

The following is from the Monday Jan. 24, 2011, edition of The Hill Times, by the UCCLA's Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk.

Genocidal Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine should be highlighted in Human Rights Museum

by Lubomyr Luciuk

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives have boasted of being the party that reached out to Canada's minorities – particularly in the person of Jason Kenney, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration – strategically undercutting what many saw as a "traditional" source of political support for the Liberals. There's truth in their claim. They certainly secured broad-based gratitude in Ukrainian-Canadian circles for settling issues arising out of Canada's first national internment operations, a feat the Liberals, for all their pretensions to being the party of social justice, nevertheless ignored, for decades. That said, the Conservatives are about to be reminded that it's not just about a first date going well. You've got to nurture nice feelings if you don't want them to blow away.

If the Canadian Museum for Human Rights were truly committed to telling human rights stories, particularly Canadian ones or those less well known, there could be no principled objection to it. Sadly, it's not. For example, the final report of its Content Advisory Committee recommended the allocation of a disproportionate share of permanent exhibit space to Jewish suffering in the Second World War. That partiality was demonstrated by the 48 references to the Holocaust this document includes, compared to only 1 about the genocidal Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine, the Holodomor. Likewise ignored were the results of the public survey Mr Arni Thorsteinson submitted on 31 March 2008 to the Honourable Josée Verner, MP, then Minister of Canadian Heritage. Reportedly, Canadians rank-ordered themes they wanted addressed at the CMHR as follows – Aboriginal (First Nations), 16.1% ; Genocides, 14.8% ; Women 14.7% ; Internments, 12.5% ; War and Conflicts, 8.7% ; Holocaust, 7% ; Children,

5.9% ; Sexual Orientation, 4.9% ; Ethnic Minorities, 3.8% ; Slavery, 2.9% ; Immigration, 2.6% ; Charter of Rights, 2.3% ; Disabilities, 2% and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1.8%. (p.63 of PDF, p.35 of document).

Echoing those findings we recommended that all 12 of this museum's galleries (or zones) be thematic, comparative and inclusive. One zone, for example, could deal with Canada's internment operations. Those afflicted not only eastern Europeans in 1914-1920 but Japanese, Italian, and German Canadians in 1939-1945 and some Quebecois in 1970. Explaining the baneful consequences of The War Measures Act upon several different Canadian communities during the course of the 20th century highlights the need for vigilance in defence of civil liberties in times of domestic and international crisis. Another gallery could compare the many genocides that have befouled human history. Placing the Shoah in context, as Professor Timothy Snyder does in his much-applauded volume, Bloodlands, would remind us that while the word "genocide" was invented during the Second World War the act itself is neither modern nor, sadly, unlikely to reoccur. Doing that has considerable pedagogical value.

How to explain that the Crimes of Communism – which the Tories have claimed they have a special interest in commemorating – weren't even referenced by the Content Advisory group? Everyone knows that Stalin and his satraps murdered millions more than Hitler, a point underscored in Professor Norman Naimark's outstanding new book, Stalin's Genocides. Yet that Soviet dictator is not named, not once. Nor are Mao Tse Tung's atrocities acknowledged even though the Chinese Communists slaughtered about the same number as Hitler and Stalin did, combined. And what about Imperial Japanese barbarities, like the infamous "Rape of Nanjing"? It's left out, as it is in most Japanese textbooks, even as the Holodomor is currently being cut out of Ukraine's. Should a Canadian museum, even indirectly, succour deniers?

Being inclusive and equitable takes nothing away from hallowing victims of the Shoah. As over two dozen well-supported museums and

educational programs dedicated exclusively to this Jewish tragedy already exist in Canada (and hundreds more internationally) this tale is already told, often and well, in no danger of being forgotten. But the catastrophe that befell many millions of non-Jews enslaved or murdered by the Nazis – including the Roma, Catholics, the disabled, Poles, Ukrainians, Soviet POWs, homosexuals and others – will be obfuscated if only the one community's suffering, great as it was, is elevated above all others.

Responding to mounting criticism, the museum's boosters have insisted that the Committee's submission, while important, is only one of many sources being considered as the museum's final contents are developed. Alas, they speak with forked tongues. For while it may well be true that the contents of the museum are "not set" two of its twelve galleries are permanently and prominently giving privileged space to the recounting of aboriginal tales of injustice and to the Shoah. All other crimes against humanity are lumped together in a "Mass Atrocities" gallery, so consigned to inferiority. Funding this kind of partiality is not acceptable in a taxpayer-funded national institution that the Conservatives first attached to the public teat and from which it has, ever since, been sucking generously, not likely to ever be weaned.

Until the controversy over this museum's contents are resolved, and the composition of its appointed board members made more truly representative of Canadian society, Mr Harper's government should reject calls for increased funding for this boondoggle and begin a truly inclusive consultation process with the many communities who want to ensure that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights meets its stated goal of "contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians." All Canadians, not some.

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