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# Schism and Suppression: Early Threats to the Esperanto Language, and Resulting Impacts on International Acceptance

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## Schism and Suppression: Early Threats to the Esperanto Language, and Resulting Impacts on International Acceptance

The constructed language of Esperanto, created by Polish linguist Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof in 1887, was founded with the intention of facilitating global peace and unification. Due to the mission and philosophy of the language, known as Esperantism, Zamenhof's invention gained popularity among political reformers and communities facing religious discrimination. Aiming to resolve conflict through common language, Esperantism inspired hope amidst the increasingly oppressive social and political climate present in Eastern Europe and Russia during the early 1900's. This paper explores the contributing factors to Esperanto's decline, and the impact of internal conflict, political affiliation, and religious significance on efforts to achieve universal acceptance.

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March 20, 2022

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“On a neutral language foundation, understanding one another, the people shall form in concert, the great family circle.”<sup>1</sup> This excerpt from *La Espero*, the Esperantist national anthem, captures the essence of a mission to achieve universal union through common language.<sup>2</sup> Such was the goal of Ludovic Lazarus (L.L.) Zamenhof, Polish ophthalmologist and linguist, who sought to bridge cultural misunderstanding through the creation of a universally accepted language, Esperanto. Zamenhof’s invention gained both social and political traction in the early 1900s, and hope for its universal adoption lasted into the 1940s. Though the many loyal followers maintained hope for success, the movement quickly fell victim to the very hatred and conflict that it wished to fight against. Esperantist populations were placed under constant scrutiny due to the rise of Western Russian *pogroms*, antisemitic acts of terror, and the Holocaust, during which many European Esperantists perished due to the language’s affiliation with both Judaism and Socialism.<sup>3</sup> Schisms between Esperantist communities proved that even with a common language, Esperanto could not evade the divisions of humanity. To achieve a “neutral language basis”, Zamenhof sought to institute Esperanto as an official second language across the globe.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate failure of Esperanto to be adopted as a second language, and its imminent decline, can be attributed to three primary factors: the rise of antisemitism in Eastern Europe from 1903-1907 in the midst of the ongoing Russian Revolution, internal strife within the Esperantist community due to reformation efforts, and censorship due to an affiliation with rising socialist and anarchist thought. Though the potential of a unifying language was promising, the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoghegan, Richard H. *Grammar and Exercises of the International Language Esperanto*. Adapted from the French of Louis De Beaufront. England: Review of Reviews" Office, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lins, Ulrich. "Esperantists in the Great Purge." In *Dangerous Language — Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, 17-28.

<sup>4</sup> Privat, Edmond. *The Life of Zamenhof: Translated, from the Original Esperanto*. Esperanto Press, 1963, 72.

downfall of Esperanto demonstrates that the mere commonality of communication is not powerful enough to resolve all hatred and conflict.

The driving force behind Esperanto's creation can be traced to L.L. Zamenhof's childhood years in Bialystok, Poland in the Grodno province, under hard-fisted Tsarist rule. Bialystok's population was overwhelmingly Jewish as a result of Pale of Settlement laws within Russia. These laws, established in 1791 by Cathrine II, strictly defined lines of territory in which Jewish people could settle.<sup>5</sup> Thus, within the predominantly Orthodox Christian population of the Russian Empire in the early 1860s, cities within Pale-administered territories such as Bialystok were roughly 69.8%<sup>6</sup> Jewish in population, "as compared with 4.13% for the whole Russian Empire"<sup>7</sup>. Zamenhof, in a letter to Ukrainian Esperantist Nikolai Borovko 1895, expresses "this place where I was born and spent my childhood gave the direction to all my future endeavors...In Bialystok the population consisted of four diverse elements: Russians, Poles, Germans, and Jews; each spoke a different language and was hostile to the other elements."<sup>8</sup> An early exposure to such divisions led Zamenhof toward a search for a unifying force to extend the barriers of differing tongues. "In this town, more than anywhere else, an impressionable nature feels the heavy burden of linguistic differences is the...main cause that separates the human family and divides it into conflicting groups."<sup>9</sup> In 1873, Zamenhof moved to a Jewish quarter of Warsaw, Poland, where he first began to create his language, which later became Esperanto.<sup>10</sup> Zamenhof's efforts began as a juvenile project, yet soon grew to larger ambitions despite backlash from family, who urged him to abandon his efforts and pursue ophthalmology. George Alan Connor

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<sup>5</sup> *The Pale of Settlement*. Facing History and Ourselves. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2022, from <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/image/pale-settlement>

<sup>6</sup> Klibanski, Bronia. "Bialystok, Poland." *Bialystok*, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bialystok](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bialystok).

<sup>7</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*. Routledge and Paul, 1960, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

(1895-1973), former officer of the Esperanto Association of North America notes in his work, *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*, that “the necessity of working for a living wage interfered considerably with his activities for the *Lingvo Internacia*, which was soon called ‘the Esperanto Language.’”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Zamenhof remained fixated on his linguistic work and the creation of a constructed language, aiming to form a unifying force to mend the cultural chasms that dominated his childhood.

Esperanto is a constructed language, and draws from Romance and Slavic languages such as Spanish, Russian, French, and Polish, as well as Germanic languages, German and English.<sup>12</sup> Present in Eastern Europe prior to the widespread popularity of Esperanto was Volapük, a constructed language created by German Catholic priest, Johann Martin Schleyer in 1879.<sup>13</sup> Though Volapük consisted of a series of complicated grammatical rules, and was sparsely spoken even amongst enthusiasts, its mission as a unifying language and subtle popularity (evident through the existence of language clubs and Volapük publications in the late 1880s) established the precedent for the adoption of constructed languages, and their accompanying philosophies of universal union.<sup>14</sup> While Volapük’s decline can in part be attributed to complex grammatical structure that rendered it impossible for the average learner, Zamenhof sought to emphasize ease and accessibility through his work, so that Esperanto could be a viable contender for universal understanding and fast-paced learning. His first text, *Unua Libro*, published in 1887, primarily expressed grammatical rules of the language. The text details sixteen core grammatical rules, including the notations that “every word is pronounced as it is spelt”, and that

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<sup>11</sup> Connor, George Alan. “The Genesis of Esperanto.” Essay. In *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*. South Brunswick: T. Yoseloff, 1966, 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> Connor, George Alan. *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*. South Brunswick: T. Yoseloff, 1966, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Kamman, William F. “The Problem of a Universal Language.” *The Modern Language Journal* 26, no. 3 (1942): 177.

<sup>14</sup> Connor, George Alan. *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*. South Brunswick: T. Yoseloff, 1966, 19.

“there is only one definite article, *la*, which is invariable”.<sup>15</sup> Zamenhof details; “the whole language consists, not of words in different states of grammatical inflexion, but of unchangeable words...,” thus providing the ease to aspiring speakers, that he notes Volapük lacked.<sup>16</sup> Eager to avoid the criticism of its predecessor, *Unua Libro* boasts “my whole grammar can be learned perfectly in one hour.”<sup>17</sup> Such advertised ease allowed for Esperanto’s quick rise to popularity, and Esperantist clubs and organizations soon sprung up across Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The budding language sparked interest in countries West of its Polish origins, and “in 1889, the World Language Club of Nuremberg, Germany, abandoned the use of Volapük and rallied to Esperanto...which began the publication of a monthly magazine, *The Esperantisto*.”<sup>19</sup> Similar publications soon sprung into existence in France (*L’Esperantiste*, first published in 1898)<sup>20</sup>, and gained popularity amongst intellectuals and idealists alike. On August 5th, 1905, Esperantist leaders and enthusiasts gathered in Boulogne-sur-mer, France for the first World Esperanto Conference.<sup>21</sup> The conference of Boulogne established principles for the following of both language and philosophy, which established the Esperanto language as the property of society, “neither in material matters nor in moral matters.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed for the evolution of the language beyond original principles, and allowed for Esperanto publications by the general public. This decree led to the publications of Esperanto poetry and literature, which expressed Esperanto’s versatility and viability to skeptics. The declaration further clarified the uses of the language on a universal scale, stating that it did not mean to intrude “upon the personal life of

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<sup>15</sup> Wells, J. C. (1969). *The E.U.P. concise esperanto and English dictionary*. English Universities Press, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*. Routledge and Paul, 1960, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Carus, Paul. “ESPERANTO.” *The Monist* 16, no. 3 (1906): 450.

<sup>18</sup> Frey, Holly, and Tracy v Wilson. “L.L Zamenhof and the Hope of Esperanto.” Episode. *Stuff You Missed in History Class*. iheartradio, March 29, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Connor, George Alan. *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*. South Brunswick: T. Yoseloff, 1966.

<sup>20</sup> De Beaufront, L. “Esperanto in France.” *The North American Review* 184, no. 610 (1907): 520–524.

<sup>21</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*. Routledge and Paul, 1960.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid .

peoples and in no way [aimed] to replace existing national languages."<sup>23</sup> The declaration sparked the international prospects of the language, and new organizations were soon initiated globally, including an American journal, *Amerika Esperantisto*, first published in 1906.<sup>24</sup> But while Esperanto continued to spread beyond its founding years, the language was consistently repressed by both oppressive political powers and hindered by its relationship to Judaism. Consistent battles against oppression and censorship would lay the foundations for the language to disappear from common use by the 1940s,<sup>25</sup> as conflict took hold both within and outside of the Esperanto community.

As previously noted in Zamenhof's inspiration for "a neutral language basis", both Jewish heritage and struggle played a large role in the foundation of Esperanto language and philosophy. Though the majority of the founding group of Esperantists were of Jewish faith,<sup>26</sup> this religious affiliation would eventually lead to the rejection of the language as it spread through Western Russian territories and beyond. Russian Esperantists struggled to maintain the language amidst steadily increasing antisemitism prior to the Revolution of 1905.<sup>27</sup> As revolts broke out against the Tsarist powers of Nicholas II from 1903-1905, a series of *pogroms* followed: anti-semitic acts of terror which targeted Jewish populations of Pale Settlements of Western Russia, where Zamenhof had grown up. Robert Weinberg, author of *Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa*, writes that many of the ethnic tensions present in Zamenhof's childhood fueled protests from various labor movements during the Revolution of 1905. These labor protests regressed into anti-semitic acts of terror, as "the growing visibility of Jews

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Connor, George Alan. *Esperanto, the World Interlanguage*. South Brunswick: T. Yoseloff, 1966, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Frey, Holly, and Tracy v Wilson. "L.L. Zamenhof and the Hope of Esperanto." Episode. *Stuff You Missed in History Class*. iheartradio, March 29, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Lins, Ulrich. "Esperantists in the Great Purge." In *Dangerous Language — Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Dillon, E. J. "The Esperanto Movement in Russia." *The North American Review* 185, no. 617 (1907).

enhanced the predisposition of Russians to blame Jews for their difficulties.”<sup>28</sup> While pogroms initiated by protesters killed Jewish populations by the hundreds, the opposing Tsarist government did nothing to stop the abuses. In the impending revolution, the attacks acted as a distraction against the political unrest, as both sides could lay blame on a common enemy: rising Jewish populations.<sup>29</sup> Edmond Privat, author of *The Life of Zamenhof*, notes that the government utilized ethnic tensions in Western territories to quell rising political unrest. Depicting the tactics used by the Russian government, he states; “the so-called ‘Black Hand,’ a branch of police designed for this work, sent gangs of men to...stir up pogroms...”<sup>30</sup> These police groups did not hesitate to disrupt Jewish communities. “Soon were heard the smashing of shops, pillage, and butchery.”<sup>31</sup> Early violence against Jewish populations negatively impacted the Esperantist mission, as the majority of Russian Esperantists of the time were of Jewish faith.

Anti-Jewish sentiment manifested itself both in and outside of the Esperantist community, through efforts to separate the language from its Jewish theory and philosophy, or Esperantism, which began in the 1890s. The reformation was pioneered by Louis de Beaufront, a French linguist, and member of the French Esperanto Association. Esperanto reformation efforts were in part driven by rising anti Jewish sentiments in France following the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906),<sup>32</sup> an ongoing publicized case concerning Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish member of the French army who was falsely accused of treason in 1894. Marjorie Boulton, author of *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*, notes that this scandal divided many leaders of the French Esperanto movement.

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<sup>28</sup> Weinberg, Robert. “Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa.” *The Russian Review* 46, no. 1 (1987): 55.

<sup>29</sup> Weinberg, Robert. “Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa.” *The Russian Review* 46, no. 1 (1987): 53–75. <https://doi.org/10.2307/130048>.

<sup>30</sup> Privat, Edmond. Essay. In *The Life of Zamenhof: Translated, from the Original Esperanto*. Oakville, Ont: Esperanto Press, 1963. 63-64.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “The Dreyfus Case.” *Harvard Law Review* 13, no. 3 (1899): 214–215.

Beaufront was “anti-Dreyfus”<sup>33</sup> and advocated for the removal of religious association in Zamenhof’s work in order to promote the success of the language on a purely practical basis. Instead, the success of Esperanto in France was based on the removal of Jewish relations; “the most fatal mistake that Zamenhof could have made in France was to let people know that he was a Jew.”<sup>34</sup> The birth of reformed Esperanto strove to promote its practical purposes such as its use in international relations and business agreements. In later years, antisemitism would further contribute to criticisms of Esperanto. In his 1924 work, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler acknowledges Esperanto as an instrument for world domination by Jewish peoples.

“As long as the Jew has not become the master of the other peoples, he must speak their languages for better or for worse, but as soon as these were his servants, they would all have to learn a universal language, So that by this means too Judaism could rule them more easily!”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, early distaste of Esperanto’s ties to Judaism foreshadowed future discrimination, which would lead to the mass decrease in Esperantist population due to the Holocaust. The early presence of antisemitism both in and outside of the Esperantist movement led to death, destruction, and the imminent decline of the language due to schisms that would occur due to the separation of Esperantist language from philosophy.

The messages of universal equality promoted by Esperanto caught the attention of political reformers in Western Russia. The language sparked the interest of anarchists and leaders of other movements against the Tsardom. Thus, Esperanto’s initial growth was

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<sup>33</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. “Division in France.” Essay. In *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*. London: Routledge and Paul, 1960. 65.

<sup>34</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. “Triumph.” Essay. In *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*. London: Routledge and Paul, 1960. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Lins, Ulrich. “Esperantists in the Great Purge.” In *Dangerous Language — Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017: 27.

suppressed by the Tsarist government which was eager to stamp out all opposing threats of revolution in the early 1900s.<sup>36</sup> Zamenhof had struggled to spread his language amidst heavy censorship in 1880s Russia. The censorship of Esperantist publications was lifted in the late 1890s, yet was reinstated due to an affiliation with Russian writer Count Leo Tolstoy and his anarchist beliefs.<sup>37</sup> In 1889, Tolstoy expressed support for Zamenhof's mission. Ulrich Lins notes in *The Dangerous Language—Esperanto Under Hitler and Stalin*, that “Russian Esperantists bore a distinct resemblance to the disciples of Leo Tolstoy—that is, to people who advocated non-violent resistance to wrongdoing by creative individuals equipped with a sense of religious responsibility.”<sup>38</sup> In 1894, Tolstoy partnered with Zamenhof's journal, *Esperantisto*. Zamenhof published Tolstoy's letter of support, and in turn, Tolstoy allowed the translation of several of his works into the new language. Tolstoy was granted his own column in the journal, titled *Reason and Religion*.<sup>39</sup> Lins states that the messages within this column were “anti-authoritarian,” and though a partnership with Tolstolian followers bonded two movements for international union, it saw devastating results. “In April 1895, the publication of Tolstoy's ‘Reason and Religion’ caused the censor to prohibit the further entry of the journal *Esperantisto* into Russia.”<sup>40</sup> This resulted in a significant loss of membership for the publication, as strict censors for Esperantist publications lasted until 1905. While Russian Esperantists were some of the first to accept the language, the authoritarian government created many obstacles to learning and supporting Esperantism.

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<sup>36</sup> Dillon, E. J. “The Esperanto Movement in Russia.” *The North American Review* 185, no. 617 (1907): 406.

<sup>37</sup> Lins, Ulrich. “Esperantists in the Great Purge.” In *Dangerous Language — Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*, . London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Lins, Ulrich. “Birth Pangs: The Tsarist Censor.” Essay. In *Dangerous Language -- Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

In the early 1900s, Esperantists continued to spread the language despite strict censorship by the Russian government. The language's message of unity presented a threat to the Tsardom, which relied on the individualized sects of class and ethnicity to prevent uprising.<sup>41</sup> Russian Esperantist organizations struggled to publish works amidst censorship by the Tsarist government of Nicholas II. Emilie Johnson Dillon, an Irish journalist who integrated himself within the Russian social circles of Tolstoy and Zamenhof, remarks on the nature of Tsarist censorship in 1907: "In a world where heterographs and typing machines are sold with more precaution than guns and pistols, a language in order to facilitate communications between the peoples of different tongues would naturally be treated as an invention of the Evil One."<sup>42</sup> Dillon further notes the consequences of the lack of available material for those interested in studying the Esperanto language, stating that "regarding the language as a means for hatching conspiracies against the autocracy, the Committee of Censure refused to permit Esperantist works to be printed in Russia or to be imported from abroad."<sup>43</sup> This censorship reflected the government's rejection of up-and-coming political ideals which promoted class equality within the Tsardom. "The arts of peace rarely flourish in wartime; and the Esperantist propaganda is eminently a work of peace..."<sup>44</sup> Though this core message of unity struggled to thrive in the Russian Revolution of 1905, it would later gain popularity among socialists during the Revolution of 1917.<sup>45</sup> However, this popularity within Bolshevik Russia later marked Esperanto as a language affiliated with communism.<sup>46</sup> The early censorship of Esperantist work demonstrates a pattern that would continue throughout Esperanto's rise and fall in popularity in

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<sup>41</sup> Privat, Edmond. Essay. In *The Life of Zamenhof: Translated, from the Original Esperanto*, 63–64. Oakville, Ont: Esperanto Press, 1963.

<sup>42</sup> Dillon, E. J. "The Esperanto Movement in Russia." *The North American Review* 185, no. 617 (1907): 406.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Triumph and Tragedy: Esperanto and the Russian Revolution." European studies blog. Accessed December 20, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the first half of the 20th century. While Zamenhof's ideals of unity and equality would appeal to political reformers, it would consistently face scrutiny from authoritarian and fascist governments, from the rule of Nicholas II to Stalin.

While Esperanto faced hardship due to authoritarian governments and antisemitism in Russia and France, it was met with further challenges within the language community itself. Seen through De Beaufront's support of an Esperantist reformation, many Esperantist groups supported differing ideas regarding the purpose of the language. These opinions lead to schisms within the larger Esperanto community in the early 1900s. Such divisions negatively impacted the common goal of universal adoption, as smaller, separated, groups lacked the power of a unified movement in the effort to fight for international use. As Esperanto spread beyond Eastern Russia, various clubs formed their own unique ideas about both philosophy and language, many hoping to form separate rules for the language on a national basis, which led to the clash of groups on multiple accounts. From its creation, Esperanto had faced criticism for grammatical rules which, despite their intended simplicity, were deemed confusing for containing unique words which strayed too far from the ties to preexisting natural languages, confusing new learners.<sup>47</sup> With the reformation of grammar came the reformation of philosophy. As previously noted, many French Esperantists wished to separate Zamenhof's philosophies and pleas for universal harmony from the practical language itself. Zamenhof, not one to accept such criticism, retaliated, and continued to preach the unifying goal of his language, which he called *interna ideo*.<sup>48</sup> This is evident in a speech made by Zamenhof at the Geneva Conference of 1906:

“Unfortunately of late there have been some voices in the Esperanto movement saying ‘Esperanto is only a language; avoid even privately connecting it with any kind of idea...’”<sup>49</sup> .

<sup>47</sup> Jespersen, Otto. “International Language.” *Science* 31, no. 786 (1910): 109–12.

<sup>48</sup> Boulton, Marjorie. “Geneva.” Essay. In *Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto*, 109. London: Routledge and Paul, 1960.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Zamenhof continues to note the consequences of separationist efforts, and their betrayal to the founding message of Esperanto, stating, “with that Esperanto, which must serve only for commercial and practical purposes, we want nothing in common”!<sup>50</sup> The result? Two separate missions which advocated for the spread of Esperanto. As further debates within the communities occurred, Esperantists continued to divide on the basis of nationality and grammatical revision. Though some of these separate communities grew significant followings in their separate entities, divisions devastated the common fight for an international language, which could have been strengthened by a sole leading group.

Amidst Zamenhof’s criticism of the neglect of *interna ideo*, many Esperanto reformists turned to create adaptations of the language with refined grammar and simplicity. The most notable of these new languages was Ido (derived from the Esperanto word for “offspring”, *idoj*).<sup>51</sup> Ido was pioneered by members of the French Esperanto Association, Louis De Beaufront and Louis Couturat in 1907.<sup>52</sup> The creation of Ido drew some skeptical Esperantists to the idea of reformation, and the language quickly rose in popularity. Danish linguist and Idist Otto Jespersen notes in his 1910 work, *The International Language*, “Ido certainly gained more followers in the first twelve months of its existence than Esperanto in the first twelve years of its life.”<sup>53</sup> The creation of Ido highlighted many of the structural issues of the Esperanto language. The concerns raised by Idists challenged Esperanto’s ability to take the world stage as a language that was easy to adopt by all peoples. The division of Idists and Esperantists was one of many schisms within the Esperantist community. After the creation of Ido, several other reformation

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Jespersen, Otto. “International Language.” *Science* 31, no. 786 (1910): 110.

<sup>52</sup> “History of the International Language Ido.” *History of the international language ido*. Accessed December 20, 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Jespersen, Otto. “International Language.” *Science* 31, no. 786 (1910): 109.

efforts, such as *Esperantido*, and *Esperanto II*, emerged.<sup>54</sup> A 1908 edition of the *British Medical Journal* depicts the conversion of Esperantists to reformation efforts, and states “there are so many other attempted reforms...In all probability Esperanto as at present constituted will soon be buried in the ashes of oblivion...”<sup>55</sup> In addition to practical uses, Idists noted that their language was easier to print than Esperanto, which contained a series of accents and specific characters which were unique to the language, and tedious to implement into literature and textbooks. Ido had essentially “fixed” Esperanto, and brought its imperfections to public light.

An edition of the *Scientific American* from June 18th, 1910, addresses the misunderstanding of Idist aims within Esperantist communities. “Some of our Esperantist friends have misunderstood the purpose of the commission, and do not fully realize the scope of the improvement which has been effected...”<sup>56</sup> The paper then notes the criticisms of Jepserson, who describes the various downfalls of Esperanto, including grammar that is “impractical” and “difficult to remember.” Jepserson further argues against Ido in his work *International Language*, in 1910. He states, “I am optimist enough to believe that the present tactics of many Esperantists will soon cease...No great invention, no scientific discovery, ever sprang into the world full-fledged...Yet we are to believe that Dr. Zamenhof’s invention of 1887 stands in no need of improvement in its final elements...”<sup>57</sup> Jepserson’s harsh words to the Esperantist community reflect the animosity that grew between conflicting groups as the language continued to develop. Though Esperanto populations were not largely impacted by this schism, Alan notes “This so-called perfection was only a further complication, which has developed the delay of Esperanto by causing confusion in the public mind.” Though Esperantist communities continued to further

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Horseman, Fredk. “Ido, Esperanto.” *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2497 (1908): 1472.

<sup>56</sup> “Esperanto and Ido.” *Scientific American* 102, no. 25 (1910): 498.

<sup>57</sup> Jespersen, Otto. “International Language.” *Science* 31, no. 786 (1910): 111.

their missions of a neutral language under the *interna ideo*, the divisions of Ido and other reformation efforts had made their mark, and what was once a united fight for common language had been broken. Smaller groups lacked the power of unity which a large union could have held. This is perhaps a contributing factor to Esperanto's decline, as the language struggled to overcome the continuous divisions of varying Esperantist groups and ideas.

Esperanto is a language of resilience and hope. While pogroms and censorship harmed both the lives and work of Esperantists in Western Russia from in the early 1900s, the language continued to gain an overwhelming support by those oppressed, many of them of targeted Jewish populations. In his work *Dangerous Language, Esperanto under Hitler and Stalin*, German historian and Esperantist Ulrich Lins expresses, "although Zamenhof had put Esperanto at the service of everyone, regardless of national or social background, and did not explicitly work for the support of the powerless, it was precisely these people who felt themselves specially called."<sup>58</sup> The language would continue to act as a beacon of hope for the oppressed, and prospect for unity amidst hatred and bigotry.

Despite repression, Esperantist organizations continued to grow across the globe and continued to thrive well into the 1930s until the rise of fascist powers in Russian and Germany wiped out large portions of the Esperanto populus. These powers even made direct orders to murder all living descendants of Dr. Zamenhof, who himself had perished in 1917.<sup>59</sup> Early struggles within the Esperantist movement did not kill the progression of the language. Rather, early internal conflict, antisemitism, and censorship would set a precedent for continuing

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<sup>58</sup> Lins, Ulrich. "Esperantists in the Great Purge." In *Dangerous Language — Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, 22.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

struggles of the language in the years to come, which would lead to a decline in population by the end of the 1940s.

Though Esperanto continued to thrive in practical use (as encouraged by French reformers), the hope for intercultural understanding remained, and continued to develop with the progression of the 20th century. These efforts are evident in the United States, where Esperanto was proposed to be taught in schools to bridge racial tensions in the 1920s. William Pickens (1881-1954), a renowned Black journalist and Esperantist, writes on the possibilities of Esperanto to create racial harmony within the United States in 1921. “Second, to further the cause of international peace and brotherhood. Except color, there is no greater bar to sympathy and communication among men than a difference in language.”<sup>60</sup> Pickens, who wrote on the reformation of education to teach Black history and liberation, notes that a common language could benefit the whole of the nation, and uplift Black populations. Schisms within the Esperantist community in the early 1900s demonstrate that even common language cannot prevent hatred and bigotry from taking root. Yet as Esperanto begins to make a return to the 21st century, its use to unify new political and social divisions is not unappealing.

In recent years, Esperanto has made a surprising comeback. Online language education applications such as *Duolingo* and *Learnu!*, have recently added Esperanto to their curriculum, bringing a new generation of learners to the “world interlanguage”. According to the Esperanto League of America, Esperantist clubs have been established in all 50 states, in addition to thriving communities worldwide, in countries from Brazil to China.<sup>61</sup> Though there are no exact records of the current number of Esperanto speakers, it is estimated that there are at least 100,000

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<sup>60</sup> Pickens, William. “Esperanto: The New International Language .” Accessed December 20, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> “Esperanto USA, Groups .” [*Esperanto-USA*], <https://ttt.esperanto-usa.org/eusa/en>.

worldwide, and over 1.1 million new speakers who have explored the language through online platforms.<sup>62</sup> But while grammar rules and vocabulary lessons are readily available online, platforms lack information regarding Esperanto's history, mission, and philosophy.<sup>63</sup> Advocates for *interna ideo* would argue that this lack of philosophy in modern education is counterproductive to the spread of unity for which the Esperanto language stands. Perhaps with the integration of both original Esperanto philosophies and texts with modern resources, Esperanto will make a triumphant return to popularity, and help break down current racial and political conflicts as William Pickens once hoped. While the language of Esperanto is not likely to gain mass popularity in present day America, one can hope that the core values of language will live on into the future, and that while conflicts may not cease to exist, Zamenhof's original message of peace and equality will continue to shine for generations to come.

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<sup>62</sup> Frey, Holly, and Tracy v Wilson. "L.L Zamenhof and the Hope of Esperanto." Episode. *Stuff You Missed in History Class*. iheartradio, March 29, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Frey, Holly, and Tracy v Wilson. "L.L Zamenhof and the Hope of Esperanto." Episode. *Stuff You Missed in History Class*. iheartradio, March 29, 2021.



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