

Chodakiewicz - Museum from 2

American-Jewish institutions provided the main source of information on the Holocaust (including Polish – Jewish relations).

At the end of 1970s the Holocaust finally gained recognition at the level of popular culture. “The Holocaust,” a 1977 television show, was a reflection of this state of affairs. Incidentally, the film also depicted Polish soldiers shooting Jews on behalf of the Germans.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, in the US, the Holocaust has become the primary reference point in the realm of ethics. The paradigmatic function of Shoah was logically supported by assertion that the tragedy was a unique and unprecedented event in human history. The Holocaust became a prism through which to view and evaluate other events and define Absolute Evil. Until fairly recently, the mass murder of the Jews was Western Civilization’s one and only absolute. It was not the subject of deconstruction or other post-modernist “exercises.” No one, save a tiny and irrelevant handful of extremist deniers, challenged this historical catastrophe. Simultaneously, knowledge about the Holocaust was becoming almost universal among Americans.

In addition to film, art, and the theater, education about the Holocaust was introduced into school curricula. Virtually every child is aware of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis (who, incidentally, have no nationality, although they are often depicted as “Poles”).

During the late 1970s the momentum in the realm of culture was also transferred into the world of politics. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. was created through an act of Congress. This guaranteed that taxpayer dollars would guarantee the facility’s existence. But, of course, great efforts were undertaken to collect additional funds for the Museum. The USHMM was entrusted to a group of prominent Jewish activists, including Nobel Prize winner Eli Wiesel. It was they who created the first council.

The Council and the Museum

Membership on the Council is considered an honor. Participation is naturally *pro bono*. Every candidate is individually vetted. They are then nominated by the President of the United States. Most of the time, the nominations follow a partisan basis, i.e. a Democrat nominates Democrats and a Republican selects someone associated with the GOP. But this is not always the case. Sometimes, a Republican president appoints a prominent individual of a different political orientation. For example, during my term, the neoconservative George Bush nominated the liberal Ed Koch, the former mayor of New York.

Individuals of particular merit recommended by political allies, or even the President’s close personal friends, may also be appointed. Often, the nominees are wealthy. This is not only because they supported the presidential campaign financially, but also because their wealth can be a great boon to the Museum and the cause of commemorating the Holocaust.

Many, though not all, have applied for the honor of serving on the council. I, for one, did not lobby on my own behalf. Instead, the “Polish seat” on the USHMC was vacant and I was asked to apply. I refused and proposed two other candidates: Professor Thaddeus Radziłowski, who was then rector of St. Mary’s College at Ave Maria University (and the current head of the PIAST Institute in Detroit), and Charles Chotkowski, who is head of Holocaust documentation team of the Polish-American Congress. Unfortunately, both are Democrats, so their candidacies fell through.

The White House wanted a Christian conservative Polish origin. Thus, in August 2004 I was asked to accept the nomination once more. This time I agreed and was nominated. As a result, I had to fill out various forms, including a complete bibliography of my publications. This list consisted of several hundred items. For over half a year I was vetted by the White House. The objective was to rule out anyone with a criminal or extremist past. In other words, the aim of the vetting process is to eliminate threats to the security of the nation and the President of the United States.

In April 2005, the White House turned to me again, informing them that no obstacles were found to prevent my appointment, and asked if I still agreed to serve on the Council. I answered in the affirmative. Meanwhile, I learned that a group of “friendly” and “tolerant” individuals drafted an open letter attacking George W. Bush for appointing an “anti-Semite” (i.e. me) to such an important function. The letter was rejected as meritless by *The Washington Post* editorial board, for which I remain grateful to Anne Applebaum. In any case, I was sworn in shortly thereafter, along with a group of other appointees, by the head of National Security Affairs, Micheal Chertoff, on behalf of the President. We received special documents from the federal government identifying us as members of the council.

A high level of idealism reigns in the USHMC. After all, almost every member has relatives who perished during the Second World War. Participation in the Council reflects the desire to commemorate the victims. Such an attitude is very admirable. The relativistic desire to “choose the future” by remaining silent about the past does not find fertile ground here. For USHMC members the past is of considerable importance for it influenced the present and shaped the future.

Our task was to support the activities of the Museum at all possible levels. This applies not only to fundraising but also participation in its activities. Generally, there are duties that each member must fulfill. USHMC members are required to familiarize themselves with the budget and approve (or reject) it. We were required to participate in semiannual general meetings of the council which last for many hours. In addition, each council member participates in selected aspect of the museum’s operation. For instance, I found myself, along with several other members, in the Acquisition Commission. We were in charge of any new exhibits, archival materials, and library purchases. We were asked to evaluate and/or approve the museum’s acquisition policy.

For example, I remember the debate concerning a painting which was to be acquired by the Museum. Supposedly, it was painted by a direct witness and depicted the deportation of Jews from the ghetto in Głębokie. The problem was that the city in the image had cobbled streets and street lights. However, Głębokie was a small town with muddy, unpaved streets and very little electricity to speak of. Moreover, the formations escorting the Jews wore green uniforms. Yet, the Belarusian SS-Schutzmannschaften (“Defense Units”) wore black uniforms with bronze-colored lapels and collars. Upon hearing this the colleagues who supported acquiring the painting began to protest but were soon pacified when one council member noticed the Hebrew caption: “Vilne.” My suspicions were confirmed. It was Wilno. Lithuanian “Ponary Sharpshooters” wore green uniforms, after all.

In addition, probably each council member has done something individually to commemorate the Holocaust. For example, one of the heads of the Council, Dr. Joel Geiderman, probes antique stores to purchase (using his own funds) items related to Holocaust, which and then

transfers to the Museum. Besides, much of this philanthropic activity occurs outside of the council. For example, one of my colleagues on the Council financed the purchase and shipment of weapons and equipment for U.S. troops in Iraq. Let us remember that the army did not have the necessary equipment – e.g., adequate body armor and bulletproof vests – in stock.

As for me, I attempted to support Polish Christian issues as much as possible. For example, I supported Bożenna Urbanowicz Gilbride, a Holocaust witness, victim, and survivor, who educates Americans about the Polish Christian experience during the Second World War. I also intervened on behalf of the Wośes, who had been commemorated by Yad Vashem, to have their names included on new plaques of the Righteous. I also advised Polish-American activists, such as John Gmerek, who wished to see Polish issues featured more prominently at the Museum.

Assuming that the memory of the Holocaust is best preserved by adhering to the truth, I presented the USHMM with documentation - submitted to me by my friend Herbert Romerstein - which proved that the Comintern forged one of Hitler’s speeches. The falsified fragment appears on a poster displayed at the museum. I am referring to Hitler’s alleged invocation of Armenian Genocide at the eve of the invasion of Poland in 1939.

Last but not least, I brought many students and VIPs to the Museum. This is very necessary for my students, especially those enrolled in my seminar on “Genocide and Genocide Prevention.” The USHMM not only plays an important educational role by commemorating a terrible past, but also by preventing such tragedies in the future.

It would be very beneficial for the Polonia to understand the above and to appropriately organize for a similar purpose. Of course, much also depends on Poles in the mother country as well. □

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Music News - victims from 3

have been a 15 year tradition at the Fryderyki Awards—the Polish equivalent of the American Grammy Awards—a single concert was performed by leading Polish pop, jazz and classical musicians on April 19. Entitled “Fryderyk 2010. Artyści w hołdzie ofiarom katastrofy lotniczej w Smoleńsku” [Fryderyk 2010. Artists for the victims of the plane Crash in Smolensk], the concert was held at the Salesian Basilica in Warsaw. The list of award winners was read, however only somberly at the end of the concert.

Rafał Blechacz has dedicated his recital on April 20 at the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń to the victims of the plane crash in Smolensk. The program included works by Chopin, Bach, Mozart and Debussy.

The Polish Presidential Tu-154 plane crashed on the morning of April 10, 2010 during a landing approach at the military airstrip near Smolensk. The 96 dignitaries and civilians on-board were members of a Polish delegation joining the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre. In addition to Polish president, Lech Kaczyński and First Lady, Maria Kaczyńska, the victims included some of the most prominent figures of Polish political and financial circles, families of Katyń massacre victims, security service members, and the plane crew. The complete list of victims is available at www.prezydent.pl.

[Sources: muzyka.onet.pl; zpk.org.pl; culture.pl; wyborcza.pl; polmic.com; rmfclassical.pl; nytimes.com] □

Taxes - Health Care from 3

prescription medications with some exceptions after 2010, along with placing a \$2,500 annual cap on expenses covered under health FSAs, starting in 2013;

✓ A 40 percent excise tax will be imposed on high-cost, “Cadillac” employer-sponsored health coverage, starting in 2018;

✓ Fees will be imposed on the pharmaceutical industry and health insurance providers, starting in 2011 and 2014, respectively;

✓ An excise tax will be imposed on medical device manufacturers after 2012; and

✓ Limits on tax-subsidized medical expenses will be imposed by raising the itemized medical expense deduction floor for regular tax purposes from 7.5 percent to 10 percent, generally starting in 2013.

Tax incentives. Among a handful of tax incentives provided under the new health-care reform package, two are particularly notable at this time: (1) the ability of parents to cover adult children up to age 27 under their tax-qualified employer-provided health plans, starting immediately for plans that elect to beat the mandatory post-September 22 year deadline for doing so; and (2) the unveiling of a simplified cafeteria plan specifically tailored to small businesses, starting in 2011.

Exchanges. The health care reform package requires each state to establish an exchange by 2014 to help individuals and qualified employers obtain coverage. Coverage will be offered at various levels. Qualified individuals may be eligible for premium assistance tax credits, cost-sharing or vouchers to help pay for coverage through an insurance exchange. An individual’s income, whether or not coverage is provided by his or her employer, will all be taken into account when determining if the individual qualifies for a premium assistance tax credit, cost-sharing or voucher.

IRS guidance. Over the course of the next few months, the IRS and other federal agencies will be filling in details on how to comply with all the provisions under the massive health care reform package. The IRS is expected to issue guidance soon on the provisions with effective dates in 2010 and 2011.

If you have additional questions about the ideas mentioned here and/or the many other strategies available to you, they may be directed to me at 800-CPA-KROL (272-5765), or you may write to:

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