New American

Written by **Michael Tennant** on September 9, 2018

Former Eastern Bloc Countries to Walmart: Stop Selling Soviet-themed Goods

While millennials show how cool they are by donning T-shirts depicting Che Guevara and other communist leaders, three eastern European countries that endured decades of communist rule are pleading with Walmart to stop selling shirts with symbols of the Soviet Union because peddling the clothes "demonstrates lack of human decency."

According to the Associated Press, the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania sent a letter to Walmart on Wednesday asking the retail giant to "immediately discontinue selling" on its website red T-shirts and other apparel emblazoned with, among other things, the hammer and sickle, "CCCP" ("USSR" in the Cyrillic alphabet), and pictures of former Soviet dictators Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, and Mikhail Gorbachev.

By selling these items, the countries' leaders maintained, Walmart "participates in promotion, among its customers worldwide, of totalitarianism, human rights abuse and suppression of freedom and democracy, the values that allowed such corporations as Walmart to grow and prosper."

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were seized by Stalin's Soviet Union in 1940 under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a secret agreement with Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany. Germany occupied the nations from 1941 to 1944, after which they returned to Moscow's control until 1990, when Lithuania led the way in breaking up the Soviet Union.

In a separate letter to Walmart, Rolandas Krisciunas, the Lithuanian ambassador to the United States, reminded the Arkansas-based retailer, "Horrific crimes were done under the Soviet symbols of a sickle and hammer. The promotion of such symbols resonates with a big pain for many centuries."

"When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, hundreds of thousands of our citizens were killed, exiled, tortured, raped, separated from their families. Similar fates struck dozens of millions of other innocent people, including children, across Europe and across the globe," he added.

The Lithuanian government "estimates that more than 50,000 Lithuanians died in camps, prisons, and during deportations in 1944-1953, while another 20,000 partisans and supporters were killed in anti-Soviet guerilla fighting," reported Agence France-Presse.

"Horrific crimes were committed under the Soviet symbols of sickle & hammer — millions killed, tortured & exiled. We trust Walmart's moral stance & call to withdraw products with the symbols of mass murders," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius tweeted Wednesday, adding pointedly:

"You wouldn't buy Nazi-themed clothing, would you?"

Indeed, no respectable retailer would dare sell shirts depicting Hitler, any of his associates, or the swastika, and no one outside of a handful of fringe lunatics would be caught dead wearing them. Why, then, is it deemed acceptable to hawk merchandise celebrating an "evil empire" (to quote President Ronald Reagan) responsible for the enslavement, starvation, terrorization, and murder of millions of people over the better — or perhaps worse — part of a century?

And yet, observed AFP, "Soviet-themed merchandise ... appears to be trendy now," mostly, no doubt, among Westerners whose idea of oppression is referring to a male who claims to be female as "he." But to those with firsthand experience of genuine oppression — and to anyone with even a cursory understanding of 20th-century history — wearing a shirt with a communist symbol is an affront to all that is good and holy.

The shirts appear to be sold through Walmart.com by a third party, the AP pointed out. Nevertheless, Walmart, which as of Friday had not responded to the three countries' letters, is ultimately responsible for what is sold on its website. Moreover, penned AFP, "guidelines posted on its website prohibit the sale of products related to 'any historical or news event' that could be considered 'offensive.'"

According to *The Black Book of Communism*, as of 1997, communist governments worldwide had murdered over 94 million people. Many of these governments were funded and controlled by the Soviet Union, which was directly responsible for the deaths of 20 million of its own citizens and another one million people in Eastern Europe. Millions more lived in constant fear and grinding poverty while their leaders, who claimed to be men of the people, resided in comparative luxury.

Question for Walmart: If that doesn't qualify as an "offensive" historical event, what does?

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