

Janez Janša

Das KAPITAL

Attracting six million visitors a year, Prague, the modern day capital of the Czech Republic, is one of the hot destinations for cultural tourism. Its appeal lies not only in its Habsburg history and its magical aura, but also in its more recent past: the so-called Prague Spring in 1968, when an extraordinary period of liberalization was bloodily repressed by the troops of the Warsaw Pact. In the capitalist democracies the martyrs of the moment were viewed as heroes, including Alexander Dubček, leader of the reformists, and the student Jan Palach, who burn himself to death on 16 January 1969 in Wenceslas Square in an act of political protest.

Given these circumstances, on 7 October 2006 the tourists in Wenceslas Square were probably not overly surprised to see the performer Mare Bulc staging Palach's spectacular suicide in typical street artist style. They would however have been struck by some of the details orchestrated by the Slovenian artist Janez Janša. The performer was up on a pedestal, holding a remote control which controlled both the movements of a toy tank, and a fan hidden inside the pedestal. There was a little camera mounted on the tank to film the action, along with the logo of the performance, which was entitled *Das KAPITAL*. The fan started up as soon as the tank passed over a large map on the ground representing the territory of the Czech Republic, at which point fabric flames rose up, celebrating Palach's martyrdom. Clearly, in Janez Janša's remake Jan Palach is no longer protesting against the invasion of Marx's *Capital*, but capital in general, which is transforming the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. It does this by adopting a language that addresses tourists (the living, omnipresent symbol of this invasion) and means (toys and technology) which are also emblematic of the new invasion. In a single gesture, the city's history is vulgarized and abridged for the tourists while at the same time being used symbolically to combat its present.

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