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Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC),

seconded by the member for British Columbia Southern Interior, moved that Bill C-459, An Act to establish a Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day and to recognize the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Speaker, this year Ukrainian Canadians, Ukrainians around the world, and the international community, will mark the 75th anniversary of one of the most heinous crimes in modern history, the state sponsored famine genocide of 1932-33 perpetrated by the Soviet regime of Joseph Stalin against the Ukrainian people.

The deliberate planned famine was devised to destroy the Ukrainian nation's aspirations for a free and independent Ukraine. It killed seven to ten million Ukrainians. For decades the truth about this horrific crime was suppressed by Soviet authorities.

Canada has a longstanding history of condemning all war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocides. That is why today we are debating an act to establish a Ukrainian genocide holodomor and famine memorial day. This bill not only designates the fourth Saturday in November as a memorial day for the Ukrainian famine but also acknowledges the famine as an act of genocide.

Across Canada right now holodomor activities are taking place, largely sponsored by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and its membership organizations. They are doing things such as holding memorials in a number of cities. Right now there is the international remembrance flame tour with the flame being carried by Stefan Horlatsch, who I had the pleasure of meeting a couple of weeks ago.

Stefan is a survivor of the holodomor, the famine in the Ukraine that was imposed upon him as a small child by Stalin. Stefan has some recollections of that horrific experience and is sharing that story as he travels across Canada carrying the international flame and talking about the problems that he endured as a child and his journey to get out of the Soviet Union.

I have been working on this bill for about 16 months. I know many members in this House have brought forward these types of bills in the past and in this current Parliament, and they feel quite strongly that this is the right issue to jump on board with.

I have to thank Senator Raynell Andreychuk who made sure that a motion like this was brought forward at the 70th anniversary back in 2003 and who had a motion in the Senate where senators discussed recognizing the holodomor as a genocide.

I also want to thank the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity) for his encouragement and help in drafting this bill.

I need to thank the Canadian Friends of Ukraine who have worked tirelessly not only to raise awareness of the holodomor but helped in drafting my legislation over a year ago. I especially thank Miss Lisa Shymko, who is the executive director and Mrs. Margareta Shpir, who is the first vice-president.

As I said, there are many other MPs here from all parties who know that this is an issue that needs to be recognized, one that all Canadians need to be better educated about, as well as making that recognition around the world.

I also want to thank the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Association of which so many of us are members.

I also want to make sure that we proceed in a non-partisan and timely manner in getting this legislation through the House, so that we recognize it before the 75th anniversary actually runs out.

I understand we need to make an amendment to my bill and I encourage that we do this at committee. When I first drafted the bill the one word that I actually did leave out was “holodomor”, which is a Ukrainian term, and I am of Ukrainian heritage. For Canadian purposes we often just refer to it as the Ukrainian famine and I definitely wanted to use the word “genocide” in the bill. We need to put the word “holodomor” in the bill in about five or six different places and the best place to do that is at committee. I am asking my fellow members in the House to send the bill to committee and make those amendments there.

Although holodomor is a Ukrainian word and recognizes the famine of 1932-33, it is based upon two Ukrainian words “holod”, which stands for hunger, starvation or famine, and “moryty”, which is to induce suffering, to kill, to die. These two words together make the root for holodomor.

We need to put this in perspective. We are talking about seven to ten million Ukrainians who died over the fall of 1932 and most of 1933. At the peak, over 25,000 people a day were

hauled out of the villages and off the farms, and just thrown on wagons and taken out back and buried in mass graves.

The only way we can really look at this is to know about that time. We are not sure what the statistics were like. We do not know solidly what the population of Ukraine was at the time. We know that the last solid census was taken about 1926-27 by the Soviet regime and it said there were roughly 28 million to 29 million Ukrainians at that time.

By just taking normal population growth with some of the statistics I saw in 1931, the population of Ukraine would have been about 31.2 million people, which is about the same population we have here in Canada, and over seven million were killed, maybe as high as ten million, if we ever could get our hands on the solid statistics of what happened during 1932 and 1933.

That would be like going to Manitoba today and taking away all the food that was harvested because we did not like the people and dumping all that food into Lake Winnipeg. Essentially, starving the entire population.

However, let us not stop there. If we are going to make a real comparison to what happened in the Ukraine, let us go to Saskatchewan, take all the food right off the farms and out of the houses, dump it into Lake Winnipeg and let those people starve to death.

However, we cannot stop there. We also have to go into Alberta, take all the food, all the grain, and all the livestock, throw all that into the lake, and let those people starve to death.

However, that is not all. We also have to go to B.C. and starve all those people to death to have the same situation that the Ukrainian people lived through under Joseph Stalin from 1932 to 1933.

It is horrific. We have to make sure that the seven to ten million Ukrainians who died at the hands of the authorities of Joseph Stalin are remembered. The Soviet regime severely punished anyone who resisted it. In addition to starvation and killings by agents of the estate, cannibalism occurred. We know that. There were many suicides and mercy killings, which just kept adding to the death toll. As I said before, I have seen numbers as high as 28,000 people dying every day at the peak of it.

I want to thank Leo Ledochowski, the President and CEO of Canada Inns. He produced and sponsored a great video on the holodomor. He talked to Ukrainian Canadian survivors of the holodomor from across this country, a lot of them right in Manitoba, including Mike and Sonya Kushliak from Selkirk in my riding.

They spoke about horrible stories they remember when growing up. They spoke about people lying on the streets, dying, because they did not have the strength to walk to town.

They spoke about people driving horses and buggies picking up the dead people and taking them out to the cemetery and putting them into mass graves.

They said that every time their parents tried to bring even a morsel of food home it seemed that the so-called “activists” of the communist regime would come into their homes and find it, even if it was just a sockful of wheat, and take it back and would not allow them to eat. All the crops were confiscated.

Ukrainians had a bountiful harvest in the fall of 1932, but all their root crops, all their vegetables, all the wheat that they had grown; all their livestock were confiscated and taken away, including their cows, their sheep, their goats and their pigs. They had absolutely nothing left and essentially were made to suffer a horrible death.

Essentially what was happening was the commitment of genocide. I want to read article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was drafted in 1948. It defines “genocide” as follows:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

That is exactly what happened in the Ukraine. It continues:

- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

So, definitely in part (c) of the definition: “Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”.

We know that the famine was not caused by drought or other environmental causes. There are plenty of records to show that there was a bountiful harvest that exports of wheat from the Ukraine and from Russia were flowing into Western Europe.

There was plenty of grain to go around. The carryover stocks of grain supplies of the Soviet Union would have been more than enough to feed the starving Ukrainians. We know that this was caused by the policies and actions of Joseph Stalin's Soviet authorization aimed at the forced collectivization of agriculture and achieving the maximum extraction of agricultural produce from the rural population.

These policies and actions included decrees “laying down grain procurement targets for Ukraine” and ordering that all collective farm property such as cattle and grain should

henceforth be considered state property, “sacred and inviolable”. Those guilty of offences against it were considered enemies of the people, to be shot unless there were extenuating circumstances including the penalty of imprisonment with confiscation of property. Severe enforcement measures included: death sentences, numbering in the thousands; imprisonment in concentration camps; and withholding of food rations and other supplies.

We always think of this in terms that this was based upon the collectivization of agriculture across the Soviet Union, but it was different in the Ukraine. It was different for a number of reasons. First of all, as well as forcing collectivization upon the Ukrainians and people of the Volga River district, Kazakhstan and the Kuban area of Russia, the Ukrainian people were unfairly targeted. They were not allowed to migrate within their own areas. They were not allowed to travel. There were blockades that were put in place to prevent the people of the northern Ukraine from going to Russia where the food was and be able to buy it at the stores, essentially forcing them to live in these starvation ghettos, these famine ghettos.

We know that in the other areas there was still the freedom of movement, that people could move around and find foodstuffs. We also know that they were not just targeting the farmers. They were not going after the peasants. It looked like they were going after the farming community across the Soviet Union. We must remember that 80% of the population at that time was peasant farmers. They were living on the land. Essentially, they were the basis of Ukrainian pride. They were nationalists. They wanted to see a free and independent Ukraine as Ukraine has often cried out for. Unfortunately, they were being quashed by Stalin himself and his thugs.

Anyone who was considered a nationalist, and most of them were peasants but there were many within communities as well, were often hauled out and put in front of firing squads or they were thrown on the train and sent off to concentration camps in Siberia. Some of the numbers I have seen indicate that over 250,000 Ukrainians were moved to Siberia into concentration camps.

Therefore, the Soviet regime was trying to kill the Ukrainian national movement and Ukrainian culture. The senior leadership of the Soviet Union, including Stalin, was directly involved in the development and implementation of these policies. The leadership under Joseph Stalin was apparently fully aware of its impact on the Ukrainian population, but nevertheless mandated actions, which worsened the situation and maximized the loss of life from 1932 to 1933.

While these elements are widely acknowledged as historical facts the debate about whether the holodomor was an act of genocide, defined as a deliberate and systematic destruction of a political, cultural or racial group continues at the political level, and it has not been conclusively resolved by international academic research.

As I said, we know for a fact that there were these starvation ghettos. We know that anyone who considered themselves a Ukrainian nationalist was exterminated. We know that the Soviet regime tried to eradicate the culture by moving people to Siberia or by having this whole inflow of immigrants into the area to drown it out.

So why now? It is the 75th anniversary. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko is coming to Canada to talk about the holodomor. He is promoting a UN resolution to recognize the holodomor as genocide. There are many other countries that have declared it as such.

I want to thank all the members of Parliament, who are supporting this, as well as the Canadian Friends of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

We need to correct history.

I call upon historians, journalists, and educators to record and include the facts of this horrible genocide so that all Canadians can learn from this tragic piece of Ukrainian history.

Vichna yim pamyat.