

## Szalasi, Ferenc

(1897--1946), Leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party and head of the Hungarian government from October 1944 until the end of World War II.

A former major in the Hungarian army, Szalasi joined an extreme right-wing, secret organization called Hungarian Life League in 1930; the league's purpose was to "protect the superior race." During the 1930s Szalasi wrote several pamphlets describing his ideology, which borrowed ideas from the Italian Fascist movement and the German Nazi Party. Szalasi played a leading role in several extreme right-wing parties, such as the Nation's Will Party, the Hungarian National Socialist Party, and the National Socialist Hungarian Party-Hungarist Movement. At one point, Szalasi was thrown into jail for spreading treasonous ideas.

In 1940 Szalasi was let out of jail. He immediately established the Arrow Cross Party, an antisemitic, fascist party that used the arrow cross as its symbol. Many of his followers were either unemployed or poor landowners, but there were also some intellectuals and aristocrats who followed his racist lead.

On October 15, 1944 Hitler overthrew the leader of the Hungarian government, Miklos Horthy, and installed Szalasi in his stead. Just days later, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross henchmen began a reign of terror against the Jews in Budapest---the only Jews left in Hungary. Some 76,000 Jews---men, women, and children---were arrested and forced on a death march towards the Austrian border. Those who lagged behind were shot to death by the accompanying guards; others perished from starvation or exhaustion. The Jews left in Budapest were subjected to increasing Arrow Cross violence. Some 20,000 Jews were marched to the Danube River and shot.

The Nazis in Hungary surrendered to the Soviet army on February 13, 1945. Szalasi tried to flee by joining the withdrawing German forces. However, he was caught in Germany by American troops, and sent back to Hungary in 1945 to stand trial. Szalasi was convicted of war crimes and crimes against the people, and sentenced to death. The former government head was hanged in public on March 12, 1946.

