



Commemoration Service and Central/ Eastern European Community Reception
Hon. David Kilgour JD.
St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church
952 Green Valley Crescent,
Ottawa
23 August 2013

Thanks to the Central and Eastern European Council of Canada for hosting events today in five Canadian cities. Among all 28 NATO member nations, I understand that our country has the highest percentage of citizens who fled totalitarianism in Europe and elsewhere, comprising today with descendants as many as 7-8 million Canadians.

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 unanimous resolution by Canada's Parliament in 2009 said in part: whereas hundreds of thousands... found refuge in Canada; whereas... Canadians of Eastern and Central European descent... have made... 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... sympathy, understanding and recognition for their suffering.



Fall of Berlin Wall, November 1989
Photo credit: the kidswindow.co.uk

Bloodlands

The masterful book *Bloodlands* (2010) by Yale history professor Timothy 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... 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...

... 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.

The sheer numbers of the victims can blunt our sense of the individuality of each one.

Author Snyder adds more haunting specifics in his preface, including these:

- *“Now we will live!” This is what the hungry boy liked to say... But the food that he saw was only in his imagination. The wheat had all been taken away, in a heartless campaign of requisitions that began Europe’s era of mass killing. It was 1933, and Joseph Stalin was deliberately starving Soviet Ukraine. The little boy died, as did more than three million other people.”*



Survivor of the
Holodomor

- *“I will meet her”, said a young Soviet man of his wife, “under the ground”. He was right; he was shot after she was and they were buried among the seven hundred thousand victims of Stalin’s Great Terror of 1937 and 1938.*
- *“They asked for my wedding ring, which I...” The Polish officer broke off his diary just before he was executed by the Soviet secret police in 1940. He was one of about two hundred thousand Polish citizens shot by the Soviets or the Germans at the beginning of the Second World War, while Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union jointly occupied his country*
- *Late in 1941, an eleven-year-old Russian girl in Leningrad finished her own humble diary: “Only Tania is left.” Adolf Hitler had betrayed Stalin, her city was under siege by the Germans, and her family was among the four million Soviet citizens the Germans starved to death*
- *(in the summer of 1942), a twelve-year-old Jewish girl in Belarus wrote a last letter to her father: “I am saying good-bye to you before I die. I am so afraid of this death because they throw small children into the mass graves alive.” She was among the more than five million Jews gassed or shot by the Germans.*

No-one here needs to be reminded of what totalitarianism in both the Soviet and Nazi forms did to every country it held between 1933 and 1989: the abuse and so much worse of tens of millions of innocent people; continuous economic failure in Soviet Russia; the merciless persecution of faith communities; forcing farmers into collectives; making it a crime to talk about representative democracy in order to protect incompetent, violent criminal dictatorships; removing all rights of unions; destroying any concept of the rule of law and the independence of judges; ethnic cleansing in the Baltic States and beyond with Russians being brought in and given special privileges in jobs, housing, etc; and turning art and culture into sterile propaganda.

Conclusion



Pope John Paul



Anne Frank



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Vaclav Havel



Anna Walentynowicz

Today, Nazism is thoroughly discredited, although there are mindless groups and individuals in various countries attempting to bring it back. Communism still exists in a few countries, most notably China (See, for example, http://www.david-kilgour.com/2013/speech_07202013.pdf), where the noble goal of human equality is invariably twisted into a shield for the special privileges of party members. 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 work hard to promote such governance in all 196 independent countries, especially those still plagued with authoritarian regimes.

Growing up in Winnipeg in the '40s and '50s, I had the good fortune to meet many courageous refugees from Europe, some of whom lived in my parents' home. Their accounts of life under the Soviets and/or Nazis stayed. That Canada helped so many newcomers to live fulfilled lives is something about which all Canadians can be proud.

Thank you.