USSR refused Canadian aid during Holodomor, speaker says

By Marco Levytsky

Ukrainian Canadian farmers offered to send aid to help the starving victims of the Holodomor, but this assistance was refused by Soviet authorities, said the keynote speaker at the Holodomor commemoration organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Edmonton Branch at City Hall, Nov. 23.

"During 1932-1933 more pressure from the West could certainly have been applied on the Soviet regime on the matter of the famine. A major problem, though, was that the Soviet regime was denying that there was a famine," said Dr. Serge Cipko, Coordinator of the Ukrainian Diaspora Studies Initiative at the Kule Ukrainian Canadian Studies Centre, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta.

"Sometime in the summer of 1932, Ukrainian farmers in Canada offered to share their harvest with the people of Ukraine and approached the Canadian Red Cross, but the offer was rejected.

"On 20 October 1932, the National Office of the Red Cross Society in Toronto wrote to the Canadian Red Cross Society in Calgary to say that a communication had been received from the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Soviet Union. That communication read as follows:

"I have just received your letter of September 9th regarding the desire expressed by a group of Ukrainians to send part of their harvest to their compatriots. While expressing my most sincere thanks for the interest you have been good enough to take in this matter, I have the honour to inform you that in view of the satisfactory harvest this year, the Executive Committee of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR believes that the carrying out of the Canadian citizens' proposal is not necessary in the absence of real need," he added.

Drawing on material collected for his book-in-progress on Canada and the Holodomor, Dr. Cipko cited several letters received by ethnic Ukrainians and Mennonites in Canada, which

clearly showed people in Canada were aware of the scope of the disaster and were willing to help, but the famine continued to be denied by the USSR.

In March 1933 the Lethbridge Herald reported that "official quarters vigorously denied reports published abroad that the nation is suffering from famine. A statement that thousands were dying of starvation was branded as 'nonsensical.'"

"The protests and appeals continued. And so, too, did the deaths — as the Soviet regime exported food abroad while millions starved. As former American president Herbert Hoover put it during a lecture in Canada in 1938, the Soviet regime, 'pitilessly left millions of its own people to die of starvation when that government had gold with which to have bought them food.'"

"And it also, as we have heard, refused the grain of farmers here in the prairies when it was offered," he concluded.

Edmonton Strathcona MP Linda Duncan told the audience she was attending by choice to help ensure that events like the Holodomor never happen again.

"In Ukrainian, the term Holodomor means death by starvation. This deadly famine genocide was engineered and organized on a vast scale by Stalin and the Soviet authorities from 1932 to 1933, causing the deaths of millions by imposed starvation. Commemoration of the Holodomor is particularly important given that this heinous crime against Ukrainian people was denied for so many decades," she said in an earlier statement posted on her Facebook page.

Speaker of the Alberta Legislature Gene Zwozdesky told the audience "the Alberta Legislature and all our 87 MLAs stand with you and behind you in commemoration of one of the greatest and most heinous crimes perpetrated on humanity in our modern times."

"As we look back and think about what happened in 1932-33 we are reminded of how tragedy can strike innocent men, women and children just because of their ethnicity. We are reminded that 25,000 people per day at the height of the famine were dying of starvation in the breadbasket of Europe. We are reminded that no one was allowed in, no one was allowed out, grain was cut off, seeds were cut off, livestock was removed, everything was by calculated design aimed at a political endeavour to annihilate a nation. We are reminded that similar events could easily occur again," he added.

Edmonton Decore MLA Janice Sarich, who was unable to attend, sent a letter in which she stated: "For decades knowledge of the Holodomor was suppressed and denied. However, the agony of a nation was exposed to the world revealing the deliberate orchestration of a grain shortage that killed not less than 7 million men, women, and children of Ukraine. It is beyond comprehension that wheat, a universal symbol of life, of physical prosperity and spiritual wealth, a historic symbol of Ukraine's livelihood, became a weapon of genocide intended to destroy a nation.

"Ukraine remembers, and we with her, and in the spirit of these two words, більш ніколи – "never again", let us pledge to never forget the torment of those who succumbed to imposed starvation, and those who witnessed in heart-wrenching and helpless misery as their family members, friends, and neighbours lost their lives, and were deprived their futures."

UCC Edmonton President Luba Feduschak termed the Holodomor "a horrendous act of genocide was committed against the people in Ukraine by Stalin's Communist regime. A cold-blooded plan to eradicate a people from the face of the earth – the Holodomor or extermination by famine. Its people were subjected to a state organized disaster that was both ethnic and political in nature.

"Unlike natural disasters that provide the affected communities with options for survival — or assistance from neighbors and friends [disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis], this disaster was a genocide," she added.

Master of Ceremonies Boris Radyo, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Planning, Edmonton Catholic School District informed the assembly that Edmonton Catholic School District board of trustees, which two years ago established a Holodomor memorial day, "has unanimously adopted a resolution urging all Alberta Catholic school districts to implement a Holodomor Memorial Day in their school year calendar and to undertake activities in their schools in recognition of the Holodomor, and indeed many of the Catholic school districts across this province have done just that."

The ceremony was opened by a Memorial Service conducted by Bishop Ilarion and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Very Rev. Father Stephen Wojeichowsky and clergy of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Responses were sung by Akolada, an ensemble that

specializes in singing sacred music according to the traditions of the Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox Churches and conducted by Halyna Lazurko.

Flag bearers from various organizations as well as members of the youth groups CYM and Plast, as well as students from Ridna Shkola, and the Ivan Franko School also participated.

Several Holodomor survivors were present including Natalka Talanchuk, Rev. Fr. Pavlo Zmiyiwsky, Dobr. Anna Zmiyiwsky and Leonid Korownyk, who read a poem he had written about the Holodomor.

Following the program, a wreath laying ceremony was held at the monument to the victims of the Holodomor in front of Edmonton's City Hall – the first such monument erected in the world.