

Canada

Country in North America that joined the war against Germany just one week after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. Despite the fact that Canada fought resolutely for the Allied cause, the country did very little to help rescue European Jewry during the Holocaust.

Canada closed its doors to Jews long before the Nazis rose to power. During the early 1920s the farmlands of western Canada attracted many Europeans, including Jews. This provoked many Canadians to oppose an open immigration policy, and in 1923 the Canadian government restricted its immigration quotas for all Eastern Europeans. Particularly strict rules limited the immigration of Jews to Canada, except those from Great Britain or the United States. After 1923, only Jews who had very close relatives in Canada or could convince the authorities to give them an entry permit—which almost never happened—were admitted into the country.

The Great Depression of the 1930s made matters even worse. Despite the rise of antisemitism in Europe, especially in Germany, Canada's conditions for immigration were further restricted. Canada's small Jewish community—which made up less than 1.5 percent of the country's entire population—responded to the immigration restrictions by lobbying the government for change. Their national Jewish organization, the Canadian Jewish Congress, also responded to the Nazi threat by arranging a national boycott of goods manufactured in Germany (see also boycotts, anti-Nazi). The boycott may have been somewhat successful, but the lobbying accomplished nothing. Canadian delegates attended the international Evian Conference of refugees in July 1938, but not to offer their country's support in helping the Jews desperately seeking a safe haven from the Nazis. Rather, totally unaffected by the Jews' plight and the lobbying efforts of Canada's own Jews, the delegates were present at the conference in order to ensure that other delegates did not suggest Canada as a possibility for some Jewish refugee resettlement plan.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, Canada's Jewish community both completely supported the war effort, and continued trying to convince the Canadian government to allow in European Jews who could still

be saved. On a very few occasions, the Canadian Jewish Congress did manage to persuade the authorities to admit into Canada small groups of Jews. In late 1941 the government agreed to accept 1,000 Jewish children from Vichy France whose parents had already been deported to extermination camps in Poland. However, their hard-won efforts came too late to actually save those children: before the children could leave for Canada, the Nazis took control of Vichy France, and the orphans were deported to their deaths. Later on in the war, the Canadian authorities allowed into Canada several hundred Jewish refugees who had made their way to Spain and Switzerland.

A third group of Jewish refugees arrived in Canada during the war, but not due to the efforts of the Jewish community or by the good graces of the Canadian government. These refugees came from England, where they had already found a safe haven from the Nazis. After France was vanquished by the Germans in mid-1940, the British started to fear an invasion of their island. They began to believe that German and Austrian refugees in Britain—including Jews who were simply trying to escape with their lives—were a danger, and might aid the enemy from within. Thus, the British began deporting such refugees to Australia and Canada. Only after two years of pressure from the Canadian Jewish community were the Jewish refugees among the group finally released.

After the war, Canada still refused to change its immigration regulations, even with its recognition of the atrocities that had occurred in Europe. Only during the late 1940s did the Canadian government open its doors wide to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.