Estonian teacher dies [7]

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Estonian teacher dies

SIR: Juri Kukk, who taught chemistry at Tartu State University from 1972 to 1979, died on March 27, 1981, in the Vologda prison camp north of Moscow. Jailed for peaceful human rights activities, he was on a hunger strike, which the Soviet authorities ignored until one day before his death.

In temporary collusion with Hitler, Stalin occupied Estonia in 1940, seven weeks after Kukk was born. In 1972 Kukk became senior instructor of chemistry at Tartu University, which continues to give instruction in Estonian, a Finnic language not related to Russian. Juri Kukk taught basic chemistry and physics research methods, supervised student laboratory work, and prepared a set of basic chemistry exercises. In 1975 he was sent to France to do research on electrochemistry, a topic on which he has at least six research papers. Later on he resigned from the Communist Party. In the eyes of the Soviet regime, that made him unfit to teach chemistry; in September 1979 he was prohibited from teaching or doing research.

Kukk also asked to be relieved of Soviet citizenship and be allowed to emigrate. The Soviets refused. Kukk subsequently protested the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and had talks with a U.S. newsman. Permanently jailed from March 1980 on, he started a hunger strike in November, was sentenced to two years for "slander[ing] the state," and was hospitalized one day before his death. His wife Silvi was allowed to attend the burial into a nameless grave carrying his prisoner number. She was not allowed to take Juri's body back to Estonia. Their son Andres was 12 and their daughter Lis was eight.

Last October several thousand Estonian students demonstrated peacefully against Soviet occupation of Estonia.

Rein Taagepera
Professor, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine

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