



## Hungary

Country located in central Europe. After Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933, the Hungarian government became interested in making an alliance with Nazi Germany. The Hungarian Government felt that such an alliance would be good for them, in that the two governments maintained similar authoritarian ideologies, and the Nazis could assist in retrieving land they had lost in World War I. Over the next five years, Hungary moved closer to Germany.

The Munich Conference of September 1938, allowed Germany to annex the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. In November, Germany carved a piece off of Czechoslovakia—a part that had formerly belonged to Hungary—and handed it back to Hungary to crystallize relations between the two nations. In August 1940, Germany gave Hungary possession of northern Transylvania. In October 1940, Hungary joined Germany, Italy, and Japan in the Axis alliance. Hungary was awarded more land in March 1941 when, despite its alliance with the Yugoslav government, Hungary joined its new ally, Germany, in invading and splitting up Yugoslavia. By that time, with all its new territories, the Jewish population in Greater Hungary had reached 725,007, not including about 100,000 Jews who had converted to Christianity but were still racially considered to be “Jews.”

Hungary commenced issuing anti-Jewish legislation soon after the Anschluss in March 1938. Hungary passed a law whereby Jewish participation in the economy and the professions was cut by 80 percent. In May 1939, the Hungarian Government further limited the Jews in the economic realm and distinguished Jews as a "racial," rather than religious group. In 1939 Hungary, created a new type of labor service draft, which Jewish men of military age were forced to join (see also Hungarian Labor Service System). Later, many Jewish men would die within its framework. In 1941 the Hungarian Government passed a racial law, similar to the Nuremberg Laws, which officially defined who was to be considered Jewish.



Despite the hardships caused by these anti-Jewish laws, most of the Jews of Hungary lived in relative safety for much of the war. However, one group of Hungarian Jews was subject to tragedy in the summer of 1941. Some 18,000 Jews randomly designated by the Hungarian authorities as "Jewish foreign nationals" were kicked out of their homes and deported to Kamenets-Podolski in the Ukraine, where most were murdered. In early 1942, another 1,000 Jews, in the section of Hungary, newly acquired from Yugoslavia, were murdered. by Hungarian soldiers and police, in their "pursuit of Partisans."

At the same time as they were passing anti-Jewish laws, the Hungarian authorities were getting more and more entrenched in their alliance with Germany. In June 1941, Hungary decided to join Germany in its' war against the Soviet Union. Finally, in December 1941, Hungary joined the axis in declaring war against the United States, completely cutting itself off from any relationship with the West. However, after Germany's defeat at Stalingrad and other battles in which Hungary lost tens of thousands of its soldiers, the Regent of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, began trying to back out of the alliance with Germany.

This attempt was not acceptable to Hitler, and in March 1944, German troops invaded Hungary, in order to keep the country loyal by force. Hitler immediately set up a new government that he thought would be faithful, with Dome Sztojaj, Hungary's former ambassador to Germany, as prime minister. Accompanying the occupation forces was a Sonderkommando unit headed by Adolf Eichmann, whose job was to begin implementing the "Final Solution" within Hungary. Anti-Jewish decrees were passed in great haste. *Judenraete* were established throughout Hungary, with a central *Judenrat* called the *Zsido Tanacs* established in Budapest under Samu Stern. The Nazis isolated Jewish populations from the outside world by restricting their movement and confiscating their telephones and radios. Jewish communities were forced to wear the Jewish badge for easy identification (see also Badge, Jewish). Jewish property and businesses were seized, and from mid to late April the Jews of Hungary were forced into ghettos. These ghettos were short-lived. After two to six weeks the Jews of each ghetto were put on trains and deported. Between May 15 and July 9, about 430,000 Hungarian Jews were



deported, mainly to Auschwitz, where half were gassed on arrival. In early July, Horthy halted the deportations, still intent on cutting Hungary's ties with Germany. By that time, all of Hungary was "Jew-free," except for the capital, Budapest. Throughout spring of 1944 Israel Kasztner, Joel Brand, and other members of the Relief and Rescue Committee of Budapest began negotiating with the SS to save lives. Many Jews (perhaps up to 8,000) fled from Hungary, mostly to Romania, many with the help of Zionist youth movement members.

From July to October, the Jews of Budapest lived in relative safety. However, on October 15 Horthy announced publicly that he was done with Hungary's alliance with Germany, and was going to make peace with the Allies. The Germans blocked this move, and simply toppled Horthy's Government, giving power to Ferenc Szalasi and his fascist, violently anti-Semitic Arrow Cross Party.

The Arrow Cross immediately introduced a reign of terror in Budapest. Nearly 80,000 Jews were killed in Budapest itself, shot on the banks of the Danube River and then thrown in. Thousands of others were forced on death marches to the Austrian border. In December, during the Soviet siege of the city, 70,000 Jews were forced into a ghetto, thousands dying of cold, disease, and starvation.

Tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest were saved during the Arrow Cross reign by members of the Relief and Rescue Committee and other Jewish activists, especially Zionist youth movement members, who forged identity documents and provided them with food. These Jews worked together with foreign diplomats such as the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg, the Swiss Carl Lutz, and others who provided many Jews with international protection.

Hungary was liberated by the Soviet army by April 1945. Up to 568,000 Hungarian Jews had perished during the Holocaust.