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<http://www.lrytas.lt/print.asp?k=news&id=13313628741330639138>

Jewish Activists Suggest Radicals March in Balbieriškės

by Monika Bončkutė

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Washington DC based journalist and descendant of Lithuanian Jews Olga Zabludoff is celebrating March 11 with a petition for Lithuanian ambassador to the US Zygimantas Pavilionis. She and Dovid Katz, a professor of Yiddish Studies who has lived in Vilnius for almost 13 years, have mobilized Litvaks and Lithuanians scattered around the world. The internet petition with over 2,000 signatures demands the Lithuanian government ban a march by radicals planned for March 11th in Vilnius.

Neo-Nazis Don't March in Front of the White House

Despite the fact a license was issued for the march long ago and that only several days remain until March 11, the Litvaks are resolved to fight it, using social networks and the global media.

The initiators of the petition say the propagation of Nazi ideas negatively affects Lithuania's image and distorts the meaning of Lithuanian Independence Day.

If the march does take place, the petitioners hope representatives of human rights organizations and Lithuanians opposed to the ideology of Nazism will take to the streets of Vilnius.

Both Zabludoff and Katz reject the argument that if the march were banned, it would violate the rights of radicals to express themselves.

Zabludoff says Litvaks and people of good will who support them point out that freedom of expression must be guaranteed to all, but that everything has its time and place.

Zabludoff says people with the most different beliefs live in the USA, including staunch racists and anti-Semites, but that none of the groups promoting hate are allowed to march down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC on July 4th, which is Independence Day in the US.

Suggests Using World's Tradition

She says there was a similar issue that cropped up in the history of US jurisprudence. Local neo-Nazis had expressed a desire to hold a demonstration in Skokie, Illinois, where many European Jews who had fled persecution in Europe lived.

After long legal battles, a categorical ban on allowing neo-Nazis to march under the windows of Holocaust survivors was adopted. They were, however, allowed to hold a small march in a small town far from Chicago.

Instead of allowing fascist youth use of the city's main boulevard, Zabludoff suggests Lithuania should follow the example of the world and move the march outside Vilnius city limits.

Katz, who spends almost equal time in Lithuania and the United Kingdom, agrees. He says he can't imagine a column of young Hitler sympathizers marching right in front of parliament on the Queen's birthday. "I will quote an old Litvak saying: 'If they really want to march, let them march in Balbieriškės [Yiddish Balbírishok—trans.],'" one of the leading authorities on the Yiddish language who has decided to respond to the neo-Nazis said.

Serves the Spreading of Hate

Asked what specifically makes the marchers, who call themselves patriots, neo-Nazis, Zabłudoff pointed to several features of the members of the movement.

First, during the march last year and during a similar march in Kaunas this year on [Lithuania's other Independence Day] February 16, marchers wore white armbands, a symbol of Nazi organizations [in Lithuania] during World War II, decorated with swastikas. These symbols deeply offend Jews who survived the Holocaust and are considered around the world to be the symbols of murderers.

Members of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), whom the Jewish community hold responsible for the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania, sported a variation of these armbands.

Finally, marchers also shout slogans such as "Lithuania for Lithuanians" which clearly means they think only people of Lithuanian ethnicity are desirable in our country . "As if that weren't enough, during previous marches different minorities were targeted, including Russians, Poles, Roma and gays," Zabłudoff said. This, she says, demonstrates these sorts of events aren't intended to mark Lithuanian Independence Day, but serve to spread hate.

Is the Lithuanian Government on the Side of the Nazis?

Katz is shocked and saddened that these sorts of events are encouraged and supported by the Lithuanian government. "By allowing neo-Nazis to march along Gedimino Prospect, in the very heart of the wonderful national capital, the Lithuanian government is sending a clear signal to the world that neo-Nazism is acceptable," he said. "It simple angered me to see two members of parliament at the march in Kaunas shamelessly address the march, the lot of them identifying with the symbols of the Holocaust's perpetrators here," the linguist continued.

The professor says he loves Lithuania and Lithuanians, and believes in the good will of the majority of the people. He is inclined to blame the parliament, which he says does not represent the opinion of the majority of the people, for mixing up patriotism with Nazism in Lithuania.