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History's most murderous ideology doesn't need adjective

BY MARK MILKE, FOR THE CALGARY HERALD JULY 11, 2010

I doubt a museum dedicated to the 20th century's bloodiest ideology is at the top of to-do lists for most tourists to Prague; most would prefer the city's picturesque core, historic Charles bridge and Prague castle. In 2003, I did as well, but I also wandered into the Museum of Communism, a remembrance of sorts to communism's impact on Czechs between 1948 and 1989.

The museum presents a picture of life under communism with replicas of rooms in a typical family apartment (and the lack of amenities).

Antiquated farm machinery decades behind the West is included. So, too, are propaganda posters and a recreation of a secret police "interview" room lighted by a single bulb and where one might have been interrogated (or worse). And then there is the museum's accompanying statistics: 178 executions over the course of communist rule, more than 250,000 prison sentences for political offences, almost as many paid police spies, and half-a-million communist party members expelled after the Soviet Union crushed the flowering Prague Spring movement in 1968.

Such suffering is one reason the proposed Canadian memorial to communism's victims should be built as soon as possible. The monument -- conceived of by a variety of people over the years-- finally got a push from the Hearts Open Toronto society in 2007; the concept was approved by the National Capital Commission last September. Alas, the Commission, responsible for all monuments in our nation's capital, proposes a clunker of a name: "Memorial to Victims of Totalitarian Communism -- Canada, A Land of Refuge."

The Capital Commission either doesn't know its history or is still stuck in Pierre Trudeau-like infatuation for Marxist tyrants. (Trudeau regularly paid homage to Chairman Mao and Fidel Castro, perhaps another reason we should build the monument -- as a symbolic rebuke to such disreputable devotion.)

The adjective, "totalitarian" is unnecessary; no other form of communism ever existed as even the few holdouts yet demonstrate. Fidel and Raoul Castro's Cuba, 51 years after their "revolution," has yet to provide basic rights -- say, to vote for the party of one's choice, or to buy, sell and trade with whom one chooses; North Korea is an almost comedic caricature of Stalin's ironfisted brutal rule, except that it's less funny for those who must live under Kim Jong-il.

Many Canadians know all this; it's why they or their ancestors fled from such regimes. Tribute to Liberty, (www.tributetoliberty.ca), the group now tasked with raising \$1.5 million for the monument, recounts the multiple examples of Canadian immigrants who fled Communist regimes: 20,000 Russian Mennonites who faced persecution in Russia and came to Canada between 1923 and 1929; 14,000 Estonians who arrived between

1946 and 1955; 34,000 Ukrainians who after the Second World War were "displaced persons" and preferred the unknown north of Canada to the possibility of more repression in the Soviet Union. (Josef Stalin's state-induced famine in the then Soviet Ukraine in 1932-33 killed six million people).

There were the 37,000 Hungarians who left Hungary after the 1956 uprising and who settled in Canada, 95,000 Poles who arrived after Polish communists crushed the anti-communist Solidarity movement in Poland in the early 1980s; from Asia, 70,000 refugees arrived from Vietnam in the late 1970s. And there were many others who fled the only other ideology in the 20th-century that could rival and surpass the body counts racked up by Nazis.

The Black Book of Communism, a 1999 recounting of the ideology from various French authors, some former communists themselves, calculated the victims of Marx and Engels's ideological heirs -- the "men of action" they inspired such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot -- to be near 100 million dead. It included 20 million people in the Soviet Union and 65 million in China.

The statistics don't communicate the horror. In the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao's attempt to collectivize Chinese farms, the results were exactly similar to Stalin's famine in the Soviet Ukraine. The Black Book recounts Wei Jingsheng, an 18-year Red Guard in 1968, who later told of how families swapped children -- this in order to eat them lest they starve. In Cambodia, under the communists, 59,000 of 60,000 Buddhist monks "disappeared." By 1979, 42 per cent of the country's children had lost at least one parent and seven per cent lost both parents in Cambodia's killing fields.

Such insanity sprung from the 20th century's deadliest ideology. At least eight million Canadians can trace their roots to countries where communism once thrived, including my family. My late grandmother arrived from the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, this after her peasant family was first transported around the U.S.S.R., including a stint in Siberia; she and her family were farmer peasants of German stock. Thus, they were undesirable elements, "enemies of the people," is how a devout communist might have put it.

We should remember them all with a monument -- and without the silly adjective that takes away from the horror that is already the noun.

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