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Nazi slaves to be paid \$7-billion

First payments to victims by end of year; at least 30,000 Canadians will be eligible

NATALIE SOUTHWORTH

The Globe and Mail; With a report from Reuters News Agency
Tuesday, July 18, 2000

Toronto -- Germany signed a historic \$7.1-billion deal yesterday to compensate nearly one million slave and forced labourers, an agreement that is likely to provide the last major payment arising from the actions of the Nazi regime.

It's a deal Howard Chandler believes is long overdue. The retired diamond cutter, who spent 2½ years of his youth as a slave labourer in Nazi-occupied Poland, says the roughly \$10,000 he will receive won't even cover the cost of a decent used car. Nonetheless, the Toronto man said yesterday, the fund's importance lies in its symbolism and message.

"It was a moral obligation that should have been forthcoming years ago," said Mr. Chandler, who came to Canada in 1947. He is one of at least 30,000 Canadians who will be eligible for compensation under the fund.

More than 3,000 German companies and businesses have pledged to raise half of the \$7.1-billion for the foundation. The other

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half will come from the German government. So far the German firms have come up with slightly more than half their share.

The first payments to victims are expected before the year's end.

"With this agreement, we can close a last open chapter of the past," German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said yesterday. "More than 50 years after the end of World War II and the Nazi dictatorship, we are making a long-awaited humanitarian gesture to all former Nazi forced labourers."

Of the roughly one million people eligible for compensation worldwide, about 170,000 are like Mr. Chandler -- Jews who worked as slave labourers. Most of the rest worked as forced labourers in what are now the Czech Republic, Belarus, Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

"This agreement does not end moral responsibility for the Holocaust," chief U.S. negotiator Stuart Eizenstat said at the signing ceremony in Berlin yesterday. "Nothing can erase the memory of those who died or the culture and potential achievements lost or the suffering of those who survived."

In Canada, news of the compensation fund was met with a mixture of pleasure and skepticism.

"No amount of money will pay for the human suffering. It is a good gesture, but we have to take it at face value," said Marek Goldyn, chairman and founder of the Canadian Polish Foundation.

He said only a few thousand Polish Canadians are entitled to money in the fund, because most of those who later moved to Canada have since died.

Slave labourers -- those whom the Nazis tried to work to death in concentration camps -- are entitled to about \$10,600 (15,000 marks) each. Forced labourers, who

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worked under less extreme conditions, will receive approximately \$3,500 each.

Lubomyr Luciuk, an Ontario man whose Ukrainian mother was a forced labourer on a German potato farm, said Ukrainian slave and forced workers will likely receive little or no money.

Many of the 35,000 Ukrainians who came to Canada after the war had worked as forced labourers on Nazi farms, but it is unclear whether agricultural workers are eligible for compensation under the deal.

"Is that fair? My mother was forced to work on a German farm. She was not raped or attacked. But she lost her family, who suffered greatly," said Mr. Luciuk, a geography professor who teaches at the Royal Military College in Kingston and is an expert in Ukrainian wartime history.

In Canada -- home to the third-highest number of Holocaust survivors -- about 15,000 Jews are eligible for compensation, said Moshe Ronen, president of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Mr. Ronen welcomed news of yesterday's signing.

"We haven't had too many people standing up and accepting culpability. The Germans have shown the world the importance of doing that," he said.

Mr. Ronen said family members will be eligible for compensation if the survivor's heir was alive after Feb. 16, 1999 -- the date when the framework for the negotiations was established.

Advertisements clarifying the criteria for applicants will be published in major newspapers around the world by the end of the month, he said.

The money is to be distributed by "partner organizations" in the countries concerned.

For Mr. Chandler, born Wajchandler, it can't come soon enough.

He lost both parents, a brother and a sister in German concentration camps. Only he and his older brother, who now lives in England, survived.

Mr. Chandler worked 16-hour days unloading iron ore to be made into gun barrels at the Herman Goering Werke ammunition factory, which was about 150 kilometres south of Warsaw.

Mr. Chandler might have been exterminated, but the teenager had acquired fake identification that enabled him to work as an adult.

The young man, who wore cement bags after his clothes turned to rags, worked for 2½ years without pay, surviving on turnip soup and coffee as a slave labourer. He later spent time in Auschwitz and Buchenwald before liberation.

"I survived on hope. I thought I would see my family again," said the 71-year-old father of four, crying softly as he spoke from his home in Toronto.

The fund is a landmark in the long campaign to redress Nazi atrocities. The World Jewish Congress exerted pressure on Swiss banks in the mid-1990s for having helped launder Nazi gold and for their refusal to release funds belonging to Holocaust victims.

Germany has already paid about \$90-billion worth of reparations since the Second World War.

Many German companies benefited from the forced labour, but German business leaders say all German companies have a moral responsibility and should contribute.



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