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## Should project be dead due to Reds?

Ottawa memorial risks offending communists

Kevin Libin, National Post

A memorial to firefighters fallen in the line of duty proved, thankfully, not too controversial to win approval from the National Capital Commission, though the monument -- to be built by 2012 on Wellington Street -- could, arguably, portray infernos in a negative light.

A sculpture honouring Maurice Richard was given a home in Jacques-Cartier Park, though supporters of Clarence Campbell's decision to suspend the Rocket from the 1955 playoffs might be miffed by it.

Plans for a monument on Parliament Hill to honour the estimated 100 million or so innocent men, women and children killed at the hands of Communist regimes around the world, on the other hand, have hit a snag, with the NCC worried that a "Memorial to the Victims of Totalitarian Communism" risks giving offence to communists.

At a public meeting last week in Ottawa, members of the NCC's board approved the plans for a monument "in principle," allowing that the submitted application for the memorial "largely meets" the commission's criteria for a public exhibit on capital land. But several members expressed concern the name was too provocative, and should be revised to eliminate any mention of communism.

"I was unsettled by this name, and other members of the committee agreed with me," Helene Grand-Maitre, one commission member, said at the public approval hearing. "We should make sure that we are politically correct in this designation.... I feel this name should be changed."

Board member Adel Ayad noted that people who identify as communists might "not like" the memorial. "It's not communism itself that we should be fighting here. It is rather totalitarianism we are against in any form."

One commissioner questioned whether Canadians could even legitimately point fingers at the brutality of Stalin or Pol Pot, given that our own federal government had put Japanese-Canadians in internment camps during the Second World War.

Perhaps, suggested another, the best route would be to avoid specifics, strike "communism" from the proposed name altogether, and dedicate the memorial to "victims of oppressive regimes," so as not to single any particular ideologies out.

But then, that would make it an entirely different monument than what its backers -- largely emigres who came here fleeing communist persecution -- intend, says Carolyn Foster, the project co-ordinator for the group, Tribute to Liberty, that is organizing the initiative.

"It's the victims of communism that the memorial commemorates," she says. "Without the word 'communism,' the memorial will cease to have its intended meaning." Similar monuments, in Europe and in Washington, D. C., explicitly identify communism as the culprit in the millions of deaths they

memorialize. She says her group is unclear on whether the monument can proceed, in light of the NCC's concerns, but remains adamant that "the word 'communism' has to be in the name."

Already the group has had to make compromises. Earlier this year, it altered the proposed name, from a memorial to the "victims of communism," to one for the "victims of totalitarian communism." Though you'd look awfully hard to find any another kind, the NCC suggested that incriminating communism as a general ideology might be "unduly critical" of Canadians who still carry a torch for Karl Marx.

In a press release, Charlie Coffey, honorary chairman of the memorial initiative, said specificity was critical to the monument's purpose: teaching Canadians about the historic crimes wrought by communism's adherents. "We often lose sight of the need to

address particular historic incidents because in doing so we might not address others," he said. "This is a mistake. The experience of people under oppressive communist regimes is of global import and has had profound implications for many, many Canadians. This needs to be highlighted."

The memorial has more support than just the \$1.5-million organizers expect to raise from various communities and the private sector. Jason Kenney, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, is an enthusiastic backer.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper last year said he would "strongly support" plans for the monument. Alykhan Velshi, a spokesman for Mr. Kenney's office, said that just because a fringe group may cling to communism, despite its consistent record of oppression and murder in nations around the world, is no reason to dilute the memorial's meaning.

"It's ridiculous to try and write the crimes of communism out of history," he says. "If Canada had a Nazi party, does that mean it would be verboten to criticize Nazis?"