

For New Jersey Newsroom

Sunday, March 16, 2014 (approximately 5:30 pm)

Jackson, New Jersey

**Lithuanian-American Community
Protests Lukoil and Putin**

By Bill Milbrodt

I was riding with my stepson, Chris, this evening after an "Asian Fusion" lunch at Wok n Roll in Jackson. We stopped at the Barnes & Noble cafe in Howell for a couple of drinks, then a quick visit to the Howell Walmart. Done for the day, we headed home.

Where Bennetts Mills and County Line roads intersect, Chris stopped for a red light -- And there on the sidewalk across from us, were about 10 people holding colorful homemade placards. It definitely wasn't a high school car wash to raise money for team uniforms. And it wasn't volunteer firefighters or rescue squad members drumming up money for new equipment.

I leaned forward for a closer look as we turned the corner. "Stop Putin" read one of the placards with a hand-drawn stop sign on it. Damn! I didn't have my camera. But I did have my iPhone.

"I think it's a protest against Russia invading Ukraine," I said,

"Let's check it out." Chris' response: "Cool." We made the first available U-turn, headed back, and parked in a lot directly across from the protesters. Chris minded the car. I ran across the street.

It turns out that there's a Lithuanian community in Jackson. It's members were indeed protesting against Russia and Putin at the Lukoil gas station. Lukoil is, after all, Russia's largest oil company. Based on information from the Lukoil web site and Wikipedia, Lukoil is the world's second largest publicly traded-oil producer and refiner in the world, second only to ExxonMobil.

One man told me, "We are Lithuanians who support Ukrainians and we are against Putin." This was the Central New Jersey Chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community. Rasa Miliute is president. They were Lithuanians standing up for Ukraine because, as one of the women said, "We don't want it to be invaded and to disappear because if Putin gets away there, where does he go next?"

Well, they may be Lithuanians but it doesn't get more American than slamming together a bunch of signs and letting your grievances be known. Here, arguing about our differences is a way of life. We do it constantly and we're protected: The Jackson police even had a patrol car parked nearby to make sure nobody bothered the protesters -- and to make sure the protestors did not display any signs large

enough to obstruct the views of drivers. But, in Russia, it seems that things are a bit different.

What do the people of Jackson think? From what I can tell, they're with these very American Lithuanians. Driving by and stopped at the light, they raised fists, shouted words of support, and snapped photos. I also noticed that they didn't buy a drop of gas at Lukoil in the 45 minutes Chris and I were there. All the while, the Sunoco station across the street enjoyed a steady flow of cars.

What's the bottom line? In Russia, it's iffy. But here, we should keep arguing. If you don't like something, make a stink. It's your right. And above all, make sure you vote.

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Video Link:

<http://youtu.be/5DOSTSyTwwg>