

Abdu'l-Bahá's many praises of Esperanto and of Dr. Zamenhof, explained that Dr. Zamenhof had exemplified the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh and because of this was a true Bahá'í, and that Bahá'ís all over the world honored Dr. Zamenhof "as an ideal model and loved him as 'majstro' ('master') and brother." FOOTNOTE: This was no exaggeration at the time, and the Bahá'í attitude toward Esperanto has always been one of official support and encouragement, although, with the exception of the Persian Bahá'í communities who responded to Abdu'l-Bahá's direct request to them, the Bahá'ís have never seriously attempted to carry out Abdu'l-Bahá's basic guidance regarding this language, namely, to "introduce it into the schools as an introduction to the oneness of humanity." (See, Jeanne Bolles, "The Bahá'í Movement and Esperanto," *Star of the West*, Vol. 11, # 17, Jan. 19, 1921, pp. 287-291.) This was a practical piece of guidance which, if it had been carried out and generalized, could have made America's schools over the decades a far much better source of world citizenship and world vision than they have been.

In any case, Lidia and Martha met again a year later, and Martha felt that Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá had guided her to Lidia. Lidia, who had been raised in a universalistic and largely secularized atmosphere, was at first sceptical. But Martha's prayers and patient personality eventually had their effect on Lidia's own, and after the two had lived together for a number of months (Martha to improve her Esperanto and Lidia to improve her English), Lidia began to see the Bahá'í model of progressive revelation and God's own universality as the extension and fulfillment of her own beliefs and identity. She became "profoundly convinced" (as have many other Bahá'ís who have delved into Esperanto) that "Esperanto was created directly under the influence of Bahá'u'lláh, although the author of the language did not know it." (i> p. 71.)

After becoming a Bahá'í, Lidia of course encountered the disapproval of some members of her own family and also of some Esperantists who wanted the issue of inter-communication delinked from the issue of religious affiliation. (There were significant movements for Esperanto in socialist quarters, which tended toward anti-religious sentiments.) She also encountered the scepticism of some Bahá'ís about Esperanto. In later years she eventually met with Shoghi Effendi, who, although he sincerely supported Bahá'í efforts to use and publish in the language, apparently never learned it (unlike Abdu'l-Bahá, who had learned at least the basics of the language with the help of Dr. Esslemont).

At various points in her Bahá'í career she apparently weathered some spiritual crises, and if I read between the lines of Wendy's biography, probably Lidia suffered from depression -- a certainly understandable problem given her

sensitivity, her basic shyness, her ideals, and the darkness of the world surrounding her. She translated many Bahá'í writings into Esperanto (most of which unfortunately still remain unpublished).

She came to the United States in late 1937 at the invitation of the US NSA and with the encouragement of Shoghi Effendi. Her stay here was for the most part successful for both the Bahá'í and Esperanto movements, but in a year the question of immigration status arose, and the Immigration Service denied a request for an extension of stay because, in its opinion, she had "worked" in the US while on a non-working visitor's visa by having been "paid" for teaching Esperanto classes. Any competent immigration attorney could have gotten her out of this mess, and it was negligent and careless on the part of the NSA, as her sponsor, to have failed to structure her stay in the US in a way which would not have triggered these problems to begin with. (I speak here as an immigration attorney myself.) Efforts to reverse the decision of the Immigration Service produced only a small extension, and in December 1938, Lidia sailed back to Poland.

In her last years, she travelled in Poland teaching Esperanto and the Faith and producing translations of the Writings. She was eventually arrested by the Nazis because of her Jewish background, was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto, where she cared for those around her and attempted to obtain medicine and food for them. She was finally killed at the Nazi extermination camp at Treblinka some time after the summer of 1942.

I might add that Lidia's memory was honored in December 1995 at a special meeting at the US Jewish Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. which focused generally on the efforts of Esperantists to help rescue Jews during World War II from fascist and communist persecution.

One further note is Lidia's inspiration to the life and work of Roan Orloff Stone, another Bahá'í of East European Jewish background who learned Esperanto and carried on Lidia's pioneering work of translating Bahá'í writings (including Nabil's Narrative) into Esperanto. Roan was known across the United States and internationally as a Bahá'í Esperantist. She was instrumental in obtaining the approval of the House of Justice for the formation of the Bahá'í Esperanto League in the early 1970s.

I hope this terribly brief sketch of Lidia's life and efforts will begin to stimulate Irfanians into a greater appreciation of the role Esperanto played in the early Bahá'í movement and among the early heroes and heroines of the Cause. The role of Esperanto could have been much greater and much more beneficial if the Bahá'ís had simply followed Abdu'l-Bahá's advice and used Esperanto as a pedagogical tool in the schools rather than always intermixing it with the

diplomatic question of an official international language, in which Esperanto always "loses" by comparison with English. Esperanto's vocabulary, despite its great increase since the time of Abdu'l-Bahá, is still not large enough for it to serve as an official international language for specialists in many fields. As a first foreign language for children, however, Esperanto offers unparalleled benefits which Bahá'í school teachers should finally begin to start exploiting.

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