



Notes (revised) for Hon. David Kilgour
St. Hyacinth Church
201 LeBreton Street North,
Ottawa
23 August 2012

Thanks to the Central and Eastern European Council for hosting this event today in five Canadian cities. Among NATO members, I understand Canada still holds the highest percentage of citizens who fled totalitarianism in Europe, comprising today with their descendants about five million Canadians.

Resolution of Parliament

Black Ribbon Day commemorates the anniversary of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which purported to authorize Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to seize the countries and peoples located between them.

A resolution passed unanimously by Canada's Parliament in 2009 says in part: whereas hundreds of thousands of human beings... sought and found refuge in Canada; whereas... Canadians of Eastern and Central European descent... have made unique and significant, cultural, economic, social and other contributions to help build the Canada we know today... be it resolved that the Parliament and the Government of Canada unequivocally condemn the crimes against humanity committed by. Nazi and Communist regimes and offer the victims of these crimes and their family members sympathy, understanding and recognition for their suffering.

Bloodlands

The masterful book *Bloodlands* (2010) by Yale history professor Tim Snyder begins:

In the middle of Europe in the middle of the twentieth century, the Nazi and Soviet regimes murdered some fourteen million people. The place where all of the victims died, the bloodlands, extends from central Poland to western Russia...(They) were murdered over the course of only twelve years, between 1933 and 1945, while both Hitler and Stalin were in power...Yet not a single one ...was a soldier on active duty. Most were women, children and the aged; none were bearing weapons; many had been stripped of their possessions, including their clothes...

Snyder adds:

(For example) in Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, and the Leningrad district, lands where the Stalinist regime had starved and shot some four million people in the previous eight years, German forces managed to starve and shoot even more in half the time.

And this:

The sheer numbers of the victims can blunt our sense of the individuality of each one. “I’d like to call you all by name,” wrote the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova in her *Requiem*, “but the list has been removed and there is nowhere else to look.” Thanks to the hard work of historians, we have some of the lists: thanks to the opening of the archives in eastern Europe, we have places to look. We have a surprising number of the voices of the victims: the recollection (for example) of one young Jewish woman who dug herself from the Nazi death pit at Babi Yar, in Kiev...



Fall of Berlin Wall, November 1989

Photo credit: the kidswindow.co.uk

No-one here needs to be reminded of what Communism did to every country it held between 1945 and 1989: the abuse and much worse of tens of millions of innocent people; continuous economic failure; persecution of faith communities; forcing hard-working farmers into collectives; making it a crime to talk about representative democracy in order to protect incompetent, violent and otherwise criminal dictatorships; removing all rights of unions; destroying any concept of the rule of law and the independence of judges; and turning art and culture into sterile propaganda.

Conclusion.

Today, Nazism is thoroughly discredited, although there are too many malicious persons attempting to bring it back. Communism still exists in a few countries, where the noble goal of human equality is invariably twisted into a shield for the special privileges of party officials. All of us here tonight owe humanity the continued spread of democracy, the rule of law and care for all members of the human family. We democrats around the world must be neither complacent nor over confident.

I’ll close on a personal note. Growing up in Winnipeg in the 1940s and ‘50s, I had the good fortune to meet many courageous refugees from Europe, some of whom lived in my parents’ home. I can never forget their tragic accounts of life under the Soviets and/or Nazis. That our country has helped so many newcomers to live fulfilled lives is something about which all Canadians can all be justly proud.

Thank you.