, Eduard Nižňanský, **Pracovní a koncentračný tábor v Seredi 1941–1945**. Bratislava: Dokumentačné stredisko holocaustu, 2009. 192 pp. ISBN 978-80-969857-3-9

In their new study, two renowned Slovak historians of the Holocaust have focused on the history of three different camps in Sered.¹ All played a crucial role in the fate of the Jewish community in Slovakia. They consisted of: a “Labour Camp for Jews” (in Slovak, *Pracovní tábor pre Židov*, PTŽ) established in September 1941 by the Minister of the Interior, Alexander Mach, and guarded by the Hlinka Guard (HG, a paramilitary wing of the ruling Hlinka Slovak People’s Party headed by Mach) and dissolved during the Slovak National Uprising (SNP) at the end of August, 1944; a “Concentration Center” (*koncentračné stredisko*) which was used as a place of detention for Jews transported from Slovakia during the first wave of deportations in 1942; and, finally, a concentration camp established in September 1944 under German command, in connection with the last phase of the Nazi “Final Solution” in Slovakia. The study is based on intensive research conducted by the authors in various archives in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany and Israel as well as on memoir literature and oral and visual history resources.

In the first chapter (“Jewish Forced Labour in Slovakia”), the authors provide the reader with contextualisation of the establishment of the PTŽ in Sered. Until now, the Nováky camp in the Prievidza district was the only one of the three Labour Camps for Jews in the fascist “Slovak State” to become the topic of a monograph²; the history of the smallest of the three camps at Vyhne in central Slovakia remains unwritten.

The Second Chapter focuses on the “Establishment and Beginnings of the Construction of the Camp in Sered”. An unprecedented operation, in which some 7,000 Jews were expelled from Bratislava to various provincial towns and “dislocation camps” in Slovakia during the autumn of 1941, was a crucial incentive for the establishment of the camps at Sered, Nováky and Vyhne. The Central Economic Authority (*Ústredný hospodársky úrad*, ÚHÚ), responsible for the “solution of the Jewish question” – understood as it was as a primarily economic problem to be resolved by “aryanisation” of Jewish property – entrusted the Jewish Central (*Ústredňa Židov*, ÚŽ), an organisation with an obligatory membership for the racially defined Jewish community in Slovakia, with the practical realisation of the dislocation. In a memorandum from November 1941, Andrej Steiner and Oskar Neumann – both Zionist employees of the ÚŽ – came up with a proposal to employ the labour force of the dislocated persons. In plans presented to the Ministry of the Interior, Steiner and Neumann laid particular accent on Sered, which was to play the role of a “show case” among the Jewish labour camps. In the leadership of the ÚŽ, Steiner’s and Neumann’s plans aimed at raising productivity faced the opposition of Orthodox Jews who proposed to boycott works perceived as beneficial to the “Slovak State”.

¹ The town of Sered was renamed Sered in 1954.

² Igor Bak: *Židovský tábor v Novákoch, 1941–1944* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2001).

The history of “The Sered camp as a Concentration Center for Jews (March 1942 to September 1942)” is the topic of the third chapter. Tragically, the role of a station *en route* to the ghettos and extermination camps “in the East” fell to the Sered camp precisely in the period when ÚŽ’s efforts to provide access to decent means of livelihood for the dislocated persons started to meet with visible success. A part of the camp was transformed into one of the five centres across Slovakia used for detention of deported Jews. According to Hlavinka and Nižňanský, some 4,463 Jews from western Slovakia were deported from the Sered Concentration Centre between 29 March and 21 September 1942. Only few survived, as was the case with the majority of Slovak Jews (some 58,000 persons altogether) deported from the country “to the East” in 1942. In addition to the *zaistenci* (detainees selected for deportation), hundreds of persons performing forced labour (*zaradenci*), along with their non-working family members, remained in the camp, their concentration in the fictitious “safety” of the camps being a result of tireless efforts on the part of the ÚŽ. In fact, the transport quotas were completed by adding labourers from the category of *zaradenci*, whenever necessary. This threat was hanging over the inmates in spite of the ordinance establishing the three Labour Camps for Jews which partially alleviated the tragedy of Slovak Jewry during the first wave of deportations. Even in this period, a confection workshop operated in the Sered camp alongside the carpentry which, as the camp’s most productive workshop, managed to win customers from all over the “Slovak State”. In addition, production of concrete pipes continued as well as agricultural works, including sericulture. In July 1942, the Jewish Hospital in Bratislava moved to the Sered camp area. In the following two years, it provided medical services to the labourers from all three Labour Camps for Jews as well as from the numerous labour centres all over the “Slovak State” and for the “free” Jews.

In the chapter entitled “The Labour Camp for Jews in Sered (September 1942 to August 1944)”, Hlavinka and Nižňanský follow the development of the camp since the termination of the first wave of deportations. Until its dissolution during the Slovak National Uprising, the Sered camp was lagging behind its counterpart at Nováky in the number of detainees. It was, however, ahead of the Nováky camp in terms of production: in 1943, its gains accounted for 2 million Slovak Crowns, in spite of the necessity for the camp to finance its own administration, nourishment for its inhabitants and care for the non-working children, elderly and ill detainees. With labour duty from the age of 14, the proportion of working detainees was 81%, with no less than 90% of them working physically. With the high quality products of its largest manufacturing unit – the carpentry – the Sered camp managed to win a wide network of customers across the country. Famously, the Minister of the Interior, HG leader and one of the key initiators of the regime’s anti-Jewish policy, Alexander Mach, was also among its clients. The labourers and – when necessary – their family members were sent to the camp by the government-appointed Commissioner for Jewish Camps, Július Pečúch, with a refusal to heed the call resulting in criminal prosecution. Hlavinka with Nižňanský provide a look at the ambivalent position of the detainees in the labour camps as well as of the ÚŽ as their founding institution with regard to the plans for resuming deportations pushed for by the radical wing of the HSLŠ in 1943. The economic profit of the camps (particularly the one at Sered) was a clear argument for those opposing the renewing

of Jewish transports. However, as the Slovak government publicly declared after a wave of escapes from the camps, it considered the *zaradenci* as hostages to be deported in the first line if transports were to be resumed. The majority of Jews in Slovakia perceived the PTŽ as concentration camps. According to Hlavinka and Nižňanský, “on the one hand, Jews provided forced labour for a state which did not want them; on the other hand, the same people, being concentrated, feared deportations which the government was ready to realise speedily”. In separate subchapters, Hlavinka and Nižňanský deal with topics such as production, living conditions, camp self-government (a “Jewish Council” headed by Alexander Pressburger was established by the Ministry of the Interior in April 1943), health and sanitation, education and child care (a kindergarten as well as an elementary school operated in the camp), culture and the resistance movement represented by the socialist Zionist youth organisation Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair. After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, most members of the resistance movement moved to the liberated area to actively participate in the battle against fascism.

The history of the Sered camp from its reestablishment after the German occupation of Slovakia until the evacuation of the remaining inmates, as well as of the camp inventory, to Terezín on 31 March 1945 – barely touched upon in earlier literature – is discussed in the fifth chapter, entitled “The Concentration Camp in Sered (September 1944 to March 1945)”. The discovery of a preserved part of the books of evidence from November 1944 until March 1945 in the Slovak National Archives in 2008 has significantly extended our knowledge about the Sered camp and the fates of its inmates in this period; no other camp documentation has been preserved. As Hlavinka and Nižňanský noted, they did not cover the full scope of the issue in their study: for instance, the fates of the inmates deported from Sered in 1944–1945 deserve further attention. The authors put the establishment of the concentration camp in Sered into the context of anti-Jewish measures taken by the German occupying power in Slovakia as represented, in particular, by the Security Police (SiPo) and Security Service (SD) apparatus with its *Einsatzgruppe H* (EG H) and the subordinated commandos (the EG H did not control the territory of Eastern Slovakia which fell into the operational space of the SiPo a SD Commander in Krakow). On the basis of reports to Berlin by the EG H Chief Josef Witiska, Hlavinka and Nižňanský conclude that the reestablishment of the Sered camp was not discussed during the first phase of short term planning in the framework of the “Final Solution” in Slovakia connected with the German occupation. As Witiska reported on 4 September 1944 – a day before the decision to restore the camp at Sered was made – a transport of Jews detained in Western Slovakia to Svatobořice located in the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was considered. SS personnel originally active in the *Heimatsschutz* (a paramilitary wing of the Deutsche Partei, a Nazi ethnic German party in Slovakia) were responsible for transforming the former labour camp into a transit camp on the way to Auschwitz. Under the command of two ethnic Germans from Bratislava, Franz Knollmayer and Josef Häckl (it is unclear which of them acted as commander and which as deputy), inmates were brutally tortured, raped and murdered from the very first days of the restoration of the camp. At the end of September 1944, the Austrian SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Alois Brunner – one of the most ex-

perienced aides of Adolf Eichmann responsible for the mass murder of Jews from Vienna, Berlin, Thessaloniki, Paris and the Provence – took over as commander of the Sered camp. Immediately after his arrival, Brunner arrested Knollmayer for alleged financial machination and raping Jewish girls in the camp. After Brunner's arrival, the practice of brutal terror and murders continued in Sered.

As we can establish from the preserved part of the evidence books, the vast majority of inmates were transferred to Sered from Western Slovakia and especially from Bratislava, with only a handful from the domain of the EG H's *Einsatzkommando 14* (EK 14) in the Banská Bystrica and Zvolen area (the EK 14's role in the "Final Solution" lay especially in the organisation of mass murders with the involvement of especially Slovak and Ukrainian collaborators in Kremnička and Nemecká). Among the Jewish inmates of the SS camp in Sered, a number of foreign citizens are documented, with most of them from Hungary. Some of the inmates claimed to be "Aryan" (especially those living in mixed couples for which a separate barracks was assigned) or of mixed race (*Mischlinge*). Members of the Jewish Council of Elders, established by Brunner and headed by Emanuel Kolm, as well as members of the Jewish Police (*ordneri*) were excluded from transports and remained in the camp until its evacuation to Terezín. After 1945, Kolm was sentenced to six months of prison by the District People's Court in Bratislava on charges of "abetment of the activity of fascist occupants" and "participating in racial persecution". Under Brunner's command, several workshops in the Sered camp resumed their operation; inability to work was a criterion for adding an inmate to a transport. In the autumn of 1944, the number of inmates temporarily concentrated in the camp exceeded 3,000 (at the time of highest occupancy shortly before the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, there were some 1,100 to 1,200 inmates at the Labour Camp for Jews in Sered). With each transport, the camp was effectively emptied. According to Witiska's reports as well as testimonies of former inmates entrusted by Brunner with leading the books of evidence, more than 7,400 people were deported from Sered to Auschwitz from 30 September until the beginning of November 1944; most of them perished. From 16 November 1944 until the evacuation of the camp, more than 4,000 inmates were moved to Sachsenhausen, Terezín and Ravensbrück. Most of these late deportees survived the Holocaust. During the transports from Sered, some deportees managed to escape, using instruments distributed by an aid organisation founded by former members of the "Working Group" (*Pracovná skupina, Nebenregierung*) established at the margins of the ÚŽ,³ including the rabbis Michael Weissmandel and Armin Frieder as well as the last chairman (*starosta*) of the ÚŽ, the earlier mentioned Oskar Neumann. Along with Jewish inmates, some 500 to 600 participants of the Slovak National Uprising, partisans and those accused by the Nazis of supporting the resistance movement were incarcerated

³ For further reference about the fight of the Pracovná skupina against deportations, see Katarína Hradská, ed., *Holocaust na Slovensku 3. Listy Gisely Fleischmannovej (1942–1944). Snahy Pracovnej skupiny o záchranu slovenských a európskych židov. Dokumenty* (Bratislava: Klemo, 2003) as well as a monograph by Gila Fatranová *Boj o prežitie* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007), translated from the Hebrew original *Haim le-Hisardut. Hanhagat Yehudey Slovakia be-Tkufat ha-Shoah* (Tel Aviv 1992).

in the Sered camp. No documentation has been preserved about these non-Jewish inmates. Altogether, some 12,000 prisoners passed through the “Brunner’s camp” in Sered, most of whom perished.

The study by Hlavinka and Nižňanský about the Sered camp is an important contribution to the mosaic of knowledge about the Holocaust in Slovakia, based on sources not earlier used. The integration of oral and visual history resources is particularly important as they extend and modify our knowledge about this tragic chapter in Slovak history.

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G. John Ikenberry, **The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. 157 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-13969-2

The Crisis of American Foreign Policy is an interesting insight to the debate over contemporary American foreign policy and its ideologies. Rather than a comprehensive book, it is a collection of four essays by G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith debating the ideologies and ideas behind the controversial Bush doctrine.

In the years since September 11, the Bush administration pursued one of the most controversial policies in American history based on provocative ideas about American global dominance. The center piece of this foreign policy was an extensive new doctrine of national security which provided the intellectual background for the invasion to Iraq in the spring of 2003. As the invasion turned into a protracted war, the Bush administration increasingly invoked liberal internationalist ideas to justify its action, where the echoes of Woodrow Wilson were unmistakable. Bush wanted Iraq to be seen ostensibly as part of America’s historic commitment reaching back to Wilson to advance the cause of freedom and democracy in the world.

In all four essays, the authors, who are all experts in American foreign policy, are debating whether this premise is true, whether Bush foreign policy reflects continuity with America’s liberal internationalist past or a radical break with it. Another question is whether Bush foreign policy and the Iraq war in particular, really grow out of the Wilsonian tradition. Tony Smith in his essay *Willsonian after Iraq* argues that America’s commitment to promote democracy in the world was the main idea behind the Bush doctrine and thus the Bush administration was the natural heir to the Wilsonian tradition, because the promotion of the democracy worldwide is the core of Wilsonianism. On the other hand, Thomas Knock (*Playing for a Hundred Years Hence*) and Anne-Marie Slaughter (*Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first century*) argue that the Wilsonian vision was not directly concerned with the spread of democracy but rather with the building of a cooperative and rule-based international order, which is an idea that the Bush administration actively resisted. In argu-