

## AMERICA ABROAD

Everybody speaks from his own experience. There are very few men who are able to rise above the personal experience and to see the picture of the world without strong stereotypes which are imposed or which came to us as a result of the misunderstandings. Each of us has his own picture of this or that country, taken from different sources, from different ideas.

America is a great country, it's impossible not to notice it. And everyone who even never visited the USA and had no contact with American studies has nevertheless his own idea about America.

So, I was brought up in the USSR, and even in this country where everything was simplified, the attitude to America wasn't so simple. On one hand America as declared a motherland of the sharks of capitalism, which brought the world to the abyss of grief and disaster. And some older citizens of the post-Soviet world keep for now the same point of view. They blame America, not their own leaders for their great misery and low social status in their countries. They consider, that it was much better, when the iron curtain was at the Soviet border and the Americans couldn't open their companies in the post-Soviet countries. Those people hate Coca-Cola and McDonalds' which are associated for them with their poverty and social humiliation. But neither the people nor the writers and other intellectuals are among them

inspire the public opinion and the attitude towards America.

On the other hand in the Soviet time we had a great slogan written on the wall in all education institutions. It was Lenin's words: "one can be communist only if he enriches his memories with all treasures elaborated by the humanity." And in the frame of this slogan we had to enrich our knowledge with the American intellectual treasures as well. So, the books by Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickenson, Mark Twain, Jack London and other great Americans were translated in a very good way according to the Russian school of translation. Millions copies of those books were published and sold in the USSR. So, the American authors with their strong will, great courage, and deep humanism worked against the image made by the communist leaders.

Not only were the old American authors well-known and loved by the Soviet people, but many great Americans of the XX century also were among the best read authors of the USSR. And Ernest Hemingway was the most beloved author of many Soviet people. We could regard this man to be a real phenomenon of the Soviet popular culture. Not only his books were read, but many plays based on "Farewell to arms" and "For whom the bell tolls" were performed by Soviet theatres. The walls in small Soviet apartments were decorated by Hem's portraits, and the T-shirts with his portraits were on sale at the Soviet black markets.

What else can be told about America in the Soviet Union? I was brought up not in Stalinist time, when the pressure was terrible and there were no conditions for appearance of a counter-culture. But in the époque of Brezhnev such non-official culture was possible. And in the circles of the apologists of such culture the image of America was very attractive. American music, American films, American jeans, American style (nobody in the USSR could explain, what in was) all of this was great for Soviet teenagers and older people who didn't want to accept the official line. And nobody from those circles saw America in reality. The image of the "Soviet America" was created only virtually.

And of course the Soviet ideologists were very familiar with such moods in the very vast circles of the Soviet people, and they did a lot to change it. According to the Soviet ideology there existed so called "progressive" writers and "reactionary" ones. The progressive American authors such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Capote, Salinger, Steinbeck and many others condemned America and it's reactionary policy, it's heartlessness towards common Americans, the lack of spiritual values in American life, the primitive inner world of the American capitalists.

But the time of changes came and the iron curtain on the Soviet borders was broken. The époque of reconstruction, so called Perestroika began. The first

years of the changes, the last years of the USSR the official line still existed and according to this line America out of the world gendarme quickly became the great paradise where everyone was happy, where people lived without any problems, where communism was really built.

Such a great advertisement was made to a country which not long ago was considered to be a kingdom of evil, and this advertisement was made by central medias, the organs of the Communist party, which still was at the head of the USSR. So, many Soviet people just hurried up to leave their native cities and towns for America. They used all legal and illegal opportunities to obtain the political asylum in the USA. And very soon, after disintegration of the USSR, when the economical situation became much worse as compared with the Soviet times, many people came to America to look for some opportunity to earn some money for their families left at home. Many thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians and representatives of other nations of former Soviet Union were working and are working for now in USA. Very few of them teach at the universities. Mostly they are workers, baby-sitters, servants. They wash dishes, dig ground, build roads. Many of them are working illegally. Some of them are staying in American jails. Some of my compatriots tried to organize a business with American partners, and not all of them succeeded. Also our people had seen the American families from inside and they

understood that not all of them are so happy. New experience changed the image of America in the minds of Russians, Ukrainians and others. The American paradise turned into inferno for many of my compatriots.

Not only post-Soviet people came to America, but America as well came to post-Soviet world. The Americans opened the departments of their companies in Eastern Europe, where they hire our people who are not used to work as the new owners would like. Many of our people are irritated with American style and American smiles. Why on devil are we to smile, if the life is so hard?

And for now if we summarize the different experiences in the post Soviet world, we can say that America is considered to be a country of wealthy but stupid people.

And TV creates maybe the most important and the most essential presence of America in the Eastern Europe. Each TV channel in Ukraine or Russia shows every day 5-6 American films with a lot of shooting, a lot of beating, a lot of driving. This are not the best American films. By the way in the Soviet time not numerous American films at the Soviet screens were really very good. And such TV representation also strengthens the image of America as the cruel stupid but wealthy country.

It's my first visit to the USA. But I visited Western Europe several times, and I can say, that the collective image of America, seen from the Eastern Europe, is very similar to the one, created by the Western Europe. In France I could listen many times, that only there the culture is really preserved in a good way, not in wealthy America. In Holland I could listen from different sources that Americans like only money. (As if Dutchmen don't like them.)

Yes, it's my first coming to America. I'm a very sceptic person who doubts all stereotypes. Now I'm in very intellectual circles here, and I understand very well that it's not the whole America. But being here only for two weeks, speaking to people here and watching TV here It seems to me that Europe, the Eastern as much as the Western one, has the second hand image of America. We in our country have no radio programs where only classical music is played. And when we have even intellectual TV programs, such as, for example, interviews with writers, they are always interrupted with advertisements, but not here. And of course the programs such as we assist now, cause greatly to improve the image of America for the world intellectuals, who to some extent generate the public opinion in their countries.