

UKRAINIAN FAMINE – HOLODOMOR; motion – February 5, 2009

Mr HAMILTON-SMITH (Waite—Leader of the Opposition) (12:12): I move:

That this house—

- (a) notes that 2007-08 marks the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33, caused by the deliberate actions of Stalin's communist government of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;
- (b) recalls that an estimated seven million people in the Ukrainian Republic starved to death as a result of Stalinist policies in 1932-33 and that millions more lost their lives in the purge that ensued for the rest of the decade;
- (c) notes that this famine resulted in one of the greatest losses of human life in one country during the 20th century and that it has been recognised as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation and its people by the Verkhovna Rada, the Parliament of Ukraine;
- (d) honours the memories of those who lost their lives and extends its deepest sympathies to the victims, survivors and families of this tragedy; and
- (e) joins the Ukrainian people throughout the world and, in particular, people of Ukrainian origin and descent in South Australia, in solemn commemoration of those tragic events.

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:18): I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion and acknowledge what the Ukrainian people had to put up with and how the Ukrainian community in Adelaide commemorated this event last year—it certainly was not celebrated. I attended the commemoration event and was made very welcome by John Dnistriansky.

Mr Kenyon interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Absolutely. They were very welcoming people and obviously a very cohesive group, and they reminded me that they will not forget what happened 75 years ago. To give some background on this, Joseph Stalin, the then leader of the Soviet Union, set in motion the events that led to the Holodomor, designed to cause a famine in the Ukraine to deliberately destroy the people seeking independence. As a result an estimated seven million to 10 million people perished in this area. The Ukraine was known then, as it is known now, as the bread basket of Europe. The people were deprived of the very food they had grown and it was put to other people's use and taken right out of their hands.

As time went on, Lenin took control. At one stage after 1921, he relaxed his grip on the country, stopped taking out so much grain and even encouraged a free market exchange of goods. However, when Stalin came about in 1924—and he was one of the most ruthless humans ever to hold power—he began to see that the continuing loss of Soviet influence in the Ukraine was completely unacceptable, so he decided he would crush the people's free spirit and began to employ the same methods he had successfully used within the Soviet Union. Thus, beginning in 1929, over 5,000 Ukrainian scholars, scientists, cultural and religious leaders were arrested after being falsely accused of plotting an armed revolt. Those arrested were either shot without a trial or deported to prison camps in remote areas of Russia.

Stalin also imposed the Soviet system of land management known as collectivisation. This resulted in the seizure of all privately owned farmlands and livestock in a country where 80 per cent of the people were traditional village farmers. Among those farmers was a class of people called Kulaks by the communists. They were formerly wealthy farmers who had owned 24 or more acres or who had employed farm workers. Stalin believed any future insurrection would be led by the Kulaks, thus he proclaimed a policy aimed at 'liquidating the Kulaks as a class'.

Back in the Ukraine, once proud village farmers were by now reduced to the level of rural factory workers on large collective farms. Anyone refusing to participate in the compulsory collectivisation was simply denounced and deported. A propaganda campaign was started utilising young communist activists who spread out among the country folk attempting to shore up the people's support for the Soviet regime. However, this failed and

the people resisted through acts of rebellion and outright sabotage. They burned their own homes rather than surrender them. They took back their property and even assassinated local Soviet authorities.

Ultimately, this put them in direct conflict with the power and authority of Joseph Stalin. Over time, Soviet troops and police were brought in. They were originally ordered to fire over the farmers' heads but then shot directly at them. But the resistance continued. The people simply refused to become cogs in the Soviet farm machine and remained stubbornly determined to return to their pre Soviet farming lifestyle. In Moscow, Stalin responded by dictating a policy that would deliberately cause mass starvation and result in the deaths of millions.

By mid-1932, nearly 75 per cent of the farms in the Ukraine had been forcibly collectivised. On Stalin's orders, mandatory quotas of foodstuffs to be shipped out to the Soviet Union were drastically increased from August through to January 1933, until there was simply no food remaining to feed the people of the Ukraine. Much of that huge crop was dumped on the foreign market to generate cash to aid Stalin's five-year plan for the modernisation of the Soviet Union and also to help finance his massive military build-up. If this wheat had been left in the Ukraine, it would have been enough to feed those people for up to two years.

Despite Ukrainian communists appealing to Moscow for a reduction in the grain quotas and also asking for emergency food aid, Stalin just responded by denouncing them and rushed in 100,000 more Russian soldiers to purge the Ukrainian Communist Party. Starvation ensued throughout the Ukraine, with the most vulnerable—the children and the elderly—first feeling the effects of malnutrition. The once smiling young faces of children vanished forever amid the constant pain of hunger. It gnawed away at their bellies, which became grossly swollen, while their arms and legs became like sticks as they slowly starved to death. Mothers in the countryside sometimes threw their emaciated children onto passing rail cars hoping that their children might get a better life in Kiev.

However, people in cities like Kiev were dropping dead in the street, and their bodies were being carted away in horse-drawn wagons and dumped in mass graves. While the police and Communist Party officials remained quite well fed, desperate Ukrainians ate leaves, killed dogs, cats, frogs, mice and birds and then cooked them. Others, who had gone mad with hunger, resorted to cannibalism, with parents sometimes even eating their own children.

Meanwhile, the Soviet-controlled granaries were said to be bursting at the seams from huge stocks of reserve grain which had not yet been shipped out of the Ukraine. In some locations, grain and potatoes were piled up in the open, protected by barbed wire and armed guards, who shot down anyone attempting to take the food.

By the spring of 1933, at the height of the famine, an estimated 25,000 people died every day in the Ukraine. Entire villages perished. In Europe, America and Canada, persons of Ukrainian descent, and others, responded to news reports of the famine by sending in food supplies. But Soviet authorities halted all food shipments at the border, because it was the official policy of the Soviet Union to deny the existence of a famine and thus to refuse any outside assistance. Anyone claiming that there was, in fact, a famine was accused of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. Inside the Soviet Union, a person could be arrested for even using the words 'famine', 'hunger' or 'starvation' in a sentence. The Soviets bolstered their famine denial by duping members of the foreign press and using propaganda so that the west would not get the right message.

Stalin's five-year plan for the modernisation of the Soviet Union depended largely on the purchase of massive amounts of manufactured goods and technology from western nations. That is why those nations were unwilling to disrupt their trade agreements with the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1933, nearly 25 per cent of the total population of the Ukraine, including three million children, had perished. The Kulaks, as a class, were destroyed and an entire nation of village farmers had been decimated. With his immediate objectives achieved, Stalin allowed food distribution to resume inside the Ukraine and the famine subsided. However, political persecutions and further roundups of 'enemies' continued unchecked for many years.

I join with the Ukrainians to remember this event. May we never see such a disgraceful attitude towards human beings ever again. I commend the motion.