

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR SOVIET JEWS

AFFILIATE MEMBER OF UNION OF COUNCILS FOR SOVIET JEWS



P.O. Box 1542 • Studio City, CA 91614 • (818) 769-8862 • Fax (818) 766-4321 • E-mail: csfrumkin@roadrunner.com • Web: www.sifrumkin.com

Congressman Howard Berman  
House Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

1/16/2009

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Almanac/Panorama Media Group  
Association Soviet Jewish Emigres  
Bulat Okudzhava Foundation  
Holocaust Survivors Ass. - Former USSR  
Media Analysis Foundation

Dear Howard:

On July 25, 2008 I wrote you a letter asking for your help in providing justice to tens of thousands of my fellow Holocaust survivors. Much has happened since then. Not least is the landslide election, your re-election and your well deserved move to the chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs committee. I congratulate you and wish you much success and meaningful accomplishments.

My July letter addresses the conflict that has been slowly winding its way through the House on the passage of H.R. 1746 – the bill dealing with restitution and compensation of the heirs and relatives of holders of life insurance policies with European insurance companies. Last year it looked as if justice was to be done but the untimely death of Tom Lantos brought it to a halt. This legislative session faces a number of important tasks. They are all critical but none will likely affect the life or death questions that this issue will – we are dealing with a destitute population of people who survived the nazis and who came to America searching for justice. I urge – I implore you to help them!

I have attached a copy of the letter of 7/25/08 that addresses the facts of the issue. I hope that you will devote some of your efforts towards a resolution that will finally do what is right.

I hope to meet with you and discuss this and any other issues when you are back in sunny California again.

A belated Happy New Year to you and yours.

Si Frumkin

Attached: Letter Si Frumkin to Howard Berman, 7/25/08

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July 25, 2008

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Holocaust Survivors Ass. - former USSR  
Media Analysis Foundation

Dear Howard:

This is not the usual letter a legislator receives. I will not regurgitate the statistics that you have seen many times before. I will not go into the legalistic minutiae that are already familiar to you and your aides. This is an appeal to you, to your conscience, to your sense of right and wrong. And it isn't a selfish appeal: I personally want nothing for myself, my friends or my family.

This is a request for justice for tens of thousands of destitute people whom I do not personally know but whom I consider my brothers and sisters because we share a tragic past.

I am a Holocaust survivor. I was liberated from Dachau by the American army at the age of 14, just twenty days after my father died. Five years later, in 1949, I managed to come to the U.S.

I have lived here for most of my life – 59 years! I married a third generation American, we had two sons and two grandchildren, I got a good education and managed to build a good life for my family.

I love and trust America and, in this, I am not alone. We, immigrants – and especially, we survivors, know how grateful we should be to this wonderful country. We know better than those who were lucky enough to have been born here, the “real”

Americans, how much better, fairer and more just this country is than just about any other on this planet.

I have tried to repay the debt I believe I owe, by helping those who were less fortunate than I. I was deeply involved in the Soviet Jewry movement that liberated 1 ½ million Soviet Jews to allow them and their children to live in freedom in the greatest Exodus to freedom in 3000 years. I have advocated help – often successfully, sometimes less so – for Holocaust survivors. I wrote and lectured on the Holocaust to thousands of children and adults at colleges, museums, churches and synagogues.

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In pre-Soviet Lithuania my father had an automobile dealership. He sold Harley Davidson motorcycles as well as German NSU and British motorcycles; Swedish SKF ball bearings; (U.S.) Fisk and (British Kelly) Springfield tires and much more. He spoke many languages, had a degree from a German university and traveled on business and pleasure all over the world.

I am mentioning this in order to show that he was a sophisticated, well educated individual who cared for his family. It is inconceivable that he didn't provide for his wife and children by purchasing life insurance. He died in Dachau on April 7, 1945 without a death certificate. Many years later, the European insurance companies (*and their handmaiden ICHEIC – created by them, financed by them, and controlled by them*) still refuse to reveal the names of their clients and thus give the possible beneficiaries a chance to see for themselves if the European insurance bandits had stolen and kept the premiums European Jews paid.

Several years ago, I was involved in the distribution of \$3 million that a consortium of Dutch insurance companies made available for destitute Holocaust survivors in California. This was the only such action by European insurers. We distributed the money to several thousand recipients – without any expense to the fund we created – all costs were covered by the interest the money earned.

By comparison, in his testimony in 2003, Lawrence Eagleburger, ICHEIC's chairman declared that ICHEIC had paid out \$35 million in insurance claims while spending \$56 million to do so. He also stated that ICHEIC regarded as valid 54,000 received claims but had made offers of payment to just 2600 – less than 5%! The best estimate by experts is that *millions* of policies were sold to European Jews by the insurance companies - ICHEIC acknowledged 54,000 as valid.

The Claims Conference has a long and convoluted history – some of it is commendable, some not. Its handling of Jewish properties in East Germany and reluctance to contact the rightful heirs of these properties, its refusal to acknowledge valid claims for restitution by immigrants and survivors from the former USSR that led to mass demonstrations in Los Angeles and resulted in a change of Claims Conference's policy for the better, its refusal to increase the participation on its Board of Directors of Holocaust survivors, the obscenely long time it took to finally expose

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and dismiss the former discredited chairman Israel Singer are examples of policies that resulted in harm to survivors without input from survivors.

At this time, HRI 746 was meant to right some of the injustice in distributing millions for research, education, museums and historical landmarks at a time when tens of thousands of destitute, sick and feeble survivors who struggle to survive would be deprived of help. All of them are at least in their 70s – disillusioned, neglected and voiceless. HRI 746 was unanimously supported by the Foreign Affairs Committee with the late Tom Lantos as chairman. And then, shockingly, the help that would have become available through HRI 746 has now been emasculated by amendments in the Financial Services Committee.

I am aware that there was support from a number of Jewish organizations for making the bill meaningless. It is interesting that most of the organizations – possibly all of them – will be receiving sizeable allocations under the adjusted and cruel bill. The organizations supporting the amendments are not directly involved with Holocaust survivors, do not represent them and, frankly, have no business in lobbying or influencing decisions concerning the plight of the survivors.

At this point I want to repeat something I have said before: if and when the lists of insurance clients are published and it becomes obvious that my father had life insurance, I will transfer anything I would be entitled to, to organizations or individuals that would use the money to help indigent survivors.

I am not in this for money. I write this letter in search of justice. In just a few years more, the survivors will be gone forever. I beg you – do whatever you can to pass HRI 746 in the form that was supported by the late Tom Lantos!

Sincerely,

Si Frumkin, chairman SCCSJ; Staff lecturer at Museum of Tolerance, Simon Wiesenthal Center; Senior Adviser and Founder Association Holocaust Survivor from former USSR; Board of Directors, L.A. County Retirement Association; L.A. Jewish Family Service Survivors Supervisory Commission; Russian Language Interviewer Shoah Foundation; L.A. City Human Relations Commission (former); Board of Directors Israel Christian Nexus; L.A. County Sheriff Advisory Board; etc., etc.,