



Michael wrote  
@ [2009-11-06 20:24:00](#)



***Since I spent too long writing this anyway...***

So I had been meaning to write for a while somewhere publicly about the issue of Holocaust obfuscation in Lithuania, which I became fascinated with this summer. Well, one of the other students on my trip (who happens to also be at UCLA) wrote about it online, and I wrote a fairly long, impassioned reply agreeing with him (and replying to some of the commenters criticizing him and our position).

The original article (which is also very much worth reading) is here:  
<http://thebruinstandard.com/?p=115>

My comment apparently still needs to be approved by the moderator on that site, but I'm posting it below. Just to say, though: even though I've always thought the Swarthmore activisty obsession is kind of stupid...this is an issue where I really do think some activism is worthwhile, because assuming that what we were told is the full story (some commenters there raised doubts, but I still haven't seen any actual arguments against what we learned), it's something people really should know more about...

-----  
As another student on the program with Josh this summer, and a fellow UCLA (graduate) student, I wanted to say thanks so much for posting this—I've been meaning to write something along these lines myself at some point, but haven't gotten around to figuring out where/how. But I have definitely been talking about it to anyone who will listen since I got back.

To Marlene and Connie—well, first, I am curious to know what you're referring to about Dovid Katz. My sources on this are basically the same as Josh's, so if you have reason to believe that the story we heard from Dovid Katz is false, I'd be curious to hear why. But I don't, at this point, have any reason to doubt his story. Indeed, I can point out that when I went to the "genocide museum" (a.k.a. KGB museum) in Vilnius on my own, before I knew about any of this, I was struck by the fact that it was in the style of a Holocaust museum, and even covered the time period before and after the Holocaust in which Lithuanian partisans were fighting against the Soviets, but said virtually nothing about the Holocaust. My response at that point was, OK, I'm sure living under the Soviets wasn't pleasant, and I have

sympathy for that...but for them to present it in this way, and completely ignore the true genocide suffered by the Jews of Lithuania, they can "cry me a river".

But then, to find out later that the Lithuanian government has threatened to arrest Holocaust survivors for supposed crimes against Lithuanian civilians because they fought on the side of Soviet partisans during WWII (when it seems highly likely that any Lithuanian civilians who they killed were fighting on behalf of the Nazis, and given the fact that Jews who wanted to help in the struggle against the Nazis had no choice BUT to fight with the Soviets)... To find out that the authorities are also trying to push out Rokhl Kostanian, the courageous woman who runs the only Holocaust museum in Lithuania, in the interests of replacing her with someone who will be willing to cover up the extreme complicity of Lithuanians in the Holocaust... (For example, one thing that I assume the Lithuanian government is eager to cover up: A letter from a Nazi officer to his superiors, quoted in the museum, where he says that he wants to commend the Lithuanian people for truly understanding the nature of the Jewish question, and for their eagerness to help the Germans kill Jews, even without direct orders from German soldiers.) To find out that not only did the Lithuanians treat the Nazis as liberators when they took over from the Soviets in 1941 (after a year of Soviet occupation), but that they still today are kinder to the Nazis than to the Soviets in their telling of history... To find out that they're also trying to get Dovid Katz to leave the country because he's loudly speaking out about this... All of these things totally changed my opinions of what, on the surface, is a quite beautiful and charming country.

Daiva, as far as the complicity of the Yiddish Institute: I don't know about the issue of not hiring Litvak professors, but I can tell you that the VYI seems to have been clearly complicit in suppressing discussion of this issue. As the best example, they cut out the trip to the partisan base this year, robbing us of the opportunity to hear Fania tell her story about when she was in the partisans. Luckily, as Jana mentioned above, we were able to arrange an unofficial trip on our own at the end of the program. Before that trip, I believed the official line that there wasn't much to see there, it was just a forest, and it wasn't worth driving out into the forest with a big bus. But after actually seeing what's there, and hearing what Fania had to say about her experience as a partisan...well, really, the only conclusion I can possibly draw is that they weren't taking us there because the Lithuanian government didn't want them to, because there's no way anybody can honestly say that it's "just a forest". (Here are a couple of pictures:

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=30849718&l=87f52bd65d&id=4100327>

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=30849719&l=1ffb2091ec&id=410>

0327 And, I have a few more, with some backstory, on page 10 of my complete album:

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2026698&id=4100327&l=2cab005248> )

Also, while I assume Daiva knows who Fania is, for others: Fania is an 87-year old former partisan, one of the partisans targeted by the Lithuanian government, who is on the staff as librarian of the Yiddish Institute...and also an amazing resource, as one of the last survivors from the prewar generation of Vilna Jews.

As for why the Yiddish Institute would be complicit in suppressing this issue—my understanding is that they receive funding and other support from the Lithuanian government, and to allow students to hear about any of this in officially-sanctioned events would threaten that support. (Most of us only learned about it because a courageous tour leader for one of our Jewish Vilna tours encouraged us to contact Dovid Katz directly.) So my impression, really just an educated guess, is that the leadership of the Institute is willing to accept that restriction, even if it weakens the program, because they're afraid that otherwise there wouldn't be a program at all. And really, I can sympathize that they're in a difficult position, if that is in fact the case. But if that's really the choice they face, it's awful. Of course, one may wonder why the Lithuanian government would be supporting this sort of endeavor at all if they're anti-Semites. But from what Dovid Katz told us, it's a subtle game in which they support certain things that commemorate the Jewish culture that used to be there, and they're eager to welcome foreigners from America, Israel, etc., for that purpose. But at the same time, this angers much of the Lithuanian populace, so more quietly, they do things like threatening to arrest 87 year old former Holocaust survivors for being perpetrators of genocide (even though they haven't gone after any non-Jewish Soviet partisans, and they celebrate anti-Soviet Lithuanians who also happened to be known Nazi collaborators...), and they try to perpetuate the idea, THROUGHOUT ALL OF EUROPE (see the Prague declaration), that their own suffering under the Soviets was just as bad as what the Nazis did to the Jews, which, as far as I know, is absolutely demonstrably false.

Finally, Vidas, as far as what Josh hopes to gain by this—I can't say what his motives are, but since I've also been trying to spread this, I can answer for myself, at least... In large part, our motivation is to put international pressure on the Lithuanian government to change their behavior. This isn't an issue that's been debated for decades, this is something that's happening today. They need to STOP threatening to arrest Fania and other Holocaust survivors. They need to STOP trying to equate their own suffering under the Soviets with what happened in the Jews during the Holocaust. (And, even more, we need to stop the effort of the Baltic states to get the history taught this way in all schools throughout Europe.) And finally, we want people from

around the world (including Jews who have been fooled by the Lithuanians) to STOP believing that the modern Lithuanian state is sincerely interested in commemorating the Holocaust and recognizing their own complicity in it—because clearly, they are not.

---

ADVERTISEMENT



---

**(1 comment) - ([Post a new comment](#))**



**[crystalpyramid](#)**  
2009-11-07 01:58 pm UTC ([link](#))

Oh, wow. This is fascinating and creepy and sad. The commentors on Josh's blog ask "what new information" he's bringing, but I'm pretty sure most Americans have never heard about this. And your comment adds a lot of important information, so I hope it goes through when the moderator gets around to it. Thank you so much for posting!

*Edited at 2009-11-07 02:22 pm UTC*

([Reply to this](#))

---

**(1 comment) - ([Post a new comment](#))**

---

ADVERTISEMENT

[Customize](#)