

CLAIMS RESOLUTION TRIBUNAL

In re Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation
Case No. CV96-4849

Certified Award

to Claimant Dr. Dezsö Vajda

in re Accounts of Otto Popper

Claim Number: 210095/EZ

Award Amount: 181,680.00 Swiss Francs

This Certified Award is based upon the claim of Dr. Dezsö Vajda (born: David Wilhelm) (the “Claimant”) to the accounts of Otto Popper (the “Account Owner”) at the Zurich branch of the [REDACTED] (the “Bank”).

All awards are published. Where a claimant has not requested confidentiality, as in this case, only the name of the bank has been redacted.

Information Provided by the Claimant

The Claimant submitted a Claim Form identifying the Account Owner as his maternal uncle, Otto Popper, who was born in 1909 in Ruma, Yugoslavia, to Jakob Popper and Berta Popper, née Reiner, and was married to Vera Popper, née Richmann, in Ruma. They had no children. The Claimant stated that his uncle was an owner of a bus company in Ruma and Nova Gradiska, Yugoslavia. He was later deported by the Nazis to a concentration camp. The Claimant further stated that his uncle survived the Holocaust and in 1947 he immigrated to Herzeliya, Israel, where he died on 24 May 1983. The Claimant indicated that he was born on 10 April 1915 in Ruma. In 1945 he changed his name from David Wilhelm to Dezsö Vajda.

Information Available in the Bank Records

The bank records consist of a 1962 survey registration form prepared by the Bank’s branches and printouts from the Bank’s database. According to these records, the Account Owner was Otto Popper from Nova Gradiska, Yugoslavia, who held the title *Director*. The bank records indicate that the Account Owner held a custody account and a demand deposit account. According to these records, the custody account was numbered 244863, and its balance on 2 December 1963 was 43 “Napoleon” gold coins of 20 French Francs each (“Napoleon coins”). The value of each Napoleon coin on this date was 37.00 Swiss Francs, and consequently the total value of 43 Napoleon coins was 1,591.00 Swiss Francs. The bank records indicate that the demand deposit account was already open in 1931 and its balance in 1959 was 32.50 Swiss Francs. The auditors

who carried out the investigation of this bank to identify accounts of Victims of Nazi Persecution pursuant to instructions of the Independent Committee of Eminent Persons (“ICEP” or the “ICEP Investigation”) did not find these accounts in the Bank’s system of open accounts, and they therefore presumed that they were closed. These auditors indicated that there was no evidence of activity on these accounts after 1945. There is no evidence in the bank records that the Account Owner or his heirs closed the accounts and received the proceeds themselves.

The CRT’s Analysis

Identification of the Account Owner

The Claimant has plausibly identified the Account Owner. His uncle’s name matches the published name of the Account Owner. The Claimant stated that his uncle resided in Nova Gradiska, Yugoslavia, which matches published information about the Account Owner contained in the bank records. Finally, the Claimant stated that his uncle owned a company, which is consistent with unpublished information about the Account Owner’s title of “Director” contained in the bank records. The CRT notes that the only other claims to this account were disconfirmed because the claimed account owners’ names and countries of residence were different from the Account Owner’s name and country of residence in this case.

Status of the Account Owner as a Victim of Nazi Persecution

The Claimant has made a plausible showing that the Account Owner was a Victim of Nazi Persecution. The Claimant stated that the Account Owner was Jewish, and imprisoned in a concentration camp, but survived the Holocaust.

The Claimant’s Relationship to the Account Owner

The Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that he is related to the Account Owner. He submitted documents, including his own birth certificate and family tree, demonstrating that his maternal grandfather was Jakob Popper, the Account Owner’s father. There is no information to indicate that the Account Owner has other surviving heirs.

The Issue of Who Received the Proceeds

Given the Bank’s acknowledgment of the status of the Account Owner as a Holocaust victim by including his account in its 1962 Survey of victim accounts, and the application of Presumptions (h) and (j) as provided in Article 28 (see Appendix A), the CRT concludes that it is plausible that the account proceeds were not paid to the Account Owner or his heirs. Based on its precedent and the Rules Governing the Claims Resolution Process, as amended (the “Rules”), the CRT applies presumptions to assist in the determination of whether or not Account Owners or their heirs received the proceeds of their accounts.

Basis for the Award

The CRT has determined that an Award may be made in favor of the Claimant. First, the claim is admissible in accordance with the criteria contained in Article 18 of the Rules. Second, the Claimant has plausibly demonstrated that the Account Owner was his uncle, and that relationship justifies an Award. Finally, the CRT has determined that it is plausible that neither the Account Owner nor his heirs received the proceeds of the claimed account.

Amount of the Award

In this case, the Account Owner held one custody account and one demand deposit account. The bank records indicate that the value of the custody account as of 2 December 1963 was 1,591.00 Swiss Francs. According to Article 29 of the Rules, if the amount in a custody account was less than 13,000.00 Swiss Francs, and in the absence of plausible evidence to the contrary, the amount in the account shall be determined to be 13,000.00 Swiss Francs. In view of the fact that the only valuation of the Account Owner's account in the bank records is from 1963, long subsequent to the 1945 valuation date used by the CRT, the CRT concludes that the average value for a custody account in 1945, provided for in Article 29 of the Rules, is the appropriate value to be used in calculation of the award to the Claimant. The present value of the amount of the award is determined by multiplying the balance as determined by Article 29 by a factor of 12, in accordance with Article 31(1) of the Rules, to produce a total award amount of 156,000.00 Swiss Francs.

The bank records indicate that the value of the demand deposit account as of 1959 was 32.50 Swiss Francs. According to Article 29 of the Rules, if the amount in a demand deposit account was less than 2,140.00, and in the absence of plausible evidence to the contrary, the amount in the account shall be determined to be 2,140.00 Swiss Francs. The present value of the amount of the award is determined by multiplying the balance as determined by Article 29 by a factor of 12, in accordance with Article 31(1) of the Rules, to produce a total award amount of 25,680.00 Swiss Francs.

Consequently, the total award amount in this case is 181,680.00 Swiss Francs.

Scope of the Award

The Claimant should be aware that, pursuant to Article 20 of the Rules, the CRT will carry out further research on his claim to determine whether there are additional Swiss bank accounts to which he might be entitled, including research of the Total Accounts Database (consisting of records of 4.1 million Swiss bank accounts which existed between 1933 and 1945).

Certification of the Award

The CRT certifies this Award for approval by the Court and payment by the Special Masters.

Claims Resolution Tribunal
March 5, 2003

APPENDIX A

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the Tribunal presumes that neither the Account Owners, the Beneficial Owners, nor their heirs received the proceeds of a claimed Account in cases involving one or more of the following circumstances:¹

- a) the Account was closed and the Account records show evidence of persecution, or the Account was closed (i) after the imposition of Swiss visa requirements on January 20, 1939, or (ii) after the date of occupation of the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner, and before 1945 or the year in which the freeze of Accounts from the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was lifted (whichever is later);
- b) the Account was closed after 1955 or ten years after the freeze of Accounts from the country of residence of the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was lifted (whichever is later);
- c) the balance of the Account was reduced by fees and charges over the period leading up to the closure of the Account and the last known balance of the Account was small;
- d) the Account had been declared in a Nazi census of Jewish assets or other Nazi documentation;
- e) a claim was made to the Account after the Second World War and was not recognized by the bank;
- f) the Account Owner or Beneficial Owner had other Accounts that are open and dormant, suspended, or closed to profits, closed by fees, or closed to Nazi authorities;
- g) the only surviving Account Owner or Beneficial Owner was a child at the time of the Second World War;
- h) the Account Owners, the Beneficial Owners, and/or their heirs would not have been able to obtain information about the Account after the Second World War from the Swiss bank due to the Swiss banks' practice of withholding or misstating account information in their responses to inquiries by Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, and heirs because of the banks' concerns regarding double liability;²
- i) the Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, or their heirs resided in a Communist country in Eastern Europe after the War; and/or
- j) there is no indication in the bank records that the Account Owners, Beneficial Owners, or their heirs received the proceeds of the Account.³

¹ See Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland - Second World War, Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War: Final Report (2002) (hereinafter "Bergier Final Report"); *see also* Independent Committee

of Eminent Persons, Report on Dormant Accounts of Victims of Nazi Persecution in Swiss Banks (1999) (hereinafter "ICEP Report"). The CRT has also taken into account, among other things, various laws, acts, decrees, and practices used by the Nazi regime and the governments of Austria, the Sudetenland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Free City of Danzig, Poland, the Incorporated Area of Poland, the *Generalgouvernement* of Poland, the Netherlands, Slovakia and France to confiscate Jewish assets held abroad.

² See Bergier Final Report at 443-44, 446-49; *see also* ICEP Report at 81-83.

³ As described in the Bergier Final Report and the ICEP Report, the Swiss banks destroyed or failed to maintain account transactional records relating to Holocaust-era accounts. There is evidence that this destruction continued after 1996, when Swiss law prohibited destruction of bank records. Bergier Final Report at 40 (stating "[i]n the case of Union Bank of Switzerland . . . , however, documents were being disposed of even after the Federal Decree [of 13 December 1996]"). The wholesale destruction of relevant bank records occurred at a time when the Swiss banks knew that claims were being made against them and would continue to be made for monies deposited by victims of Nazi persecution who died in the Holocaust and that were (i) improperly paid to the Nazis, *see Albers v. Credit Suisse*, 188 Misc. 229, 67 N.Y.S.2d 239 (N.Y. City Ct. 1946); Bergier Final Report at 443, (ii) that were improperly paid to the Communist controlled governments of Poland and Hungary, *see* Bergier Final Report at 450 -51, and possibly Romania as well, *see* Peter Hug and Marc Perrenoud, Assets in Switzerland of Victims of Nazism and the Compensation Agreements with East Bloc Countries (1997), and (iii) that were retained by Swiss Banks for their own use and profit. *See* Bergier Final Report at 446-49.

"The discussion on "unclaimed cash" persisted throughout the post-war period due to claims for restitution by survivors and heirs of the murdered victims, or restitution organizations acting on their behalf." *Id.* at 444. Nevertheless, the Swiss Banks continued to destroy records on a massive scale and to obstruct those making claims. ICEP Report, Annex 4 ¶ 5; In re Holocaust Victim Asset Litig., 105 F. Supp.2d 139, 155-56 (E.D.N.Y. 2000). Indeed, "[i]n May 1954, the legal representatives of the big banks co-ordinated their response to heirs [of account holders] so that the banks would have at their disposal a concerted mechanism for deflecting any kind of enquiry." Bergier Final Report at 446. Similarly, "the banks and their Association lobbied against legislation that would have required publication of the names of so called 'heirless assets accounts,' legislation that if enacted and implemented, would have obviated the ICEP investigation and the controversy of the last 30 years." ICEP Report at 15. Indeed, in order to thwart such legislation, the Swiss Bankers Association encouraged Swiss banks to underreport the number of accounts in a 1956 survey. "A meager result from the survey," it said, "will doubtless contribute to the resolution of this matter [the proposed legislation] in our favor." ICEP Report at 90 (quoting a letter from the Swiss Bankers Association to its board members dated June 7, 1956). "To summarize, it is apparent that the claims of surviving Holocaust victims were usually rejected under the pretext of bank secrecy . . . ", Bergier Final Report at 455, or outright deception about the existence of information, while wholesale destruction of bank records continued for over a half century. Under these circumstances, utilizing the fundamental evidentiary principles of United States law that would have applied to Deposited Assets claims had the class action lawsuits been litigated through trial, the CRT draws an adverse inference against the banks where documentary evidence was destroyed or is not provided to assist the claims administrators. *See In re Holocaust Victim Asset Litig.*, 105 F. Supp.2d 139, 152 (E.D.N.Y. 2000); Reilly v. Natwest Markets Group, Inc., 181 F.3d 253, 266-68 (2d Cir. 1999); Kronisch v. United States, 150 F.3d 112, 126-28 (2d Cir. 1998).