Katherine Page

From: Katherine Page
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Jewish childhood friends to meet Pope in Holy Land

BBC News
Monday, 13 March, 2000, 17:27 GMT

Austria ’holding stolen art’

By Ray Furlong in Bratislava

The Secretary-General of the World Jewish Congress, Dr Israel Singer, has told a conference of European rabbis that art stolen from Austrian Jews during the Holocaust is now worth $10b.

He caused shockwaves at the meeting in Bratislava by producing what he said was a secret US State Department report from 1953 listing the property.

He said it was still in the hands of the Austrian Government and Austrian people, and that they should not continue to hold it.

Report hidden

Dr Singer made sweeping attacks on those who had prospered through the Holocaust, stating that 50% of the art in American collections was stolen Jewish art.

But the US State Department report was his trump card. He produced a bundle of papers from his bag which,
he said, were a secret file on Jewish property stolen in Austria during the war.

In Monday's figures, the property would be worth $10bn, he said, adding that the State Department had successfully hidden the report until Friday last week, when he got a federal court ruling to have it declassified.

Dr Singer said libraries, art collections, businesses and private homes had all been plundered and that the pickings were still in the hands of Austrian people and the Austrian Government.

He was not entirely clear about what would happen next.

Further revelations

He said all those who had lost property would be "red-flagged" and that, in regard to whether the property would be returned or not, the process would be painful and painstaking.

Speaking informally on his way to the airport afterwards, he said he had handed the documents to the Israeli Government and the World Claims Conference, and it would be part of discussions with the people of Austria, not the Austrian Government.

They should not be allowed to hold on to stolen property, he said, adding that further details would be announced in Jerusalem tomorrow.

Some delegates at the conference said the speech was shocking and showed just how much was still to be learnt - others said they were not so surprised.

But everyone seemed to agree that more revelations are yet to come.

New York City museum says Rubens is not Nazi loot

03/14/00

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, March 14 (Reuters) - New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art on Tuesday said that a 1597 painting by Peter Paul Rubens had not been looted by the Nazis though it was handled by a dealer known for plundering Jewish assets.

The Met, in a statement, cited what it called a 76-year-old article in an authoritative German art journal, "Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen," as proof that the Rubens portrait was owned by Henry Blank of Newark, New Jersey, by 1924 -- at least nine years before the Nazis came to power.

Last week, the world-renowned museum confirmed it was investigating the painting, called "Portrait of a Man, possibly an Architect or Geographer," because it went through the hands of Karl Haberstock, an infamous Nazi art dealer.

The U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency, in a post-war report on art work stolen by the Nazis, described Haberstock as: "The most prolific German buyer in Paris during the war and regarded in all quarters as the most important German art figure."

The U.S. report was provided to Reuters by the World Jewish Congress. The Jewish advocacy group last month turned up the heat on museums by demanding that they identify any paintings that might have been looted instead of just conducting their own research in private.

Otherwise, it is too difficult for Holocaust survivors - many of whom are elderly - and their heirs to figure out if the museums have heirlooms that were looted from them, according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC.

U.S. museums in June 1998 promised to audit their collections for any works that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims.
British museums last month published a list of some 300 works suspected of having been looted by the Nazis and now hanging on their walls.

Harold Holzer, a Metropolitan museum spokesman, has said that the museum in the next few weeks will issue a study showing how many of its 2 million works of art it has checked to figure out if they were looted from Holocaust victims.

But the WJC did not back off its demands for what it calls greater and swifter transparency.

"It's remarkable how quickly they can do such research when they want to," Steinberg told Reuters by telephone. Whether the Met's Rubens had been looted by the Nazis was a question that only arose publicly last week.

Saying he was pleased that the museum had filled in any gaps in the portrait's provenance or history, Steinberg added: "Whatever the state of their research is now they should release it," he added.

Nazi Loot?
Art Institute of Chicago negotiating with Holocaust victim's heir over painting

Updated 8:24 a.m. ET (1324 GMT) March 15, 2000

Fox News

LONDON - The Art Institute of Chicago has acknowledged questions about the ownership history of one of its paintings and is negotiating with a Holocaust victim's heir who claims she owns the work.

Amid growing concern about art looted during the Holocaust, the institute also announced Thursday that it will release an inventory of pieces with questionable histories.

The work at the center of the announcement is called the "Rock at Hautepierre," an 1869 painting by Gustave Courbet.

Museum spokeswoman Eileen Harakal said the painting was acquired from a New York gallery in 1967. It had been owned in the 1920s by Max Silberberg, a German Jew and art collector who died with his wife at Auschwitz.

His daughter-in-law, Gerta Silberberg, is trying to reclaim the collection that Max Silberberg lost during World War II. She has made successful claims to three artworks in the Prussian Heritage Foundation in Berlin - including an $8 million sketch by Van Gogh.

"Mrs. Silberberg and the Art Institute are working together to resolve ownership of the painting," said Harakal. She would not comment further.

Some art experts say there are thousands of pieces on display in museums across the United States that are among works stolen from Jews during the Holocaust. Some have been returned to heirs of Holocaust victims.

Elan Steinberg, the director of the World Jewish Congress, praised the Art Institute.

"I can only hope that the other major museums throughout the country, in places like New York and L.A., will follow this lead," he said.
BASF says giving 100 mln dmk to Nazi slave fund

03/15/00

LUDWIGSHAFEN, Germany, March 15 (Reuters) - Europe's largest chemicals maker BASF AG said on Wednesday it was contributing 100 million marks ($49.4 million) to the compensation fund for the families of Nazi slave labourers.

"We are participating with 100 million (marks) and I think this is comparable to what other companies are offering," BASF Chief Executive Juergen Strube told a news conference.

The fund includes contributions from other German blue chip companies including Volkswagen AG and Deutsche Bank AG.

($1 =2.025 Mark)

Jerusalem Post

Knesset begins inquiry into unclaimed Holocaust-era assets

By Nina Gilbert

JERUSALEM (March 15) - The Knesset commission of inquiry into unclaimed Holocaust-era assets held in Israel by banks, the state, and public institutions began its deliberations yesterday. Members expressed hope that they can get all the necessary information without having to use legislation to force a handover of documents.

The commission, headed by MK Colette Avital (One Israel), decided to begin the six-month probe with the issue of dormant bank accounts, although it is estimated that the bulk of the assets are in real estate.

In the next meetings, the custodian-general and the supervisor of banks will be summoned.

Avital said there has been nothing thus far to indicate that all of the information has been handed over to the custodian-general.

Bar-Ilan University Prof. Yossi Katz said the biggest problem with the assets is that people do not know they are heirs.

Zvi Barak, who was a member of the Volcker Committee that probed Nazi-era accounts in Swiss banks, said that if efforts are made, nearly 80 percent of the heirs of the assets could be found. He doubted the committee could conclude its work in six months, and said the most important thing is for it to first break banking secrecy.

Katz said that all parties must understand that it is in their interest to cooperate.

Former Labor MK Yona Yahav, who dealt with the issue in previous Knessets, said the difference between the Swiss banks and the Israeli banks is that in Israel it is an issue of negligence, whereas the Swiss committed robbery and then tried to destroy the evidence.

The root of the problem, Yahav said, is that the British confiscated the assets under the Enemy Property Act.

Likud MK Avraham Herschson, who heads the Knesset subcommittee on Holocaust restitution, said that British policy turned European Jews who invested in Palestine into "double victims."

According to Katz, the custodian-general released land to immigrants who arrived after the establishment of the state and had proof of ownership.

It was noted that Herzliya Pituah and Sheba Hospital at Tel Hashomer had been established on unclaimed land.
Katz noted that not only Bank Leumi should be probed, but also other banks that were in existence before the establishment of the state, including Israel Discount Bank, Barclays, and foreign banks.

The members agreed that making information available on the Internet, as done by Bank Leumi, should be accompanied by publication in newspapers and in other outlets to ensure that those without computer access can be reached.

Holocaust-era accounts here are estimated to amount to some $40 million. The custodian-general has estimated the quantity of land at some 6,000 dunams (1,500 acres), with a value of some $90m.

The committee is to examine ways to expand the search for assets and set policies for restitution.

U.S. judge says Swiss delay Holocaust bank accord

03/14/00

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, March 14 (Reuters) - A federal judge on Tuesday cited Switzerland's failure to publish the names of account holders as the reason he extended the deadline for a plan to distribute a $1.25 billion Swiss bank settlement to Holocaust victims.

The move by Brooklyn-based U.S. District Judge Edward Korman, who presides over class-action lawsuits brought against Swiss banks by Holocaust survivors and their heirs, means that potential claimants will have to wait a bit longer for payments.

A plan on how to divide up the $1.25 billion settlement had been due from court-appointed special master Judah Gribetz on Wednesday. The settlement with Swiss banks, which Korman still must approve, was reached in 1998.

Critics of the accord have charged that Holocaust survivors, many of whom are elderly, might not live long enough to collect any payments.

The pact with Swiss banks aims to settle 55-year-old claims that the banks never returned the assets that Jews deposited with them for safekeeping before World War II. In return for the settlement, U.S. lawyers who had sued Swiss banks on behalf of Holocaust victims agreed to drop their cases.

The plan to repay Holocaust survivors and heirs hinges upon getting lists of prewar accounts with Swiss banks that were looted, dormant or closed by the banks.

The Volcker commission, which was set up in 1996 by Swiss banks and the World Jewish Congress, an advocacy group, found some 44,000 bank accounts that were held by victims of the Holocaust -- more than 50 times the number the banks had claimed four years ago.

The judge on Tuesday pinned the blame for the latest delay -- which was first disclosed on Monday -- squarely on the Swiss, saying that it had been more than two months since the Volcker commission had issued its findings.

Korman on Tuesday included in his order to extend the deadline for filing the distribution plan a Feb. 22 letter he wrote to Paul Volcker, the former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve who chaired the investigatory commission.

"I agree that the success of this effort depends on the willingness of the Swiss authorities to adopt your recommendation that a central archive of data on all 4.1 million accounts be established and that they publish the names of some 25,000 account holders in Swiss banks from 1933-45 whom (the commission) has identified as probably or possibly related to the victims of Nazi persecution," the judge said in the letter.

Korman, in his order, said he had been told that the Swiss authorities had promised to give the Volcker Commission an answer by March 27.

Once Switzerland has told the Volcker commission whether it would publish the names, Korman said he would approve
the bank settlement and require the distribution plan to be submitted within 30 days.

Swiss Defensive About WWII Role
10:20EST
03/15/00

BERN, Switzerland (AP) -- The Swiss are well-informed about Nazi Germany's World War II atrocities, but only 35 percent think Switzerland should have taken in more European Jews, a U.S.-sponsored study said Wednesday.

"Holocaust denial is rejected by nearly all Swiss," said the New-York based American Jewish Committee, which joined with Geneva's Inter-Community Coordination against Anti-Semitism and Defamation to commission the survey.

However, "in the main the Swiss are untroubled by Switzerland's conduct toward Jews in the context of the Holocaust," it said.

The survey found 16 percent of Swiss hold anti-Semitic views, reflecting an increase triggered in the 1990s by international scrutiny of neutral Switzerland's past. The sponsors said latent anti-Semitism could be much higher.

The telephone survey was carried out by the Swiss-based GFS polling organization among 1,210 adults in January. Respondents were asked questions covering Holocaust knowledge and attitudes, and Switzerland's wartime conduct. The survey gave a 3 percent margin of error.

A majority accepted the December 1999 conclusion of a government-appointed panel that Switzerland, which took in nearly 30,000 Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, "turned away refugees who were in danger of being killed."

But only 35 percent thought Switzerland took in too few Jews, while 43 percent said the number accepted was the "right amount."

A strong majority felt Switzerland's behavior was "justified, in order for Switzerland not to be invaded." The neutral country, then with a population of 4 million, was surrounded by Germany, Nazi-occupied France and Nazi-allied Italy.

Some 26 percent of those surveyed described the Swiss stance as "cowardly."

The survey indicated most Swiss see anti-Semitism as a problem. Nevertheless, a 1998 state-commissioned report found that anti-Semitism was revived here by the controversy over Switzerland's relations with Nazi Germany and its banks' treatment of Holocaust victims' assets.

Switzerland's two biggest banks agreed in August 1998 to pay Holocaust survivors $1.25 billion in compensation for wartime losses. The accord followed prolonged international pressure, notably from Jewish groups.

Pope seeks reconciliation in Israel
By Judy Dempsey - 13 Mar 2000 22:04GMT

Financial Times

When John Paul II visits Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the Holocaust, this month it will mark the end of a journey that started 14 years ago in the Great Synagogue of Rome.

The visit is described by Rabbi David Rosen, a leading proponent of interfaith dialogue, as "the culmination of the transformation of Christian-Jewish relations". After 2000 years of hatred and persecution, leading rabbis believe that the Pope's visit signifies a genuine willingness for reconciliation.

John Paul became the first Pope in living memory to enter a synagogue in 1986. The path towards removing all
prejudices was "still at the beginning", he told his audience of Roman Jews.

Since then, the Polish-born Pontiff has made several trenchant speeches on Christian-Jewish relations and on the Holocaust. Ahead of next week's six-day trip the Vatican published its long-awaited Memory and Reconciliation, a historical analysis of the Catholic Church "and the the faults of the past". The Holocaust, it said, was the result of "the pagan ideology animated by a merciless anti-semitism that not only despised the faith of the Jewish people but also denied their very human dignity".

While many Christians, it added, risked their lives to save Jews, other Christians did not. This required "an act of repentance . . . to keep a moral and religious memory of the injury inflicted on the Jews".

With this quest for reconciliation and repentence as the main theme of his visit, it was unsurprising that the Pope insisted on spending time at Yad Vashem. However, the historic dimension of the visit, will not be understood by most Israeli Jews. Rabbi Rosen says some are hostile to the visit, others ignorant of its aim.

Hostility runs deepest among the Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox Jews. Posters plastered throughout ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods in Jerusalem describe the Pope as "the evil one" and advise him to stay away. "The Haredim are still living in medieval times," says Yaacov Katz, professor of education at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv. "They are rooted in the belief that the Pope is the enemy of the Jews . . . coming to convert."

Other religious Jews are sceptical of the visit for a different reason. Holocaust survivors and their descendants, says Mr Katz, are not ready to forgive the Vatican for not speaking out against concentration camps.

Indeed, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Israel's chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, most of whose family died in the Holocaust, says he is still waiting for the Vatican to condemn the behaviour of Pope Pius XII.

As for secular Jews, educationalists say they have no idea about Christianity, let alone their own religion.

An opinion poll published by Gallup and commissioned by the Interreligious Co-ordinating Council in Israel confirmed as much. A majority said it did not know the Vatican had apologised for the Holocaust or that it opposed anti-semitism. Most-respondents said the education ministry did not encourage mutual religious tolerance. Still, a small majority viewed the Papal visit positively. For most Jews, especially secular ones, the visit is a political, not a spiritual one. They believe, said Mr Katz, that the Pope is coming to recognise the state of Israel and the Jewish people.

But like any other state visitor, the Pope will have to find his way through the quagmire of the Middle East peace process. The Palestinians, while welcoming him, fear that Israel will make political capital of his visit. "The Palestinians view the visit with a mixture of expectations and apprehension," said Father Frans Bouwen of St Anne's Catholic church in east Jerusalem.

The expectations are high because Yassir Arafat, the Palestinian president, hopes that the Pope will support a Palestinian state and the right of refugees to return to the homes in Israel from which they fled in 1948.

Paradoxically, apprehension is greatest among the dwindling Palestinian Christian community of 160,000 who live in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel. As a tiny minority, they feel squeezed by Israel's Jews and Palestinian Muslims. They fear they will be blamed for the failure of European Christians to oppose the Holocaust.

"The Pope will speak about the Holocaust but we do not feel responsible for it," explained a Palestinian priest. "It is a western affair unrelated to the Middle East. We are victims of the Holocaust. Without it, Jews might not have such support for the Jewish state and we - Christians and Muslims alike - would not have been turned into refugees."

The Pope had also wanted to meet the Muslim Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine together with the Chief Rabbi.
So far, Sheikh Ekrima Sabri has turned him down.

The main obstacle to the meeting, said a Palestinian official, was the same enduring suspicion that makes reconciliation of the three monotheistic religions so difficult.

14-Mar-2000 -- EWTN News Brief

JEWSIISH CHILDHOOD FRIENDS TO MEET POPE IN HOLY LAND

JERUSALEM (CWNers.com) - A group of Israeli Jews originally from Pope John Paul II's Polish hometown of Wadowice will meet with the Holy Father during his visit to the Holy Land next week.

Yosef Bienenstock, 80, on Sunday remembered attending school with the young Karol Wojtyla. "We sat on the same bench and I have to thank him today because I was mischievous and when I didn't want to do my homework I would copy from the Pope, Karolik," he said. He will be among 20 Jews from Wadowice who will meeting the Holy Father at Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial.

"He was a genius in every sense of the word," Bienenstock told Reuters news agency. "In school, the teachers didn't know what to do with him. When the teacher opened his mouth, he completed the sentence."

Bienenstock remembered living down the street from Karol and said he plans to reminisce about their childhood. "I will kiss him, I will speak to him in Polish," Bienenstock said. "Trust me, we have a common language. From what I understand he has a good memory." He also called the Pope a friend of the Jews. "I have to say he came from a house where they didn't know what anti-Semitism was," he recalled.
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U.S. to defend seizure of Schiele painting

Joan Gralla
03/15/00

NEW YORK, March 15 (Reuters) - A U.S. attorney on Friday was expected to tell a federal judge that authorities should not be forced to return a 1912 painting seized after it arrived in New York from Austria for exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Mary Jo White gained possession of the Egon Schiele painting, which had been handled by a Nazi art dealer, after an heir to a Jewish art dealer claimed the painting had been part of his family's collection in Vienna before the Second World War.

In a Sept. 22, 1999, statement, White said she wanted to seize the Austrian Expressionist's picture to give it back to its rightful owners. White filed the forfeiture action, which is a civil procedure, saying there was probable cause that the work had been stolen.

"It is an important policy of the United States and other countries to return Holocaust-era looted property," she said.

But the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Leopold Foundation in Vienna, which loaned the painting, each have asked the federal court to return the work to them.

Since then, another rival claimant has joined the battle to get the painting, called "Portrait of Wally," which is valued at some $2 million.

Herbert Hadad, a spokesman for White, on Wednesday confirmed that the government will file a motion arguing against a dismissal of the seizure and declined further comment.

A number of U.S. museums, which believe that the seizure has made it harder for them to get European galleries to loan them art, have lined up behind MoMA, sources close to the case said. They say the government is interfering in what should be a civil dispute between rival heirs.

A spokeswoman for MoMA, saying the museum did not want any looted art -- including works stolen by the Nazis -- in its collection, declined to comment on the Schiele case.

The battle over the oil painting began in January 1999 when the picture of the artist's mistress was claimed by Henry Bondi of New Jersey. He said he was the heir of Lea Bondi Jaray, a Jewish art dealer who had the painting in her private collection in Vienna before the war.

But another claimant, Ron Jaray of Australia, last autumn entered the fray, arguing the painting belonged to his grandfather, Sandor Jaray, a sculptor who was a friend of Schiele and the Art Nouveau painter Gustav Klimt.

"I believe the painting arrived in the Jaray home around 1918, having been given to Sandor Jaray by his friend, fellow..."

Sources close to the case provided Reuters copies of Jaray's letters to the court. They declined to be named.

The painting by the artist, who in 1918 died of influenza at age 28, ended up in the collection of Dr. Rudolf Leopold, who sold it to the Leopold Foundation.

Jerusalem Post

Lipstadt counsel says Irving exposed as fraud
By Douglas Davis

LONDON (March 16) - The Holocaust denial by revisionist historian David Irving has been exposed as a "fraud," according to Richard Rampton, counsel for American historian Professor Deborah Lipstadt.

Rampton made the assertion in his 24-page closing address following a two-month libel action brought by Irving against Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books.

Irving alleges that his reputation has been damaged and his career wrecked by Lipstadt's 1994 book, Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory, which, he claims, depicted him as a Holocaust denier who distorts historical data to suit his own ideological goals.

Irving's denial that Auschwitz was a death camp had been based on worthless scientific research, said Rampton, who noted that Irving had never been to Auschwitz to examine the archeological remains or the documentary evidence in its archive.

"It follows that some other reason must be sought to explain his devotion over many years to the bizarre idea that no significant numbers of people were murdered in the homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz/Birkenau," said Rampton.

The reasons, he continued, were not hard to find: "As the evidence in this court has shown," he said, "Irving is a right-wing extremist, a racist, and, in particular, a rabid antisemite."

Irving, who represented himself - in sharp contrast to the large legal team defending Lipstadt - claimed the defense case had cost some $6 million and at least 20 man-years in researching the case.

"This blinding and expensive spotlight has been focused on the narrowest of issues," he said, "yet it has still generated more noise than illumination."

In his 104-page address, Irving asserted that Lipstadt's book had been paid for and directed by Israeli Holocaust specialist Professor Yehuda Bauer, then of the Hebrew University, who, he said, had urged Lipstadt to incriminate him.

This, claimed Irving, was part of a 30-year international campaign, led by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and others, which had aimed to discredit him.

"It is quite evident that the ADL, in cahoots with Lipstadt, set itself the task of destroying my career," he said.

Without their financial assistance, he asserted, it is doubtful whether the expensive defense team could have "mounted this colossal assault on my name."

As a result of their campaign, he continued, he had been banned from Germany, Austria, Canada, Australia,
New Zealand and South Africa.

"I have been subjected since at least 1973, and probably before then, to what would be called in warfare a 'campaign of interdiction,'" said Irving. "I know of no other historian or writer who has been subjected to a campaign of vilification even one-tenth as intense.

"The book, Denying the Holocaust, was the climax of this campaign." Irving, who has described Auschwitz as a "fable" and insists there is no evidence to suggest that Hitler ordered the systematic mass destruction of the Jews, claimed that the attack on him by Lipstadt and Penguin Books was animated by malice.

In the court, Lipstadt followed the proceedings intently, as she has each day since the trial opened on January 11. And, as at all the previous sittings, she uttered not a single word.

Judgment is expected to be delivered in about four weeks.

**British Holocaust trial ends with claim of Jewish conspiracy**

*By Douglas Davis*

LONDON, March 15 (JTA) - David Irving told the High Court in London this week that some of the world's largest Jewish organizations are involved in an international conspiracy against him.

The self-described Holocaust revisionist's claim Wednesday was the centerpiece of his 104-page closing address at the end of a two-month libel case against American Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books.

Irving has alleged that his reputation was damaged and his career wrecked by Lipstadt's 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory," which, he claims, depicted him as a Holocaust denier who distorts historical data to suit his own ideological goals.

The trial, which has attracted international attention, has been described as the most important trial involving the Holocaust since Adolf Eichmann, the chief engineer of the Holocaust, was convicted in Israel in 1961.

A ruling is expected to be delivered in about four weeks.

The plaintiff and defendant have shown sharply contrasting styles. Irving - who served as his own attorney and appeared to relish the spotlight - wasted no opportunity in and out of court in making statements supporting his claims that Auschwitz was not a death camp or that there was no systematic, mass destruction of Jews; Lipstadt, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta, has sat silently throughout the proceedings.

Asserting that Israeli Holocaust specialist Yehuda Bauer paid for and directed Lipstadt's book, Irving alleged that Bauer urged Lipstadt to incriminate him.

The book, said Irving, is part of a 30-year international campaign, led by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, JTA, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and others, which had aimed to discredit him.

"It is quite evident that the ADL, in cahoots with Lipstadt, set itself the task of destroying my career," he said, asserting that "the real defendants in this case are not represented in this court."

But, he added, "We have them to thank for the spectacle that has been presented in this courtroom since January."

Without their financial assistance, he said, it is doubtful whether the expensive defense team could have
"mounted this colossal assault on my name."

As a result of their campaign, he continued, Germany, Austria, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have banned him.

Irving has represented himself - in sharp contrast to the large legal team defending Lipstadt - and he claimed that the defense case had cost some $6 million and at least 20 combined years of research.

"This blinding and expensive spotlight has been focused on the narrowest of issues," he said, "yet it has still generated more noise than illumination."

Irving has described Auschwitz as a "fable" and insisted there was no evidence to suggest that Hitler ordered the systematic mass destruction of the Jews.

Irving was particularly scathing about JTA. He claimed the news agency provided material in 1992 for Lipstadt's assertion that Irving was to have participated in a gathering in Sweden, which was later canceled, that would have been a "confluence between anti-Israel, anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial forces."

Among others who Lipstadt said were scheduled to attend the conference were Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, Holocaust revisionists, representatives of the Islamic fundamentalist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, and the ultranationalist Russian group Pamyat.

Irving also claimed that a 1995 JTA report accused him of "having supplied the trigger mechanism for the Oklahoma City bomb."

"That item," Irving told the court, "was picked up by the American, and then faintly echoed by the British press. It was only months later that I found out who had started that lie."

A JTA report, dated March 4, 1996, said Timothy McVeigh's lawyer had gone to London to investigate whether British neo-Nazis provided components for the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 that killed 168 people.

The report named Irving as one of three British citizens the FBI had subpoenaed to "provide information on the alleged European link" behind the bombing.

In his 24-page closing address, defense lawyer Richard Rampton declared that the trial had exposed Irving's views as a "fraud."

Irving based his claim that Auschwitz was not a death camp on pseudo-scientific research, said Rampton. He noted that Irving has never traveled to Auschwitz to examine the archeological remains or the documentary evidence in its archive.

"It follows that some other reason must be sought to explain his devotion over many years to the bizarre idea that no significant numbers of people were murdered in the homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz/Birkenau," said Rampton.

The reasons, he continued, were not hard to find: "As the evidence in this court has shown," he said, "Irving is a right-wing extremist, a racist, and, in particular, a rabid anti-Semite."

Whether anti-Semitism led him to become a Hitler apologist or vice versa was unimportant, added Rampton.

"Whether they are taken together or individually, it is clear that they have led him to prostitute his reputation as a serious historian - spurious though it can now be seen to have been - for the sake of a bogus rehabilitation of Hitler and the dissemination of his virulent anti-Semitic propaganda."

It will not be an easy wait for either Lipstadt or Irving.
Judgment at Pasadena
The Nuremberg Laws Were in California Since 1945. Who Knew?

By Sharon Waxman
03/16/00
Washington Post

LOS ANGELES -- Martin Dannenberg, 84, has plenty of war stories, but there's one he's never been able to put out of his mind. Because he wasn't sure of the ending.

Until now.

In 1945 the Baltimore native was a counterintelligence officer roaming through the wasteland of Western Europe with two other officers, gathering information for postwar trials, digging out suspected war criminals for prosecution.

Occasionally he would come across something unexpected. Like the day he was approached by a young German in a pub near Nuremberg. "He said he knew of something of great importance that would be of interest to us. That he would take us to it in exchange for transportation," recalls the white-haired veteran.

The informant led the agents south to the home of his uncle, an official with the German Finance Ministry, who led them to a bank vault in the town of Eichstaett. The official opened the vault with a key, and handed some documents in a yellow envelope, sealed with red wax swastikas, to the American soldiers. "I slit the top of the envelope and pulled it out," says Dannenberg, who is Jewish. "The first thing I see is this signature, 'Adolf Hitler.'"

Sgt. Frank Perls was one of two officers accompanying Dannenberg. A German-born Jew from Los Angeles who joined the Army after fleeing his homeland, he translated the text: "Marriages between Jews and citizens of German-related blood are forbidden. . . . Jews are forbidden to raise the Reich or national flag."

The documents were the infamous Nuremberg Laws, drafted hastily over a weekend in 1935 to legalize discrimination against Jews. The four typed sheets of paper were nothing less than the legal blueprint for the marginalization and, ultimately, the destruction of European Jewry.

Perls grew teary-eyed. "You'll never know what this is unless you've lived through it," he told Dannenberg.

Dannenberg took the documents, but didn't sleep much that night. "I was thinking where on my wall this would look best. But these were historical documents and were not in the right of any individual to own them personally. It had caused more misery than just about any document there is," he observes.

He turned them over to his commanding officer, who ordered Dannenberg and Perls to deliver them to Gen. George S. Patton, commander of the Third Army, who was about 100 miles south in Bad Tolz. The discovery was featured in articles in the New York Herald Tribune and Le Monde.

That was the last Dannenberg heard of the Nuremberg Laws until last June, when the Huntington Museum in Pasadena, Calif., revealed that the documents had been hidden there for 54 years.

"I thought they were with other documents used in the Nuremberg trials. It never dawned on me that they'd been sidetracked somehow," he said.

He was wrong. The Nuremberg Laws merely went from one private vault to another.

And the reason why that occurred has touched off an inquiry into questions of racism and secrecy in our own country, a faded echo of the ill intent enshrined in the document itself.

When the Huntington Library announced last June that it was donating the original text of the Nuremberg Laws to a Jewish cultural center on the west side of Los Angeles, there was surprise, and there were many questions.

Why were the Nuremberg Laws in Pasadena-- Why did the Huntington never disclose their presence--

The answers were vague and incomplete. Patton, America's larger-than-life war hero, had donated them to the library, Huntington officials said, on a visit home in June 1945. As a child, Patton lived next door to Henry Huntington's estate, which later became the museum, and the two families were friendly. The document, accompanied by Perls's translation,
did not fit the museum's collection of English art and antiques, and so was filed away and forgotten.

But these answers left many other questions in their wake. Why did the museum never publicly acknowledge receiving the documents—Why were they not formally made part of its collection until 1999—

Dannenberg, on reading the news, had one thought about his commanding officer. "I thought: That scoundrel," he says.

Tony Platt, a social work professor on fellowship at the Huntington at the time, was similarly struck by the news. "In the original press release they never talk about how Patton got the laws, or why. They avoided those topics," he says. "That made people like me curious about why they avoided the most obvious things on people's minds."

He dropped his research on California history and began looking into the story of the Nuremberg Laws in this country, which became the subject of a book he's writing.

In the months since the Nuremberg Laws were placed in a glass display case at the Skirball Cultural Center, researchers have concluded that Patton had no right to take the documents and apparently invented the story of how they came into his possession. The center has removed his error-laden letter of donation from its display.

Was the Huntington reluctant to display a document certain to draw Jewish visitors to Pasadena in 1945, a city where Jews and other minorities were not especially welcome—Or was it wary of the documents' dubious provenance—Platt believes that both are probably the case. The Huntington of 1945 "would not particularly want to make a public show of an icon that would explain to people racism against the Jews," he says.

Huntington President Robert Skotheim, who has been at the institution for 12 years, says both notions are mere speculation, and disputes that there would be a desire to discourage visitors of any kind.

"There's no doubt there was pervasive antisemitism," he says. "But I can't imagine not doing an exhibit so as not to attract certain people to the Huntington. All cultural institutions are interested in people coming to see them. I think that's absurd."

Instead, he insists, "It was clearly a case of amnesia."

But the decision to allow the Nuremberg Laws to gather dust for five decades leaves Holocaust historians mystified.

"The whole fact that Patton got it and gave it to a friend of his is strange. But that's not so strange, since Patton is Patton," reflected Saul Friedlander, a UCLA history professor and author of a seminal work on the Holocaust, "Nazi Germany and the Jews, Years of Persecution 1933-39." "But the strangest thing is that the Huntington didn't immediately forward it either to the National Archives or another institution for which it would be relevant.

"If in 1945 they couldn't understand the importance of the text, they certainly couldn't miss it after the Nuremberg trials" in 1946, Friedlander observed.

"And the more time went on, the more those issues became important for historians and survivors."

The answers may lie in the cultural and social norms of Pasadena and neighboring San Marino, a small city where the Huntington is located. In the 1940s, these towns were bastions of white Protestant culture. Minorities were prevented from living there through restrictive covenants enforced by homeowners' associations and, after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the covenants in 1948, through individual land deeds.

San Marino "was truly a racist little community," says Skirball Center President Uri Herscher. "It was packed with oil lords, and no Jews and no Italians lived there."

The millionaire barons—the Chandlers, Mudds, O'Melvenys—made their homes here. And Nobel-winning physicist Robert Millikan, chairman of the Huntington trustees, proudly considered his region "the westernmost outpost of Nordic civilization . . . [with] a population which is twice as Anglo-Saxon as that existing in New York, Chicago or any of the great cities of this country."

Millikan, president of the California Institute of Technology, was a Social Darwinist and an active board member of the Human Betterment Foundation, a group engaged in eugenics research. In the 1940s the foundation was documenting the medical sterilization of mentally ill people, and exchanging correspondence with Nazi scientists.

What would such a man do with the Nuremberg Laws, which outlawed marriage, cohabitation and relations between Jews and Aryans—Certainly not put them on display, Platt concludes.

In searching the Huntington's archives and reviewing Patton's papers, Platt found not only new evidence of the general's antisemitism, but indications that the Huntington studiously ignored these documents of seminal historic importance.
Two months later, the hero came to Los Angeles and was greeted by parades and huge crowds. He also visited the Huntington's collection.

The three Nuremberg Laws—the first titled "Law for the Safeguard of German Blood and German Honor"—were drafted at a police station over a frantic two-day weekend just ahead of a major Nazi Party rally in 1935. Signed by Hitler and a few Nazi officials, the laws stripped German Jews of their German citizenship, barred marriage and "extramarital sexual intercourse" between Jews and other Germans, barred Jews from flying the German flag and from employing German domestic help.

Patton's writings are peppered with derogatory remarks about blacks and Jews. For instance, in a diary entry from Oct. 1, 1945, he wrote, "The Jewish type of DP [displaced person] is, in the majority of cases, a sub-human species without any of the cultural or social refinements of our times. . . . I have never looked at a group of people who seem to be more lacking in intelligence and spirit."

Patton also donated a massive, ceremonial copy of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" to the Huntington in April 1945—one of many war souvenirs he gave the museum—with the curious notation in an accompanying letter that it was given "as a slight tribute to the memory of my father."

Two months later, the hero came to Los Angeles and was greeted by parades and huge crowds. He also visited the Huntington, next door to his childhood home, and gave the Nuremberg documents to Millikan. A photographer captured the moment, but the photo was never released, the donation never announced and the document not formally made part of the Huntington's collection.

And Patton dictated a letter to a Huntington clerk on June 11 that seemed tailor-made to deflect questions over ownership:

"These soldiers of the 90th Division were very fond of me and I was very fond of them. They thought they would like to do something for me, so they sent for me, and we had a great public presentation. The former commanding general of the 90th Division . . . General Van Fleet, he actually made the presentation to me. So it is my property," it read.

Neither Platt nor anyone at the Skirball or the Huntington has found any independent evidence of such a ceremony.

Just as significant is what is not in the Huntington's official records. In the months and years after the documents' donation, there is no mention of the Nuremberg Laws in the notes of trustee meetings, highly unusual for such significant documents. A sole reference from a 1951 trustee meeting to "certain documents which General Patton turned over to us during his visit to the Library in June, 1945," never mentions the laws by name. Patton, the trustees noted, wanted the documents preserved "but with no publicity about them."

The idea, says Skotheim, might have been to hold the papers for Patton, though he acknowledges the documents were loot that probably should have been handed over to a government body. "I assume our motivation for accepting the documents, other than just a conquering hero returning and giving the booty of war to the Huntington, was they hoped to have Patton's private and military papers," he says. The Huntington did not get the bulk of Patton's papers, however, after the general was killed in a car accident in December 1945. Skotheim says the laws were forgotten after that.

Platt finds such a conclusion disingenuous. "Antisemitism was a regular pattern of the attitudes and behavior of Patton, Millikan and other Huntington fixtures. "Antisemitism and racism blinded them to seeing this as important."

The Nuremberg documents were ignored for three decades. But by the latter part of the 1970s, museum officials recall seeing them. The current curator of rare books, Alan Jutzi, remembers seeing the papers around 1975. The curator of rare manuscripts, Mary Robertson, was shown them in the late '70s or early '80s. Skotheim recalls an inventory turning them up sometime in the 1980s.

Still, the museum was exceedingly slow in deciding what, if anything, to do. In 1991 Robertson wrote a memo to the chief librarian saying that the Huntington might want to "review our policy" regarding the Nuremberg Laws.

She wrote: "Largely because of the uncertainty over title," the previous librarian was "hesitant to accession them formally as part of our collections and open them up to research in the general way. Presumably they have been in our vault since 1945, and have been quietly ignored for all of that time. . . . It seems proper to me that at some time the material should be made available to scholars."

It was Skotheim who finally acted. In 1996 he visited the new Skirball Center, and determined to entrust the Nuremberg Laws to the Jewish cultural institution. It took another three years before this could be accomplished. The document was permanently loaned, with the copy of "Mein Kampf," to the Skirball last June.

The lessons of history loom unexpectedly, to discomfit and instruct, again and again. Here in the shadow of the Santa Monica mountains, Skirball docents are anything but reticent to tell visitors about the full history of the Nuremberg Laws. They even point out what they take to be a mystical coincidence: the reflection of the photographs of Holocaust victims, installed across the way, in the glass of the display case.
However uncomfortable, Platt believes it is important to trace the path of the Nuremberg Laws, both before and after World War II. "I'm not trying to embarrass the Huntington. I'm trying to understand what happened," he says. "There should be a full accounting of what took place over the 50 years they had the document. They had a responsibility to check out who owned it, and to understand the history of the document in their own institution."

He adds: "The seeds of antisemitism and fascist ideas are here as well as over there. If you don't look at that, you say it's only a problem of Nazism as opposed to a real issue in the United States as well."

On this point, Herscher, the Skirball president, passionately agrees. "History is not just about Hitler and his documents," he says. "It's important to know that America is not pure of racist characters. This is still one of the greatest countries in the world, but let's not forget the warts. That only makes this country stronger."

Rabbis Welcome Pope's Statements
March 15, 2000
BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (AP) - The Conference of European Rabbis ended a four-day meeting Wednesday with praise for Pope John Paul II's appeal for forgiveness for Catholic sins through the ages. "We applauded this courageous and strong declaration made by the pope," Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi of Britain, told reporters as the conference ended. "We hope the words will be heard and implemented throughout the Catholic Church." Sacks also praised EU countries' strong stand against the participation of the far-right Freedom Party in Austria's government. The Freedom Party's leader, Joerg Haider, made comments in the past that were sympathetic to aspects of Nazi labor policies. "We are concerned about Austria, and not only on behalf of the Jewish community there," Sacks said. "We are concerned when such parties are not marginalized in the country, when they enter the mainstream." On Tuesday, the rabbis went to Vienna, Austria to meet with members of the Jewish community there. "We went there to express our solidarity," Sacks said. He said Austrian Jews "are concerned, but are not panicking about the situation." Also during the conference, the secretary of the World Jewish Congress displayed records which he said reveal the Nazis seized property worth at least $10 billion from Austrian Jews during World War II. "We will try to restore the things that were taken from Jews to their original owners," a rabbi told reporters on Wednesday. But the rabbis did not want to give more details about what steps they might take, saying it is "a concern of the World Jewish Congress and not of the Conference of European Rabbis." On Monday, the conference awarded famed Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal a plaque bearing the words: "Never forget."
U.S. Museums Reveal
Holocaust-Era Assets

Your Feb. 29 story “British Museums to Disclose a List of Art Possibly Looted During the War” said critics charge that American museums are “dragging their feet” on revealing Holocaust-era assets.

At a Feb. 10 hearing before the House Banking Committee, museum directors testified about the Holocaust-era assets guidelines of both the Association of Art Museum Directors and the American Association of Museums, both of which commit museums to research gaps that may exist in ownership records for objects that changed hands during the Nazi era. Ron Tauber, chairman of the Art Loss Register, testified that “we don’t see a large number of cases in the U.S.” and noted that museums in the U.S. have been at the forefront in accepting responsibilities in this area. Jonathan Petropoulos (Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the U.S.) noted that the “process of self-scrutiny at museums is working.” And Banking Committee Chairman Jim Leach praised the “solemn determination on the part of museum directors, here and abroad, to scour their collections and return any tainted pieces to their rightful owner.”

To give just one recent example, the North Carolina Museum of Art worked closely with two claimants and promptly acknowledged their ownership of a painting as soon as their claim, with the help of the museum, was proven.

EDWARD H. ABLE JR.
President and CEO
American Association of Museums
Washington
Eizenstat, Survivors Clashing On Minnesota Restitution Bill

By MELISSA RADLER
FORWARD STAFF

NEW YORK — The deputy secretary of the treasury, Stuart Eizenstat, is clashing with the Jewish community and Holocaust survivors in Minnesota over legislation that the Minneapolis support but that Mr. Eizenstat is trying to scuttle.

In a March 3 letter to Governor Ventura, the former professional wrestler who is the top executive of the Gopher State, Mr. Eizenstat wrote that the bill could penalize insurance companies that have been participating in the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, the recognized body for dealing with claims. The result, Mr. Eizenstat wrote, would be to “undermine” the commission.

Mr. Eizenstat’s intrusion into the legislative process is a sign that the federal government is looking askance at state efforts to regulate restitution. Such conflicts may escalate as frustration builds with the pace of the international commission’s efforts: The panel has been in existence for two years and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on expenses, yet it has reached no overall settlement agreement for survivors. By criticizing Minnesota’s proposed law, Mr. Eizenstat is coming into conflict with Minnesota’s Jewish community, whose representatives say they support the bill. About 300 Holocaust survivors live in Minnesota, according to local officials. The international commission was set up by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners and five European insurance companies, including Generali, Allianz, AXA, Zurich and Winterthur, which are working in cooperation with European regulators, Jewish organizations and Israel to uncover unpaid policies.

Mr. Eizenstat wrote in his letter to Mr. Ventura that companies already negotiating with the international commission need to be granted a “safe haven” from any new charges brought against them as a result of state legislation. Mr. Eizenstat charged that the safe haven granted by the legislation — to September 30, 2000 — is inadequate. The companies would “find themselves subjected to extensive and intrusive regulation, as well as the threat of fines or loss of license” under the legislation, Mr. Eizenstat wrote.

But the director of public affairs for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, Shep Harris, said that state legislation is needed to expedite the claims process. “I’m just really surprised here to see Deputy Secretary Eizenstat involved in this,” Mr. Harris said. “He is misinterpreting the legislation.”

“I think this bill is needed,” Mr. Harris said. He said that the longer the insurance companies delay, the fewer survivors there are.

Harris also said that the legislation will only affect companies that are not cooperating with the international commission, and that the deadline for safe haven has been moved to December 31. He said that the bill has been passed in five legislative committees and is ready to go to the floor in both houses. Mr. Eizenstat could not be reached for comment.

The president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, Steve Hunegs, said, “Survivors very much favor this legislation. It shows that Minnesota takes very seriously the idea that European insurance companies need to redeem their obligations to qualify selling insurance in Minnesota.”

“We respect the work of the International Commission and Secretary Eizenstat on all the issues related to Holocaust assets,” Mr. Hunegs said. “However, states generally regulate insurance. If you bring pressure to bear on the European insurance companies in the U.S., it will make the work of the international commission more effective,” he said.

Mr. Hunegs said that he knows of five non-participating companies in Minnesota that could be brought under the jurisdiction of the legislation.

According to Mr. Hunegs, the legislation was modeled on similar Washington state legislation which was passed last year. Washington’s insurance commission, Deborah Senn, said that the legislation is a success.

“In Washington, we passed a good piece of legislation and it’s working well,” Ms. Senn said, adding that Mr. Eizenstat has never expressed any objections to the legislation.

But the public affairs counsel for Allianz AG insurance, Peter Lefken, objected to the legislation on the grounds that it does not automatically exempt companies already negotiating with the international commission.

“We would urge a modification of the state legislation,” said Mr. Lefken. “We believe that companies that are complying with the international commission should be exempt from state laws that seek to apply sanctions. Allianz has been a member of good standing in the international commission and has long felt that a cooperative approach between and among the various states, the U.S. Department of State, Jewish organizations and European regulators offers the best means to resolve this issue. A state-by-state approach, as being advocated in Minnesota, will probably detract from the process of the international commission.”

“Our most important goal is to resolve this matter,” Mr. Lefken said. “If Minnesota imposes a whole new set of criteria which differ from Washington state, which differ from Florida, the result of all this is a massive amount of information in different formats being submitted to all these states, which imposes enormous costs to insurance companies. The idea behind the international commission was that a coordinated approach offers the best hope for restitution, and that a patchwork of state laws creates confusion and delay. Should Minnesota proceed, we believe that an automatic exemption should be applied. If not, it would certainly deter other companies, who are not members of the international commission, from joining.”

In January, Allianz testified before a public hearing in Washington state after the period of safe haven ran out on January 1. Mr. Lefken said that he is confident the commissioner there will find Allianz in full compliance with the law, and that the company will be exempt from further state regulations.
Restitution

WJRO, Polish Jewry agree on joint fund

Over half a million file claims against Swiss banks settlement

Munich Re risks fines over Holocaust lists

NYC museum has famous painting seized by Nazis

Austria Urged To Compensate Jews

General

Sharansky asks pope to open Vatican archives

Austria tries ‘Grim Reaper’ doctor for Nazi-era euthanasia of children

WJRO, Polish Jewry agree on joint fund

Ha'aretz 03/17/00

A new fund is to be set up by the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the Jewish community of Poland to act as a receiver for property belonging to Poland's pre-Holocaust Jewish community.

The fund is intended to bypass Polish law, which states that only the country's present Jewish population is eligible to receive the property of Poland's former Jewish community, according to reports from yesterday's meeting of WJRO administrators in Jerusalem. The WJRO plans to insist that all of the property be transferred to the joint fund.

According to the proposal of Jewish Agency chair Salai Meridor, revenues from restituted property would be used to finance tours for Israeli and Diaspora Jewish youth of Nazi death camps in Poland, and to provide stipends to needy Polish Jews throughout the world.

Jerusalem Post
03/19/00

Over half a million file claims against Swiss banks settlement

By Marilyn Henry

NEW YORK (March 19) - More than 520,000 Nazi victims and heirs have submitted claims for the $1.25 billion Swiss banks settlement, with fewer claims coming from Israel than either the US or the former Soviet Union, according to an analysis prepared for an American court.
The claim forms were contained in questionnaires sent last summer as part of the legally mandated "notification" of the Swiss settlement to some 900,000 Nazi victims worldwide who were potential beneficiaries.

Some 32 percent of the responses came from the US, 28% from the former Soviet Union, and 22% from Israel, according to a preliminary analysis of a sample of questionnaires that was submitted earlier this month to the US federal court in Brooklyn that is overseeing the settlement.

The responses do not reflect the geographic split that traditionally is associated with the number and dispersal of survivors. The largest percentage is widely assumed to be in Israel.

The settlement, which was reached in August 1998, is being financed by Credit Suisse and UBS. It concludes class-action suits that were filed in October 1996, charging Swiss banks with hoarding Holocaust accounts.

However, the settlement is intended to resolve virtually all claims against Switzerland, with the exception of those against three insurers.

It applies to five specific categories of "victims or targets" of Nazi persecution, and specific classes of beneficiaries, including those who had Swiss bank deposits, slave laborers, refugees who sought sanctuary in Switzerland, and those whose assets were looted. The "looted assets" class is vague, and it is not clear if there is a legal requirement for the plundered property to be linked to a Swiss institution.

When the full analysis of the questionnaires is completed, it will provide the first public glimpse, although selective and imperfect, of Nazi victims' assessments of their material losses.

It is not known how or when the $1.25 billion will be allocated among the beneficiaries, or the amounts they could expect to recover. Last week, US District Judge Edward Korman postponed approval of the settlement and the release of a proposed plan to distribute the funds until the Swiss Federal Banking Commission indicates if it will implement the recommendations of the Volcker Committee, which conducted a forensic audit of Nazi-era accounts.

The Volcker Committee called for the commission to arrange to publish the names associated with some 25,000 "probable" Holocaust accounts and to create a central archive of some 4 million Nazi-era bank accounts. The committee said the banks must consolidate their records in order for Holocaust claims to be processed.

That seemed to be borne out by the analysis of claims, in which only 6% of the those who said they had a claim against the banks could recall the name of the relevant bank.

According to an analysis of a sample of 10,345 questionnaires - 2% of the total 520,884 filed - 79% of the claimants are identified as Jewish. However, the percentages also vary by region. Some 89% of the sample set from the US is Jewish, versus 83% in Israel and 68% in the former Soviet Union.

Among the other victims, 22% are Jehovah's Witnesses; 4% are Romani (Gypsy); 1% are physically or mentally disabled; and about 0.1% are identified as homosexual victims of Nazi persecution.

About 20% made claims for "deposited assets." The majority of the claimants, 79%, were for looted assets, and 88% of those claims include specific information, such as a description of the property lost. However, only 1% of those claims were supported by documentation.

The settlement includes two classes of slave laborers, and 41% of the claims are for slave labor.

Many of these claims also may be covered under the DM 10b. German fund for slave and forced labor. When negotiators on the German fund convene this week in Berlin, they are expected to discuss how German compensation to Jewish former slave laborers may be affected by the Swiss settlement.
Munich Re risks fines over Holocaust lists

By Joan Gralla

03/17/00

NEW YORK (Reuters) - New York State Thursday warned a U.S. unit of Germany's Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurer, that the company would face fines of up to $1,000 a day if it failed to submit lists of unpaid Holocaust policies.

California, Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania are pushing Europe's insurers to finally answer long-standing claims that they robbed Holocaust survivors by failing to honor prewar life and property insurance policies.

New York State insurance commissioner, Neil Levin, gave the U.S. unit of Munich Re - called American Re - until April 7 to fulfill his demand. Munich Re has had every opportunity to comply with a state law requiring all insurers in New York's borders to submit lists of all unpaid policies sold during the Holocaust era, he said.

"Now we have no choice but to take swift action against the company for failing to comply with the law," Levin said, in his statement. A spokeswoman for Levin did not specify what other steps might be taken against Munich Re. "We'll pursue other measures as necessary," she said.

Tom Walker, a Princeton, N.J.-based spokesman for American Re clashed with Levin's interpretation of the issues, and said the company was ready to fight in court.

"We will certainly dispute the imposition of fines for something which we cannot do," he told Reuters by telephone.

As reinsurers, American Re and Munich Re have never sold policies to individuals, Walker said. Though Munich Re has a stake in the German Victoria insurance company, which did sell policies in prewar Europe, German law prevents Munich Re from forcing Victoria to hand over lists of policyholders, Walker said.

Walker said Victoria's records were incomplete. But New York's insurance commissioner said American Re's annual report certified that Munich Re's subsidiaries in Europe have lists of Holocaust-era policies. Further, the New York State Holocaust Claims Processing Office has more than 130 unpaid policies issued by Munich Re's subsidiary, Victoria, worth about $1.5 million.

This is not Munich Re's first battle with state regulators over Holocaust claims. California's top insurance regulator on March 7 said he had subpoenaed Munich Re officials to appear before a March 20 hearing to investigate the German reinsurer's efforts to resolve unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims.

And American Re on Feb. 8 sued Pennsylvania's insurance regulator, saying its purchase of a medium-sized insurer was being delayed due to concerns about how Munich Re was handling claims from Holocaust survivors.

New York's Holocaust law does not require insurers to submit lists of Holocaust-era policies if the firms have joined an international panel auditing insurers and overseeing any payments to Holocaust victims and heirs.

"We have offered to join the commission and we haven't gotten any response," Walker said.

Connecticut, in a separate move on Thursday, entered the battle to get Europe's insurers to show whether they
paid policies sold to Holocaust victims.

Richard Blumenthal, the state's attorney general, told Reuters concerns about how ING - a giant Dutch insurer with about $463 billion of assets - was treating Holocaust victims could derail any attempt by ING to pursue a $10 billion bid for Hartford, Conn.-based Aetna. Aetna is the No. 1 U.S. health insurer.

"When I learned about the ING refusal to participate in the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Policies, my very definite conclusion was that this kind of corporate citizen would not be welcome here in such a key role in our state's economy, and there are various standards of moral and ethical behavior that seem appropriate, which ING doesn't seem to meet."

Blumenthal added all European insurers should take note of his views if they want to expand in his state.

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**NYC museum has famous painting seized by Nazis**

*Updated 9:00 PM ET March 17, 2000*

By Joan Galla NEW YORK (Reuters) - New York's renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art said Friday that a famous picture by a 17th century Flemish painter was plundered by the Nazis. The Met said it published the work's provenance or history in a 1984 catalog, including the fact that it had been seized in Vienna by the Nazis in 1938, in the hope more information would turn up. But nothing has, it said. U.S. museums in June 1998 promised to search their collections for any Nazi loot. Now the World Jewish Congress is demanding the museums publish their research to make it easier for Holocaust survivors and heirs to find heirlooms. The latest picture to become part of the fray, "Guardroom with the Deliverance of Saint Peter," was painted by David Teniers, the Younger, a noted Flemish genre painter. The Met, which has some 2 million works of art, has had the painting since 1964, according to data provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles. Harold Holzer, a museum spokesman, told Reuters by telephone: "I think this suggests the Metropolitan has always been forthcoming about its collections and always believed that research into the ownership of works of art is never-ending." Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, said: "I think the Met has a serious problem if they believe that they can continue to hold in good conscience works of art that they cannot demonstrate clear and unambiguous title to." Holocaust victims should not have to search the world's museums to find their family's art work, he said, calling on U.S. museums to follow the example of Britain's galleries. Last month, U.K. museums put out a list of 300 works of art that might be Nazi loot. The Met has said it plans to publish such a list in the next few weeks. The Met is not the only U.S. museum with a Teniers that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims. The Allen Memorial Art Museum of Oberlin College in Ohio has the artist's "Saints Anthony and Paul in a Landscape." Hermann Goering, Hitler's air minister, got possession of that picture, which probably was confiscated from an unknown French collection, according to the Getty data. An Allen Memorial spokeswoman was not immediately available to comment. An assistant provided a copy of the museum's policy on what it called disputed art. That paper, which says it would be immoral to keep any art proven to have been stolen, adds: "It is the opinion of the Allen Memorial Art Museum and Oberlin College that each case brought to its attention will be given rigorous review to determine if a disputed art work was forcibly relinquished during the Nazi era." The Saint Louis Art Museum also has works with question marks. In 1937, the Nazis declared that two paintings by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner were "degenerate" and confiscated them -- but from whom they were taken is not certain, according to the Getty data. The two pictures by the German Expressionist are called "Circus Rider," and "View from the Window." The St Louis museum also has three works that were confiscated and sold by the Nazis. An Henri Matisse painting called "Bathers with a Turtle" was taken from a German museum, the Getty data showed. So was a work by Otto Muller, called "Akte in Landschaft," and a painting by a member of the German Secession movement, Max Beckmann, which was called "Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery."
WASHINGTON (AP) - The World Jewish Congress demanded Thursday that Austria compensate Jews for assets taken by the Nazis in World War II.

Elan Steinberg, executive director, cited a 1953 U.S. government report that more than $1 billion - or $10 billion currently - was seized by Austria from its Jewish citizens under a 1938 decree.

He said the assets included property now occupied by Joerg Haider, who has praised Adolf Hitler's "orderly employment" policies and lauded veterans of the murderous Waffen SS as "decent people of good character."

Haider headed the far-right Freedom Party, which is part of Austria's ruling coalition.

"We will fight Haider," Steinberg vowed in a telephone interview from his office in New York.

Austria formed a union with Nazi Germany in 1938. There were about 200,000 Jews living in Austria, most of them in Vienna, the capital. Homes and business owned by Jews were seized; they were ordered to turn over their assets.

More than half of the Austrian Jews emigrated before the outbreak of World War II in September 1939.

An estimated 65,000 Jews were murdered by the Germans and their allies, among them Austrian Jews who had fled but did not get beyond the reach of the Nazis and their killing machine.

Steinberg said Austria, unlike Germany, has never paid reparations.

In a statement, a steering committee that includes the World Jewish Congress and several other groups said "it has been known for more than a half-century that Jews from Austria were deprived of their assets in an immoral and violent manner."

And, the committee said, since a large part of those assets were not returned, restitution should be made by those who now hold the assets to the survivors and the heirs of victims.

Most of the approximately 20,000 survivors are elderly. The committee said payment to them was of "utmost urgency."

The committee called on the Austrian government to pay individual compensation to all victims of Nazi persecution with "special regard for those who were taken to concentration camps."

The committee also said "an education campaign on the moral aspects of the Holocaust in Austria is important, both for Austria and the wider world."

Among the assets not returned to Jews, the committee said, are 70,000 apartments and 35,000 businesses.

European governments and the United States distanced themselves from Austria to protest the inclusion of Freedom Party members in a new government.

The Austrian government has said Haider does not make government policy. While he has announced he was stepping down as leader of the party, he wields influence on the federal government through those holding ministerial
Sharansky asks pope to open Vatican archives
By Haim Shapiro

Jerusalem Post

JERUSALEM (March 20) - Interior Minister Natan Sharansky has asked Pope John Paul II to open the Vatican archives to Holocaust researchers.

He based his appeal on his own experience as a victim of the KGB who was later able to examine that body's secret records of his imprisonment.

The issue of the activities of the Vatican during World War II has been a public issue since the publication of The Deputy, a 1963 play by German Protestant writer Rolf Hochhuth which portrayed Pius XII as too fearful to publicly challenge the Nazis.

In response to the criticism, the Vatican commissioned four Jesuit priests to study the relevant documents. They brought out an 11-volume work in the 1980s.

However, Jewish groups remained unhappy that the archives were closed to Jewish scholars. These feelings intensified following a negative Jewish reaction to the defense of the role of Pius XII, in March 1998 Vatican document "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah."

Last October, the Vatican announced that a joint Jewish-Catholic commission would study the records. But some Jewish experts on the Vatican expressed fear that such a study would be based on the 11 published volumes and the scholars would not have free access to the records.

In a letter to John Paul, Sharansky noted that as a Jew and a minister in the Israeli government, he welcomed the recent papal request for forgiveness for past sins against the Jewish people and that he was certain this would mark a turning point in Catholic-Jewish relations. But he added that an honest assessment of the events during World War II is an essential element of reconciliation.

"As long as the Vatican archives are off-limits to historians and survivors, the full truth will remain elusive, thereby casting a shadow over efforts toward Jewish-Catholic rapprochement," Sharansky wrote.

He then spoke of his own sensitivity as a Jew who was arrested by the Soviet KGB in 1977 for the "crime" of being a human rights and Jewish emigration activist. Sharansky said his struggle for the right of man to choose his own destiny was won, largely thanks to the pope's work on behalf of freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe.

During a recent visit to Russia as an official guest, Sharansky said, he was able to read the record of his own arrest and incarceration.

"On a personal level, sifting through the files helped me to come to terms with what was the most trying and difficult experience of my life.

"This reinforced my conviction that awareness of the truth is an essential component of the healing process, whether for individuals, nations, or institutions," Sharansky wrote.

He added that the Holocaust was the darkest chapter in the history of mankind and the Vatican archives likely contain a vast trove of invaluable documentation for historians and survivors. If the healing process between Jews and Catholics is to advance, he wrote, it must be based on truth and openness, and as long as the archives remained closed, suspicion and mistrust would remain.
Sharansky called on the pope to take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by his pilgrimage and make a gesture to the Jewish people by announcing the opening of the archives.

Commenting on the request, Natan Ben-Horin, who served as minister plenipotentiary in charge of Vatican affairs from 1980 to 1986, said that if the pope wants to do so, he could order the archives opened. However, he added that even if he did not make such a gesture, it is important to remember that this pope made important steps relating to the Jewish people and to Israel from the time he was elected.

Ben-Horin, who was first secretary at the Israel Embassy in Rome during the visit of Pope Paul VI in 1964 and had to arrange its details, contrasted the two visits and noted the symbolic importance of John Paul going to visit the chief rabbis and President Ezer Weizman.

In 1964, he said, the Vatican officials did not even consult with the Israelis, but simply told them when and where the pope would go.

"We heard of the visit from the radio," Ben-Horin said.

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**Austria tries 'Grim Reaper' doctor for Nazi-era euthanasia of children**

By Douglas Davis

LONDON, March 20 (JTA) - A prominent Austrian neurologist was slated to go on trial this week for complicity in the murders of nine children when he served as a Nazi doctor during World War II.

Heinrich Gross is alleged to have participated in the killings at the Am Spiegelgrund Children's Clinic in Vienna, where some 700 children deemed physically or mentally impaired by the Nazis were put to death as part of Hitler's "euthanasia" program.

Gross, 84, is the first war crimes suspect to be charged in Austria since 1975.

This week's trial is not the first for Gross, who became known to the clinic's inmates as "The Scythe" - a reference to the Grim Reaper.

In 1950 Gross was tried and convicted on a single count of manslaughter and sentenced to two years in jail. But the following year, the verdict and sentence were overturned by the Supreme Court, which ordered a retrial.

By that time, however, Austrian officials had decided it was time to bury their country's Nazi past. They quietly dropped the case and Gross was allowed to resume his medical career.

In subsequent decades, Austrians were slow to own up to their Nazi past, preferring to portray themselves as helpless victims of Hitler rather than collaborators.

As the years wore on, Gross, still practicing in the same clinic, won a reputation as one of Austria's most eminent neurologists.

In recognition of his work, he was presented with his own institute, where he continued conducting research on the brains of children who had perished at the clinic during the war.

But four years ago, Austrian prosecutors reopened the Gross case after fresh evidence became available to the Justice Ministry.
In February 1998, Austrian police swooped down on Gross' institute, where they seized thousands of papers, as well as the brains of 400 children from the doctor's "private collection."

For the past 14 months, Austrian prosecutors weighed the evidence, attempting to determine whether it was sufficient and whether the aging neurologist was fit to stand trial.

Despite vigorous opposition from Gross' lawyers, the prosecutors decided to proceed with the case, which was scheduled to start Tuesday.

During the course of the trial, survivors are expected to testify to experiments that were conducted at the clinic. They will tell that they were wrapped in sheets soaked in freezing water and subjected to paralyzing injections that caused nausea and vomiting.

In an interview last year, Gross insisted that he remembered little of his wartime experiences, although he did recall that windows were left open to study the effect of cold weather on the children.

He also admitted referring children to the Nazi euthanasia board. But he flatly denied that he himself had ever killed anyone.

This is not the view of the witnesses, among whom will be Johann Gross, a survivor of the clinic.

Johann Gross, now a 69-year-old retired painter and decorator, lives alone in a small flat in Vienna on a minimum pension.

He is not, he says, seeking revenge. Nor does he particularly want the doctor to be jailed. But he does want Gross to be stripped of the wealth he accumulated since the war and he does want to see justice done.

He also says he wants the "chance to face him across the courtroom and ask him if he sleeps well at night."

Johann Gross' mother abandoned him when he was a baby. He was left in the care of his father, an invalid and an alcoholic.

As a young boy, he dressed in the uniform of the Nazi youth movement and went out to collect money for the Nazi troops.

He landed in trouble, however, when, at the age of 9, he decided to give some of the money he had raised to a woman who had once looked after him. The boy was caught, handed over to Nazi officials and branded "antisocial."

In 1940, as a punishment, he was sent to a Nazi children's home and the following year, after repeatedly trying to escape, he was sent to Am Spiegelgrund, one of 30 Nazi euthanasia clinics for the "disabled."

Among the first people he encountered at the clinic, he says, was Heinrich Gross, who examined him and measured his shaven head.

Continued escape attempts landed the young Gross in the clinic's punishment wing, where he now says he was regularly injected by the experimenting Nazi doctor.

Some of the injections made him sick for weeks. Once the substance took effect, he now recalls, it was "like a hard blow in the stomach."

Then the nausea started, and he remembers thinking, "This is what dying is like. I was convinced that I'd been injected with a deadly poison."

On another occasion, he was given a yellow fluid - what he describes as "the sulphur treatment" - that left him
unable to walk and in great pain for two weeks.

But it is the memory of children's bodies piled up in wagons that continues to haunt Johann Gross.

He remembers seeing the cadavers "lying all over each other, like dolls that had been thrown away, with their limbs in unnatural positions. Most of their bodies had a strange green-blue color."

And he remembers the nurses warning the young survivors that such would be their fate, too, if they misbehaved.

Drugs that precipitated attacks of pneumonia accelerated the deaths of many of the clinic's 700 young victims. The illness would be left untreated and the resulting deaths would be invariably attributed to "natural causes."

Dr. Ernst Illing, the clinic's head, was executed for his part in the killings immediately after the war. Marianne Tuerk, another doctor, was jailed for 10 years.

Now, 40 years after his first trial, Heinrich Gross will face the retrial that Austria's Supreme Court demanded nearly a half-century ago.

"For decades, the victims of Spiegelgrund have kept quiet and did not dare go public with their stories," says Wolfgang Neugebauer, a historian of modern Austria.

"After being branded 'anti-social' and 'prone to crime' by the Nazis, they were also discriminated against after 1945 and had to watch how former Nazis made careers for themselves in postwar Austria."
Slave Labor

Nazi-Era Slave Compensation Soon

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http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20000321/wl/germany_slave_labor_2.html

Tuesday March 21 11:37 AM ET

Nazi-Era Slave Compensation Soon

BERLIN (AP) - Germany's chief negotiator on Nazi-era forced and slave labor compensation said Tuesday he was hopeful an agreement on how to distribute the funds would be reached this week.

German government and industry have agreed to contribute equally to a $5 billion fund. Victims' groups have challenged plans to divert some of the money for Holocaust education and for confiscated property, in addition to administrative costs and lawyers' fees, leaving just $4 billion for victims.

"I expect that we will come to a final result on the distribution question in the next two days," Otto Lambsdorff told Berlin's Inforadio. Talks were to continue Wednesday and Thursday in the German capital.

"I assume that in the end all concerned will understand that there will only be a certain amount for distribution, and that the wishes that everyone has cannot be fulfilled," he said.
Germany has already reduced the education fund to $350 million from an initial $500 million, Lambsdorff said. Another $500 million will be allocated to a fund for payment of confiscated property. He said that sum was not negotiable.

Lambsdorff appealed to slave labor representatives from five central and eastern European countries to give up demands that a full $4.5 billion be allocated to victims.

German industry and government agreed in December on the planned fund in part as a moral responsibility for having used forced and slave laborers to keep the Nazis' World War II industrial complex operating, but also to end U.S. lawsuits filed against the Germans.

Germany has paid some $60 billion in reparations to Jewish victims of the Holocaust since the war, but many forced and slave laborers from eastern Europe were locked behind the Iron Curtain and unable to file for payments until communist borders began crumbling in 1989.

The forced laborers were those sent from outside Germany to work in German industry and other enterprises, while the slave laborers were placed in work-to-death conditions in Nazi concentration camps.

The number of people who could benefit from the fund is estimated as high as 2.3 million, mostly non-Jews from central and eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the head of German media giant Bertelsmann said Tuesday that his company would join the firms participating in the fund. Almost 600 companies so far have pledged to contribute, including many that have not made their names public.

Bertelsmann chief Thomas Middlehoff said the company was joining in a gesture of “solidarity with German industry.” An independent commission investigating the company's past found it had close ties to the Nazis, but is continuing to investigate whether Bertelsmann used Nazi labor.

http://biz.yahoo.com/rf/000320/46.html

**Jewish group weighs Holocaust suit against Austria**

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, March 20 (Reuters) - The World Jewish Congress said on Monday that it was considering filing a class-action suit against Austria or Austrian companies as part of its program to get reparations for Nazi-era slave laborers and people whose assets were looted.

The Jewish advocacy group added that Austria's efforts to limit reparations to slaves or forced laborers and not pay compensation for property claims was unacceptable.

"In general, a class-action suit would be aimed at securing all questions of restitution," Executive Director Elan Steinberg told Reuters.

The World Jewish Congress is in the midst of negotiations with Germany to set up a $5 billion Holocaust reparations fund. The group's international steering community, which includes Holocaust survivors, will decide in the next couple of weeks whether to sue Austria.

"The leadership of the Austrian Jewish community has been very positive that a class action suit be filed here," Steinberg said.

How Jewish groups will handle Holocaust talks with Austria, whose new government promised swift
compensation for former slave laborers, is a tricky issue.

The Claims Conference, which is closely related to the Jewish congress, has refused to negotiate Holocaust reparations directly with Austria because it does not want to do anything to lessen the country's current ostracism.

But the group might be willing to negotiate through intermediaries, including the U.S. government.

SHUNNED BECAUSE OF COALITION

Austria has been shunned by the European Union, the United States and Israel since early February when its coalition government let in the anti-immigrant Freedom Party.

The party's leader, Joerg Haider, was best known outside the country for making remarks that appeared to play down Nazi atrocities. While Haider later stepped down as the head of the Freedom Party, he remains an influential figure.

Separately, Ed Fagan, a New York lawyer who met last week in Vienna with Austria's Holocaust negotiator, Maria Schaumayer, threatened to sue more Austrian companies on behalf of Holocaust victims if Austria did not agree to pay property claims in addition to slave labor claims.

But "there's no reason for us to drag them to the table in that fashion if they publicly state they will negotiate all these claims," he said.

Fagan, who already has sued a number of Austrian companies, also called on Austria to start negotiations within 30 days, appoint industry representatives to the talks and have a mechanism in place by Sept. 1 to pay claims.

DUTCH INSURANCE CLAIMS

In another development, the World Jewish Congress said its battle with insurers in the Netherlands appeared to be on the way to resolution because the Dutch insurers as a group were evidently ready to join the international panel probing unpaid Holocaust claims.

The group has been pressuring Dutch insurers, including industry giants ING and Aegon, to join the international commission. The commission is the only venue backed by the U.S. government for resolving claims that Europe's insurers failed to honor policies they sold in prewar Europe to Holocaust victims.

"We have been informed through the International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims that the Dutch Association of Insurers, including ING, Aegon and others, has expressed their intention of joining the ICHEIC," Steinberg said.

Bertelsmann to join Nazi slave labour fund -CEO

03/21/00

BERLIN, March 21 (Reuters) - Thomas Middelhoff, chief executive of Bertelsmann AG, said on Monday the German media giant would join a 10 billion mark ($5 billion) compensation fund for Nazi-era slave labourers.

"We will take part in the fund. We recognise a need to show solidarity within German industry," Middelhoff told Berlin's Foreign Press Association, adding that no decision had been made yet on how much Bertelsmann would contribute to the fund.

The outline of the fund, which aims to compensate survivors of concentration camps and forced work schemes, was agreed late last year but the German government and survivors' groups are still in tense negotiations to
Middelhoff said there was no evidence to show the firm employed forced labour or slave labourers under Adolf Hitler and the contribution was not an admission of guilt.

Some 65 top German firms, including blue-chip companies like Siemens AG, Volkswagen AG and DaimlerChrysler AG, launched the fund after legal threats and warnings they may face trade sanctions in the United States.

Industry will pay five billion marks under the settlement while Germany must pay an equal sum from the public purse for its contribution.

Bertelsmann was also in the process of revising its corporate history following revelations about its activities under the Nazis, Middelhoff said.

The company had previously maintained that it stood in confrontation to the Nazi regime and was closed down because of its views, but recent research has shown this was not the case.

"The firm was not closed by the Nazis for political or ethical reasons," he said.

New evidence unearthed by an historical commission appointed by the firm showed that Bertelsmann was involved in producing some anti-Semitic literature and some literature for the German army during the Nazi era.

Bertelsmann is one of the biggest media groups in the world. It became the world's largest publisher of English-language books when it acquired the publisher Random House in 1998. The firm also owns a major stake in the Internet bookseller Barnes&noble.com.

Among its other interests are the New York-based BMG music group, which includes Arista records with stars like Whitney Houston and the Backstreet Boys.

($1=2.013 Mark)

Germany sees progress on Nazi slaves fund

Mark John

BERLIN, March 21 (Reuters) - Germany said it was confident a new round of negotiations over a compensation fund for Nazi slave workers and other Third Reich victims starting Wednesday would make progress.

Otto Lambsdorff, the German government's chief mediator on the $5 billion fund, said he believed the two days of talks in Berlin with victims' representatives would end a dispute over how the cash should be divided up.

"I certainly expect the allocation issue to be sorted out," Lambsdorff told Reuters in an interview.

He said there were signs a deal could be reached over unpaid insurance policies held by Nazi victims, one of the toughest bones of contention standing in the way of a final deal on the fund, financed jointly by the German state and industry.

"TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT" OFFER POSSIBLE

Aimed predominantly at around a million Nazi-era forced labourers mostly from east Europe, the fund will also compensate 240,000 mainly-Jewish "slave labourers" who were meant to be worked to death in concentration camps.

A separate, smaller category includes those who suffered financial losses at the hands of German firms during
the period.

Lambsdorff said after the last round of talks in Washington earlier this month that forced and slave labourers were being offered 8.1 billion marks of the 10 billion total, more than an original offer but less than the nine billion they wanted.

He said he and U.S. Deputy Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, his U.S. counterpart in the talks, might present a final proposal on allocation even if no agreement was reached between victims' groups.

"If need be, Eizenstat and I will set out the allocation and say, 'That's it, if you don't sign it you won't get any money'," he said.

Participants at the talks include government delegations from eastern Europe and Israel, the Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and U.S. class action lawyers.

The question of whether German insurance claims are paid out of the fund has been complicated by the fact that European Nazi-era claims are being handled by a separate commission chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

Lambsdorff said Germany's largest insurer Allianz AG would be invited to discuss special arrangements over the payment of its outstanding policies. German officials have said that if agreement can be reached on the Allianz claims the wider insurance issue could be settled swiftly.

The fund was launched just over a year ago after U.S. class action lawyers threatened to sue many of Germany's top firms.

Earlier, German media group Bertelsmann AG said it would join the fund after new evidence emerged that it had produced anti-Semitic literature and publications for the German army during the Nazi era.

($1.2012 Mark)

Washington Post
03/21/00

Talks on Nazi-Era Claims

Austria's newly appointed chief negotiator on Nazi-era slave labor claims met with her U.S. counterpart here.

Maria Schaumayer, the former National Bank president named to the new post after a center-right coalition took office in Vienna last month, spent about an hour with Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart E. Eizenstat, officials said.

March 21, 2000

More Work Urged on Slave Labor Cases

Filed at 3:12 p.m. EST

By The Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Clinton administration said Tuesday that Austria has done much work on plans to pay people forced into slave labor during the Holocaust but said the Austrians should deal with a host of other Nazi-era wrongs as well.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, the main U.S. negotiator in German labor compensation talks, made the assessment after he met with Maria Schau~ayer, head of a month-old task force trying to establish a similar payment program for the estimated 150,000 surviving victims of Austria’s World War II government.

Schau~ayer traveled to Washington to outline Austria’s efforts for Eizenstat and other U.S. officials. She was to return home Tuesday night.

“It was clear from her presentation that a great deal of work has already been done,” Eizenstat said in a statement Tuesday about their Monday meeting.

Meeting with reporters Tuesday, Schau~ayer said since her appointment in February, her panel had been talking individually with survivors’ representatives and Austrian industry. She said she hopes to get the interested parties together in one or two meetings to complete a compensation fund in the next several months to be paid out this year.

“The new Austrian government decided ... to quickly address a question which has been on the table of the former government for some time,” she said. “People are old. People are ill. We don’t want to delay.”

As Germany has done, Schau~ayer said Austria will set up a fund with contributions from government and industry to compensate people forced into labor by Austria’s wartime Nazi regime.

Eizenstat said that in his meeting with Schau~ayer he “noted other issues need to be addressed” by Austria as well, including insurance and stolen art.

“As soon as slave and forced labor is settled,” Schau~ayer said, “there may be consideration for some other questions.”

Munich Re skips Calif. hearing on Holocaust insurance

03/20/00

By Michael Kahn

SAN FRANCISCO, March 20 (Reuters) - German reinsurer Munich Re on Monday skipped an official state hearing into its unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims, moving one step closer to losing its license to operate in California, officials said.

Deputy Insurance Commissioner Dan Edwards said Munich Re's failure to attend the San Francisco hearing had prompted officials to seek a Superior Court order which would force the firm to provide details of its unpaid Second World War-era insurance policies under oath.

That is the next step in a lengthy process that could end with state insurance regulators either fining Munich Re, or completely revoking the licenses of its U.S. subsidiaries to do business in the most populous U.S. state.

“Their continued refusal to address the issue of Holocaust insurance claims has moved them one step closer to the Commissioner taking all appropriate sanctions against Munich Re and its subsidiary companies in accordance with the law,” Edwards told Reuters in a telephone interview.

State Insurance Commissioner Chuck Quackenbush subpoenaed Munich Re to attend Monday's hearing in early March in response to what he described as deliberate delays in complying with California's requests for information about Holocaust-era policies and policyholders.

Currently, there are some 20,000 Holocaust survivors living in California who might have unpaid insurance policies from that era, according to the Department of Insurance.
Earlier, an administrative law judge had ruled that California officials had the jurisdiction to punish Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurer, if it failed to provide the requested information.

But Munich Re's lawyers answered Monday by asking the court to quash the subpoena, arguing that Quackenbush lacks the authority to compel officers of Munich Re to travel from Germany to California for deposition.

"The Department's action is an unconstitutional and unlawful attempt by a state agency to direct the actions of foreign companies," the company said in a statement.

Other U.S. states are also pushing Munich Re and other European insurers to answer to answer long-standing claims that robbed Holocaust survivors by failing to honor prewar life and property insurance policies.

New York state's insurance commissioner last week warned American Re, a U.S. unit of Munich Re, that it would face fines of up to $1,000 a day if it failed to submit unpaid Holocaust policies.

Quackenbush has been among the most aggressive state officials on the Holocaust issue. He has also been pressing Munich Re to join the International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims, headed by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, which is trying to track down unpaid insurance policies from that era.

California has one of five state insurance officials on the commission, which also includes representatives of the World Jewish Congress, Israel and five European insurance companies.

Quackenbush has also threatened to bar Italy's Assicurazioni Generali and Germany's Allianz AG from doing business in the state unless they obey the law requiring them to name Holocaust-era policyholders.

**Dutch apologise for World War Two, offer $300 mln**

Christine Lucassen

03/21/00

AMSTERDAM, March 21 (Reuters) - The Netherlands apologised on Tuesday to Jews, Indonesians and Romas for a "chilly" official response to claims on property seized during World War Two and offered 680 million guilders ($300 million) compensation.

The terror of the Nazi occupation was compounded by a post-war government that blocked efforts to recover seized property, Prime Minister Wim Kok acknowledged.

"There were faults and shortcomings that need to be faced," Kok told a news conference. "The recovery programme after World War Two was too formal, bureaucratic and most of all, chilly."

The country's largest Jewish group welcomed the government offer of 400 million guilders in compensation to Jewish victims, an increase on 250 million earlier recommended by a commission, but far short of what the organisation had earlier demanded.

The Central Jewish Congress (CJO) said that it, the government and accountants commissioned by the CJO had worked out a fair compensation deal.

"The CJO hopes that...the agreement, despite the extended period it took to reach, will alleviate some of the sadness and hurt among the war generation," it said in a statement.

**INDONESIANS DISAPPOINTED WITH OFFER**

Kok said the government offered the Indonesian community 250 million guilders and the Romas (gypsies) 30 million.

"We want to clearly and finally offer justice," Kok said.

The Indonesians spurned the offer, saying it was too little.

"We were surprised with the outcome this morning," said Herman Bussemaker, a member of a group representing those who came to the Netherlands from its former colony.

He said 144,000 Indonesians in the Netherlands were due compensation and the government offer, when split among
them, would be a scant sum.

Many Indonesians who supported Dutch rule fled to the Netherlands during wartime Japanese occupation and during the subsequent battle for independence, won in 1949.

The government acknowledged that it let down the immigrants, many who had risked their lives fighting for the Dutch during the independence struggle, giving them a cold welcome.

They received little help in retrieving assets they had left in Indonesia and their position was made more difficult by a currency devaluation.

A spokesman for the Romas and Sintas, who were targeted by the Nazis, said the government move would help them feel they were accepted.

"We are satisfied. We can now make a new start in the Netherlands with this acknowledgment, this money," said Zoni Weisz, an advisor for Roma and Sinta organisations.

The CJO said it would donate 50 million guilders of its compensation to humanitarian causes overseas, to express "solidarity" with Jews and Gentiles suffering from wars abroad. ($1=2.266 Guilder)

NYC museum clears famous painting from Nazi taint

03/20/00

Joan Gralla

NEW YORK (Reuters) - New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art on Monday said that a famous 17th century painting by a Flemish painter that was plundered by the Nazis was not tainted because it was returned to the victims after the war.

The latest painting to become part of the battle over how U.S. museums are handling art that could have been looted from Holocaust victims is called "Guardroom with the Deliverance of Saint Peter" by David Teniers, the Younger.

The World Jewish Congress is demanding that museums publish a list of any art work that might be Nazi booty, just as British museums did last month. This would save Holocaust survivors and heirs from having to search the world’s collections for missing heirlooms. The Met has said it plans to soon publish such a list.

The Nazis seized the picture - described in one of the Met's catalogs as "the best work by Teniers in the museum's collection" - from the Charles Neuman de Vegvar family in Vienna in 1938, Harold Holzer, a Met spokesman, told Reuters by telephone.

The Nazis annexed Austria in March 1938.

"After the war it (the painting) was returned to them; they moved to Connecticut and donated it to the Met," the spokesman explained.

Holzer on Friday had said the museum did not know from whom the Nazis had seized the picture.

"Obviously, the Met does not want to own works of art for which title isn't clear, nor want to do any injury to any survivor or descendant of Holocaust victims," he said.

In June 1998, U.S. museums promised to search their collections for any paintings or sculpture that might be Nazi plunder. The WJC last month began prodding the museums to release the results of their research.

"It’s amazing how quickly they can do the research when they have to; it’s unfortunate that outside agencies have
to keep bringing this to their attention," WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg told Reuters.

This is not the Met's first brush with art that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims.

In early March, the museum, which has 2 million art works, confirmed it was investigating a 1597 painting by Peter Paul Rubens because it went through the hands of Karl Haberstock, an infamous Nazi art dealer.

The following week, the museum said the work, called "Portrait of a Man, possibly an Architect or Geographer," had not been looted. It cited a 76-year old article that showed the painting was in New Jersey by 1924 -- at least nine years before the Nazis came to power.

And the Met is not the only U.S. museum with a Teniers that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims. The Allen Memorial Art Museum of Oberlin College in Ohio has the artist's "Saints Anthony and Paul in a Landscape."

Hermann Goering, Hitler's air minister, got possession of that picture, which probably was confiscated from an unknown French collection, according to data provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles.

COMMENTARY
Could Irving succeed in libel trial? World awaits verdict from London
By Douglas Davis

LONDON, March 20 (JTA) - Emerging from the Royal Courts of Justice here on the evening of March 15 was like leaving a musty 17th-century ecclesiastical battle for the fresh air of the 21st century.

The proposition presented to the court by Holocaust revisionist David Irving in his libel suit against the American Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt throughout two months of often mind-numbing esoterica might just as easily have been that the world is flat.

Was Auschwitz really a death camp where Jews were systematically slaughtered en masse? Did the Holocaust really happen? Did Hitler order, still less know about, the destruction of European Jewry? No, no, no, thundered Irving.

Given the wealth of historical documentation, physical evidence and eyewitness testimonies, including those of former death camp commandants, the questions might have been redundant to most reasonable people. But not, apparently, to Irving.

To Irving, Auschwitz was an awful slave labor camp where most of the 100,000 Jewish inmates - his figure - died of natural causes. To Irving, the Holocaust was the sum total of all the casualties of World War II. To Irving, Hitler was the best friend the Jews had in the Third Reich.

So who was to blame for the suffering of the Jews? Why, says Irving, the Jews themselves who, by their unspeakable behavior and insatiable greed, have invited the hatred and persecution of their hosts wherever they have lived over the past 3,000 years. By Irving's logic, the victims become the perpetrators.

Then, again, he has a penchant for turning facts on their head. While it was Irving who instigated the libel trial, he used his closing address to argue that if he lost, the real victims would be free speech and the pursuit of knowledge. The bottom line, he contended, was that his defeat would deny his type of historians the opportunity
to question the conventional narrative of the Holocaust.

In fact the opposite is true. If Irving loses, his reputation might suffer - it might equally be enhanced, at least among his followers - but nothing will prevent him from continuing to propagate his crackpot views.

If he wins, however, mainstream historians will have to think long and hard about the consequences of taking on the flat-earth brigade that Irving represents with such felicitous ease.

But the case that Irving brought against Emory University's imperturbable Lipstadt was not based on her contention that the earth is actually round; rather, that Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books, had accused him of deliberately ignoring the evidence that the earth is round.

Irving claims that Lipstadt's assertion that he is a Holocaust denier, a distorter of history, a Hitler partisan and, in the words of defense lawyer Richard Rampton, "a right-wing extremist, a racist and, in particular, a rabid anti-Semite" ruined his reputation and wrecked his career.

Could Irving succeed in his libel action? And what would that mean?

A senior source deep inside the Lipstadt defense team was euphoric immediately after the closing statements last week. There was no doubt, he said, that the judgment - expected in about three weeks - would be in Lipstadt's favor.

Then, again, Irving was equally confident: "That's a stupid question," he replied tersely when I asked him whether he thought he would win.

British libel law is stacked in Irving's favor. The judge is not being asked to rule on whether the Holocaust happened, whether Hitler knew or approved of the extermination of Jews or whether Auschwitz was indeed the scene of systematic mass killing.

Instead, he must decide whether, as Lipstadt charged in her book, Irving deliberately distorted, misstated, misquoted and falsified historical evidence and manipulated historical documents in order to make them conform to his own ideological agenda. And he must decide whether Irving deliberately ignored evidence in order to exonerate Hitler for the persecution of the Jews.

The burden of proof fell on Lipstadt to show that Irving actually had evidence to support the conventional meaning of the Holocaust; he says he did not because it is a subject he finds "endlessly boring." So, too, was the burden on Lipstadt to show that Irving had evidence to link Hitler with an order to kill Jews; Irving maintains no such definitive document exists.

It is possible, on strictly technical grounds, that the judge will find in Irving's favor, and the effect of such a decision could be far-reaching.

To many who are not versed in British libel law, a victory for Irving - however narrow, however technical - will be perceived as a vindication of Holocaust denial and a blurring of the line between legitimate historical inquiry and partial "research" that is designed to aid right-wing extremism and fuel neo-Nazism.

Whatever the outcome, it would be entirely wrong to assume that Irving is a cardboard cut-out fascist or a raving lunatic. His public speeches might be intemperate, but his actions are carefully calculated. He is a prolific author, an articulate spokesman for his cause and he has a presence - physical and intellectual - that commands attention.

In other circumstances, Irving might have been a front-line academic, a political leader or an effective courtroom advocate. Instead, he has found a niche for himself as the jewel in the crown of right-wing extremism, its intellectual guiding star.
Adding to the contradictions that accompany Irving is that he is openly contemptuous of the neo-Nazi skinheads who proliferate at many of the 200-odd meetings he addresses each year, a disdain that possibly has more to do with class than ideological difference.

For two months, the standing-room-only crowd of lawyers, journalists and public who converged on Court 73 were treated to a guided tour of the Alice-in-Wonderland world that Irving inhabits, where nothing is ever quite what it seems to be.

He was at once the sycophantic schoolboy when addressing the judge, the overbearing bully when dealing with defense counsel and the bantering schoolyard chum when mixing it with media. He was always the child, a point underscored by his nostalgia for the days of his youth and his seeming obligatory reference to his father, whether in his curriculum vitae or in court.

Ultimately, Irving presented an image of an overindulged, somewhat precocious Bar Mitzvah boy, thoroughly enjoying the celebrity of the occasion, smug in his own cleverness, scowling when he is denied an extra helping of chopped liver.

Whether railing against the international Jewish conspiracy that he says has hounded him for 30 years, excoriating what he perceives to be the enemies of free speech - most major Jewish organizations, and JTA - or lamenting the stream of countries that have deported him because they found his views too obnoxious, Irving is clearly a child who hates having his party ruined.
Restitution

Dutch Govt., Jews Reach Settlement

Germany Seeks To Recompense Gays
WJC backs U.S. states in pushing German insurers
Austria Nazi claims chief meets U.S. counterpart
German Cabinet Backs Nazi Compensation Bill

Nazi-era compensation falls short

General

'Holocaust denier showed his anti-Semitism in court'

http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20000321/wl/netherlands_holocaust_redress_1.html

Tuesday March 21 5:26 PM ET

Dutch Govt., Jews Reach Settlement

By JEROME SOCOLOVSKY, Associated Press Writer

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) - The Dutch government said Tuesday it had agreed to give the Jewish community $180 million to compensate for injustices they suffered in Holland after returning from Nazi death camps.

The settlement followed protests from Dutch Jews that an earlier offer of $114 million - which the government called its "moral obligation" - fell far short of real redress for misappropriated Jewish assets.

The government also earmarked $114 million for Dutch victims of Japanese World War II prison camps in the former East Indies colony, now Indonesia, and $14 million for Dutch Gypsies persecuted by the Nazis, the Finance Ministry spokesman said.

"We are happy that this settlement has been reached," said Ronni Naftaniel, a spokesman for the Central Jewish Council, which negotiated the settlement with Finance Ministry officials.

Finance Ministry spokesman Jeroen Sprengers said the government increased the offer because "it was convinced by the arguments that were put forth by the Jewish community."

Naftaniel said the agreement covers 15 types of assets, including administrative costs for returned Jewish property and money confiscated from Jews by the Nazi puppet regime to run concentration camps.

The lion's share of the payment will go to Dutch Jewish war victims, most of whom live in the Netherlands, Israel and the United States. Naftaniel said the council will contribute $23 million to an international fund for
war victims.

The settlement followed a series of investigations into the treatment of Jews and other Nazi victims, exposing the neglect of their suffering and the plundering of assets following the Netherlands' liberation from German occupation.

Out of the Netherlands' prewar population of 140,000 Jews, more than 100,000 died in Nazi death camps during World War II or on the trains taking them there.

Germany Seeks To Recompense Gays

By PAUL GEITNER, Associated Press Writer

03/22/00

BERLIN (AP) - As talks on a fund for Nazi-era slave laborers resumed today, German lawmakers announced action to address long-neglected demands by another group persecuted by the Nazis: homosexuals.

Parliamentary leaders from the governing Social Democratic and Greens parties introduced a joint petition in parliament that could lead to the lifting of convictions of gays persecuted under the draconian Nazi law criminalizing male homosexuality, known as Paragraph 175.

"It's long overdue," said Volker Beck, the Greens party legal affairs spokesman. "It's really very shameful that there's only now a majority (in parliament) for such an apology and a rehabilitation."

The petition, approved separately by the parliamentary factions on Tuesday in consultation with the Justice Ministry, seeks public acknowledgment by parliament of the persecution of gays under the Nazis, he said.

It also calls on the government to consider expanding an existing law lifting unjust Nazi convictions to include those prosecuted under Paragraph 175, under which even a kiss or glance between men could result in being sent to prison or a concentration camp.

The law applied only to men, reflecting the Nazi view of male homosexuality as a threat to its ideal of Aryan manhood, while lesbians were ignored.

Of the estimated 50,000 men convicted under the law, few ever came forward after World War II because of the continuing stigma as well as the fact that Paragraph 175 remained on the books in West Germany until 1969. Beck said the coalition wants parliament to issue an official apology for that as well.

The number of surviving victims is unknown, but their plight has gained attention since the release this year of a U.S.-made documentary about the Nazi persecution of gays, "Paragraph 175," which won awards at the Sundance and Berlin film festivals.

The bill is to have its first reading in parliament's lower house on Friday before being referred to committee. Beck said he expected it would be ready for a vote in a few months.

"Fifty-one years after the adoption of the (West German) constitution, persecuted homosexuals will also finally have their honor returned," Beck said.

Meanwhile, Germany's chief envoy to the slave and forced labor compensation fund talks said he believed "significant progress" would be made on resolving how to distribute the $5 billion fund.

The negotiations are "just short of the final breakthrough," Otto Lambsdorff told NDR radio.
Victims groups, especially those from eastern Europe, have challenged Germany’s plans to divert some of the money to a foundation for Holocaust-related education and research projects, as well as to cover compensation for confiscated property and administrative costs.

As the talks began, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s Cabinet discussed the bill setting up the fund. Half of it will be financed by the government, and the rest will come from German industry.

Beck, who has also been involved in the slave labor talks, said the government hoped to have the bill through both houses of parliament before the summer recess so that payments could begin this year.

WJC backs U.S. states in pushing German insurers
03/21/00
By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The World Jewish Congress on Tuesday said it backed attempts by U.S. states to force Europe's insurers to say whether they failed to honor prewar policies sold to Holocaust victims.

Munich Re is battling New York and California, which want the world's largest reinsurer to submit policy records for a German insurer called Victoria, in which it owns a majority stake.

The world's tenth biggest reinsurer, Gerling, has attacked Florida and California for trying to make its U.S. affiliates say how the German concern treated Holocaust survivors and heirs.

Though the U.S.-based Jewish advocacy group wants all European insurers that sold prewar policies to join the international panel overseeing claims from Holocaust survivors, it says German insurers should be held to a higher standard because they helped the Nazis wage war.

"That these two German companies in the 21st century would seek to invalidate minimal protections for the rights of Holocaust survivors in America today is beneath contempt," Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters by telephone.

But Tom Walker, a Princeton, N.J.-based spokesman for American Re, which is part of Munich Re, says the German firm, as a reinsurer, never sold policies to Holocaust survivors, and does not control Victoria's board.

Further, Walker said Victoria does not have all the records being demanded because it sold prewar policies through units, some of which later were nationalized.

"Nevertheless, Munich Re has been working with Victoria to get it to voluntarily assist the (state) insurance departments," Walker said. "Admittedly, those records are, after many years, no longer a complete record of what happened in the prewar times."

Saying there were constitutional limitations on what states can do, Gerling’s lawyer, New York-based Fred Reif, added: "From the German side, Gerling Life has reviewed every single one of its documents and has not found any unpaid claims for the period in question."

Further, Reif cited a 1943 report by the U.S. Board of Economic Welfare, called "Axis Penetration of European Insurance," which said Gerling was at a disadvantage:

"As the Gerling opponents have the upper hand in Nazi officialdom, the Gerling Concern seems to have been discriminated against in the distribution of business allotted to German companies from occupied areas."

Reif provided Reuters a copy of the report that was declassified about two years ago.
The 1943 U.S. report clashed with a 1947 Treasury report provided by the WJC. That study said the Nazis forced German insurers to loan money to industrial companies, especially those involved in war production. It detailed the close ties between insurers and other firms.

The Treasury report said 22 members of Gerling's boards served on the boards and executive committees of 123 industry companies, 18 banks, 28 Nazi government agencies, and 52 other insurance companies.

Further, 11 Munich Re officials served on the boards of 33 industry companies, 12 banks, 16 Nazi government agencies, and 60 other insurance companies.

Germany has entered the battle in Florida, telling the U.S. court trying whether the state's Holocaust law was constitutional that the law violated sovereign immunity. The German government also noted there were plans to create a $10 billion German Holocaust compensation fund.

But the United States, saying it was not taking a position on the merits, on Tuesday filed a brief saying nothing in the current talks to create a German Holocaust fund obliged the court to make a particular decision.

"I think this shoots the German brief right out of the sky," Dan Dearing, an assistant attorney general in Florida, said.

**Austria Nazi claims chief meets U.S. counterpart**

*March 20, 2000*

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Austria's newly appointed chief negotiator on Nazi-era slave labor claims had a first meeting with her U.S. counterpart in Washington Monday as a Jewish group threatened to sue Austria for property claims.

Maria Schaumayer, the former National Bank president named to the new post after a center-right coalition took office in Vienna last month, spent about an hour with U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, officials said.

Schaumayer explained the Austrian plan to set up a compensation fund for former slave and forced laborers, similar to the German fund on which Eizenstat has been working for most of the past year, officials said.

The Austrian fund differs from the German fund in that it is confined to labor claims and does not include property, insurance and other claims against Austrian companies.

The World Jewish Congress (WJC) said on Monday the limited scope of the fund was unacceptable and it was considering filing a class-action suit against Austria or Austrian companies as part of its program to get reparations.

"In general, a class-action suit would be aimed at securing all questions of restitution," WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg told Reuters.

Separately Ed Fagan, a New York lawyer who met Schaumayer in Vienna last week, threatened to sue more Austrian companies on behalf of Holocaust victims if Austria did not agree to pay the property claims in addition to the slave labor claims.

A spokeswoman for Eizenstat said he was impressed by the preparatory work done by Schaumayer and her staff and thought that their first meeting was productive.

"They agree to work closely together in this historic effort," added the spokeswoman.
The United States has said it will judge the Austrian coalition, which includes the right-wing Freedom Party, in part by the way it handles the Nazi-era claims.

It gave a cautious welcome in February to assurances from Vienna on quick compensation for victims of the Nazi era.

Schaumayer and Eizenstat plan to meet twice by the end of May, Eizenstat's spokeswoman said.


**German Cabinet Backs Nazi Compensation Bill**

Mark John
03/22/00

BERLIN (Reuters) - Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's cabinet approved legislation on compensation to Nazi-era forced laborers Wednesday despite complaints from some survivors that the amount offered was too small.

A copy of the draft obtained by Reuters calls for payments of 8.1 billion marks ($4 billion) to former forced laborers and another billion marks to compensate property and financial claims from mostly Jewish victims.

A further 700 million marks will be directed to a "future fund for social and cultural projects" and 200 million marks has been set aside for administrative and legal costs.

But participants at talks in Berlin to discuss allocation of the cash said delegates representing east European victims, which make up the majority of the estimated million surviving forced laborers, had rejected the draft proposal.

"They said they were not prepared to accept this compromise," said one participant who did not want to be named.

A separate dispute over whether the fund should offer compensation for unpaid insurance policies held with German firms by Nazi victims was also no nearer to being solved, participants said.

Most of the forced laborers are elderly and about 1 percent are dying each month. There are also about 240,000 mainly Jewish "slave laborers" who were meant to be worked to death in concentration camps.

Delegates from Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Belarus have demanded a 9 billion mark share of the cash for the forced laborers, many of whom have missed out on previous compensation pay-outs made during the Cold War.

Their demand would, however, likely cut into the amount of compensation on offer to the families of the mostly Jewish victims who suffered financial losses at the hands of German firms under the Nazis.

The fund was launched just over a year ago after U.S. class action lawyers threatened to sue many of Germany's top firms. The 10 billion mark global compensation figure was agreed with much fanfare last December.

The latest round of talks are due to end Thursday. German negotiators say they expect one more session to be needed before a deal can be reached. Parliament is expected to pass legislation by the summer, releasing payouts by year-end.

Financial Times

**Nazi-era compensation falls short**
By Haig Simonian in Berlin - 21 Mar 2000 21:35GMT

Manfred Gentz, the co-ordinator of efforts by German business to compensate Nazi-era forced and slave labourers, on Tuesday admitted companies had so far pledged less than half the DM5bn (E2.56bn, $2.48bn) promised last December.

Speaking on the eve of a two-day round of talks between German business, the Berlin government and victims’
representatives, he said differences over insurance claims were now the main factor impeding a settlement.

Agreement on the highly complex insurance issues was essential to persuade Germany's powerful insurance sector to join in the financial settlement, he said.

While optimistic on the chances of raising the DM5bn - half the DM10bn settlement broadly agreed with victims' representatives last December - he warned disagreements over insurance could still break the deal.

The German government is providing the other DM5bn. Mr Gentz, finance director of DaimlerChrysler, said that the parties also still had to be resolve precise allocations of money between the settlement's four main components.

These comprise about DM8bn to compensate forced and slave labourers; DM1bn for non-labour issues such as property; some DM800m for a fund for humanitarian projects; and a allocation for administrative costs, including fees for the US class action lawyers representing some victims.

He said negotiations were in certain cases additionally complicated by the need to agree allocations between sub-divisions of the main categories, exacerbating divisions between many participants.

However, Mr Gentz said the German side was confident the differences could be resolved, allowing a settlement to be reached by the next round of talks.

The meetings, which started last year, made a breakthrough in December when the German government and business significantly raised their previous compensation offers.

But the deal could still collapse because of the highly complex insurance issues. Simply stated, these centre on settling any remaining legal or moral claims on German insurers within the framework of the foundation set up by German business last year.

German insurers are also facing potential claims under separate talks involving a number of Europe's leading insurance groups. Mr Gentz said he had recently received clear indications the German insurers would be exempt from participation in broader talks on insurance assets if they formed part of the German foundation's settlement.

German insurers have argued they have already met all obligations regarding policies written in Nazi-era Germany under a compensation deal agreed after the war. However, differences remain over policies written by eastern Europe subsidiaries.

'Holocaust denier showed his anti-Semitism in court'

By Sharon Sadeh
Ha'aretz Correspondent
03/22/00

LONDON - When she sat in the courtroom during the hearings of the libel suit against her and against Penguin Books by British historian David Irving, says Deborah Lipstadt, what surprised her most was the ferocity of his anti-Semitic and racist statements.

"I sat there and I couldn't believe my ears," said Lipstadt, who in her 1994 book "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory" called Irving "one of the most dangerous spokesmen in the service of Holocaust denial."
Speaking to Ha'aretz, she said that Irving displayed "mockery and contempt" for Holocaust survivors, and for survivors of Auschwitz in particular, treating them as pathological spinners of fantasies. And his loathing for blacks and for English people of Pakistani origin was also manifest.

She was "in shock" at the cumulative effect of all the findings and utterances that came out at the trial - and as "an expert in anti-Semitism" she is not easily frightened by such material.

Lipstadt says she stands by every word she wrote in the book about Irving, and in light of what she has since learned about him, she would have written much more. "He takes up only six pages in a book of about 300 pages," she notes.

The hearings in the trial, which lasted about ten weeks, ended last week and the judgment is expected early next month. Lipstadt, could not give interviews during the trial and the legal team decided not to put her on the stand. "It wasn't because I didn't want to testify," she explains. "I asked them whether they wanted to me to take the stand, even though personally I had no interest in getting into a discussion with him [Irving, who conducted his own defense], but I was told there was no need.

"My book speaks for itself and I was sued for what I published. The legal arguments consisted of proof of the arguments against Irving."

The trial, she says, was forced on her, and in contrast to the U.S. system, "the burden of proof was on me."

Lipstadt was born in Manhattan in 1947 to a traditionalist Jewish family and grew up in Queens. She describes herself as a member of the Conservative stream in Judaism. She once entertained the idea of settling in Israel and lived in the country, where she has many relatives in Be'er Sheva and Jerusalem, from 1966 to 1968.

However, her father's worsening health forced her to return home, her academic career developed in the United States, "and somehow it was already too late to change things. If I could turn back the wheel, I would immigrate to Israel."

She took paid leave from Emory University in Georgia, where she teaches modern Jewish history, to attend the trial.

A good many of her friends and relatives visited her in London - she stayed in a plush apartment hotel near Buckingham Palace - and she was inundated with hundreds of messages of support from around the world. Their main thrust, she says, was: "We know what you're going through, but you are on the front, you are waging an important struggle and you have to fight for what you wrote."

Irving sued in 1996, two years after the book appeared, and claimed that his contentions - that Hitler did not authorize the Final Solution and that the buildings at Auschwitz are fakes and were build by the Poles after the war - did not make him a Holocaust denier because they were true.

Lipstadt maintains that Irving is a frightening and dangerous phenomenon because he is deeply acquainted with the relevant historical material and because of his manipulative ability, his articulate presentation and because of the status he has secured in academic circles.

"But we dug deep into his work, the roots of his conclusions, we checked his footnotes one by one," Lipstadt says. "We simply saw that he was distorting things from A to Z."

She admits that as an observer from the side, she found that the trial sometimes seemed to be not over freedom of expression, as Irving claimed, but about the existence of the Holocaust, though that was not the intention, of
course.

"Our line was to focus on Irving, and that was why, for example, we did not bring Holocaust survivors to testify."

Lipstadt says she will now return to the United States "and try to resume a normal life." Still, she says, "despite the tension and the fears, and contrary to my advance expectations, it was a very uplifting experience, which strengthened my awareness and my ties to Judaism, to the Jewish heritage, and internalized for me the importance of belonging to the Jewish people."
Restitution Issues

Nazi Labor Funds Agreement Reached
Compensation Agreement Reached on Holocaust Forced Labor
LA’s Getty museum has painting looted in Nazi-era
Payments to Nazi-Era Slaves Seen by Year-End
Austria Might Compensate Jews
Division of Nazi Labor Fund

Pope in Israel

Pope’s Speech at Holocaust Memorial
Pope grieves for Holocaust dead

http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20000323/ts/germany_nazi_labor_4.html

Thursday March 23 6:11 AM ET

Nazi Labor Funds Agreement Reached

BERLIN (AP) - Negotiators agreed today on how to allocate the money from a $5 billion fund to compensate Nazi-era slave and forced laborers, resolving the last major point of contention after months of negotiations.

“There is an agreement in principle on the numbers and the allocations,” said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Jewish Claims Conference.

All negotiators were to meet in a plenary session to approve the deal, he said.

The agreement would allocate $4 billion for compensating slave and forced labor victims and another $500 million to cover claims for bank accounts and insurance policies stolen by the Nazis.

Another $350 million will be used for a foundation that will sponsor research and projects around the theme of Nazi labor.

Since all sides agreed in December on the fund’s amount, negotiators had been wrangling over how to divide the money among the various groups to be covered.

Eastern European countries had been pushing to get the most money possible to cover victims of the Nazis’ labor practices, while German industry insisted the foundation for future projects was an integral part of the
effort. Jewish groups had wanted to make sure an appropriate amount was allocated for the other bank and insurance claims.

Under the deal, slave laborers - those who were put to work in concentration camps and expected to die doing their job - would receive up to $7,500 each. Forced laborers, who worked in factories outside camps, would get up to $2,500 each.

Taylor said there still remained technical questions to be resolved in the German legislation that creates the fund, which government officials said they hoped to pass before parliament's summer break. Taylor declined to speculate on when payments might actually begin to victims.

On Wednesday, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's Cabinet approved a bill to set up the fund, which is to be financed in equal parts by the government and German industry.

Estimates about how many people could benefit from the fund range from 800,000 to 2.3 million. Most are non-Jews from Eastern Europe who had been left out of previous compensation efforts because they were behind the Iron Curtain.

Germany has paid $60 billion under other compensation for Nazi-era wrongs since World War II.

Israel's Business Arena

Thursday, Mar 23, 2000 Sun-Thu at 18:00 (GMT+2)

Compensation Agreement Reached on Holocaust Forced Labor

By Itamar Levin

The governments of the US, Germany, Israel and East European countries, representatives of the German business sector, the Jewish organizations and the attorneys representing survivors of Nazi persecution, today reached agreement over the details of compensation to Holocaust era forced laborers.

129,000 Jewish survivors of slave labor will receive DM 15,000 each. Another 28,000 Jews who were forced laborers will each receive DM 5,000. Similar compensation, based on the same criteria, will be given to over a million non-Jewish survivors. The compensation is a one-off payment.

Over DM 1 billion will be allocated for compensation for assets seized by the Nazis, mainly from Jews, including insurance policies and bank accounts. The agreement will also include the Allianz insurance company. Less than DM 1 billion will be allocated for education and documentation purposes, and the compensation fund's administrative and legal expenses. The fund will be financed in equal shares by the German government and 600 German companies.

LA's Getty museum has painting looted in Nazi-era
03/23/00

By Joan Gralla NEW YORK (Reuters) - A Los Angeles art museum has a 17th century painting by a renowned Dutch painter that was stolen from Belgium during the Nazi era, according to data provided by the J. Getty Trust Wednesday. The J. Paul Getty Museum's painting, called "The Satyr and the Peasant Family" by the Dutch painter Jan Steen was plundered from Belgium between 1939 and 1945. But from whom it was stolen is not known, according to the J. Getty Trust data. Since February, when British museums published a list of some 300 art works that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims, U.S. museums have been under the gun to identify any of their works that might be Nazi booty. A spokeswoman for the Getty museum, Lori Starr, had no immediate comment on the painting by Steen, who also was considered an excellent draftsmen. Earlier this month Starr said that if research into the history of the museum's art work showed gaps in the record of previous
owners, it likely would publish a list. Gaps in a work of art’s provenance or history are not uncommon, and are simply a sign that more research should be done. U.S. museums in June 1998 promised to study their collections to find any works stolen from Holocaust victims. A prominent Jewish advocacy group says that by now the museums should have completed their audits. "It is astonishing what can be found out about Nazi looted paintings in public data bases," Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, told Reuters by telephone. "Why haven't American museums fulfilled their pledge of two years ago?" The Getty is only the latest gallery to join the list of U.S. art institutions that might have Nazi plunder hanging on their walls. Another of California’s best-known museums, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, is investigating a 17th century Rembrandt painting called "Portrait of a Man," which ended up in Hitler’s museum. Whether it ever was returned to its owners is not known. The county museum also is researching whether a 15th-century work by an artist called the Master of the Bargello Judgment of Paris was stolen from Holocaust victims by an infamous Nazi art dealer. In the Midwest, The Art Institute of Chicago has a 19th century painting by Gustave Courbet called "Rock at Hautpierre," which it says might have been stolen from Greta Silberberg’s father-in-law, Max, who died in a concentration camp, along with his wife. The Allen Memorial Art Museum of Oberlin College in Ohio has a 17th century picture by the Flemish painter David Teniers, the Younger, called "Saints Anthony and Paul in a Landscape." Hermann Goering, Hitler’s air minister, got hold of the painting, which probably was confiscated from an unknown French collection, according to the Getty data. The Saint Louis Art Museum also has works with question marks. In 1937, the Nazis declared that two paintings by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner were "degenerate" and confiscated them -- but from whom they were taken is not certain, according to the Getty data. In Washington, the National Gallery of Art has red-flagged a 16th century painting by Frans Synders, called "Still Life with Fruit and Game," because it went through the hands of another notorious Nazi art dealer. On the East Coast, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston has a 17th century panel by Domenico Fetti that was handled by yet another infamous Nazi art dealer, which means it could have been taken from Holocaust victims. New York City’s Museum of Modern Art is considering whether to identify a dozen works of art it is studying to find out if they are Nazi plunder. And the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the next few weeks plans to publish a list of works that have gaps in their provenance that suggest more research will have to be done to clear them of any possible Nazi taint.

Payments to Nazi-Era Slaves Seen by Year-End

March 23, 2000

By Mark John

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany said on Thursday it hoped payments to Nazi-era slave workers and other Third Reich victims could be distributed by the end of the year after a dispute over its proposed compensation fund was settled.

Negotiators for the German government and survivors’ groups around the world said they had solved a dispute over how to share out cash from the $5 billion fund to over a million elderly victims around the world, many from east Europe.

"The issue of how the money is shared out has been successfully settled," German government negotiator Otto Lambsdorff told a news conference after the negotiations.

Assuming legislation is passed by parliament as scheduled in July, Lambsdorff said cash from the fund would be transferred to Jewish groups and national governments in autumn, allowing them to release payments late this year.

"BETTER LATE THAN NEVER"

An international advertising campaign, through newspapers and other media, will advise potential claimants of
the planned payments, which will average 5,000 marks ($2,500) for those put to work in Nazi forced labor schemes.

The mainly Jewish slave workers who were expected to be worked to death in concentration camps will get up to three times as much. Victims of medical experiments and those that suffered financial losses at the hands of German firms can also expect payments.

"This is an important step that for some has come a little too late," said Noah Flug, an Auschwitz survivor who represents Jewish victims in Israel.

"But as the saying goes, better late than never," he added.

Germany has paid over 100 billion marks ($50 billion) in reparations to Nazi victims since World War Two. Gerhard Schroeder, the first German chancellor too young to remember Adolf Hitler, has said it is time to look to the future.

This new fund, jointly financed by the German state and industry, was proposed by some of Germany's top firms last February after U.S. lawyers threatened them with billion-dollar class action lawsuits over their Nazi pasts.

Fund officials and victims groups agreed last December that the fund would be set at 10 billion marks, but since then there have been acrimonious disagreements over who should get what.

The new proposal envisages 8.1 billion marks for labor claims, one billion for financial damages and 700 million for educational projects.

A further 150 million marks is due to be added to the labor compensation by re-investing interest payments on fund capital and by a donation from a separate fund created by Swiss banks.

Up to 300 million marks has been set aside to pay for life insurance policies on Nazi victims that were never paid out.

U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, co-chairman with Lambsdorff of the talks, said the U.S. government would begin work on measures aimed at ruling out future lawsuits against German firms over their activities in the Nazi era.

A statement by firms involved in the fund, which include car-maker DaimlerChrysler AG, insurer Allianz AG and chemicals giant BASF AG, said outstanding details of how the legal protection could be put in place would be dealt with in the coming weeks.

($1-2.026 Mark)

**Austria Might Compensate Jews**

*March 23, 2000*

**VIENNA, Austria (AP) - Austria's vice chancellor says the government may compensate Jews for assets stolen by the Nazis in World War II after a settlement is reached on payments to former slave laborers, a weekly reported Thursday. Speaking to the NEWS weekly, Vice Chancellor Susanne Riess-Passer said the government may tackle the issue of confiscated Jewish assets as a second step in working through the country's past. "Right now the slave laborers are the priority," Riess-Passer told the magazine. "But in a second step, the question of Aryanization should be addressed. We have to address every injustice that Austria is responsible for." Last month, the Austrian government named Maria Schaumayer, to bring labor groups and representatives together with Austrian companies to hammer out an agreement on compensation for former slave laborers. While the government's efforts have been welcomed, Jewish groups and others have urged the Austrians to compensate for other Nazi injustices. Last week, the World Jewish Congress demanded that Austria provide compensation for the estimated $1 billion - or $10 billion currently - in assets that were seized by Austria from its Jewish citizens**
under a 1938 decree. But some victims groups have said they will not work with the current Austrian
government, which includes the far-right Freedom Party. The party’s leader, Joerg Haider, earned international
infamy for praising Nazi employment policies and saying concentration camps were "punishment camps." The
vice chancellor, who is to succeed Haider as head of the party, refuted such arguments, saying: "It is important
that every victim is can be compensated, it has nothing to do with politics."


Division of Nazi Labor Fund
09:08EST
03/23/00

BERLIN (AP) -- Negotiators agreed Thursday on how to divide up the $5 billion fund set up by Germany mainly to
compensate Nazi-era slave and forced laborers. Here is a breakdown, according to the U.S. and German envoys to the
talks:

$4.075 billion for forced and slave labor claims. That includes:<

-- $906 million to Jewish Claims Conference
-- $906 million to Poland
-- $862 million to Ukraine
-- $417.5 million to Russia
-- $347 million to Belarus
-- $211.5 million to Czech Republic
-- $400 million for the rest of the world.
-- $25 million for other personal injury claims, such as quasi-medical experiments.

$500 million for property claims, that includes:

-- $175 million for property claims, including stolen bank accounts and insurance policies.
-- $325 million for humanitarian cases.

$350 million for a foundation to sponsor research and educational projects on Nazi labor policies.

$100 million for administration and legal costs.

Note: Figures do not total exactly $5 billion because some include accrued interest.

Slave laborers -- an estimated 240,000 living victims who were put to work in concentration camps and expected to die
doing their jobs -- would receive up to $7,500 each.
Forced laborers, who worked in factories outside camps, would get up to $2,500 each. Their number could be more than 1 million people.

Thursday March 23 7:13 AM ET

Pope’s Speech at Holocaust Memorial

By The Associated Press,

Text of Pope John Paul II’s speech Thursday at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial:

The words of the ancient Psalm, rise from our hearts: “I have become like a broken vessel. I hear the whispering of many - terror on every side - as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord: I say, ‘you are my God.”’ (Psalms 31:13-15)

In this place of memories, the mind and heart and soul feel an extreme need for silence. Silence in which to remember. Silence in which to try to make some sense of the memories which come flooding back. Silence because there are no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy of the Shoah.

My own personal memories are of all that happened when the Nazis occupied Poland during the war. I remember my Jewish friends and neighbors, some of whom perished, while others survived. I have come to Yad Vashem to pay homage to the millions of Jewish people who, stripped of everything, especially of human dignity, were murdered in the Holocaust. More than half a century has passed, but the memories remain.

Here, as at Auschwitz and many other places in Europe, we are overcome by the echo of the heart-rending laments of so many. Men, women and children, cry out to us from the depths of the horror that they knew. How can we fail to heed their cry? No one can forget or ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale.

We wish to remember. But we wish to remember for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again will evil prevail, as it did for the millions of innocent victims of Nazism.

How could man have such utter contempt for man? Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people.

The honor given to the ‘just Gentiles’ by the state of Israel at Yad Vashem for having acted heroically to save Jews, sometimes to the point of giving their own lives, is a recognition that not even in the darkest hour is every light extinguished. That is why the Psalms and the entire Bible, though well aware of the human capacity for evil, also proclaims that evil will not have the last word.

Out of the depths of pain and sorrow, the believer’s heart cries out: “I trust in you, O Lord: I say, you are my God.”’ (Psalms 31:14)

Jews and Christians share an immense spiritual patrimony, flowing from God’s self-revelation. Our religious teachings and our spiritual experience demand that we overcome evil with good. We remember, but not with any desire for vengeance or as an incentive to hatred. For us, to remember is to pray for peace and justice, and to commit ourselves to their cause. Only a world at peace, with justice for all, can avoid repeating the mistakes and terrible crimes of the past.

As bishop of Rome and successor of the Apostle Peter, I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church, motivated by the Gospel law of truth and love, and by no political considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and
The church rejects racism in any form as a denial of the image of the Creator inherent in every human being.

In this place of solemn remembrance, I fervently pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people suffered in the 20th century will lead to a new relationship between Christians and Jews. Let us build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Jewish feeling among Christians or anti-Christian feeling among Jews, but rather the mutual respect required of those who adore the one Creator and Lord, and look to Abraham as our common father in faith.

The world must heed the warning that comes to us from the victims of the Holocaust, and from the testimony of the survivors. Here at Yad Vashem the memory lives on, and burns itself onto our souls. It makes us cry out: “I hear the whispering of many - terror on every side - but I trust in you, O Lord: I say, ‘You are my God.’” (Psalms 31:13-15)

Thursday, 23 March, 2000, 14:28 GMT

**Pope grieves for Holocaust dead**

Pope John Paul II has expressed heartfelt grief at centuries of Christian persecution of Jews during an emotional visit to Israel's Holocaust memorial.

He called for a new relationship between the two faiths based on their common roots, but stopped short of the apology many Israelis had sought for the silence of the Catholic Church during the Nazi extermination of six million European Jews.

"I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church ... is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place," the Pope said at the Yad Vashem memorial above Jerusalem.

He said there were "no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy" of the Holocaust.

**'Historic change'**

Speaking immediately afterwards, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak - whose mother's parents were killed in a death camp in Poland - welcomed the Pope's visit to the memorial as "a climax of this historic journey of healing".

"You have done more than anyone else to bring about the historic change in the attitude of the Church towards the Jewish people ... and to dress the gaping wounds that festered over many bitter centuries," he said.

But he said it was impossible to overcome all the pains of the past overnight.

Earlier, in a symbolic gesture, the Pope rekindled the eternal flame in the memorial's dark Hall of Remembrance, which is paved with slabs bearing the names of the concentration camps.

He then laid a wreath on the stone slab under which remains of victims from the Nazi camps are buried, and met Holocaust survivors and residents of his former home town in Poland.

The Catholic Church stands accused of not speaking out against the extermination of the Jews during World War II and, for many Israelis, this amounts to complicity with the genocide.

After the Pontiff's expression of sympathy for Palestinian refugees on Wednesday, Israelis expected a gesture of acknowledgment of their national tragedy.

**Disappointment**
Many hoped the Pope would use his visit to Yad Vashem to deliver a fuller apology for what they regard as the Vatican's failure to condemn the Holocaust while it was taking place.

Last week, in a plea for forgiveness for the sins of Roman Catholics throughout the ages, the Pope disappointed Jews by not mentioning the Holocaust by name.

After Thursday's speech, Israel Lau, one of Israel's two chief rabbis, said he had hoped the Pope would make an explicit apology for the Vatican's inaction.

"I expected him to say things touching not only on church members who sinned against the Jewish people, but also on the Catholic Church itself which more than once has spread hatred against Jews," he said.

"It was a good speech, a nice speech - very emotional - but I wait for chapter number two."

Others agreed but said the solidarity demonstrated with Holocaust victims would go far towards improving Catholic-Jewish ties.

The head of the Yad Vashem memorial, Avner Shalev, told reporters "the Pope said some capital things about the Shoah (Holocaust) and its meaning".

"I would have liked him to ask pardon in the name of the Christians, but he alluded to such repentance."

The Vatican itself has suggested that the Church's silence actually saved thousands of Jewish lives, and the wartime Pope, Pius XII, is being considered for beatification.

Last supper

The latest leg of the Pope's historic Holy Land pilgrimage came after he began the day early with a private mass at the Church of the Dormition, in the room where Jesus Christ is said to have held his Last Supper.

He also held meetings with Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Chief Rabbi Meir Lau during the morning.

The papal itinerary for Thursday also includes an inter-faith meeting of Christians, Muslims and Jews, and an encounter with 20 former friends from the Polish town of Wadowice, where the Pope, Karol Wojtyla, spent his youth.

On Wednesday, the Pontiff celebrated mass in Bethlehem's Manger Square and recognised Palestinians' "natural right to a homeland".
Germany earmarks $270 mln for Holocaust insurance

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, March 27 (Reuters) - German insurers will pay a minimum of $270 million to settle claims they never honored prewar policies sold to Holocaust victims, according to a letter written by Germany's top negotiator for the country's new $5 billion compensation fund.

The letter by Otto Lambsdorff, provided to Reuters by a source close to the issues, makes it clear that German insurers will have to pay for claims they sold throughout Eastern Europe, not just inside Germany.

Further, another $50 million will be put into escrow to make up for any shortfall if the initial sum is not big enough to pay all of the claims, the letter said.

The effort to get compensation for Holocaust survivors covers a wide range of issues, from reparations for slave and forced labor, to trying to identify looted assets, from artwork to bank accounts to insurance policies.

One of the most important aspects of the accord outlined in Lambsdorff's letter is that it sets a benchmark for how much non-German insurers will have to pay to settle claims that they too robbed Holocaust families by refusing to honor their policies after the end of the Second World War, said the source, who declined to be named.

"What that implies is a certain range non-German companies will have to meet," he told Reuters.

The letter was written to Lawrence Eagleburger, the former U.S. secretary of state, who heads the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims. A spokesman for the panel, which is overseeing insurance payments to Holocaust survivors and heirs, was not immediately available to comment.

Last week, U.S. and German negotiators reached an accord on allocating the new Holocaust compensation fund for different kinds of war crimes, from slave labor to the wholesale plunder of property.
UNPAID INSURANCE CLAIMS

How unpaid insurance claims would be handled was one of the trickiest questions facing U.S. and German fund negotiators, partly because the international insurance panel is a separate initiative. So far only one German insurer, Allianz, has joined both the insurance commission and the German compensation fund.

World Jewish Congress Executive Director Elan Steinberg declined comment on the letter Lambsdorff wrote, but he called on other German insurers to join the international commission on insurance:

"We believe we arrived at a fair and equitable settlement with respect to insurance in the German foundation, and we believe that the companies Munich Re and Gerling, even if their liabilities are covered, must still join the international commission as there are other issues, such as archives and outreach to deal with."

The international insurance commission is auditing the five European insurers who joined it, and using company as well as government archives, to turn up unpaid policies. To some extent, the commission is relying on U.S. state insurance commissioners to force European insurers who have not joined it to turn over lists of policies that might have been sold to Holocaust victims.

Munich Re and Gerling are fighting a handful of states over Holocaust reporting requirements.

The WJC said it believed that joining the German foundation could end the two insurers' financial liability. "But Munich Re and Gerling must satisfy the state insurance commissioners," Steinberg added.


U.S. criticizes German law on Nazi-era fund

March 24, 2000

By Jonathan Wright

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States criticized on Friday German draft legislation on a compensation fund to settle Nazi-era claims, saying it could not provide a basis for stopping class-action lawsuits against German firms.

U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, one of the main mediators in this week's agreement on how to share out the fund, told reporters inadequate legislation could undermine all the work that went into the agreement.

The law would set up a foundation to manage the 10 billion mark ($4.9 billion) fund and pay out the money to former slave and forced laborers and cover some property claims.

"They have got to pass a law that allows us to argue to a U.S. court that the foundation is indeed the exclusive remedy for all claims," Eizenstat told a conference call.

"One disappointment is that we have not persuaded the German government to put in the things we need," he added.

The missing elements include a catchall provision to cover claims that may arise in the future, a "broadened scope for property claims" and some definitions to clear up possible ambiguities about subsidiary companies, he said.

"None of these should be difficult but they have been. Until they are resolved we can't move forward," Eizenstat added.

COMPANIES NEED 'LEGAL PEACE'
One of the motives for setting up the fund was the threat to German companies from about 30 lawsuits on behalf of people forced to work for the companies during World War II.

In return, the German companies putting up half of the 10 billion marks want "legal peace," the technical term for immunity from future suits by claimants.

The U.S. government, if it is satisfied with the deal, would provide legal peace by telling U.S. courts the fund is the sole recourse for claims and that it is in the interests of U.S. foreign policy to dismiss the lawsuits.

"It would be tragic if, after all this work had been done, the legislation is not adequate. ... Getting this legislation right is absolutely crucial," Eizenstat said.

The U.S. official will have talks on the problem in Washington late next week with legal experts from the German government and German industry, he said.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's cabinet approved the legislation Wednesday, before Thursday's agreement on how to share out the money in the fund between all the claims, mainly from Jewish groups and five east European countries.

Eizenstat said the details of the allocation, which offers 8.1 billion marks ($4 billion) to the estimated 1.25 million slave and forced laborers, can now go straight into the draft.

**Payments Set For Ex-Slaves Of Nazi Regime**

*By William Drozdiak*

Washington Post Foreign Service

Friday, March 24, 2000; Page A13

BERLIN, March 23-Negotiators agreed here today on how to divide a $5 billion German fund to compensate Nazi slave and forced laborers, raising hopes that more than 1.2 million elderly victims will receive payments before year's end.

Under the terms of the accord, about 240,000 slave laborers, who were placed in concentration camps and expected to die from the extreme hardship of their jobs, will receive up to $7,500 each. More than a million forced laborers, who worked in factories outside the camps, would be paid up to $2,500 each.

Led by representatives of the United States and Germany, negotiators agreed in December on the size of the fund, which will be financed equally by German industry and government. But in the past three months, they became ensnared in a bitter argument over how to split the money, with some participants despairing that the victims would ever receive any payments.

"We have taken a huge step forward today," said Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, the U.S. government envoy to the talks. "This brings this process a substantial step closer to completion."

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright said in Geneva that she was pleased by the deal, because "we've worked very hard to get that compensation fund up and going and to be able to begin the distribution."

Most of the victims are non-Jews from Eastern Europe who lived behind the Iron Curtain and never had the opportunity to share in the $60 billion in reparations that Germany has paid since the end of World War II as redress for Nazi crimes. About 10 percent of the victims die every month, creating a special urgency to speed up the distribution of the money.

Noah Flug, a 75-year-old Auschwitz survivor who heads an umbrella organization of Holocaust survivor groups in Israel and who served as one of the negotiators, said two-thirds of the people who could have qualified for the
money have died.

"I have a lot of mixed feelings about this agreement, because I cannot understand why it took so long," he said. "But as the saying goes, better late than never."

The Nazis submitted slave laborers to such extreme working conditions in concentration camps that they were expected to die quickly. Forced laborers were brought to Germany from Eastern Europe toward the end of the war to replace German workers sent to the battle front and to keep factories running as the war effort took its toll on the economy.

For years, German industry balked at making payments, because many companies said the Nazi regime foisted the workers on them. Conversely, the German government denied responsibility because it said the laborers were employed by private firms.

But when a series of U.S. class action lawsuits raised the specter of a worldwide boycott of German products, the companies proposed a compensation fund last year—an idea that drew strong support from the new government of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

The agreement will devote more than $4 billion of the funds to compensate slave and forced labor victims and allocate $500 million to cover claims on property, bank accounts and insurance policies stolen by the Nazis. About $350 million will be provided for a foundation to sponsor research and educational projects on Nazi labor.

Nearly $100 million will be spent on administrative costs and to pay the enormous legal fees. Lawyers rejected appeals to donate their services on a pro bono basis, provoking criticism from other negotiators who said the lawyers were exploiting a humanitarian cause.

The only lingering problem to be settled focuses on the key issue of "legal peace"—a demand by German companies that they be shielded from any further class action lawsuits over their Nazi-era activities. The U.S. government has promised to ask American courts to refer all legal claims to the foundation for settlement.

Eizenstat said that to ensure full American support, the German Parliament must pass legislation that conforms to all principles of the agreement. On Wednesday, Schroeder’s cabinet approved a bill to set up the fund and called for Parliament to enact the legislation by July so the victims can receive payments in the second half of this year.


**Possible Nazi Paintings Probed**

*March 24, 2000*

*By MARTIN FINUCANE, Associated Press Writer*

BOSTON (AP) - The Museum of Fine Arts is joining other major museums in publishing lists of paintings in their collections that may have been plundered by the Nazis during World War II.

The museum said Friday its list would include about 12 to 15 paintings. It said it still has questions about the paintings' histories and hopes the public can help.

"We think it's the right thing to do," museum director Malcolm Rogers said. "The truth is, we've taken our research so far. Now is the time to bring these paintings into the public domain. The answers may not lie within museum walls."

The museum identified the paintings by reviewing the times and places when the works changed hands or whether they passed through the hands of people implicated in Holocaust-era looting.
Similar announcements have been made in recent weeks by the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The Smithsonian Institution, which runs the National Gallery of Art, said this month it would publish a list by the end of this year.

The World Jewish Congress, which has worked for the return of Holocaust victims’ assets from banks, insurers and art museums, had pushed museums to release information on the histories of pieces in their collection.

"We welcome the spirit of openness and cooperation," said Elan Steinberg, the group’s executive director. "We’re trying to achieve justice, or more precisely only a measure of justice, because it’s 50 years too late."

The group estimates about 200 of the nation’s 750 art museums might hold art plundered from victims of the Nazis.

**Exhibit Focuses on Gay Nazi Victims**

*March 26, 2000*

*By PAUL GEITNER, Associated Press Writer*  
BERLIN (AP) - Focusing attention on a long-neglected group of Nazi victims, a two-part exhibition about gays persecuted under the Nazis opened Sunday at museums in Berlin and in a former concentration camp where many of the victims were killed. The exhibits of documents, photos, drawings and other objects collected during 10 years of research is the largest on the subject ever mounted in Germany, project organizers said. It documents the fate of 700 individuals who suffered under the Nazis’ draconian anti-gay laws and tells 60 personal stories. "We want to return to the gay victims of the Nazis their names and to show their lives, as far as possible, so as to at least symbolically liberate them from the dehumanizing barbarity of the Nazis," said Andreas Sternweiler, project director at the Gay Museum in Berlin, where part of the exhibit is being shown. The other half opened at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where many gay men - labeled with a pink triangle - ended up because of the camp’s proximity to the capital. Some 600 homosexuals were killed there between 1939 and mid-1943 alone, according to the researchers. The Nazi anti-gay law, known as "Paragraph 175," was directly solely against gay men, since the Nazis were mainly concerned with perceived threats to their ideal of Aryan manhood. Lesbians were generally ignored, although some were arrested as "asocials" or "prostitutes." Few surviving victims ever came forward after World War II because of continuing stigma associated with homosexuality, which remained illegal in West Germany under the same Nazi law until 1969. Tens of thousands of men were prosecuted in those postwar years. Historians also generally ignored the Nazi persecution of homosexuals until the 1980s, meaning many survivors had already passed away, organizers said. Only a handful are known to still be alive; their stories are told in a U.S.-made documentary, "Paragraph 175," which won awards at film festivals in Berlin and at Sundance this year. Germany’s center-left government introduced a bill last week - 55 years after the end of the war - that would require parliament to officially recognize and apologize to gay victims. It also calls on the government to study whether a blanket annulment should be issued for convictions under the Nazi anti-gay law, under which even a glance between men could be cause for prosecution. Guenter Morsch, director of the Sachsenhausen memorial, noted that protests erupted after the first plaque dedicated to gay victims of the Nazis was hung at the Dachau concentration camp outside Munich in the 1980s. Last year, Germany’s national Holocaust memorial day commemorated gay victims for the first time with a ceremony at Sachsenhausen. Events like that and the new exhibit are important, he said, because all groups - not just those that are "politically correct" - must be remembered if tolerance is to be promoted. About 200,000 people were interred at Sachsenhausen between 1936 and 1945, including Jews, Roma, communists and other political prisoners. More than 1,400 Jews were killed there, thousands more sent off to be killed in Auschwitz. Others were forced to work in adjacent factories.

**Eichmann Vienna Files Found**
BERLIN (AP) - Thousands of documents from Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann's year in Austria just before World War II broke out have been discovered among East German secret police files that ended up in Germany's federal archives, a newsmagazine reported Saturday. The files, confiscated from Eichmann's Vienna office by the Soviets after the war and turned over to East Germany in 1955, are expected to add new fuel to the debate in Austria over compensating Holocaust victims, Der Spiegel magazine said. Eichmann followed Hitler's army into Austria in 1938 and immediately began an anti-Semitic campaign to force Austrian Jews out. While much is already known about his terror tactics, the files are expected to add details as well as possibly aid survivors and their heirs seeking the return of stolen property. Unlike Germany, Austria has paid relatively little to Nazi victims in the way of compensation, claiming its 1938 annexation by Germany made it Hitler's first victim. A commission set up by Austria's new government to review restitution claims has already expressed interest in reviewing the newly found files, Spiegel said. Berlin historian Joerg Rudolph, who discovered the files by chance still packed in the East German secret police cartons in a branch office of the Federal Archive, estimated it would take months to go through the 15,000 to 20,000 files. In addition to the papers from Eichmann's Vienna office, other files relate to Gestapo persecution of communists, Catholics and other groups. Eichmann, who returned to Berlin in 1939 to head the Gestapo's Jewish office and oversee the Holocaust, was sentenced to death in Israel and hanged in 1962.


Boston Globe

Clinton aide urges Holocaust education

By Michael Paulson, Globe Staff, 3/27/2000

WALTHAM - The legacy of the Holocaust should be memory, not money, the Clinton administration's top negotiator on Holocaust reparations said last night.

Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart E. Eizenstat, who has helped get billions of dollars from European governments and corporations to compensate survivors, called for a greater focus on the history of the Holocaust by improving education aimed at schoolchildren and by scrutinizing how numerous governments, including the United States, conducted themselves during World War II.

"After widespread public discussion, nations can recognize the lessons, make apology, and take steps to help the victims of injustice," Eizenstat said. "Nations that come to terms with their actions during the Holocaust serve as an example to other nations looking into crimes against their own people."

Eizenstat made his remarks in a speech opening a four-day conference at Brandeis University on the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary society. Scholars will be discussing how the Holocaust has affected postwar national and ethnic identity, attitudes toward genocide, and Catholic-Jewish relations.

The conference comes on the heels of Pope John Paul II's visit last week to Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial to the Holocaust, and the unprecedented apology by the pope and Cardinal Bernard Law for years of Christian anti-Semitism.

Eizenstat spent last week in Berlin as the US envoy to talks on how to allocate compensation for injuries committed by German industry, including slave and forced labor, insurance and banking ripoffs, property seizures, and medical experiments. Eizenstat said there are an estimated 100,000 Holocaust survivors in the United States.
"While no amount of money can ever compensate the survivors for their loss and their suffering, what they will receive from this agreement will help them lead a life of dignity," Eizenstat said. "There is a sense of urgency since survivors are dying at a rate of close to 1 percent per month."

The negotiations over German industry are the latest in a number of developments over the last two years, Eizenstat said, including:

Swiss banks agreed to pay $1.25 billion to settle claims that they had denied access to money deposited in their accounts for safekeeping during the war by an estimated 25,000 people.

Some large European insurers agreed to make good on policies taken out by Holocaust victims before the war.

Poland plans to return almost 3,000 synagogue buildings, cemeteries, libraries, and other structures to help rebuild Polish Jewry, and Eizenstat said similar property restitution is occurring throughout central and eastern Europe.

Forty-four nations have agreed to try to return the estimated 600,000 works of art to the families from whom they were stolen.

"Almost every country on the continent was complicit to some degree in the theft of property from Jewish victims during the war and the denial of adequate restitution and compensation afterwards," Eizenstat said. "A general consensus has developed there that Europe needs to complete this, the last piece of unfinished business of World War II, if it is to enter the new century strong and united."

But, even as he continues in his role as US special envoy for property claims, Eizenstat urged the academics to turn away from financial issues and toward thinking about the lessons of the Holocaust.

"It would be profane to say that an event so monstrous could have any beneficial consequences, but at least the world has learned some lessons," he said.

He argued that after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is less pervasive, saying that interfaith relations have improved and that "culturally, it is no longer acceptable, as it was among the educated classes of Europe in the 1930s, to look on Jews as a race apart, or talk of the ‘Jewish problem.’"

And citing NATO actions in Bosnia and Kosovo and war crimes courts probing slaughters in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, Eizenstat said "nations today are willing to take collective action against nations that commit genocide and other crimes against humanity."
Slave Labor

German Ford joins Nazi forced labour fund

Most recipients of slave labor fund will be non-Jewish victims of Nazis

Nazi slave workers in Australia eye early payment

General

Custodian General Launching Campaign to Trace Real Estate Purchased by Holocaust Victims

Yitz Greenberg’s Biggest Gamble

http://biz.yahoo.com/rf/000328/jv.html

German Ford joins Nazi forced labour fund

BERLIN, March 28 (Reuters) - The German subsidiary of U.S. auto giant Ford Motor Co said on Tuesday it would contribute to a $5 billion industry fund to compensate Nazi-era forced labourers.

Cologne-based Ford-Werke said its contribution to the fund, which is jointly financed by the German state and industry, would amount to around 26 million marks ($13 million).

"Ford-Werke wants to make a humanitarian contribution to help former forced labourers who are still alive and others who suffered hardship during the NS (Nazi) regime," it said in a statement.

A spokesman said Ford employed around 2,000 workers under forced labour conditions at its Cologne plant between 1933 and 1945. They received no salary but got a small allowance from the state for the standard 10-hour shift at the plant.

Some of Germany's biggest companies proposed the fund to compensate forced labourers and other Third Reich victims last year after being threatened with huge class action suits by American lawyers.

Germany drafted people from across Europe to help the Nazi war effort by working at its companies for next to no wages. About 1 million of those workers are still alive today, mainly living in eastern Europe and often in hardship.

Some 240,000 predominantly Jewish "slave workers," who were expected literally to be worked to death in concentration camps, have also survived and will be able to draw on the fund, which more than 600 firms have joined.

Germany's parliament is expected to pass legislation this summer enabling the fund to begin making payments by the end of the year. Forced workers are due to receive around 5,000 marks ($2,500) each, slave workers up to three times that amount.

Under the agreement, the U.S. government will undertake to discourage future legal action against German
firms, their parent companies and subsidiaries over the issue.

($1 equals 2.027 Mark)

http://jta.virtualjerusalem.com/index.exe?0003288

Most recipients of slave labor fund will be non-Jewish victims of Nazis
By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK, March 28 (JTA) - Jewish groups were the driving force behind the creation of Germany's latest Holocaust compensation fund, but Jews will not be the primary recipients.

Indeed, only about 30 percent of the approximately $5.2 billion fund will go to Jews or Jewish causes, according to a source close to the negotiations that resulted in the fund's creation.

After months of squabbling among the various parties - particularly involving lawyers representing competing interests - those negotiations wrapped up March 23 in Berlin with an agreement to provide the bulk of the fund to Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

Jews are receiving a smaller piece of the pie because there are fewer living slave laborers, most of whom are Jewish, than forced laborers, who are non-Jewish.

Nazi policies account for the sharply different proportion of survivors from these two groups. The slave laborers were concentration camp prisoners whom the Nazis sought to work to death. The forced laborers, imported from Eastern European nations to free up Germans to serve in the army, worked under better conditions than the slave laborers.

Jewish groups have been pressing German companies to pay Nazi-era slave laborers since the end of World War II.

The strongest "moral argument came from the Jews, based on the slave-labor issue," said Karen Heilig, staff counsel for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which was among the groups negotiating on behalf of the laborers.

This was the "driving force" behind all the negotiations with Germany, she added.

A series of lawsuits brought in recent years in U.S. and German courts on behalf of Jewish slave laborers are generally credited with getting Germany to agree to the fund. Indeed, German firms had demanded that the agreement include a provision giving them protection against any future lawsuits.

Heilig said the presence of German subsidiaries on U.S. soil, which made them the targets of possible sanctions, also played a role in getting Germany to agree to the fund.

There were several other factors, she said, pointing to the reunification of the two Germanys, recently declassified Holocaust-era documents and a $1.25 billion agreement involving Swiss banks that was reached in 1998 to settle claims surrounding Switzerland's handling of Holocaust victims' assets.

"A lot of different pieces of the puzzle started coming together," said Heilig.

Compared to the Jewish effort, Eastern European countries joined the negotiations far more recently.

Although Germany has paid more than $54 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors since World War II, no payments were made to those living in the Soviet-bloc countries during the Cold War.
The negotiators - including representatives of Holocaust survivors, the German, U.S. and Eastern European governments, and German companies - agreed last December on the size of the fund, to be split equally by German government and industry.

Since then, in talks alternating between Berlin and Washington, the negotiators have been wrangling over how to divide the money.

Jewish groups welcomed last week's allocation agreement, but felt it came too late for many who suffered in the Holocaust.

"It's important to note" that the agreement "comes five decades after the war," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

"At best, what has been accomplished represents a measure of justice," Taylor said. "What is needed now is a German statement on the accord's moral dimension."

Taylor and other Jewish leaders have long stressed that their efforts focused on achieving justice - not simply on Jews getting more money.

Noah Flug, who serves as secretary-general of an umbrella group representing Holocaust survivors in Israel, called last week's agreement "an important step that for some has come a little too late."

Flug estimated that two-thirds of those survivors who would have been eligible to receive payments from the fund have already died.

The chief German negotiator, Otto Lambsdorff, predicted that payments could be made later this year - assuming the German Parliament passes enabling legislation, a move expected in July. The German Cabinet approved the bill one day before the distribution agreement was reached.

U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, who represented the United States in the negotiations, said claimants will have eight months to apply for compensation after the legislation is approved. Claims procedures are expected to be announced in the coming months.

Under the terms of the deal, some 240,000 slave laborers - about 140,000 are Jewish - will receive up to $7,500 each. More than 1 million forced laborers will get up to $2,500 each.

People whose property was looted by the Nazis, victims of Nazi medical experiments and those with unpaid Holocaust-era insurance policies will also be among those entitled to claim payments.

The allocation agreement includes the following distributions:

- $906 million to Poland; $862 million to Ukraine; $417.5 million to Russia; $347 million to Belarus; and $211.5 million to the Czech Republic. Jews living in these countries are expected to get payments from these allocations;
- The Claims Conference will get about $906 million for distribution outside the above five countries;
- $500 million for property claims, including looted bank accounts and unpaid insurance policies;
- $350 million for a foundation to sponsor research and educational projects on Nazi labor policies.

Nazi slave workers in Australia eye early payment
CANBERRA, March 28 (Reuters) - Former Nazi-slave labourers living in Australia are hoping to be among the first Third Reich victims to receive compensation from Germany following an agreement over arrangements to submit claims.

Australia's Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock said on Tuesday that during a visit to Berlin he had raised the need for the estimated 20,000 victims in Australia to have access to information about compensation.

"I have been assured that Australia will be among the first countries to be informed how claims can be submitted," Ruddock said in a statement.

Last week German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's cabinet endorsed draft legislation that Germany hopes could enable the start of compensation payments to Nazi-era slave labourers later this year.

About 65 top German companies and the government launched a fund for slave labourers worth around 10 billion marks ($5 billion) a year ago after legal threats and warnings that they may face trade sanctions in the United States.

A copy of the cabinet draft obtained by Reuters calls for direct payments of 8.1 billion marks ($4 billion) to former forced labourers and another billion marks ($500 million) to compensate property claims from mostly Jewish victims.

There are about one million forced labourers, primarily from east Europe, still alive 55 years after the end of World War Two but about one percent are dying each month.

There are also about 240,000 mainly Jewish 'slave labourers' who were meant to be worked to death in concentration camps but managed to survive the Holocaust.

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**Tuesday, Mar 28, 2000 Sun-Thu at 18:00 (GMT+2)**

**Custodian General Launching Campaign to Trace Real Estate Purchased by Holocaust Victims**

*By Zvi Lavi*

*Israel's Business Arena 03/28/00*

The Custodian General is launching a campaign to trace assets, mainly real estate, belonging to Jews who perished in the Holocaust. The Custodian ordered 15,000 files of abandoned property in his offices to be manually scanned, on the basis of three criteria, with a view to tracing certain properties.

The criteria are: the property was purchased before World War II and at latest by the end of the war; the property was purchased by a resident of one of the countries that came under Nazi occupation or rule; to date, there have been no applications by owners or their lawful heirs for the release of the property.

Custodian General Shmuel Tzur announced the campaign today at the parliamentary examining committee formed in Knesset to trace properties, situate in Israel, of Jews who fell victim to the Holocaust. Tzur said that, in his assessment, the campaign would last six months, and in any event, he would have a sample snapshot of the situation in three months time.

Regarding allegations that the vaults of Israeli banks also hold dormant accounts of persons who perished in the Holocaust, Tzur said that to the best of his knowledge, such dormant accounts as do exist belong to Israeli citizens and do not date from the Holocaust era.

Tzur noted - as reported by "Globes" - that on the outbreak of WWII, the Mandatory government confiscated all bank accounts of persons being citizens or residents of countries under Nazi occupation, and transferred their contents to the Custodian of Enemy Property. He said the confiscated accounts had been restored to their owners over the course of years, and those not demanded were being held and administered by the Custodian General along with all abandoned property.

Tzur stated that the likelihood of any Holocaust victim's account remaining in any bank and not having been seized by the British is very scant.
The new chairman was looking a little lost. Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg was navigating his way through the labyrinthine offices of the U.S. Holocaust Council, the panel that runs the Holocaust Memorial Museum a few steps away on Washington’s Mall.

But that’s nothing compared to the land mines he will face as he traverses the political and ideological controversies that have swirled around the federally chartered, privately built museum he now heads.

Rabbi Greenberg, at least, knows where he wants to go. In his first major interview since being nominated to the voluntary post in February - he succeeds Miles Lerman officially on April 1 - he came down squarely on the side of those who want to use the memory of Jewish suffering during the Nazi years to teach universal lessons applicable in today’s world.

“There could be no more appropriate tribute to honor the memory of the dead,” he said.

In using the museum and its message as agents, of good, he said it is necessary to take chances, as the museum did in 1998 with an invitation to Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat that blew up in the faces of council leaders.

Rabbi Greenberg said it is appropriate to draw analogies between the Holocaust and current events, as long as it’s done without diluting the essential Jewish truths of Holocaust history. “If the Holocaust is so awesome and absolute that you cannot draw analogies, you’ve made it irrelevant,” he said. “But every time you walk on this path, you have to walk with caution and care and reverence.”

Longtime friends and colleagues say the 66-year-old Rabbi Greenberg, a leading Orthodox theologian who has done landmark work in integrating the Holocaust into Jewish religious thought, is uniquely qualified to help the museum balance its disparate functions without inflaming Jewish sensitivities.

But some worry that the rabbi, who has spent recent years in the rarefied air of Jewish foundations - he is the founder of CLAL-the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, and currently serves as president of the Jewish Life Network - will be an easy mark for critics in the snake pit of political Washington.

One former colleague dismissed that danger.

“He has a core of steel wrapped in velvet,” said Mark Talisman, a Jewish activist in Washington who was another major figure in the museum’s creation. “He’s nobody to be trifled with, but it takes a long time to get to the steel. He’s a very patient person, and he isn’t moved easily.”

Rabbi Greenberg, a tall, gangly man in an unfashionable hat with a kipa underneath, he cuts an odd figure among the swarms of young bureaucrats who staff the council offices on Raoul Wallenberg Place. His talk is peppered with Talmudic quotes and references to Torah, not about authorizing legislation and budgets. His words pour out in a torrent, not neat sound bites. He rarely finishes a sentence before finding some new angle to analyze and discuss.

Rabbi Greenberg’s connection to the museum goes back to the late 1970s, when he headed the first Presidential Commission on the Holocaust, the predecessor to today’s council. He later served on the council. His departure in 1993 led to widespread fears it would hurt the museum’s scholarly functions.
He praised the museum’s “overwhelming record of accomplishment,” but said it has “taken a pounding” in the past few years in the wake of a string of controversies - including the Arafat invitation, the abortive selection of scholar John K. Roth to head the museum’s academic arm and the council’s role in negotiating with foreign governments over Holocaust sites.

“In the Jewish community, there’s been constant criticisms that it’s not Jewish enough - which I honestly believe are not correct,” Rabbi Greenberg said. “But I also feel there has been some erosion in its political support. Before, political figures treated this as something transcending politics. There has been some chipping away of the pedestal.”

He attributes the museum’s successes to two factors: “The people who have carried it out - and, even more important, the American people.”

In the early planning stages, the rabbi said, “some important Jews - I won’t mention names - attacked us. They insisted that the American people didn’t want to hear about the Holocaust, and never will. What if you built this incredible thing and nobody came?”

That didn’t happen. Americans - Jews and non-Jews - came in droves, more than 2 million every year. “What the American people said, essentially, was teach us these lessons, educate us,” he said.

‘Not Just A Jewish Event’

Inherent in Rabbi Greenberg’s philosophy about the Holocaust is the view that it was a pivotal event for the world, not just for the Jews - a view that shapes his view of an activist museum, not a static collection of exhibits.

“If I can draw an analogy: The Exodus is an event that happened in Jewish history, but it became the core of biblical religion. It transformed the way people see the world, and not just for Jews.

“It seems to me this is exactly how one has to understand the Holocaust. It’s not just an event in Jewish history. Once you begin to come to grips with that - you never entirely come to grips with it - it transforms the way you understand the world, the way you understand religion.”

The museum has to begin with memorializing the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, but move on from their to use their deaths in a proactive way in today’s world, he said. “At the risk of sounding corny, I feel that when the Jews shared their deepest suffering, or their deepest victories, or their deepest religious meanings with the rest of the world, that’s what the Torah means when it says to be a blessing to the world.”

That doesn’t diminish the museum’s function as a memorial, he argued. “This idea of memory vs. action in the world today is a false dichotomy. Jews as a culture have always believed in action as a critical test of values.”

The museum, he said, was never meant to be a “Jewish” museum, dealing only with Jewish victims.

“In the ’70s, I believed there would be a museum in every major city. There was talk about a Holocaust museum in New York; that should have been the museum ‘owned’ by the Jewish community.”

A museum on Washington’s Mall, he said, should be different - broader, more focused on generalizing the lessons of the Holocaust. “We can’t sound like this is a Jewish private club we are inflicting on others. We have to be prepared to deal with the fact of the non-Jewish victims without losing sight of the fact that the overwhelming majority were Jewish. We have to find the lessons for today’s world.”

Rabbi Greenberg left the Holocaust Council in 1993, just before the museum opened, to attend to CLAL.

“But I had anxiety: Would they do it right? Would they balance the story? There were enormous tensions in the early years,” he said.
His anxieties were allayed when the museum opened to the public. "It was done with such extraordinary fidelity and effectiveness," he said. "I was so moved and so pleased at how right they got it. It could easily have been cheapened, or turned into a horror show."

Adding to the power of the message, he said, was the "self-critique of the American role. That ensures this is not a triumphalist exhibit."

And the museum treated the issue of other victims of the Holocaust with care. "It's important to capture the centrality of Jews in the Holocaust without denying or degrading or impugning the suffering of others," he said. "That's a vital part of the museum, and they've done it well."

But the museum has not done as well in other areas, he said.

"Yad Vashem set the research agenda on the Holocaust for a whole generation," he said. "We haven't done that yet, and we should."

The Washington museum's educational functions should be beefed up, he said, despite some notable successes in bringing the lessons of the Holocaust to school districts around the country. And the museum's Committee on Conscience - charged with speaking out on potential instances of genocide today - has been a disappointment.

"It hasn't had much impact," he said. "Can you take the genocide in Rwanda, or Bosnia, and say that we've made a difference? It cannot be claimed that the museum played a special role."

The museum, he said, has to take chances to speak out effectively on situations that could produce genocide in today's world. But it has to choose its targets with care.

"If it wanders off and focuses more on human rights, it will fail," Rabbi Greenberg said. "Genocide has to be the focus."

Facing The Critics

That is unlikely to reassure museum critics.

Rabbi Avi Weiss - a personal friend who describes Rabbi Greenberg as his "teacher" - said that while it is appropriate to apply the lessons to clear-cut modern genocides such as Rwanda, Rabbi Greenberg's "universalist" focus will "propel the museum into human and civil rights areas."

He cited Rabbi Greenberg's support for museum advertisements on Kosovo - "certainly not a war aimed at destroying an entire people. Once he starts down this path, it's not difficult to slide further down the slippery slope: human rights and China, Burma and then maybe Peru, and the legitimate rights of Palestinians. Pretty soon it's the entire portfolio of human suffering which become the business of the museum."

That process, he said, inevitably dilutes the core message of the Holocaust.

"Eventually ... the Shoah itself will seem more routine, and eventually will become devoid of all profundity."

Managing the risk that's inherent in any application of Holocaust memory to modern life, Rabbi Greenberg said, is a primary reason he re-entered the museum fray. "It's not the best time in my professional and personal life, but I felt that if I believe in this and teach this, I have to be willing to practice this. I feel a certain responsibility for this process, and for encouraging us to take this road of risk."

He said survivors and their descendants will continue to play a "special role" in the operation of the museum - "as long as we understand that nobody is the sole owner of this. Once the generation that lived through the Holocaust is gone, the critical question will be whether people - and not just the second generation - feel their lives were touched in some way by the Holocaust. I hope the Second Generation will play a role, but it can't be
Rabbi Greenberg agreed that the idea of a rabbi as chairman of the council is jarring to some.

"A lot of people are nervous about it," he said. "They think 'church-state,' or that it's going to result in a one-sided religious approach. I see a lot of stereotypes; I wear a kipa, and people feel nervous about that."

He said he hopes his status as a rabbi "will reassure those who believe the Jewishness of the museum is being hidden. The fact that the president felt comfortable to appoint someone who wears a kipa is an important message."

His return to the museum - this time as chair of the panel that runs it - also plays into another aspect of his life and his career.

"There's a kind of tragic dimension to Yitz," said a longtime associate. "He stayed where he was, but the community of which he was a prime articulator left him. Orthodoxy moved to the right and became more parochial; Yitz continued to promote pluralism and openness. He became a man without a community."

The council, this observer said, gives him another chance to demonstrate a kind of tolerant, outward-looking Orthodoxy that reaches out to the world.

"The museum will be more Jewish under Yitz - and its message will be more universal. That may seem like a contradiction, but it's very consistent with his worldview. And ultimately, it could be just what the museum needs."
Reparations

German Insurance Companies to Pay $270 Mln to Heirs of Insured Holocaust Victims

U.S. Senate panel to probe Nazi loot, insurance

German Slave-Labor Fund Donors Total 800; DM2.4 Billion Amassed

Reparations Focus Turns To Austria

General

Clinton Proposes Adding $253 Million to 2000 Budget

History lesson in person

Wednesday, Mar 29, 2000

German Insurance Companies to Pay $270 Mln to Heirs of Insured Holocaust Victims

By Itamar Levin

German insurance companies will pay at least $270 million in compensation for Holocaust victims' policies. The compensation will also be granted to those who purchased policies from the Eastern and Central European arms of those companies, in addition to those from Germany itself.

This was stated in a letter sent by the German government representative in the negotiations on compensation to slave laborers, Otto Lambsdorff. The letter was published by Reuters. The insurance policies arrangement is part of a general agreement reached last week on distribution of money from the $5 billion compensation fund.

Lambsdorff also announced that another $50 million would be set aside as a reserve for covering additional claims, should the original sum prove insufficient. If this sum is not required, it will be added to the $350 million "Future Fund", which will finance Holocaust educational and memorial activities around the world.

Lambsdorff's letter was sent to Lawrence Eagleburger, chairman of the international conference on Holocaust victims' policies. Allianz of Germany is a member of this conference, and according to last week's agreement will treat claims according to the conference's rules. Payment for the claims, however, will be handled in the framework of the German compensation fund.

World Jewish Congress executive director Elan Steinberg called on other German insurance companies, including Munich Re and Gerling, to join the fund for compensating slave laborers. In his opinion, such a step would allow the insurance companies to fulfill their financial obligations to Holocaust survivors and their heirs, although they would have to comply with the rules of the Eagleburger conference.


U.S. Senate panel to probe Nazi loot, insurance

Joan Gralla
03/28/00
NEW YORK, March 28 (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 5 will probe how efforts to make restitution to Holocaust victims are proceeding, from returning looted artwork to honouring prewar insurance policies, a committee aide said on Tuesday.

The World Jewish Congress (WJC), an advocacy group, said it has been invited to testify at the hearing.

"We intend to focus on Holland, Austria, insurance and issues relating to art and the Holocaust," Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters.

Austria's controversial coalition government has pledged to create a fund to compensate Nazi-era slave labourers.

The hearing is scheduled to be held before the Foreign Relations subcommittee on European affairs, the Democratic committee aide said. The panel is chaired by Republican Gordon Smith of Oregon and its ranking Democrat is Joseph Biden of Delaware.

Those invited to testify before the panel include Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel and WJC chief Edgar Bronfman, the WJC said.

Many of Europe's insurers face charges that they robbed Holocaust survivors because they failed to honour prewar policies. Whether Dutch insurers will come under the spotlight at the hearing could depend on the outcome of meetings set for next week by the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims.

The commission is due to meet with the WJC and the Dutch Association of Insurers. Dutch insurers, including Aegon NV, which does two-thirds of its business in the United States, are being pressured to join the commission.

The commission, which audits the insurers' policy records and oversees payments to Holocaust families, is the only remedy to the Holocaust-era claims that the U.S. government recognises.

"They have indicated that the intention of all Dutch insurers, not just Aegon, is to join the international commission," Steinberg said. "If that can be finalised next week, it will not be necessary to raise it before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee."

Efforts also are underway to return artwork that was plundered from Jewish victims by the Nazis. Since June 1998, U.S. museums have been checking their collections to see if they possessed any art that might have been stolen from Holocaust victims.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art confirmed that two paintings must be researched further because they were handled by a Nazi art dealer, Zacharie Birtschansky.

The first work is an 18th century portrait by the Swiss neoclassical painter Angelica Kauffmann, called "Half-length Portrait of the Duchess of Courland." The second work is a painting by Jan Mandyn, entitled "Saint Christopher and the Christ Child."

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**Wed. 29 Mar 2000, 2:03pm EST**

Bloomberg

**German Slave-Labor Fund Donors Total 800; DM2.4 Billion Amassed**

By Iain Rogers

Berlin, March 29 (Bloomberg) -- More than 800 companies have committed to pay into a joint German government and industry compensation fund for Nazi-era slave laborers worth 10 billion deutsche marks ($4.9 billion), a fund spokesman said.

Companies including Deutsche Bank AG and DaimlerChrysler AG have so far gathered about 2.4 billion marks, less than half their planned 5 billion-mark contribution, spokesman Wolfgang Gibowski said in a statement. DaimlerChrysler has made one of the largest contributions, worth 100 million marks, while the smallest totals 500 marks, the spokesman said.
German negotiators last week agreed with representatives of former laborers on how to distribute the fund, clearing the way for survivors to claim cash before the end of the year. The government will match industry’s donation.

The fund is designed to compensate as many as 1 million people forced to work for the Nazi regime. Former laborers, one percent of whom die each month, will be entitled to as much as 15,000 marks each.

Germany’s industry groups have been attempting to persuade all German companies to contribute to the fund in recognition of their “joint moral responsibility.” Manfred Schneider, president of Germany’s VCI chemical industry association, repeated the call in a written statement released today.

Foreign companies with operations in Germany before and during World War II have also contributed to the fund. Ford-Werke AG, Ford Motor Co.’s German unit, said yesterday it plans to contribute about 26 million marks.

New Clause

A fresh sticking-point has emerged over draft legislation designed to regulate payments from the fund, weekly magazine Wirtschaftswoche reported in a pre-release of this week’s edition.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder wants to include a clause in the law that prevents cash set aside for people who had property stolen by the Nazis from being labeled as reparation payments.

Otto Lambsdorff, Germany’s chief negotiator in talks on the fund, insists there’s “no room for maneuver in this question,” the magazine reported, citing unnamed chancellery sources.

The German government fears referring to the cash as reparation payments could pave the way for more claims similar to a recent demand for 50 billion marks from the Greek government, the magazine said.

(Wirtschafts Woche 3/29)

Jewish Week

March 31, 2000 / 17 Adar II 5760

Reparations Focus Turns To Austria

Stewart Ain, Staff Writer

Jewish organizations are turning their attention to Austria following agreement last week on how to divide a $5.2 billion German fund to compensate Nazi-era laborers and those whose bank accounts, insurance policies and property were stolen by the Nazis. “It’s 60 years too late, but it brings a measure of justice,” said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, of the German settlement. Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and Austria, pointed out that the German parliament, or Budestag, must approve the arrangement. He said Jewish groups want the legislation to spell out precisely how the money will be divided. Taylor hoped it would be done before the Budestag’s summer recess so that the first payments could be mailed by the end of the year. The German government and German industry are equally financing the fund. Taylor said that in dividing the money, negotiators estimated that about 120,000 slave laborers would apply, about 40,000 of them Jewish. Each is to receive about $7,500. In addition, he said there are about 1 million forced laborers, few of whom are Jewish.
Those who apply are each to receive about $2,500 because they worked under much less harsh conditions. As much as $300 million will be available to pay insurance claims, and about $100 million to pay other claims, including those against banks. Claims against insurance companies in other countries must still be resolved, Taylor said, and the Swiss bank settlement was still awaiting a judge's approval. He said efforts would be directed at resolving Holocaust-era claims against Austria. The Austrian government wants to resolve slave and forced labor claims first, Taylor said, before moving on to discuss Holocaust-era property issues. “We believe it is crucial that Austria deal with these issues still remaining,” he said. Austrian Vice Chancellor Susanne Riess-Passer has told The Jewish Week that all other outstanding claims would be resolved once the slave and forced labor claims are settled. Among the claims are compensation for 70,000 apartments and 35,000 businesses seized from Jews. A 1953 U.S. State Department document said the Austrians under a 1938 decree seized $1 billion in Jewish assets - $10 billion in today’s valuation. Maria Schaumayer, appointed by the Austrian government to handle slave and forced labor claims, and Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, U.S. emissary for the talks, met in Washington last month to discuss the issues. There have been no government talks with Jewish groups since the rightist Freedom Party helped to form a coalition government in Austria earlier this year. But Jewish leaders said there are other ways to negotiate, such as through a third party, and that such efforts would be pursued. A settlement in the Austrian talks would be welcome news to Isle Loeb of Monroe Township, N.J., who said she is seeking compensation for her family’s business, Vienna apartment and her father’s life insurance. “I have proof of all three,” she said. Loeb said she, an older brother who went to the U.S. in 1939 and three cousins were the only members of her family to survive the Holocaust. “My parents died in the Belzec concentration camp,” she said. “My father’s brother was taken to the camp in 1941, but because they needed my father to make counterfeit English pounds, he was not sent until 1942. They wanted all of Vienna to be Judenrein [free of Jews], no matter how good you were.” Loeb said her parents sent her to Holland right after Kristallnacht in November 1938, when Jewish-owned stores and synagogues were looted and firebombed. Before that, she said her family had been ordered with other Jews to leave their apartments. “We had to leave in five minutes,” said Loeb, who was 13 at the time. “My father had to ask permission a few days later to go back and get our belongings. Finally they said yes, and we all went back while three men watched what we took. On the night table was my mother’s gold watch with a chain and I took that. I gave the watch to a friend; I still have the chain.” She said she has her father’s life insurance policy. Loeb said also that claims she has filed with the Austrian government for the money and her family’s apartment and business have gone unanswered. Taylor said that even before last week’s talks were held, there were hints that a deal might be reached, about a year after talks began. Upon hearing that, Taylor said, he decided to fly to Berlin for the negotiations. “We were very anxious to make sure that there be an adequate amount for Jewish slave laborers,” he said. “We ended up with Jewish slave and forced laborers getting close to $1 billion. “We would not have gotten that figure based on the initial figures because the East European governments wanted larger amounts for forced laborers. We were quite far apart and discussions were rather tense in the weeks leading up to the final meeting. But we felt it important that Jewish slave laborers be protected. For us, that was an absolute and we stood very firm, despite huge pressures.” Taylor stressed that that the money is “inadequate and only symbolic.” “We just wanted to get the best agreement we could to protect the interests of Jewish slave laborers,” he said, “but we fully understand that nothing will compensate them for what they went through.”


Clinton Proposes Adding $253 Million to 2000 Budget

03/28/00

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Clinton has requested an additional $253 million in funds for fiscal 2000, including supplemental requests for social security, aviation safety improvements and a fund for hemophiliacs with HIV.

The request was made as Congress debates billions of dollars of extra funding to help Colombia fight its illegal drug trade and replenish U.S. military coffers.
In his $253 million supplemental budget request, sent to Congress on Tuesday, Clinton asked for $100 million for payments to hemophiliacs who contracted HIV through the use of tainted blood products between July 1982 and December 1987.

The money would increase total 2000 budget allocations to the Ricky Ray Hemophilia Relief Fund Act to $175 million, the White House said in a statement. The Act authorized the establishment of a trust fund to pay out money to infected hemophiliacs.

Clinton also requested an additional $35 million for the Social Security Administration for one-time administrative costs of repealing the retirement earnings test for workers at or above the normal retirement age.

He also asked for $77 million for the Federal Aviation Administration for air traffic control support activities and to hire additional aviation safety inspectors and medical and certification staff.

Clinton also put forward a $40 million proposal to be distributed to programs in 50 cities to help provide summer jobs to about 24,000 low-income youth.

The remaining funds were requested to help pay for activities related to the completion of a report on the acquisition and disposition of Holocaust-era assets in the United States.

Cincinnati Post

**History lesson in person**

**Teens hear from Auschwitz survivor**

*By Shelly Whitehead, Post staff reporter*

03/29/00

For awhile, Gene Deutsch’s teen-age years had been as carefree as those of the Dayton, Ky., students he talked with Tuesday: He liked to walk to school with his girlfriend, and he loved his family very much.

Then his world changed. It was 1943. Deutsch lived in Hungary. And he was Jewish.

"When we arrived at Auschwitz," said Deutsch, a Cincinnati businessman recalling the day he rolled into the Nazi concentration camp in a crowded boxcar, "there was a sign that said in German, 'Work will make you free.' When people got off the train, most were directed to what they called the bathhouse, which was where the killing took place.

"Confusion soon took over. Children screamed for their mothers as they became lost. There was blood everywhere. The SS guards picked up the children who were screaming and hauled them away. And the poison gas was poured into the gas chambers from the outside so the people closest to the vents were the first to die. The others kept screaming for their life, but after about ten minutes, everything was quiet."

At 14, Deutsch had been old enough to be spared death. He was sentenced instead to join the thousands of enslaved Jewish laborers installing train tracks, repairing bomb damage and generally providing forced assistance to the Nazi war effort.

Deutsch’s account of his first day at Auschwitz - and the last day to see his family - drew the rapt attention Tuesday of the junior history students he was speaking to in the school’s library. For two hours the students listened, watched and questioned continually.

"Did you look like the people you see on TV during the Holocaust?,” they asked. "How much did you weigh?”
"I weighed about 60 pounds," answered Deutsch, matter-of-factly.

"When were you allowed to eat," a student wondered. "What did they give you?"

"In the morning for breakfast - there was no breakfast. We were supposed to have tea, but all it was was warm water. Then they took us to the camp and for lunch we had potatoes if they had them, but most of the time we got dog meat or mice... In the evening, back at camp, bread was issued, but it was black bread with a small piece of margarine added to it."

"Did you have a number on your arm?"

"Yes, my number was 79125," said Deutsch.

"Do you still think about it? Do you wonder," they asked, "why you survived?"

And thoughtfully, Deutsch answered, "In the morning when I go to work, I see smoke coming from the chimneys and I feel like I was lucky I didn't get into one of them... My girlfriend, Eve, was in the women's camp," he said, his voice cracking as he recalls a note she sent to him. "In it she said, 'You know where we are, and that our parents are no longer with us, and that I love you. And after the war we'll go home together and have children, and have a new family.' And unfortunately, she didn't make it."

Deutsch said he is driven by the memory of Eve and all the others who didn't make it to tell his story. He tells of his liberation with the bittersweet joy of one who has survived, but lost so much.

He concluded by unwrapping one red rose in remembrance of the 1.5 million Jewish children slaughtered in the Holocaust, entreating his young listeners to remember his story and prevent it from recurring, even if they cannot fully comprehend the scale of his horror.
Banks

Swiss let banks publish more Holocaust accounts.

Books

Austria Has 186,000 Books Looted by Nazis--WJC

Gold

Portugal's Fatima shrine held Nazi gold-magazine

Insurance

State wants WWII-era insurance policies

General

Hundreds rally against insert in campus newspaper that denied Holocaust

http://biz.yahoo.com/rf/0003301z8.html

March 30

Swiss let banks publish more Holocaust accounts

By Michael Shields

ZURICH, March 30 (Reuters) - Swiss banking regulators agreed on Thursday to waive banking secrecy and let banks publish the names on 26,000 accounts judged most likely to belong to Holocaust victims.

But the Federal Banking Commission (SFBC) stopped short of embracing another recommendation from an independent panel that hunted Holocaust victims' assets in Swiss banks for three years.

The watchdog authorised banks to set up a central data base of 46,000 accounts with a possible Holocaust link, well short of the 4.1 million accounts proposed by the search panel that was set up by banks and Jewish groups.

Swiss banks have already published thousands of names on wartime-era dormant accounts to help find their rightful owners.

The SFBC said in a statement that its president, Kurt Hauri, saw the way now clear for the big two Swiss banks' $1.25 billion settlement of allegations that they hoarded the unclaimed assets of Holocaust victims to proceed.

UBS AG and Credit Suisse Group proposed the payment in 1998 to settle U.S. class-action lawsuits against them. The U.S. judge handling the case has been waiting to see how Swiss regulators dealt with the issue before signing off on the deal.
Dr Haurisaid that with this landmark decision the path was now open for a rapid implementation of the New York Settlement Agreement and including the payment of the settlement amount to the claimant Holocaust victims and that he expected that the proper decisions would be taken soon," the commission said.

"Prior to this, it will not be possible to implement the decisions of the SFBC," it added.

The watchdog said the body set up in Switzerland to handle Holocaust-era claims would have access to the data base.

LARGE DATA BASE "NEITHER NECESSARY NOR MEANINGFUL"

It played down its decision to narrow the data base from the scope proposed in December by the Volcker Commission, named for its chairman, former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker.

Creating a central data base for all the 4.1 million accounts in Swiss banks during World War Two was "neither necessary nor meaningful," the commission said.

It noted the Volcker panel itself "had -- after a very thorough investigation -- no reason to believe that these accounts were in any way related to victims of the Holocaust."

Limiting the data base in no way affects claims of Holocaust victims or their heirs, Hauri added.

The Swiss Bankers Association hailed the ruling, which it said essentially implemented the Volcker panel recommendations.

"It is now up to the...U.S. courts to ensure, by resolving the claims procedure as well as by approving the big banks’ class-action settlement, that payment to the rightful owners takes place promptly," Chief Executive Niklaus Blattner said.

In its report released late last year, the Volcker Commission said it had found nearly 54,000 accounts probably or perhaps linked to Holocaust victims who stashed wartime wealth in neutral Switzerland to escape the Nazis.

It has since reduced that number to 46,000.

It said it had found no evidence to back up allegations that banks had conspired to steal Jews’ money, but criticised some banks for their callous treatment of victims, misleading statements and sloppy record-keeping, especially years ago.

http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20000329/wl/holocaust_austria_1.html

Wednesday March 29

Austria Has 186,000 Books Looted by Nazis--WJC

Joan Gralla NEW YORK (Reuters) - Demonstrating the wide reach of Holocaust restitution efforts, the World Jewish Congress said on Wednesday that Austria's libraries had 186,000 books that the Nazis had stolen from Holocaust victims. "The documents made clear that the books are almost entirely of Jewish origin, that is having been seized from Jewish victims in Austria and The Netherlands," Elan Steinberg, executive director, WJC, told Reuters. He was referring to documents found in Austria's archives that show that on Nov. 18, 1951 the government appropriated the books the Nazis had taken from Jewish institutions, libraries, schools and individuals, and divided them among educational and cultural institutions.
Portugal's Fatima shrine held Nazi gold-magazine

LISBON, March 30 (Reuters) - Nazi gold was once deposited in a bank account belonging to Portugal's Fatima shrine, one of Roman Catholicism's most revered sites, weekly news magazine Visao said on Thursday. Visao published what it said was a 1976 bank statement showing that Fatima's gold deposits included four ingots weighing some 50 kilos and cast during World War Two by the Prussian Mint in Berlin, the German capital. The magazine said it was not known what happened to the ingots subsequently as the bank that held the deposits -- Banco Pinto de Magalhaes -- was involved in a series of mergers and no longer existed as an independent bank. Authorities at Fatima, which Pope John Paul is due to visit in May, were not available for comment. But the primate of Lisbon, the leader of the Roman Catholic church in Portugal, said that Fatima's only income came from donations by pilgrims visiting the site where the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared to three shepherd children in 1917. "If any gold passed through it is because someone dropped it in the collection boxes. I don't know what all of this is about," Cardinal Jose Policarpo told journalists. "Fatima has no other type of investments or other type of business." The magazine said that Banco Pinto de Magalhaes transferred the Nazi bullion to the Fatima account to replace gold the bank had borrowed earlier. The Fatima account had at various times held up to 258 kilos of gold bars made from melting down the offerings of the pilgrims and worshippers, it said. Portugal was neutral during World War Two and as such was legally allowed to trade with both the Allies and the Axis powers. It received gold in payment for trade with Germany. But in 1944, Portugal stopped taking gold when it was warned by Britain and the United States that some of it could be "tainted" because Germany had raided the central banks of countries that it overran in the 1939-45 conflict. A government-appointed commission last year cleared the then Portuguese government of rightwing dictator Antonio Salazar of any wrongdoing over the wartime trade in gold.

San Francisco Examiner

State wants WWll-era insurance policies
Peter Hartlaub OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

March 29, 2000

Munich company accused of having ties to Nazis, 'hiding out' in Europe  The largest reinsurance company in the world once had strong ties with Adolf Hitler, and is now "hiding out" overseas to avoid an investigation of Holocaust-era insurance claims, state officials contend. The allegations by the California Insurance Commission against Munich Reinsurance Company surfaced this month in a legal petition that has become the center of a court battle in San Francisco. Insurance Commissioner Chuck Quackenbush, who has been investigating Holocaust-era insurance claims since 1998, wants a judge to order Munich Reinsurance to turn over insurance policies that it and its affiliates issued from 1920 to 1945. Munich Reinsurance has filed its own detailed legal complaint, claiming Quackenbush doesn't have the right to sue the German corporation. The dispute between Quackenbush and Munich Reinsurance has been going on for more than a year, but the telephone book-sized petition filed on March 20 represents the first time the state has asked a judge to act as an enforcer. A hearing on the petition is scheduled for April 11 in San Francisco Superior Court. The complaint alleges that Munich Reinsurance had close ties to the Nazi regime, claiming a former president for the company was also an Economic Minister for Hitler. "Munich Re was a Nazi collaborator and it and its affiliates then victimized, and are still victimizing these persons today, many of whom are residents of this state," the petition contends. Munich Reinsurance lawyer Martin Checov called those allegations "irrelevant" to the case, and in a letter accused Quackenbush of seeking publicity. In court papers, Checov claims Munich Reinsurance had a U.S. branch that started doing business in California in 1959, but stopped three years ago when its license ran out. "Munich Re is a reinsurer organized under the laws of Germany with its headquarters in Munich, Germany; it maintains no office employees or license to do business in California," Checov said in a court declaration. Checov added: "A subpoena issued under the law of this state cannot compel a person . . . located in a foreign country to attend a deposition in California." The commissioner is
investigating whether any Holocaust survivors or their heirs in California are entitled to long-dormant policies which were not honored by occupying Nazi forces. Some insurers have tried to settle the claims, while others have not cooperated with the investigation. Insurance Commission spokesman Ryan Staley said Munich Reinsurance has been "seriously uncooperative." "They just have been on the sidelines every step of the way," Staley said. Munich Reinsurance points out in court papers that it turned over information last year, after company officials entered into a stipulation with Quackenbush. Quackenbush claims the company didn't turn over enough. As a reinsurance company, Munich insures more than 5,000 other insurance companies, according to its Web site. The petition claims the company is the single largest reinsurer in the world, although Munich Reinsurance claims only to be one of the largest. Lawyers for the Insurance Commission accuse Munich Reinsurance of "hiding out in Munich" after doing business in California for 40 years. "It would be an absurdity to suggest that a California corporation of any kind could escape its liabilities to California regulators simply by moving out of the state," the petition states. The petition contends Munich Reinsurance's ties to Hitler were strong during the Holocaust, when it was one of the two largest reinsurers in the world. According to the court papers, Kurt Schmitt was Hitler's economic minister from 1933 to 1934, before retiring to become president of Munich Reinsurance. The petition contends that his Nazi allegiances remained strong. "In August 1936 Schmitt caused Munich Re to sponsor a hunting outing for high Nazi officials (including Himmler) at Schmitt's lodge," the petition states. Checov said he is filing a response to the petition, which will call the Nazi collaborator accusations "irrelevant." In a letter to the Department of Insurance, he criticized Quackenbush for sending out a press release about Munich Reinsurance to the media earlier this month. "It has not escaped the attention of my clients that, while they have dedicated themselves to a process of negotiation and cooperation, the Department of Insurance Commissioner has used every opportunity to disparage and attempt to intimidate respondents in the public media," Checov wrote. Even if a judge grants the Department of Insurance Commissioner its request, it may be difficult for the department to compel records from Munich Reinsurance. Quackenbush has threatened to strip the license of European companies that do not cooperate with his investigation. But Munich Reinsurance doesn't have a license in California anymore. "Obviously, we can't remove their certificate because they have none," Staley said. Staley said a court order could include fines against Munich Reinsurance's affiliates, which still operate in the United States.

Star Tribune
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Hundreds rally against insert in campus newspaper that denied Holocaust

Statewire

ST. CLOUD, Minn. (AP) -- It cost Holocaust revisionist Bradley R. Smith just $315 to grab the attention of St. Cloud State University.

Smith paid for a 24-page insert in last Thursday's edition of the campus newspaper, the University Chronicle. Titled "The Revisionist," it denies that Nazis exterminated 6 million Jews during World War II.

That prompted some 500 to 1,000 students and faculty to gather Wednesday for a lunchtime protest against anti-Semitism. Twenty-eight people spoke, many sharing stories about loved ones who survived or died in the Holocaust.

"I am incredibly heartened by the response made by the SCSU community," said professor Steve Klepetar, the Jewish son of a Holocaust survivor.
The 4,500- to 5,000-circulation Chronicle is the fifth college newspaper to allow "The Revisionist" in its pages, said Shephard Harris, public affairs director for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

While the ad insert was accepted without full knowledge of its contents, the Chronicle takes protesters’ concerns seriously and will re-examine its procedures, faculty advisor Mike Vadnie said. In the future, the Chronicle will ask for ad inserts in their entirety, not just the first page, before approving them.

Smith first faxed an inquiry about the cost of inserts to the Chronicle, then faxed the cover page. The ad manager may have mistaken it for a political ad after a cursory glance at the cover, Chronicle editor Kristin Albrecht said.

Albrecht said today’s edition would address the controversy in depth.

Written in an academic tone, "The Revisionist" claims many Holocaust survivors’ stories are myths.

"It masks itself as scholarship, but it’s really mean-spirited trash," said professor Geoffrey Tabakin, a protest organizer.

Some speakers defended the Chronicle’s student staff for making a regrettable mistake. Others demanded accountability.

"I’m going to hold them incredibly responsible," professor Tracy Ore said.

Speakers also called for solidarity against anti-Semitism and all prejudices.

"One action, one word against one of us, is an action against all of us," said Ali Malekzadeh, vice president for academic affairs.
Restitution Pact Attacked for Stinting on Insurance, Labor Claims
Survivors Say $270 Million for Policies Is Too Low, but Steinberg Expresses Satisfaction

By MELISSA RADLER
FORWARD STAFF
NEW YORK — One week after German government and industry agreed to allocate $5.2 billion to settle claims for slave labor, forced labor and insurance policies during World War II, some individuals involved in the negotiations are expressing concern that the settlement does not go far enough to compensate the survivors it is intended to help.

The parts of the settlement that are prompting the most complaints are a $350 million "future fund" for Holocaust awareness and education and $270 million to settle claims on pre-war insurance policies that were sold by German companies to Holocaust victims in both Germany and Eastern Europe.

Setting a price for insurance claims is expected to have a significant impact upon the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, which oversees all insurance payments to Holocaust survivors and their heirs. The international commission is currently auditing five insurance companies — Allianz in Germany, Generali in Italy, Winterthur and Zurich in Switzerland, and AXA in France — to settle unpaid policies, and it is pressuring other insurers to turn over lists of policies. What remains unclear is whether $270 million is enough for the companies to pay for their role in the Holocaust and after it. Another factor complicating the issue is the aging of the survivor population, which many people feel should be given financial restitution as quickly as possible with whatever money there is on the table.

A member of the Claims for Jewish Slave Labour Compensation, the British claims conference representing about 250 survivors, called the settlements of $7,500 per slave laborer and $2,500 per forced laborer "unnecessarily low." "Both the Jewish organizations and the lawyers representing the survivors haven't fought hard enough for our interests," said the conference's academic adviser, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky. Mr. Pinto-Duschinsky, a political scientist at Oxford and government adviser on constitutional affairs, was born in the Budapest Ghetto during the war.

An American class-action lawyer representing survivors, Melvyn Weiss, expressed disappointment with the amount being set aside for insurance. "No amount of money is really enough, but there comes a time when it's more important to get the money to the people that need it," Mr. Weiss said.

The executive director of the World Jewish Congress, Elan Steinberg, expressed satisfaction with the amount set aside for insurance claims. "I think we arrived at a satisfactory conclusion with respect to insurance claims and German companies' liability for claimants," Mr. Steinberg said. "It certainly establishes a benchmark now that the non-German insurance companies have to meet."

But in the past, insurance industry analysts were quoted as saying that outstanding claims could total between $1 billion and $4 billion, and the World Jewish Congress estimated the value of all unpaid claims to be between $2 and $2.5 billion. Now critics of the settlement, among them survivors and class-action lawyers, are shaking their heads at the slow pace of the international commission, which is headed by Lawrence Eagleburger, and at the relatively low sums that it will eventually pay out. In its two years of existence, the commission has paid out $10 million to claimants. A spokeswoman at the commission declined to comment.

According to the class-action lawyer that represents the largest claims organization, Rudy Drucker-Cornell, said that the Allianz headquarters in Munich; Generali before and during the war; she blames the delay on infighting between the various Jewish organizations. "I have exactly the number of the policies, the amount and when they were purchased," Ms. Drucker-Cornell said. "They know how to figure it out. I am 73 years old; I lost everything, everybody, and this belongs to me."

Another bone of contention is the future fund, which will be allocated about $350 million for German government and industry to set up education and awareness programs. Mr. Pinto-Duschinsky dismissed the future fund as "propaganda to smooth over the past."

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A spokesman for Allianz, Jorg Allgaeuer, called the future fund "another pillar stone to keep it living, to keep the memory alive and to learn the lesson." Speaking from Allianz headquarters in Munich, Mr. Allgaeuer said, "I've very rarely met people in Germany who don't live up to the extent of their own history. That's why the foundation initiative was possible — we had a generation of people who didn't do it to compensate for their own wrongdoing but to live up to their history."

In another Holocaust-restitution-related development, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States has scheduled an April 12 hearing in New York City to discuss Nazi-looted art. Expected to attend are the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philippe de Montebello; the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Glenn Lowry; the director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Malcolm Rogers, and the director of the North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence Wheeler. The meeting will be chaired by the chairman of the commission, Edgar Bronfman, and the chairman of the Commission Committee on Art and Cultural Property, William Singer.
Staking a claim to Jewish claims

Czech Holocaust victims to be compensated

Swiss banks OK bid to find account heirs

General

Holocaust survivors to reunite in France

Ha'aretz
03/31/00

Staking a claim to Jewish claims

Vast sums of money are at last being given in restitution or compensation for Holocaust crimes. But who gets to decide where the cash goes? As the leading Jewish organizations gear up for the fight, individual victims feel they are losing out.

By Yair Sheleg

In 1993, Irving Wolf, a Jewish Holocaust survivor from Chicago, filed a lawsuit against the Claims Conference, the international Jewish organization that, ever since the historic reparations agreement was reached half a century ago, has been representing world Jewry in claims for restitution from the German government for the crimes of the Holocaust. Shortly prior to that, Wolf, then 75 and subsisting on a meager monthly income, had submitted a request to the Claims Conference, seeking to benefit from the German compensation money being transferred to it. His lawyer, Mark Donjawsky, says that his client was informed by the Claims Conference that he was not entitled to compensation because, according to the information in its possession, Wolf had previously received 1,800 Deutsche Marks from the Germans.

Wolf was stunned by this response - not merely because of the rejection, but because of the way the Claims Conference used German criteria as a cover for its decision. Consequently, Wolf filed his lawsuit in court. In 1996, he lost his case. Donjawsky says the reason they lost was that, according to the nature of the agreement between the government of Germany and the Claims Conference, the Conference has no clear criteria by which it is bound to assist survivors, and thus, it can do whatever it pleases.

Incensed about the situation and the outcome of the case, Donjawsky has since written about the whole affair, and has referred to the Claims Conference as "Judenrat," implying that its members collaborated with the Germans just as the Jewish councils in the ghettos did with their Nazi overseers during the Holocaust.

He used this expression again in a recent hearing before New York judge Edward Kurman concerning the manner of distribution of the restitution money from the Swiss banks, as a justification for his assertion that the money should be transferred directly to the survivors and not to the Jewish organizations.
MK Michael Kleiner (Herut-National Movement) employed the same harsh appellation a few weeks ago from the dais of the Knesset as he submitted a motion denouncing the abuses and failures in the work of the Claims Conference. Members of the Conference, many of whom have been active in the organization for years, were furious. When they visited the Knesset last week as part of a conference aimed at reassessing the organization’s operation and possibly reshaping its plans, MK Avraham Hirschson (Likud), chairman of the subcommittee on matters of Jewish property, sought to effect a reconciliation. Kleiner agreed to apologize for using the term "Judenrat," but was not willing to retract the gist of his charges.

In his speech, Kleiner listed several offenses that he attributes to the members of the Conference. He received most of the material that he quoted from Martin Stern, an accountant who divides his time between his place of business in London and his residence in Jerusalem. For a number of years now, Stern has been zealously working to expose the way that Jewish organizations have mishandled the issue of Jewish property. These organizations have long ago catalogued Stern as a "troublemaker" and one of the "crazies."

**Sarajevo incident**

One thing that Kleiner mentioned was the Sarajevo incident - 130 Jews from Sarajevo (whom Stern found out about after the son of one of them came to his London office looking for work) sent letters to the Claims Conference offices in New York, identifying themselves as needy Holocaust survivors and asking for assistance. They were also turned down "based on the criteria." It was explained to them that, according to the rules, only those who had hidden from the Germans for at least 18 months were eligible for compensation; they had hidden for a shorter period of time, and moreover, since they had assumed Christian identities in order to hide, it was uncertain how they would be able to prove that they are Jews who are eligible for compensation.

Stern is outraged: "According to these criteria, had Anne Frank survived, she wouldn't have been eligible for compensation, since she was only in hiding for 16 months."

The most extensive complaint against the Claims Conference has to do with Jewish property in the former East Germany. Upon the unification of Germany about 10 years ago, the Claims Conference sought compensation for the return of property also in regard to assets possessed in the former East Germany, to which there had hitherto been no access. The legislation regarding this matter that was enacted in the united Germany stipulated that all property that remained unclaimed by December 13, 1992 would revert to state possession, but that Jewish property that had no private heirs and was claimed by the Claims Conference before the deadline would become the property of the Conference.

The members of the Claims Conference made a concerted effort to submit as many claims as possible before the deadline, and they managed to file claims on approximately 80,000 properties. One of the arguments presently being made against the Conference is that it did not go to any lengths to notify the public at large about the possibility of filing claims and that it was thus able to inherit more properties itself. In 1997, Netty Gross of The Jerusalem Report published a series of articles on the Claims Conference; she found that the Conference had made only three press releases about the matter and had not placed any paid advertisements. Members of the Conference say that they did publicize it, but only within the internal frameworks of the Jewish organizations and not in the general press.

When Jews found out about their property after the deadline had passed and they applied to the Claims Conference (which had since been granted ownership rights) seeking to have it returned to them, they were refused.

Yosef Wolf, the former chairman of the PazGas Company and a member of Kibbutz Yavneh, tried to help several of his kibbutz friends whose families had owned property in the former East Germany. He recalls the quick and concise response his friends received from the Conference: "According to section such and such of German law, you have lost your rights to the property."
It was only in 1994, after public criticism had begun to grow, that the Conference established its "Goodwill Fund," which, as the name implies (and as was explicitly defined by members of the Conference), was intended to show that, even though the legal heirs had lost their rights according to the German law, the Claims Conference was willing to meet them halfway and give them a certain percentage of the property's value.

Thus began the exhausting bargaining process over what percentage of compensation the heirs would receive from the properties that had belonged to their families. The Claims Conference put together a complicated compensation scale composed of two central elements: The value of the property - for the first 100,000 Deutsche Marks, the heir receives full compensation; for 400,000 Deutsche Marks, he receives 50 percent compensation, and so on - as the value goes up, the percentage of compensation goes down.

The second criterion was the level of closeness to the original owners: Immediate relatives were to receive 50 percent, somewhat less for each level more removed, all the way down to a minimum of 20 percent. The Claims Conference is proud of the fact that its Goodwill Fund has given out many millions of dollars. The heirs are enraged that they were forced to bargain - and with a Jewish organization, no less - over the rates of compensation for their property.

Interestingly, the members of the Conference who are most militantly opposed to returning the property to its legal heirs are the representatives of Holocaust survivors from the Organization of Holocaust Survivors in Israel. They want to see the property remain in the hands of the Conference so that it will divide the proceeds from the sales of these properties to the institutions that assist elderly and needy Holocaust survivors. Organization chairman Moshe Zanbar, who also serves as Conference treasurer, stated outright: "Rather than seeing the assets go to a small group of heirs, it would be better for them to be used for the welfare of all Holocaust survivors, especially the needy among them."

Rights of the needy
Zanbar also maintains that "You have to remember that a large portion of the heirs who come [with claims] are distant relatives, the grandson of an uncle, or something like that. Do their rights take precedence over the right of needy survivors in a situation in which, in any case, they no longer have any legal rights to the property?"

Zanbar is so steadfast in his position that, to this day, he takes pride in his opposition to a change in the Conference's policy (instituted last July in wake of the rising criticism), whereby those claiming property are eligible to receive 80 percent of its value (with the other 20 percent deducted for the Conference's expenses in filing claims on the property and seeing to its upkeep).

The Claims Conference currently has possession of about 5,000 properties out of the 80,000 that it claimed in the early 1990s (40,000 properties are still under discussion; others were later discovered not to have belonged to Jews; some lack sufficient identifying information; and others were eventually given to private heirs who filed claims within the allotted time - in a neck and neck race with the Claims Conference). About 700 properties have been sold and most of the rest are being rented. The Conference is estimated to have taken in hundreds of millions of dollars (another complaint against the Conference - it doesn't publicize the exact value of the properties in its possession), and most of the money was used to expand the budgets of Jewish welfare organizations that provide assistance to Holocaust survivors worldwide.

Thus, for example, members of the Conference point out that, in the past decade, thanks to income from the property in the former East Germany, they were able to donate 3,500 beds for elderly people in geriatric wards and nursing homes in Israel, or to fund medical equipment not covered by the National Insurance Institute (NII), such as eyeglasses, hearing aids and dentures, for Holocaust survivors. Hundreds of thousands of meals are distributed to elderly Holocaust survivors each month by the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in the former Soviet Union; much of the funding for this comes from the Conference.

As well, it funds educational activities and efforts aimed at perpetuating the memory of the Holocaust
(amounting to as much as 20 percent of total donations made by the Conference). For instance, the new archive
and library building at Yad Vashem was mainly financed by a contribution from the Claims Conference. And
the Conference does all this in addition to its role as a conduit for the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars
from the Germans to those whose eligibility rights have been recognized on the basis of the German criteria.

But all of this most welcome activity does not neutralize Wolf and Stern's protest: By what right do the heads of
the Conference allow themselves to keep true heirs from receiving their property, even if it is for the lofty goal
of the general welfare of Holocaust survivors, they ask. And moreover: If the objective, according to Zanbar, is
to give the needy survivor priority over the heir to a property, why does the Conference hide behind the
Germans' formalistic criteria and reject requests from needy survivors like Irving Wolf and the Jews from
Sarajevo, instead of at least using some of the tremendous amounts of money at its disposal from the property in
East Germany to assist these people?

Given the existing situation, it appears that there are two issues: one, whether to assign priority to the needy
survivor over the heir, and, two, whether to give precedence to providing aid to the needy via the established
organizations or to help needy individuals who don't have any organization behind them.

Wolf believes that the heads of the Conference have become overly infatuated with the power they have to
decide who's going to enjoy the money and who isn't.

The Claims Conference was established in 1951 by Dr. Nahum Goldman, who was serving at the time as the
president of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). The objective was to create an authorized representative of the
Jewish people to conduct negotiations with Germany (alongside the negotiations that the Israeli government
held with the Germans). Goldman assembled a coalition of 24 Jewish organizations - some of which are very
prominent even today, such as the Jewish Agency and the Joint, and some whose importance has faded.
Nonetheless, to this day, no one has bothered to try to modify the roster of organizations that are members in the
Conference, with one exception: Ten years ago, Holocaust survivors demanded representation (prior to then,
they had no such representation; in 1951, they were not yet capable of organizing themselves to assert their
claims) and two new organizations entered the group - the Organization of Holocaust Survivors in Israel and its
American counterpart.

The composition of the leading personalities in the Conference has also remained centered on close associates
of Goldman. The current president, Rabbi Israel Miller, was brought into the Conference by Goldman, and has
held the presidential post ever since Goldman passed away in 1982. Sol Kagan, appointed by Goldman in 1951
to be director-general of the Conference, held that position until the end of 1998, when he was succeeded by
Gideon Taylor.

Exclusive club
These circumstances have engendered an management culture akin to that of an exclusive club, in which a
handful of people divide up the funds given to the Jewish people as it sees fit, with a lot of the money going to
organizations that are members of the Conference. When Netty Gross of The Jerusalem Report visited the
Conference's headquarters in 1997, she reported that all of the vast sums handled there were being kept track of
in old notebooks; nothing was computerized.

It was only the coincidence of the unprecedented access to the enormous assets in the former East Germany
(which caused more attention to be paid to how the Conference was operating) and the general changes in
management culture around the world that brought pressure to bear on the Conference leadership to alter its
approach. This pressure was also connected to the fact that, today, at issue are not just the hundreds of millions
of dollars from the assets in East Germany, but also the approximately 1.5 billion Deutsche Marks (about 3
billion shekels) that are due to come into the Conference coffers in the near future. This German compensation
for heirless assets is to be taken out of the large, recently-established German fund meant to provide
compensation for those who were forced to work as slave laborers during the Holocaust. And a little further in
the future, once contacts progress, substantial funds are also expected to be forthcoming from Austria.

In the meantime, in wake of the criticism, computers have been purchased, a new young staff has been recruited and, in recent months, a "planning committee," whose ranks include not only representatives of prominent organizations in the Conference, but also outside figures such as former Supreme Court Justice Menachem Elon, Professor Anita Shapira and others, has been formed and charged with the task of determining a new organizational structure for the Claims Conference.

Two issues stand at the center of the debate. One is a rearrangement of the constellation of member organizations to include representation for the Jews of Eastern Europe (and for the Holocaust survivors among them, in particular), who, because of the Iron Curtain, were unable to participate in the Conference when it was first founded. Survivor organizations are also dissatisfied with the representation given them and are demanding a greater share of votes (up to 51 percent). Meanwhile, for the first time, the government of Israel is requesting a say in the Conference's business, and wishes to be accorded a central status. The government is not aiming to be included as the 27th member organization, but, as Rabbi Michael Melchior, Israel's Minister for Diaspora Affairs, who is handling the issue on behalf of the government, puts it, what it wants is "that the government of Israel from now on fill a central role, with a status that will allow it to influence the organization's policy."

No less important is the question of how the huge sums that the Conference is due to acquire will be divided. Melchior wants to see a principle instituted whereby "the situation in which the organizations that receive the money are also the ones who decide on the manner of its distribution shall not continue."

Apart from the natural desire of every organization that deals with the welfare of Holocaust survivors and the memory of the Holocaust to be able to benefit from the funds, leading members of the Conference are presently at loggerheads over another fundamental question: What is the proper balance to strike between aid for the welfare of survivors and funds for educational activities and projects that perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust? At present, 80 percent of the money distributed by the Conference goes to welfare and 20 percent to educational endeavors. In discussions last week, it was decided to continue with this formula for the time being.

Just over the horizon are the appeals of some Jewish leaders that these funds be used to further other Jewish objectives, primarily Jewish education and fostering of Jewish culture. Zanbar, resolute as ever, is vehemently opposed to this idea and is demanding that all the money go to benefit the survivors. At most, he is ready to consent to a certain percentage being allotted to perpetuating the memory of the Holocaust - the current rate, as a maximum - but not to any other type of activity.

On the other side of the divide stands Dr. Israel Singer, secretary-general of the WJC, which, in the last few years, has led the struggle for the return of Jewish property (or of compensation for it), who also serves as vice president of the Claims Conference. He argues that it would be appropriate for the property of all of the victims to be used to meet the needs of the entire Jewish people, and not just those Jews who were fortunate enough to survive the Holocaust and live into old age. As Singer bluntly puts it: "My grandmother's money doesn't necessarily have to go to Zanbar."

Last week, a marathon session of the planning committee took place in Jerusalem, but its decisions are not expected any time before May. Either way, the talks are focusing on the question of what is the most proper way of dividing up the money among the various organizations. No one appears to be entertaining the question of how it might also be possible to ensure that the individual Jew in Sarajevo or Chicago is able to benefit from the money, even if he is unfortunate enough not to meet any of the German criteria.
government allocated an initial 300 million kroner ($8.1 million) yesterday to a newly created Holocaust Victims Fund for the restitution of Holocaust-era Jewish communal and private property. The fund will begin paying compensation in May. "Not everything will be solved by this but still, it is a breakthrough," President Vaclav Havel, who attended the commission session, said after the news conference at the presidential palace in Prague. Those attending the news conference included Havel, Deputy Prime Minister Pavel Richetsky, representatives of the Czech government, and leaders of the Jewish community. "We told them that we are going to regard this as a beginning of a process," said Dr. Avi Beker, who negotiated the deal with the Czech government over the past year as a representative of the World Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Restitution Organization. "I was encouraged when Richetsky presented this, because he said, 'This is a beginning. It is better to start with something because survivors are passing away,'" Beker said from Prague following the meeting. "They are trying to show that they mean business, and not using delaying tactics." Beker said the commission "did a very thorough job in terms of study and research," through the work of three subcommittees which investigated gold and precious materials taken from Jews, communal and private property, and art. The subcommittee on communal property listed 1,200 pieces, which today are under different ownership. "Richetsky said that those properties that are under state control - a little more than 100 - he would do his best to give them back," Beker said. Other property belongs to the church, and some to municipalities, would be very difficult to give back to the Jewish community. "In some cases there will be compensation, other places the community will be able to sell the property," Beker said. "So I think that this is a breakthrough. The government was very serious in its investigation, and I am really satisfied that the government accepted our basic claim. And it was stated today that this is the beginning, and this is not a closure, a final settlement, like was done in other places."

Chicago Tribune

SWISS BANKS OK BID TO FIND ACCOUNT HEIRS

Associated Press
March 31, 2000

BERN, Switzerland -- The Swiss bank regulator on Thursday approved the publication of names on 26,000 Holocaust-era accounts in a final push to find the heirs of victims.

The Swiss Federal Banking Commission said it was following the recommendation of the international panel headed by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker.

"By publishing the accounts, justice will be done to victims of the Holocaust who during the war held their assets in Swiss banks," said Kurt Hauri, president of the commission.

Hauri said the decision clears the way for rapid implementation of the $1.25 billion settlement reached two years ago between banks and Jewish organizations and Holocaust claimants in New York under U.S. District Judge Edward Korman.

The New York-based World Jewish Congress reacted cautiously, saying the judge must still decide if the action complies with Volcker's panel.

The panel recommendations came last December after more than two years of combing through all the records it could find on 4.1 million accounts in 254 Swiss banks in operation during World War II while the Nazis controlled neighboring Germany.

The panel compared the names on the accounts with the names of Holocaust victims from lists in Israel and the United States and said it had found 54,000 accounts never before disclosed that might have a link.
For public release, it narrowed the figure down to the 26,000 accounts that it considered most likely

March 30, 2000, 9:11PM

Holocaust survivors to reunite in France

By ALAN BERNSTEIN and LINDSAY HEINSEN
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Chaja Verveer wasn't an orphan. But the Nazi soldiers of World War II classified her as one when they sent her to a concentration camp for Jews.

Inside the camp, she became the favorite toddler of a nurse, Sonja Sturkop. In bondage, they formed a glowing bond. Verveer grew to call the nurse "aunt" and "mama."

Verveer, 58, is a Friendswood resident. Born in the Netherlands, she is one of about 25 Houston-area members of International Child Survivors of the Holocaust.

She hasn't seen Sturkop since they parted at a prison camp in 1945. But that is changing. Verveer flew to France on Thursday for a reunion with the long-lost woman who was her surrogate mother during the genocide that erased 6 million Jews.

Verveer's dress, and other artifacts from her turbulent childhood, lie in display cases at Holocaust Museum Houston. She gives local speeches about life in the jaws of Adolf Hitler's beastly hate campaign against the Jews. But now, she gets to relive history in a different way.

"It's a reaffirmation of life," Verveer said about her pending reunion. "And it's a miracle."

Sturkop, reached by phone Thursday, was overcome with emotion as she and her entire family anticipated meeting Verveer at the airport in Nice, France.

"I have no words," the 80-year-old woman said. "I never thought I would see (Verveer) again. I thought she was dead."

Last year, Verveer used the Dutch war archives to trace one of Sturkop's daughters. Letters and e-mail messages led to a recent telephone conversation between Verveer and Sturkop.

Verveer, a business consultant, has been busy on other Holocaust projects. Partly through her efforts, the international child survivors' organization will conduct its annual world convention in Houston next year. The convention will go beyond discussion of the Nazi Germany's atrocities to an exploration of how more recent wars, such as the one in Bosnia, have affected children.

But Verveer's own story about persevering and being helped by people like Sturkop is a tale for any time.

Verveer, a soft-spoken woman of steely poise, said her brothers and many other Holocaust survivors won't talk publicly about their horrifying travails. Also, she said, the experiences of child survivors are undervalued because of the mistaken assumption that war was less traumatizing for them than for adults.

But the recent public statements and writings of people who deny that the Holocaust took place have inspired her to actively detail her life, she said. She has made sure she is backed by folders full of letters, photographs and eyewitness testimony.

Like young diarist Anne Frank, the famous Holocaust victim, Verveer belonged to a Dutch Jewish family that
went into hiding after the German invasion.

Dutch resistance forces broke up her family so each member could be hidden more efficiently. As an infant, Verveer was placed with a non-Jewish family that housed fugitives in the cellars of its butcher shop in The Hague.

German soldiers found out about Verveer through the interrogation of a captured Jewish child. Verveer was seized and deported to the orphanage at a Dutch "transit camp" called Westerbork, where she was classified along with at least 50 other youngsters as "the unknown children."

There she was put in the care of Sturkop, a Jew who had avoided execution by telling the Nazis she was a nurse who could help care for other prisoners. In fact, Verveer explained, Sturkop had never been a nurse.

The woman and the little girl forged their emotional alliance. A letter written years later by Sturkop’s ex-husband said Verveer called the nurse "aunt" and "mama." "I clung to her a lot," Verveer recalled before leaving for France. "I always wanted attention. I guess I haven't changed."

As World War II’s Allied Forces advanced from the west, the Nazis moved Verveer and other prisoners eastward by train across Germany. The nurse and her special girl were separated. But when Verveer arrived at the Terezin camp in Czechoslovakia, Sturkop was there. They bonded again, with Sturkop using more artful fibs to keep the children fed and shielded from harassment, Verveer explained.

In early 1945, Verveer said, the nurse and her husband were sent to Switzerland to be exchanged for Nazi prisoners. They asked to take Verveer with them, but the Nazis refused.

The Russian army liberated Terezin four months later, and Verveer eventually was re-united in Holland with her mother and brothers. Her father, a resistance fighter, had been killed.

Verveer’s mother moved the family to Israel in 1961 to escape memories of the war. College, marriage and career took Verveer to Austria and Brazil and, in 1971, to Houston.

The meeting with Sturkop apparently has caused a local media sensation in Sturkop’s French town, Golfe Juan. Radio and TV reporters were preparing to document the gathering.

"She is my baby," Sturkop said of Verveer. "And I love her."

Verveer plans to travel afterward to The Netherlands to do more historical research that would lend deeper authority to her speeches about the terrors of the war.

"I still have the feeling that's why I survived, to make a difference," Verveer said. "I have an obligation."

The non-Jews who hid her in their butcher shop are listed as honored helpers at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Israel that Pope John Paul II visited last week. And Verveer is trying to organize a re-union of some of the 50 "unknown children" who were sent as supposed orphans to Westerbork, where Anne Frank, too, got her first wrenching taste of imprisonment.