

How We Sold the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia for Plastic Shopping Bags

By [Andre Vltchek](#)

Global Research, June 23, 2020

[China Daily](#) 19 June 2020

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [History](#)

For months, this has been a story that I have wanted to share with young readers in Hong Kong. Now it seems to be the really appropriate time, when the ideological battle between some West superpowers and China is raging, and as a result of it, Hong Kong and the entire world is suffering.

I want to say that none of it is new, that the West superpowers already destabilized so many countries and territories, brainwashed tens of millions of young people.

I know, because in the past, I was one of them. If I weren't, it would be impossible to understand what is now happening in Hong Kong.

I was born in Leningrad, a beautiful city in the Soviet Union. Now it is called St. Petersburg, and the country is Russia. Mom is half-Russian, half-Chinese, artist, and architect. My childhood was split between Leningrad and Pilsen, an industrial city known for its beer, at the Western extreme of what used to be Czechoslovakia. Dad was a nuclear scientist.

The two cities were different. Both represented something essential in the Communist planning, a system that you were taught, by the Western propagandists, to hate.

Leningrad is one of the most stunning cities in the world, with some of the greatest museums, opera and ballet theaters, public spaces. In the past, it used to be the Russian capital.

Pilsen is tiny, with only 180,000 inhabitants. But when I was a kid, it counted with several excellent libraries, art cinemas, an opera house, avant-garde theaters, art galleries, a research zoo, with things that could not be, as I realized later (when it was too late), found even in the US cities of 1 million.

Both cities, one big and one small, had excellent public transportation, vast parks, and forests coming to its outskirts, as well as elegant cafes. Pilsen had countless free tennis facilities, football stadiums, even badminton courts.

Life was good, meaningful. It was rich. Not rich in terms of money, but rich culturally, intellectually, and healthwise. To be young was fun, with knowledge free and easily accessible, with the culture at every corner, and sports for everyone. The pace was slow: plenty of time to think, learn, analyze.

But it was also the height of the Cold War.

We were young, rebellious, and easy to manipulate. We were never satisfied with what we were given. We took for granted everything. At night, we were glued to our radio receivers, listening to the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and other broadcasting services aiming at discrediting socialism and all countries which were fighting against Western imperialism.

Czech socialist industrial conglomerates were building, in solidarity, entire factories, from steel to sugar mills, in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. But we saw no glory in this because Western propaganda outlets were simply ridiculing such undertakings.

Our cinemas were showing masterpieces of Italian, French, Soviet, Japanese cinema. But we were told to demand junk from the US.

The music offering was great, from live to recorded. Almost all music was, actually, available although with some delay, in local stores or even on stage. What was not sold in our stores was nihilist rubbish. But that was precisely what we were told to desire. And we did desire it, and copied it with religious reverence, on our tape recorders. If something was not available, the Western media outlets were shouting that it is a gross violation of free speech.

They knew, and they still know now, how to manipulate young brains.

At some point, we were converted into young pessimists, criticizing everything in our countries, without comparing, without even a tiny bit of objectivity.

Does it sound familiar?

We were told, and we repeated: Everything in the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia was bad. Everything in the West was great. Yes, it was like some fundamentalist religion or mass-madness. Hardly anyone was immune. Actually, we were infected, we were sick, turned into idiots.

We were using public, socialist facilities, from libraries to theaters, subsidized cafes, to glorify the West and smear our own nations. This is how we were indoctrinated, by Western radio and television stations, and by publications smuggled into the two countries.

In those days, plastic shopping bags from the West became the status symbols! You know, those bags that you get in some cheap supermarkets or department stores.

When I think about it at a distance of several decades, I can hardly believe it: Young educated boys and girls, proudly walking down the streets, exhibiting cheap plastic shopping bags, for which they paid a serious amount of money. Because they came from the West. Because they were symbolizing consumerism! Because we were told that consumerism is good.

We were told that we should desire “freedom”. Western-style freedom.

We were instructed to “fight for freedom”.

In many ways, we were much freer than the West. I realized it when I first arrived in New York and saw how badly educated local children of my age were, and how shallow their knowledge of the world was; and how little culture there was in regular midsize North

American cities.

We wanted, we demanded designer jeans. We were longing for Western music labels in the center of our LPs. It was not about the essence or the message. It was form over substance.

Our food was tastier, ecologically produced. But we wanted colorful Western packaging. We demanded chemicals.

We were constantly angry, agitated, confrontational. We were antagonizing our families.

We were young, but we felt old.

I published my first book of poetry, then left, slammed the door behind me, went to New York.

And soon after, I realized that I was fooled!

This is a very simplified version of my story. Space is limited.

But I am glad I can share it with my Hong Kong readers, and of course, with my young readers all over China.

Two wonderful countries which used to be my home were betrayed, literally sold for nothing, for pairs of designer jeans, and plastic shopping bags.

The West celebrated! Months after the collapse of the socialist system, both countries were literally robbed of everything by Western companies. People lost their homes and jobs, and internationalism was deterred. Proud socialist companies got privatized and, in many cases, liquidated. Theaters and art cinemas were converted into cheap secondhand clothes markets.

In Russia, life expectancy dropped to African sub-Saharan levels.

Czechoslovakia was broken into two parts.

Now, decades later, both Russia and Czechia are wealthy again. Russia has many elements of a socialist system with central planning.

But I miss my two countries, as they used to be, and all surveys show that the majority of people there miss them too. I also feel guilty, day and night, for allowing myself to be indoctrinated, to be used, and in a way to betray.

After seeing the world, I understand that what happened to both the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia also happened to many other parts of the world. And right now, the West superpowers are aiming at China by using Hong Kong.

Whenever in China's mainland, whenever in Hong Kong, I keep repeating: Please do not follow our terrible example. Defend your nation! Do not sell it, metaphorically, for some filthy plastic shopping bags. Do not do something that you would regret for the rest of your lives!

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He has covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. He is the author of 20 books including “China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, and “China and Ecological Civilization”.

The original source of this article is [China Daily](#)
Copyright © [Andre Vltchek](#), [China Daily](#), 2020

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Andre Vltchek](#)

About the author:

Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His latest books are: “Exposing Lies Of The Empire” and “Fighting Against Western Imperialism”. Discussion with Noam Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return is his critically acclaimed political novel. Oceania - a book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book about Indonesia: “Indonesia – The Archipelago of Fear”. Andre is making films for teleSUR and Press TV. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and the Middle East. He can be reached through his website or his Twitter.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca