

*Revolutionary Social Democracy* concludes by arguing that the cry for “all power to the soviets” never meant a socialist revolution but at best could provide the impetus for one that would be international in scope. More than a century on, the world is paying an ever-bigger price for “the borderlands . . . constituting more of a barrier than a bridge” (393) to the revolution’s spread. The depredations of capitalism against which revolutionary social democrats fought in imperial Russia have only intensified and expanded, threatening nothing less than the survival of the species.

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***Esperanto and Languages of Internationalism in Revolutionary Russia.*** By Brigid O’Keeffe, London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. xii, 252 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$115.00, hard bound.  
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Today social media allows us to traverse borders with relative ease. In the early twentieth century, Soviet advocates of Esperanto did so as well by taking advantage of new technologies like radio and tried-and-true pen and paper. As Brigid O’Keeffe reminds us in her superbly researched book, such interactions promised them “a salve for their stunted wanderlusts,” but also “a means to a higher end—that is, effective cultural diplomacy from below” (122). The study masterfully displays the deep-seated commitment of Esperantists in the Russian empire and USSR to an adaptable vision of “cosmopolitan modernity” embodied by this language of their choosing.

One of the most compelling aspects of O’Keeffe’s account is her telling of the creation of Esperanto. It was formulated by Lazar Zamenhof, a Jewish doctor and native of Białystok, then in the Russian empire. The son of a self-taught teacher of German, Zamenhof was a polyglot by training and necessity. In a mixed, predominantly Jewish-Polish region, Zamenhof learned multiple languages to navigate relations with his neighbors and the Russian-faced state. Although O’Keeffe underscores that multilingualism was an advantageous skill for the residents of Białystok, Zamenhof came to believe that linguistic difference divided humankind and enabled internecine violence. Fascinated with languages at an early age, he developed an auxiliary international language in 1887 to secure communal harmony. Thus, Esperanto was born in the specific circumstances of “an empire in crisis” (16). Zamenhof found a receptive audience within the Russian Empire and beyond among those similarly devoted to solidarity between all peoples.

The construction of a real, if often epistolary, Esperantoland was primarily an elite or middle-class project. O’Keeffe stresses that Esperantists viewed themselves as patriots of their homelands who simultaneously embraced an ecumenical devotion to cooperative exchange. While this seems a little too ideal—tensions between these two attachments must have arisen—it is clear that many Esperantists around the globe believed this orientation to be valid. When the Bolshevik Party gained power in 1917, Esperantists in the former Russian empire were forced to abandon a commonly accepted pretense to political neutrality. A newly formed Union of Soviet Esperantists (SEU) now claimed that Esperanto was intrinsically a proletarian language because of the supposed ease by which it could be learned and placed in the service of the international working class. Attempts by SEU leaders to get the Comintern, a presumably natural supporter, to adopt the language for its conference proceedings were met with apathy or irritation.

Bolshevik leaders and even Russian educational officials refused to institute the costly, far-reaching measures that were necessary to encourage fluency in Esperanto. Other political and economic issues logically took priority. The most visible success of the Soviet Esperantists was their hosting of a 1926 congress for the Worldwide Anational Association (SAT). The foreign, leftist delegates who attended wrote generally favorable stories of their visit to Leningrad. However, their purportedly unmediated conversations in Esperanto with Soviet counterparts gave political authorities pause. Furthermore, despite the lofty dreams of SEU members, the organization's leaders never convinced the Soviet government that Esperanto had any real advantage, even as a preparatory tongue for the universal communist language anticipated by the linguist Nikolai Marr. This official disregard might suggest Esperanto's irrelevance, but O'Keeffe convincingly demonstrates that the international ties held by Soviet enthusiasts were significant enough to trigger repressive action by the xenophobic Stalinist state of the 1930s.

What is remarkable is that this international language was devised in the Russian empire's western borderland because of a perception that ethnic conflict stemmed from linguistic diversity. This motivation tends to get lost in the history that follows Esperanto's design. Presumably this is because the prevailing Esperantist concern came to be a rupture between states. But the Soviet government, whose favor the SEU so desperately sought, was in fact preoccupied with multilingualism within its own borders. Many of the rank-and-file activists whom O'Keeffe references resided in Ukraine, and some were teachers or provincial youths. They advocated for Esperanto while confronting an alternative, state-sanctioned solution to linguistic alienation: an overturn of Russian dominance and the promotion of a universal Ukrainian language alongside national minority tongues. The study misses an opportunity to investigate this dilemma, as well as to deeply explore the self-fashioning of cosmopolitanism amidst ethnic heterogeneity. Regardless, it is undoubtedly a work of considerable achievement. The book is an eloquent, essential reading of an ambition produced not by a passing fancy, but by widely shared, timely regard for global engagement and peace.

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***Kampf um die Brester Festung 1941: Ereignis—Narrativ—Erinnerungsort.*** By Christian Ganzer. *Krieg in der Geschichte (KRiG)*, vol. 115. Paderborn, Germany: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, an imprint of Brill Deutschland, 2021. xi, 490 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. €89.00, hard bound.  
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Russian President Vladimir Putin's colonialist invasion of Ukraine has made Christian Ganzer's critical dissertation on a reportedly "key symbol of Soviet resistance" ([www.belarus.by/en/travel/belarus-life/brest-fortress](http://www.belarus.by/en/travel/belarus-life/brest-fortress)) and on its Soviet and Russian propagandistic legacy particularly timely. So too the statement by Belarus President Aliaksandar Lukashenka, Vladimir Putin's ally, in late June, 2022, underscoring a long-term "kinship" between their countries: "Minsk must be ready for anything . . . to defend our fatherland from Brest to Vladivostok" (Emphasis added: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2022/06/26/putin-promises-belarus-nuclear-capable-missiles-to-counter-039aggressive039-west>).

Ganzer's *Kampf um die Brester Festung 1941* (Battle for the Brest Fortress 1941), published in 2021, microscopically focuses on the above-mentioned "Soviet resistance"