

*Frum: 'It will recommit
all of Canada to the
principles of liberty
and dignity'*

ISSUES

A MONUMENT TO OPPRESSION



ABSTRAKT STUDIO ARCHITECTURE

The winning design for Canada's new monument to the victims of communism, to be built in Ottawa.



DAVID FRUM

The federal government has approved a design for Canada's monument to the victims of communism. That monument has sparked controversy from the very start, and as it moves from concept to plan, the controversy has intensified. Here's why the critics are wrong.

Monuments matter to a capital city. Monuments give that city its meaning. Monuments express shared experiences and declare high national values. Millions of Canadians either fled communism, or are descended from someone who did. Their sufferings, their losses, their memories are as central to the Canadian story as the hardships of the first settlers of New France, the arrival of the Loyalists, and the battles of 1812. When their story is honoured in Canada, that same honour also recommit all of Canada to the principles of liberty and dignity that opposed communist oppression.

The great Czech novelist Milan Kundera wrote, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." In the places where the crimes of communism occurred, power continues to impose forgetfulness. Unlike democratic Germany, which has fearlessly faced its own history, countries like Russia and China and Vietnam

refuse to acknowledge theirs. Even many democratic nations are reluctant to memorialize those crimes lest they offend the successors of the perpetrators. In this landscape of denial and evasion, Canada proposes to erect a rare symbol of remembrance, in a place where every visitor to Canada's capital will see it.

Even now, some still hesitate to condemn communism outright. While they are ready to concede that excesses occurred at certain times and in certain places, they are reluctant to blame communism as such for the deaths, exile

those over office space. Add parking to the mix, and watch things really get ugly.

The Federal Court of Canada could be located elsewhere, of course. But proponents of the courthouse plan argue that moving it will mar the symmetry of Canada's emerging "judicial triad." The Supreme Court is flanked by a judicial office building on one side; the principles of urban design require an equal and opposite judicial office building on the other.

Urban design is important. But design for what? Even though the Place de la Concorde forms an exact perfect balance across the Seine to the French National Assembly, the Parisians have declined to build a parliamentary office building and accompanying garage on the site. The French understand that a great city is made great by its places of memory as well as by its structures. Ottawa, abundant in government office buildings, is poor in such places of memory.

I served on the jury that recommended the winning monument design. All the jurors recognized that the winning concept contained many significant internal challenges, including the threshold question: Can it really be built on the stated budget? Yet at the same time, the majority of jurors recognized in the winning design a rare ambition and clarity about the human catastrophe that claimed victims from Kronstadt to Tiananmen Square, from Vilna to Vietnam, and beyond, over nearly a century — and still counting. It's a project — and a commitment — in which Canadians should take great pride.

National Post

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Millions of
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and suffering of tens of millions of people.

Others — and this is the source of the most intense criticism of the plan — concede the merits of some monument, while objecting to the placement and design of this one. The government has selected a large plot of ground, fronting on to Ottawa's Wellington Street, south and west of the Supreme Court of Canada. This site had previously been assigned to a new building for the Federal Court of Canada and an accompanying garage.

As that great observer of government, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, once quipped: The nastiest government fights are



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CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

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