



brotherhood; the official Marxist interpretation posited Zizka as the leader of a proletarian revolution and the Hussites as communists *avant le mot*. In 1953, Klement Gottwald, Czechoslovakia's first communist president, died. The Monument was given a macabre Soviet-style twist, becoming a venue for the public display of Gottwald's (poorly) embalmed remains and those of two successors. Bas-reliefs celebrating class warfare in the approved socialist-realist style were added to the building's massive doors.¹⁰

After communism's fall in 1989, Vitkov Hill and Zizka's statue languished as little-visited reminders of the recent totalitarian past. The remains of Gottwald, *et al* were reburied elsewhere. Nonetheless, an aftertaste lingered. Most adult Czechs could not consider the Monument without thinking of Gottwald's horrifically mummified body, while the bas-reliefs made it one of Prague's most hated landmarks. Minor renovations were undertaken in the 1990s, but the monument's future use and ownership remained murky.

In May 2007, the Czech National Museum, which had taken possession of the Vitkov memorial site seven years earlier, began a massive Can\$10 million, two-year reconstruction project. Prague temporarily lost one of its dominating features as restorationists dismantled the weather-beaten statue. According to Karel Ksandr, the National Museum's deputy director, its inner construction



was very badly damaged due to specifics in the original design. "There are two problematic areas," Ksandr explained, "first, the horse's legs, which contain support structures, saw a lot of condensation and freezing of water over the years, cracking the sculpture's surface. The other is that the statue itself is made up of thirty-nine separate bronze plates, joined by steel screws from 1950 which are now heavily rusted." After repairs, Ksandr said, the statue is to be returned to its appointed spot.¹¹

On October 8, 2005, Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek held a ceremony at Zizka's statue marking the 581st anniversary of the Hussite general's death. His remarks suggested a new ideological context for Zizka's victory. Paroubek expressed concern about government corruption, shady business practices, and organized crime plaguing the Czech Republic following the disappearance of communism. Paroubek held up Zizka as a moral exemplar who fought selflessly against institutional greed and immorality. "We Czechs, who have an unshakeable Hussite belief in human brotherhood, dignity and social justice in the very foundations of our traditions," declared Paroubek, "must stand up to ... aggressiveness and malice impelled by the thirst for money."¹²

Vitkov's transformation is to be marked by an opening ceremony planned for October 28, 2009, the 91st anniversary of Czechoslovakia's independence from Austria-Hungary. As a frontispiece to an envisioned "Museum Mile" featuring national, railroad, and military

museums, Kafka's creation and Zizka's legacy will be reintegrated into the larger context of Czech history—as freely constructed by the Czechs themselves. ←

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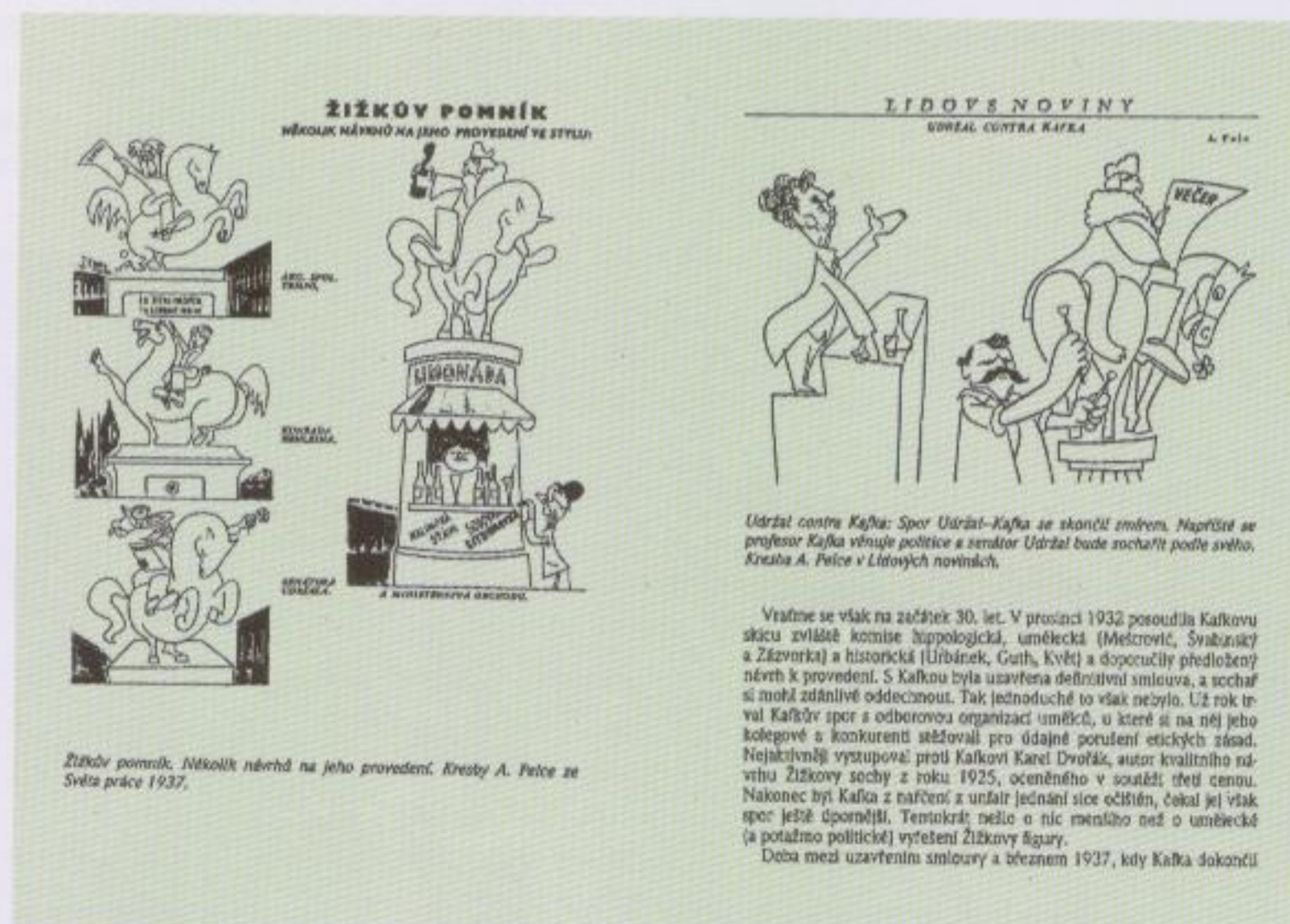
1. According to a 2001 census, 59% of Czechs considered themselves agnostics, atheists, nonbelievers or unaffiliated with any organized religion. The 2005 Eurobarometer poll found that 35% of Czechs stated they did not believe in God, spirit, or life forces and only 19% claimed to believe in God, surpassing in Europe only Estonia's 16%. These statistics are distinct from Slovakia, where 69% of the

population identify themselves with Roman Catholicism.

2. Christian Falvey, "Things to Think About on Vitkov Hill", Radio Prague, Feb. 22, 2009.
3. John Sherrill Houser's *Don Juan de Oñate* in El Paso (c. 2007) and Enrico Chiaradia's *Victor Emmanuel II* in Rome (c. 1906) are both over 11 meters high.
4. Zdenek Hojda and Jiri Pokorny, *Pomníky a Zapomínky* [Monuments and Forgetting] (Prague: Paseka, 1996), 155.
5. Marie Klimsová, "Czechoslovak Public Sculpture and its Context from 1945 to the 'Realizations' Exhibit, 1961," in *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945–1968*, ed. Charlotte Benton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 35–6.
6. Oklahoma State University, Department of Animal Science, "Noric," <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/horses/noric/index.htm> (accessed Apr. 17, 2009).
7. Christopher Gravett, *German Medieval Armies 1300–1500* (Oxford: Osprey, 1985), 16.
8. Jaroslava Gregorova, "Bohumil Kafka," Radio Prague, Feb. 23, 2006.
9. Kimberley Ashton, "New Life Planned for Vitkov Hill," *Prague Post*, May 30, 2007; "National Memorial at Vitkov," Prague.net, <http://www.prague.net/vitkov-monument> (accessed Dec. 4, 2008).
10. Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 276–7.
11. Jan Velinger, "Vitkov Memorial to House Museum Dedicated to Czechoslovakia's Turbulent History" July 31, 2007.
12. Kristina Alda, "Praguescape: Monumental Transformations," *Prague Daily Monitor*, Nov. 13, 2007.

←
Billboard detailing the the Vitkov monument's renovation. February 22, 2008. Prague. Photo: Victor Verney.

← ←
Soviet-style bas-reliefs were removed from the Vitkov monument's doors as part of the site's renovation. Prague. February 22, 2008. Prague. Photo: Victor Verney.



Artist Antonin PELC mocked the endless arguments by Czechoslovak politicians about what Bohumil Kafka's statue should look like. On the left, he satirizes the self-interested suggestions of Jiri Stribrny (using it to promote his own business) and Konrad Hejnen, and he ridicules Frantisek Urdzal's preference for a saintly Zizka carrying a Bible. The larger cartoon at right sarcastically suggests that the Minister of Commerce might instead prefer a statue that could serve as a money-making refreshment stand. From: *Pomníky a Zapomínky*.