



Yad Vashem and the ‘two genocides’

Eastern European politics is rewriting the history of the Holocaust and threatening Yad Vashem’s mission of remembering

I REMEMBER my first visit to Yad Vashem as a 16-year-old visitor to Jerusalem. It had a profound, and indeed formative, effect on me. I left there with a badge clipped to my lapel inscribed with the motto, *zakhor*, the Hebrew word for remember.

Yet for all its splendid work, Yad Vashem whose formal title is The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, I am sorry to say, is now dramatically failing both the victims and martyrs of the country where the percentage of the Jewish community annihilated in the Holocaust was higher than anywhere else in Europe – Lithuania.

In 1998, the Lithuanian government established the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupational Regimes in Lithuania. Many eminent historians joined that commission, including former Chairman of Yad Vashem Yitzhak Arad, himself a Lithuanian Holocaust survivor. However, when Lithuanian prosecutors began a campaign against some of the surviving Jewish partisans of the anti-Nazi resistance, having the gall to investigate Arad and other former Jewish partisans for “war crimes,” the commission’s credibility came into question.

It soon became apparent that its focus was not only on academic research and education. It was clearly a political tool to equate the supposed “two genocides” in Lithuania, the Nazi and the Soviet, by downgrading the Holocaust, inflating Soviet crimes and rewriting history. Little wonder that respected historians who were members of the commission, such as Britain’s Martin Gilbert, the Hebrew University’s Dov Levin and Arad himself jumped ship.

Recently, however, the commission has reinvented itself by incredibly again recruiting Yad Vashem to sit at its table where the likes of Arad, Gilbert and Levin would not. This, as it continues its efforts to downgrade the Holocaust. For example, on the anniversary of the start of the Lithuanian Holocaust in June 1941, commission member and Lithuanian government historian Arūnas Bubnys claimed there was “no evidence” Lithuanian anti-Soviet activists were engaged in mass murder of Jews. And at a commission-initiated forum last November, when Prof. Pinchos Fridberg, a Holocaust survivor who has

dedicated his life to gaining recognition for righteous Lithuanians questioned a specific case, he was accused of “purposely” spreading “lies about the departed rescuers.”

Fridberg published an article in which he asked for answers to three questions: “How to inform all the participants of the forum that instead of objective information they were palmed off with complete nonsense? How to inform thousands of Lithuanian pupils that when

studying the Holocaust they are given myths, not facts? And, most importantly, can we trust any of the commission’s materials?” These would be good questions for Yad Vashem to ponder too. And they could start by defending Fridberg’s right to ask them.

The commission’s head, Emanuel Zingeris, is the one Jew in Europe who signed the shameful 2008 Prague Declaration, the “bible” of the “two genocides” thesis. In a recent encounter with a senior Yad Vashem educator, I asked why it allows itself

to be complicit in the commission’s double genocide purveying efforts. He replied he doesn’t get involved in politics.

But it is politics that is rewriting the history of the Holocaust and which threatens Yad Vashem’s mission of universal remembrance. It is the combined politics of the Prague Declaration, the commission and Eastern Europe’s new anti-Semitic far right that is calling for joint museums reflecting the “two genocides,” rather than museums that focus on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. And it is politics that is literally calling for a rewriting of history textbooks throughout Europe so the Holocaust is taught as part of “two genocides.”

How tragic that Yad Vashem chooses to side with the commission and not Holocaust survivor Fridberg who is fighting valiantly against the preposterous notion of “double genocide.” It seems that for some inexplicable reason they have forgotten, at least in the case of Lithuania, the motto that over 30 years since my first visit to Yad Vashem remains stuck in my mind – *zakhor*. ■

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Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius lays a wreath at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, May 19