

From Revolutionary Pariah to Respected Pundit: Zinovi Peshkov and American Audiences, 1915-1917

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Abstract

This article considers a pivotal moment in the life of Zinovy Peshkov: his 1916-1917 speaking tour of the United States. Adopted by famed author Maksim Gorki, Peshkov spent much of his youth among Russian revolutionaries. Yet, he turned his back on their path when he joined the French Foreign Legion during the First World War. Combat wounds led to the loss of an arm but also to a transformation once Peshkov was sent to the United States by a French government hoping to increase American support for the Allied War effort. The advent of the Russian Revolution made Peshkov an important pundit – one with access to American politicians, businessmen, and opinion-makers – and a heroic figure in the eyes of the public.

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Alison Rowley

“It is because of my wound that I became someone.”

Zinovi Peshkov to his friend Ambassador Francis Huré¹

In September 1916, Lieutenant Zinovi Peshkov of the French Foreign Legion sailed for America. He then spent the next nine months touring the United States and Canada, all the while raising funds for the American Ambulance at Neuilly, informing the public about the fighting raging in Europe, and being feted by members of business groups and social elites. As this article will show via an exploration of press coverage of his speaking tour, Peshkov's reputation and public persona underwent quite a transformation during this time. Born Yeshua Sverdlov – brother of the arguably more famous Bolshevik – and eventually adopted by famed Russian writer Maksim Gorki, as a young man Peshkov had solid credentials within the revolutionary community, even if he was not a professional revolutionary. Yet, he ultimately turned his back on that world, with tropes associated with martyrdom and bodily suffering (he had lost an arm in combat) becoming the means toward redemption *from* his youthful contact with radical politics. In other words, he reversed the pattern that most scholars have described when studying martyrdom in the Russian revolutionary context. This difference makes Peshkov's story an interesting and unusual contribution to that literature.² His case also raises the question of whether someone had to die to be considered a martyr, and if not, how much bodily suffering was needed to ennoble a cause and win the support of others? Finally, Peshkov's reception in the United States speaks to the evolving nature of American public opinion. It shows that the days when revolutionary visitors were lionized as freedom fighters were gone,

¹ Quoted in Guillemette de Sairigné, *Pechkoff, Le manchot magnifique* (Paris : Allary Éditions, 2019), 153. Huré served as French Ambassador to Cameroon (1965-68), Israel (1968-1973), and Belgium (1970-80).

² Arguably the only other person to undergo such a radical shift away from the revolutionary world was Boris Savinkov. See Vladimir Alexandrov, *To Break Russia's Chains: Boris Savinkov and His Wars Against the Tsar and the Bolsheviks* (Cambridge: Pegasus Books, 2021). I am grateful to Ben Phillips for reminding me of this point.

replaced by a desire for a reliable ally as the country advanced along the path towards participation in the First World War.

Russian Revolutionary Martyrdom and American Audiences

“Plasticity” – a word employed by George Gilbert and Ben Phillips in their introduction to a recent collection of articles about martyrdom in the Russian revolutionary context – is the perfect way to characterize the shifting nature of martyrdom, which was a highly visible construct in fin-de-siècle political culture. As they note, “we find the term ‘martyr’ applied to individuals who took their own lives, who died of natural causes, or who suffered various kinds of hardship for the cause, but relatively few who were ‘martyred’ in a conventional sense.”³ In other words, gone were the days when martyr status could only be conferred on those who sacrificed their lives in the name of their religious beliefs. Now, to quote Valérie Rosoux, “On the political stage, the use of the word ‘martyr’ ceases to be literal and becomes metaphorical.”⁴ The life stories of the people so designated also became increasingly connected with nationalism and state-building projects. These individuals were especially useful when it came to building imaginary communities since martyr “status conferred credibility, integrity and commitment upon the subject,” and the cause for which they had suffered.⁵

Among those who suffered but did not die while trying to change Russia’s political system, we find Maria Spiridonova. A little-known Socialist Revolutionary (SR) when she attempted to assassinate General G.N. Luzhenovskii in January 1905, Spiridonova’s mistreatment at the hands of the police during her arrest and transportation to prison, as well as her bouts of serious illness during the many years she subsequently spent in incarceration, raised her to celebrity status in revolutionary circles and sealed her reputation as a martyr.⁶ On the international stage, a similar position was occupied by another SR, Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia whose advanced age won her the nickname “Grandmother of the Russian Revolution.” American audiences embraced Breshkovskaia during her 1904-05 speaking tour of the United States, and she remained in contact with key supporters from the Progressive movement for well over a decade.⁷ As these friends worked tirelessly to keep Breshkovskaia’s story in the public eye, their letters to editors and other pieces of journalistic writing consistently underscored the damaging effects that imprisonment, and later exile to Siberia, had on

³ George Gilbert and Ben Phillips, “Introduction: Political Martyrdom in Late Imperial Russia,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 102 No.1 (2024), 11.

⁴ Valérie Rosoux, “The Politics of Martyrdom,” in *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-Sacrifice*, ed. Rona M. Fields (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 84.

⁵ Gilbert & Phillips, 7.

⁶ See Sally A. Boniece, “The Martyrdom of Illness: Mariia Spiridonova in Siberian Imprisonment, 1906-1917,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 102 No.1 (2024): 98-125.

⁷ On Breshkovskaia’s speaking tour, see Jane E. Good and David R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya (1944-1934)* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1991), 78-90.

Breshkovskaia's body.⁸

These stories definitely held an appeal in the United States. Many Americans were highly critical of the Russian government at the turn of the 20th century, believing it to be oppressive and especially violent towards the empire's ethnic minorities. Events such as the Kishinev pogrom (1903) as well as the 1905 Revolution were covered extensively by US newspapers. In other words, the United States was fertile ground for garnering transnational support for revolutionary change in Russia. At least it was until perceptions began to change in the wake of the 1910 bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building as well as other acts of domestic terrorism, which created a climate of fear in the years leading up to the First World War.⁹ Episodes of pro-labor movement violence led authors and film directors, for example, to rethink their depictions of Russian revolutionaries; these shifted from being cast as martyrs and freedom fighters to being portrayed as thugs, criminals, and degenerates.¹⁰ The press joined in as well. Suddenly, immigrants from Eastern Europe were under suspicion since it was assumed that they were incapable of embracing an "American" way of life. As Krzysztof Wasilewski writes, "Based on the 'dangerous foreigner' stereotype then prevalent in American society, US newspapers ran a campaign in which even the slightest criticism of the country's economic or social system was deemed unpatriotic, treasonous, and foreign."¹¹ And it was into this changed environment that Zinovi Peshkov stepped in 1916.

Peshkov's Early Years

The young man who eventually came to be known as Zinovi Peshkov was born in 1884. The name he was given then was Yeshua Solomon Sverdlov. His family lived near Białystok, in the Polish part of the Russian empire, and Yeshua's father supported everyone, meaning his wife and their seven children, by working as an itinerant coppersmith and engraver. Yeshua's mother died when he was fifteen and the family seems never to have recovered from that blow. By the time he was 16 ½, Yeshua had caught the attention of the local Tsarist police. He had also moved out and was residing with Lidia Ivanovna Sokolova, a young woman who was one of the students Maksim Gorki supported financially

⁸ This subject is discussed in Alison Rowley, "Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity: A Case Study of Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Melanie Ilić (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7-23.

⁹ See Lew Irwin, *Deadly Times: The 1910 Bombing of the Los Angeles Times and America's Forgotten Decade of Terror* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Choi Chatterjee, "Transnational Romance, Terror, and Heroism: Russia in American Popular Fiction, 1860–1917," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 No.3 (2008), 770.

¹¹ Krzysztof Wasilewski, "The Image of Immigrants as Anarchists in the American Press, 1886–1888," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 23 No.2 (2017), 371.

in their educational endeavours.¹² Meeting Gorki likewise had a profound effect on Yeshua, who had never been a regular attendee at school and whose status as a Jew in a country that profoundly discriminated against minorities meant that many educational opportunities were closed to him. Gorki offered the young man a job as his personal assistant.

For the next few years, Yeshua was deeply involved in all of the writer's activities. This was a time when Gorki's literary reputation was growing at home and abroad, but so too was his involvement in revolutionary work. The latter spilled over and came to affect Yeshua as well. On one occasion, the young man was entrusted to take papers – actually some pamphlets meant to appear in the Social Democratic newspaper, *Iskra* – to Lenin.¹³ Yeshua often lived in Gorki's house, although when he did not, the police watched what he was up to closely. During one raid on Yeshua's apartment, he avoided arrest by swallowing items that would have incriminated him.¹⁴ Eventually, and evidently with Gorki's blessing, Yeshua decided to become an actor and secured a place with the prestigious Moscow Art Theatre. To get rid of the residency restrictions that he faced because he was Jewish, and hence be able to move freely to Moscow, the young man converted to Russian Orthodoxy and was formally adopted by Gorki, whose real name was Aleksei Peshkov. Henceforth, and for the rest of his life, Yeshua used the name Zinovi Peshkov.

These actions did not end the police scrutiny that he faced, however. Only a few months into his studies in Moscow, Peshkov's residence was again searched by police who suspected him of revolutionary sympathies. His roommate found Peshkov naked and unconscious on the floor after having been beaten by the authorities.¹⁵ Undoubtedly this incident factored into Peshkov's decision to leave Russia in August 1904. So too did the Russo-Japanese War. With no desire to serve in the Tsar's armed forces, Peshkov knew that a long sojourn abroad could help him avoid being conscripted.

During this unsettled part of his life when he had yet to find his true calling, Peshkov tried many kinds of employment but also appeared to be filled with wanderlust. He crossed from Finland to Switzerland before journeying to London, and then on to North America. For a time, he held a series of manual labor jobs in Canada. In Toronto, for example, he worked in a factory that manufactured leather goods, while also learning English.¹⁶ Then he moved across the border and settled in New York City where Peshkov began to do typographical work. To fill his evenings, he attended meetings hosted by Russian émigrés and was also attracted to the idea of writing some journalistic pieces, which Gorki promised

¹² Gorki, who had deep concerns about the impact of anti-Semitism in the Russian empire, paid the expenses of several Jewish students. See Tovah Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 28.

¹³ de Sairigné, 40.

¹⁴ de Sairigné, 40.

¹⁵ de Sairigné, 61.

¹⁶ Alain Dubosclard, "'Commandant' Pechkoff (1884-1966). De l'armée à la diplomatie au service des intérêts français, » *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 202-203 No.2 (2002), 245.

to have published by “Znanie,” the publishing house he had been the director of since 1902. All the while, Gorki and “Zina,” as he fondly called his adopted son, continued to correspond. (Indeed, they would do so until the writer’s death in 1936.)¹⁷

The men reunited in person on 10 April 1906 when Gorki, who was traveling with actress Maria Andreeva, arrived in New York. At Lenin’s suggestion, the writer had agreed to undertake a speaking tour in the United States. It was assumed his fame was such that he would draw large crowds and hence raise significant funds for the Bolshevik party. Peshkov, along with former members of the Bund as well as representatives of the Socialist Labor Party, were there to greet Gorki’s ship when it docked.¹⁸ In the days to come, Peshkov was charged with serving as Gorki’s secretary and translator throughout his visit to America. In that capacity, he gave an interview with *The New York Times* that outlined the writer’s planned itinerary but the paper, as well as others that picked up the story, got Peshkov’s name wrong.¹⁹ They referred to him as Nikolay Zavolsky Pieshkoff.

It is impossible to say whether this mix-up made any difference when journalists turned their focus (and pens) towards Peshkov, the now dashing Lieutenant from the French Foreign Legion, a decade or so later. But the “Zavolsky” bit is interesting, since it harkens back to a handful of articles in the American press that predated Gorki’s visit by almost a year. In early April 1905, these – all relying on the same initial wire report for their material – informed the public that the Gorki’s adopted son was not only touring North America as an emissary of the writer, but that he was there to foster the spread of socialism. This brief notice was sure to underscore the revolutionary credentials of Zavolsky (i.e. Peshkov) by noting that the Russian “government decided that Zavolsky as the adopted son of Gorky must also be a revolutionist, and he was shadowed day and night. He was smuggled out of Russia and went to London, where he was received by Prince Peter Krapotkin, the Russian literatuer [sic].”²⁰ No mention was made of Kropotkin’s anarchism; nor did the story really catch fire.

The same cannot be said of Gorki’s sojourn in the United States which garnered much more sustained interest. Once members of the press got wind of the fact that Gorki’s female companion was not his wife, a scandal erupted. Gorki and his entourage were kicked out of their hotel. In fact, they were eventually evicted from three hotels and Gorki saw many of the invitations that he had received rescinded. For instance, noted Progressive activist and campaigner for women’s rights, Alice Stone Blackwell, was scathing when she addressed the press about cancelling a Gorki-related event in Boston. “We wanted Gorky to speak at our

¹⁷ Some of their correspondence has been published, although unfortunately not any letters from the period being discussed in this article. See *Gorki et ses fils, Correspondances (1901-1934)*. Trans. Jean-Baptiste Godon (Geneva: Éditions des Syrtes, 2022).

¹⁸ Yedlin, 72.

¹⁹ “Gorky’s Adopted Son Tells of Writer’s Plans,” *The New York Times*, 8 April 1906, 4.

²⁰ “Gorky’s Adopted Son in America,” *The Daily Review* (Decatur, IL), 6 April 1905, 5. The story was also covered in “Palace of Czar Yields Two Bombs,” *The Saint Paul Globe* (Minnesota), 6 April 1905, 1; and “Gorky’s Adopted Son Touring America for Socialists,” *The Muskegon Chronicle* (Michigan), 8 April 1905, 4.

meeting in Faneuil Hall,” she said, but “since this horrid news has become known, such action on our part would mean the driving away of all Americans who love decency.” She ended by simply stating: “I don’t want to judge Mr. Gorky, but apparently his views on morality and ours somewhat differ, and consequently we must make different plans in trying to bring about the liberation of Russia.”²¹ Religious leaders were also keen to denounce the visiting Russians. At the annual convention of the American Federation of Catholic Societies, Bishop McFaul took to the podium to denounce socialism and divorce. He brought up Gorki’s private life as an example. “See him living with a woman who cannot be recognized as his wife,” he thundered, that “villain and scoundrel and polluter of womanhood would preach to us the gospel of human liberty.”²² Clearly, the Bishop had no interest in hearing anything Gorki had to say. Plans for a possible reception at the White House, to be hosted by President Theodore Roosevelt, were also cancelled. Gorki, and undoubtedly Peshkov, carried on as well as they could under the circumstances and the former managed to write his novel *Mother* while in the United States. But overall, everyone considered the tour a failure, particularly when compared with those embarked upon by well-known Russian Socialist Revolutionaries such as Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia.

After this debacle, Gorki left for Italy and Peshkov went in the other direction – to New Zealand via San Francisco. Still unsettled, Peshkov’s travels came to an end, for now at least, when he rejoined Gorki in Capri in May 1907. Gorki’s home was a hub for Russian cultural and revolutionary figures alike. His visitors included famed singer Fedor Chaliapin as well as Lenin, Anatole Lunacharsky, and Alexander Bogdanov. Peshkov stepped in to act as his adopted father’s secretary again. A well-known photograph from this time shows Peshkov and Gorki watching Lenin play chess with Bogdanov, although Peshkov was airbrushed out of the image when it appeared in Stalin-era publications.

Peshkov’s personal life grew more complicated in these years as well. He married Lydia Bourago, the daughter of a Cossack colonel, in October 1910. She was pregnant at the time and Gorki supported the family financially once Peshkov’s daughter Elizabeth was born. The marriage was soon in trouble. Peshkov departed alone for Canada since his wife refused to join him. His reception in Canada was far from warm. The police met him upon his arrival in Toronto and Peshkov spent ten days in jail.²³ He returned to Capri in 1913 and again moved back into Gorki’s radicalized milieu. Nothing in his movements during the previous decade indicated that Peshkov was about to embark on a radical change in his outlook and abandon his youthful radicalism. But he was.

Peshkov’s Response to the First World War

Peshkov was still in Italy, staying with Russian writer Alexander Amfiteatrov, when the First World War broke out. Logistically, it would have been extremely difficult for him to return to Russia in order to volunteer for the army, and frankly,

²¹ “Boston Will Snub Them,” *The New York Times*, 15 April 1906, 3.

²² “Bishop Denounces Gorky,” *The New York Times*, 30 July 1906, 1.

²³ de Sairigné, 109.

Peshkov was not keen to fight for the Tsar in this conflict.²⁴ Moreover, widespread expectations that it was only going to be a short war undoubtedly shaped Peshkov's thinking as well. Should he try to reach Russia, the fighting could potentially be over before he arrived. So Peshkov did something unexpected: he joined the French Foreign Legion on 31 August 1914. Usually when men signed up, they were expected to serve a five-year term. Since he enlisted in wartime, Peshkov's commitment was more open-ended: he signed up for the duration of the fighting. Of the 18,000 men who volunteered for the Foreign Legion at this time, an estimated 3400 were Russian, making the Russians the second largest group after the Italians.²⁵

Peshkov spent the next eight months in the trenches of the Western front. He had already fought in three short engagements and been promoted to corporal by the time he was seriously wounded near Arras. Hit in the arm by an exploding shell fired from a machine gun, Peshkov made a tourniquet with his belt – something that was extremely hard to do with only one hand – and then walked a kilometer to get to the nearest medical post. His wound became infected, leaving doctors no choice but to amputate Peshkov's now gangrenous arm on 9 May 1915. He recovered from the surgery at the American Ambulance, a hospital at Neuilly, where he stayed for several months.²⁶ Peshkov opted not to wear a prothesis, arguing that he did not have a big enough stump to support the leather corset needed to hold one.²⁷ Soon his empty sleeve became one of his recognizable features.

In early April 1916, Peshkov was granted a pension by the French military and then embarked on a brief speaking tour in Italy after he was released from hospital. In June, he signed a new contract with the Foreign Legion, again for the duration of the war. At the same time, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a House of the Press to communicate propaganda to neutral countries, like the United States.²⁸ Suddenly, a man like Peshkov – a decorated combat veteran who could speak half a dozen languages – was a prized commodity and he soon found himself on the way to America to lobby audiences there for support for the American Ambulance as well as the war effort in general. On the eve of his departure, Peshkov was promoted to sub-lieutenant.

Zinovi Peshkov's Speaking Tour of America

Peshkov's trip across the Atlantic was likely an extremely interesting one. He joined 399 other passengers, including members of *Les Ballets Russe*, on the

²⁴ de Sairigné, 123.

²⁵ de Sairigné, 132.

²⁶ On the American Ambulance Field Service in France, see A. Piatt Andrew, "For Love of France," *The Outlook*, 27 December 1916, 923-931. Andrew was its Inspector General.

²⁷ It would have weighed 2.5 kg. See de Sairigné, 160.

²⁸ The French were not the only ones to create such a body. In late 1916, the Russians established the Nord-Ziud Agency in New York. Its members were tasked with supplying American newspapers with positive stories about the Russian war effort. See I.V. Ob'edkov, "Russian War Propaganda in the United States during the First World War," *Russian Studies in History*, 57 No.1 (2018): 30-53.

Lafayette, which set sail on 9 September 1916. A short announcement that was picked up by many US newspapers informed readers that Peshkov was coming to do a short, two-month speaking tour of the United States. It reminded people that he was Maksim Gorki's adopted son (although often the word "adopted" was left out), but much more was made of his bravery on the battlefield and the wound that he sustained in this early publicity.²⁹ Forgotten was any role he might have played in the writer's ignominious visit to the United States a decade earlier, and only Canadian newspapers made reference to the time he had previously spent in North America. Instead, the focus was squarely on Peshkov's war record and his physical suffering. Readers were told that Peshkov had been "decorated for bravery in the battle of the Labyrinth. He was wounded at the taking of Carency, where he lost his right arm. He was made an officer on the battlefield."³⁰ And as we shall see, this was only the beginning of his lionization.

The logistics and geographic reach of the speaking tour were impressive. The pace during its first month was less frenetic than it would become as Peshkov's speeches gathered more and more media attention and increased in frequency. After arriving in North America in the third week of September, 1916, he criss-crossed the Canada-US border for a few weeks. Peshkov attended a luncheon hosted by the Canadian Club at the Café Royal in Toronto on October 10th.³¹ Two weeks later, he popped up at a film screening in New York City; the event was a fundraiser for the American Ambulance Field Service and featured motion pictures showing the organization's work in France.³² Four days later, Peshkov was back in Canada for lunches held in his honor by the Ottawa and Kingston branches of the Canadian Club. He was invited by Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden to attend a military inspection along with other dignitaries.³³ Another particularly noteworthy event on Peshkov's calendar was a recruiting meeting for the Queen's University Highlanders (Overseas Battalion) held in Kingston, Ontario on 20 November 1916. Peshkov was the main speaker at this free event, and his address outlined his experiences at the front.³⁴ The press coverage of these events was glowing and indicated that his speeches were being well-received.³⁵ In Montreal, for example, when Peshkov spoke at a lunch at the Windsor Hotel, "the entire audience broke into spontaneous cheers some time before he had finished his speech, and kept cheering so long that he did not rise to complete it."³⁶ Likewise, the crowd that listened to Peshkov in Kingston, at the luncheon before the recruiting event, was rapt. A reporter in attendance wrote that listeners "were charmed with the address,

²⁹ See, for example, "Gorky's Son Coming Here," *The New York Times*, 11 September 1916, 2.

³⁰ "Gorky's Son Coming," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, DE), 11 September 1916, 2.

³¹ "Thanksgiving Day at Café Royal," *Star Weekly* (Toronto), 7 October 1916, 28.

³² "Show Ambulance Work," *The New York Times*, 25 October 1916, 2.

³³ "Inspection of Two Fine Battalions," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 October 1916, 3.

³⁴ See advertisement in *The Daily Standard* (Kingston, ON), 17 November 1916, 2.

³⁵ Sadly, throughout his tour, the newspapers generally opted to summarize his remarks rather than print his remarks verbatim, so it is difficult to recapture Peshkov's voice.

³⁶ "Lieut. Pechkoff Stirs Montreal Audience," *The Daily Standard* (Kingston, ON), 18 November 1916, 4.

which was easily the most instructive and enjoyable of the series [put on by the Canadian Club], and frequently applauded the inspiring sentiments of the gifted speaker.”³⁷

Similar success greeted Peshkov’s appearances once he returned to the United States. After lectures in New York City, he moved on and gave two talks at the National Geographic Society’s new Masonic Temple in Washington, DC as well as an afternoon speech at the National Press Club.³⁸ By now, Peshkov had honed his craft as a speaker. He illustrated his lectures with lantern slides and sometimes short motion pictures. The lecture he seems to have returned to time and again, “The French Foreign Legion on the Western Front,” gave an account of the trench warfare on the Western Front, although other titles, such as “In the Clutch of the War,” are also given in press reports and it appears that Peshkov tinkered with the contents of what he was saying if there were developments in Europe such as German overtures for peace.³⁹ It also appears that his assistant, a young British woman named Alissa Franc who was hired by the French government for \$18/day, may have helped with editing Peshkov’s speeches, particularly when he later had to develop new material in the wake of the Russian revolution.⁴⁰ She certainly kept his schedule and helped with the reports that Peshkov sent regularly to the French government; these included clippings from US papers showing how much attention their representative was getting. Ms. Franc, however, was never mentioned in any of the press coverage devoted to the visiting pundit that she so assiduously preserved for him. Instead, the only person ever noted as accompanying Peshkov was Hugh S. Bird, then assistant treasurer of the American Red Cross and Executive Secretary of the Polish Victims’ Relief Fund.⁴¹

Soon Peshkov’s commitments took him further afield. December 1916 saw events scheduled in Detroit and Madison, WI. In both instances, he spoke to local university clubs, at fundraisers for the American Ambulance Club, and occasionally at the private homes of local notables. The first month of 1917 was even more jam-packed as the legionnaire visited Chicago, Madison (again), Omaha, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, and Portland, Oregon. Often, Peshkov appeared at several events on the same day, with his evening lectures in particular

³⁷ “Fine Address by Lieut. Pechkoff,” *The Daily Standard* (Kingston, ON), 20 November 1916, 2).

³⁸ “Will Tell of Service with the Foreign Legion,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC) 23 November 1916, 23; and “Nutshell News,” *The Washington Herald*, 26 November 1916, 3.

³⁹ “Coming Events,” *Brooklyn Times Union*, 29 November 1916, 7. On Peshkov’s opinions about German overtures, see “Says Allies Will Refuse Peace Offer,” *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), 12 December 1916, 1.

⁴⁰ de Sairigné, 188.

⁴¹ “French Lieutenant to Tell of Front,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 January 1917, 16. Bird’s job with the American Red Cross is mentioned in his obituary. See, “Hugh S. Bird,” *The Washington Herald*, 14 April 1931, 20. His position in the Polish Victims’ Relief Fund is listed in a letter he wrote thanking a woman in North Carolina for her donation; the letter was published in a local newspaper. See *French Broad Hustler* (Hendersonville, NC), 23 March 1916, 7.

usually booked at the most prestigious local venues, such as the ballrooms of downtown hotels.⁴² The Western leg of the speaking tour lasted into February. It featured stops in San Francisco and Santa Barbara, California. After a brief break, likely to travel back into the heartland of the United States, Peshkov resumed his fundraising activities. In mid-February he mentioned the needs of Russian POWs for the first time, adding them to the list of recipients for which he was raising money.⁴³ And, it should be noted that Peshkov was raising larger and larger sums, like the \$12,000 that was promised in subscriptions for the American Ambulance in Neuilly after he lectured at the home of former US Ambassador to France, Myron T. Herrick, in Cleveland in February 1917.⁴⁴

On occasion, Peshkov shared the stage with local celebrities. One evening in December 1916, in Brooklyn, NY, his lecture was combined with a concert by soprano Elizabeth Sherman Soloff.⁴⁵ Born in Russia in 1885, local newspaper reports show that Soloff was a frequent performer at benefit concerts in the 1910s and 1920s. Then, six weeks later, Madame Leon Dupriez, appeared alongside Peshkov. During the war years, and while her husband taught as a visiting lecturer at Harvard, Mme. Dupriez became involved in Belgian relief work. Interestingly, it seems to have taken her to as diverse locations as Peshkov since their joint appearance came at the Knife and Fork Club in Kansas City, Missouri, and her presence on the bill serves as a reminder that Peshkov was far from the only person trying to lobby members of the American public (and their government) at this time.⁴⁶

Still, Peshkov seems to have had superior access to the some very wealthy and powerful people. That was evident during his brief stay in Chicago in January 1917. Rather than stay in a hotel, the visiting legionnaire was the guest of Kellogg Fairbank, a prominent attorney and president of the Chicago Shipbuilding Company during the war years. Peshkov's by-invitation-only lecture was hosted by members of the Chicago committee for the American Ambulance Fund and put on at the Prairie Avenue mansion of Mrs. George Pullman, whose husband had made a fortune designing and manufacturing the Pullman sleeping car.⁴⁷ Guests also enjoyed a performance by Lucien Muratore, the principal French tenor with

⁴² For example, the "gold room" of the Hotel Utah was booked for Peshkov's 26 January 1917 speech in Salt Lake City, and the "Italian ballroom" of the St. Francis hotel in San Francisco was used for a lecture two weeks later. See "French Legionaire [sic] to Make Address," *The Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, 19 January 1917, 5; and "Society Applauds at War Lecture," *The San Francisco Examiner*, 3 February 1917, 7.

⁴³ "Russian Cry for Bread Circles Half the World," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1917, 5.

⁴⁴ "Treat Wounded Kindly," *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), 20 February 1917, 12.

⁴⁵ "Tells of French Life," *Brooklyn Times Union*, 4 December 1916, 2.

⁴⁶ "Relief Workers to Speak," *Kansas City Journal*, 17 January 1917, 5; and "Woman Describes the Horrors of War to Rouse U.S. Protest for Belgium," *The Kansas City Post*, 23 January 1917, 9.

⁴⁷ "Happenings in the Smart Set," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 December 1916, 15; and "Speaks for American Ambulance," *Chicago Tribune*, 31 December 1916, 40. Both articles provide advance publicity for the event.

the Chicago Grand Opera Company. Nor was this the only event of its kind. The guest list for a later lecture in April 1917 reads like a veritable who's who of people from the wealthiest families in America. In the ballroom of "Rauscher's" restaurant, an establishment sometimes referred to as the "Delmonico's of Washington," Peshkov delivered his "The Changes in Russia" lecture, whose contents are discussed later in this article.⁴⁸ The patronesses that day included: Mrs. William Corcoran, Mrs. Marshall Field, Mrs. A.G. McClintock, Mrs. Medill McCormick, Mrs. George W. Vanderbilt and Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt.⁴⁹

The Evolving Press Coverage of Peshkov's Visit to the United States

To understand the transformation of Zinovi Peshkov's public persona – in other words, how he was accepted as an expert by people like those listed above – one must also look beyond the quantity of press coverage that he received in 1916-17 and pay attention to its qualitative side. Two things stand out when one does that. First, that the press made a very big deal out of his war wound, so much so that it cast the ability to carry on after extreme physical pain and suffering as a measure of the man. And, as Peshkov's tour progressed, articles written about his events came to more closely resemble announcements from the society pages of the era's newspapers. In other words, Peshkov's entry into elite American society – something that his younger more radical self could never have achieved – was confirmed for all to see and read about.

Americans first learned about Peshkov's arm injury when the newspapers carried short articles announcing that he had received several awards for bravery from the French government at a ceremony held at the American Ambulance in Neuilly. The initial notice was quite matter of fact, saying that while Peshkov was leading his men into battle, they came under machine gun fire and he "was struck by four bullets in the right arm which had to be amputated at the shoulder."⁵⁰ However, Peshkov's decision to forego wearing a prothesis meant that his missing arm became a defining feature of his public persona – arguably his most important one – as soon as Peshkov set foot on American soil. Take this headline from *The Bridgeport Evening Farmer* which was used when the paper announced his arrival: "Gorky's Son, Minus An Arm Lost in War, Visits America."⁵¹ It does not refer to Peshkov's military rank, membership in the Foreign Legion, or revolutionary past. Those parts of his biography have been omitted from the words trying to catch the attention of readers. Moreover, as if to further underscore the absent limb mentioned in the headline, the newspaper ran a photograph of the dapper young man wearing a sharp dark suit and hat, but also with his empty sleeved tucked into the pocket of his jacket. Visually, however, the

⁴⁸ "Rauscher's," *Virginia Glee Club Wiki*, n.d., <https://viriniagleecclub.fandom.com/wiki/Rauscher%27s>. [Accessed 16 July 2025]

⁴⁹ "French Lieutenant to Give Lecture," *The Washington Times*, 5 April 1917, 7.

⁵⁰ "Americans to Leave Legion," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, DE), 8 September 1915, 2.

⁵¹ "Gorky's Son, Minus An Arm Lost in War, Visits America," *The Bridgeport Evening Farmer* (Bridgeport, CT), 22 September 1916, 21.

image does not emasculate Peshkov. Instead, it, as well as other photographs that were used to publicize his speaking engagements and which showed the empty-sleeved Peshkov in his Foreign Legion uniform and medals, conveyed a sense of purpose. They demonstrated that Peshkov still had a military role to play while the world continued to be at war. (That point was similarly underscored by frequent references to his military rank in newspaper headlines and articles.)

In other instances, the language of sacrifice was used. For instance, a feature article by Frank Ward O'Malley, who had interviewed Peshkov at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, referred to him in its headline as "Russian Writer Who Gave Arm for Cause."⁵² After an engagement in Kingston, Ontario in November, an unnamed journalist gave a detailed account of the evening for one of the city's newspapers. The most striking part of that story is what the author had to say about Peshkov as a person: "His presence was also inspiring, his empty right coat sleeve making a silent but eloquent appeal to service and to sacrifice."⁵³ Similar remarks were made in the wake of one of Peshkov's National Geographic Society lectures, when the reporter described how "the empty sleeve, pinned across his right breast, bore mute testimony of the price he had paid for serving the cause of the entente allies."⁵⁴ It is worth remembering that that sacrifice – arguably a kind of martyrdom – came while fighting in a war that most of his Peshkov's youthful revolutionary acquaintances did not support, even if some of the more moderate SRs and liberal Constitutional Democrats in Russia did. His brother and other Bolsheviks, for example, would not have seen Peshkov's actions in the same light as our correspondents. But in a world turned upside down, the loss of an arm could transform someone previously deemed a danger radical into a hero for the mainstream public.

The O'Malley feature quoted above also demonstrates how unstable and malleable the story of what had happened to Peshkov in the trenches in France was. O'Malley wrote that "German shrapnel had ripped his right arm off at the shoulder." This kind of lurid prose, sometimes accompanied by erroneous details, was common. In fact, Peshkov did not have "his arm torn off," as the *Brooklyn Times Union* reported, but rather it was hit by bullets from a machine gun.⁵⁵ We do not know for certain that they were "expanding bullets," but saying so made for a better story when Omaha's *Morning World-Herald* wanted to let its readers know about Peshkov, whom they also referred to as a "one-armed hero" in the title of the article announcing his visit to the city.⁵⁶ Reporters and wire services were on firmer footing when they mentioned the gangrene that soon set in and led to

⁵² Frank Ward O'Malley, "Russian Writer Who Gave Arm for Cause Relates Striking Instances of New National Spirit Which Has at Last Emerged From the Shadow of '71," *New York Herald*, 22 October 1916, 51.

⁵³ "Campaign for Recruits Is On," *The Weekly British Whig* (Kingston, ON), 23 November 1916, 3.

⁵⁴ "French Foreign Legion is Subject of Lecture," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), 25 November 1916, 2.

⁵⁵ "Tells of French Life," *Brooklyn Times Union*, 4 December 1916, 2.

⁵⁶ "Lieutenant Pechkoff, One-Armed Hero, Here," *Morning World-Herald* (Omaha), 20 January 1917, 6.

the wounded legionnaire being sent to the American Ambulance for care. But it has to be said that the word “gangrene” itself – let alone printing that the “wound became highly infected by gangrene gazeuse [sic]” – likely created a visceral response in readers who came across it when reading about Peshkov’s recent medical treatment.⁵⁷ To save his life, Peshkov’s arm was eventually amputated but he was not out of the woods after the operation, or as the press put it: “for months he lay between life and death.”⁵⁸

Every instance where reporters and editors embellished Peshkov’s story or opted to use dramatic language like the examples quoted here, only added to depth to the young man’s perceived suffering and sacrifice. And there is no evidence that Peshkov did anything to rein in any exaggerations made by the American press or that he was uncomfortable with how the media portrayed him. In his lectures, he usually declined to speak about what had happened or simply said “I was wounded in the early days of battle,” before shifting the focus on his remarks back to either trench life or the work of the American Ambulance, which he consistently underscored had saved his life.⁵⁹ Reporters did not question this decision; instead, they chalked it up to modesty.

As Peshkov became more of a celebrity, members of elite society (and those who aspired to be) were keen to bask in his reflected glory. That is one of the most striking features of the press coverage of the young man’s speaking tour and demonstrates that he was accepted by very different segments of American society than the revolutionaries who had toured the United States in the previous decade. Indeed, the articles and notices that announced his forthcoming engagements, as well as the summaries that were published afterwards, came to include language more reflective of newspaper society pages than their sections devoted to the political news of the day. The following four brief announcements are good examples of what I mean:

Mr. and Mrs. Worcester R. Warner, Magnolia drive N.E., entertained with a dinner of fourteen covers Tuesday for Lieut. Zinovi Pechkoff, a member of the French Foreign Legion who, since losing an arm in service, has been touring Italy and now America, lecturing for the benefit of the American Ambulance Hospital in Paris. Lieut. Pechkoff gave an address at the home of Col. and Mrs. Myron T. Herrick, Overlook road, Cleveland Heights, last Sunday afternoon, and remained in Cleveland until Wednesday morning as the guest

⁵⁷ “Maxim Gorky’s Adopted Son in War Talk,” *The Morning Press* (Santa Barbara, CA), 30 January 1917, 3. *Gangrene gazeuse* is the French term for gas gangrene, a condition that produces tissue gas within the affected area and leads to the rapid destruction of that tissue. It can cause serious illness and death.

⁵⁸ “Real Hero of European War Comes Here on Social Visit,” *Evening World-Herald* (Omaha), 22 December 1919, 9.

⁵⁹ See “Soldier of Foreign Legion Addresses the Omaha Club,” *Morning World-Herald* (Omaha), 21 January 1917, 6; and “Lieutenant Pechkoff, One-Armed Hero, Here,” 6.

of Mr. and Mrs. Myron T. Herrick.⁶⁰

Mrs. E.H. Wells, of South Mountain avenue is to give a tea next Thursday afternoon to Lieut Zinovi Pechkoff, whose lecture at Unity church in the evening will be for the relief work in which Mrs. Edith Wharton is engaged.⁶¹

Mrs. Charles F. Coffin, of Melrose place, Montclair, and Mrs. R.R. Conklin, of New York, will entertain at dinner to-morrow at the Roland, No. 535 Park avenue, New York. The guests will be Ian Hay, Sydnor Harrison, Ernest Seton Thompson, Lieut. Pechkoff, William Faversham, Lyn Harding, Henry Ketchell Webster and Prince Troubetskoy.⁶²

An interesting event of the afternoon will be the lecture of Lieut. Zinovi Pechkoff, of the French Foreign Legion, which will be delivered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph VanLandingham, on The Plaza, Chatham Estates, promptly at 4 o'clock. Special invitations are extended [to] the Colonial Dames, Halifax Convention Chapter, D.A.R., Sorosis, the Dolly Madison Book Club."⁶³

These notices were intended to convey information about people's standing in their communities, what charities they supported, and their wealth. The latter could easily be discerned by readers – even when no overt references to money were included – because of the addresses that were frequently provided. Simply put, most city dwellers knew the minute they read an address whether the location was in a wealthy neighborhood or not. For the women mentioned in so many of the articles published concerning Peshkov's various engagements, this was an opportunity to flex their political muscles, even though American women did not yet have the right to vote in every state. As Lee A. Farrow showed in her book on the earlier Catacazy affair, where society hostesses made the Russian ambassador's position untenable by refusing to receive his wife, wealthy and politically connected women often had tremendous informal power.⁶⁴ Hence, the lengthy lists of patrons and patronesses that became a regular feature in the press coverage was demonstrable proof of Peshkov's acceptance by the country's elites.

Acceptance by educators and scholarly organizations was also forthcoming. On occasion, Peshkov was invited to speak to teachers' associations, as he was in April 1917 when the Shelby County Teachers' Association in Tennessee organized an event for him at the Hotel Gayoso.⁶⁵ Over the many months he was in the United States, Peshkov also delivered lectures at university clubs in Detroit, Madison (WI), Omaha, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, and Portland. Students at

⁶⁰ "Society's Activities for a Week, *The Plain Dealer*, 25 February 1917, 44. Herrick was the former US Ambassador to France.

⁶¹ "Tea Party for Lecturer," *The Montclair Times* (Montclair, NJ), 17 March 1917, 2.

⁶² "To Entertain Notables," *The Montclair Times*, 7 April 1917, 12.

⁶³ "Lieutenant Pechkoff's Lecture," *The Charlotte Observer*, 19 April 1917, 6.

⁶⁴ Lee A. Farrow, *The Catacazy Affair and the Uneasy Path of Russian-American Relations* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), especially chapter five.

⁶⁵ "Pechkoff Speaks Today," *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), 14 April 1917, 8.

Ivy League institutions, as well as at the University of Pittsburgh, Vanderbilt University, and Peabody College (Nashville, TN) packed auditoria to hear what this visitor from Europe had to say. Peshkov's morning meeting with students at the University of Cincinnati – held in the school's stadium – was likely the largest of these gatherings; it drew 3000 people.⁶⁶ Peshkov was even elected as a member of the American Historical Society.⁶⁷ It bears repeating: none of these things would have been possible had Peshkov not turned his back on the revolutionary movement and had his physical suffering not made him a person to admire in mainstream American culture.

Peshkov & the Russian Revolution

In mid-March 1917, Peshkov received word from his old friend Amfiteatrov, telling him that the Romanov dynasty had fallen. Peshkov was not upset by the news because he felt that the Russian war effort might improve because of the change of government.⁶⁸ And he did not race back to see what was happening. Instead, he remained in the United States until early May. Peshkov did, however, retool the content of his speeches and used them to argue that Russia was a major power ready to assume its responsibilities on the world stage. In other words, he looked to assuage American worries about their new ally in the war that they had officially joined on 6 April 1917.

Peshkov continued to be a popular, and extremely busy, expert in the final weeks of his speaking tour; he often participated in two, and sometimes three, events per day. After a quick jaunt across the border, where he was welcomed as a guest of honour alongside the Canadian Minister of Trade & Commerce, Right Hon. Sir George E. Foster at a luncheon hosted by the Canadian Club and the Board of Trade in Hamilton, Ontario, Peshkov spent most of April 1917 making dozens of speeches along the American east coast.⁶⁹ These events also continued to raise significant monies for the American Ambulance Hospital in Paris. Indeed, Peshkov eventually presented it with \$70,000 in donations when he returned to France.⁷⁰ On occasion, Peshkov raised funds for other causes as well. For example, on 22 March 1917, he gave an evening lecture at Unity Church in Montclair, NJ. Attendees were charged 50 cents for admission, with the proceeds – a total of \$350 – being given to the Edith Wharton Fund of Tuberculosis.⁷¹

In early April, Peshkov gave his first speeches about the Russian situation at events in New York City and Washington, DC; he then traveled to Cincinnati, Nashville, Memphis, and Charlotte. The lecture he developed was entitled “The Changes in Russia.” In it, he assured listeners that autocracy was finished, even though the country's form of government had yet to be determined. He said that the Provisional Government was “in good hands” under the leadership of Pavel

⁶⁶ “Mars Enters University,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 April 1917, 16.

⁶⁷ de Sairigné, 189.

⁶⁸ de Sairigné, 209.

⁶⁹ “Double Treat,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 23 February 1917, 12.

⁷⁰ de Sairigné, 207.

⁷¹ “Lecture for Wharton Fund,” *The Montclair Times*, 17 March 1917, 7.

Miliukov and emphasized the peasantry had significant experience with local self-government.⁷² Perhaps, most importantly to the Americans in attendance, he constantly reassured them that Russia was going to stay in the war. As one newspaper piece put it, "The new Russian government will not make a separate peace with Germany and will be greatly inspired by the entrance of its sister democracy, the United States into the war, in the opinion of Lieut. Zinovi Pechkoff..."⁷³ Peshkov also apparently said that "no Russian war had ever had such unanimous support of all classes when it began."⁷⁴ At no point did Peshkov voice support for the revolutionaries whom he must have known were going to press for a radical restructuring of the political system as well as of society in general. Instead, he stuck to offering views that would have been comforting to members of the political mainstream.

Despite often implying to audiences and reporters alike that he possessed insider knowledge, Peshkov only got his first glimpse of what was happening in Russia when he returned there in May 1917. He was sent to the now stricken empire on a propaganda mission by the French government whose leaders hoped that Peshkov could persuade Russian soldiers to continue fighting against the Central Powers.⁷⁵ Amfiteatrov met him at the Finland Station, and Peshkov had a meeting with Prime Minister Georgy L'vov right away. That was followed by conversations with General Aleksei Brusilov and the freshly appointed Minister of War, Alexander Kerensky. Peshkov participated in the early stages of a planned summer offensive in Galicia, but once that collapsed, he returned to Petrograd, where he visited his adopted father but not members of his birth family. By then Peshkov was not a fan of Alexander Kerensky, who had replaced L'vov at the head of the Provisional Government. His opinion did not improve when Kerensky prohibited Peshkov from any further propagandizing among Russian troops. Unable to do more to accomplish his mission, Peshkov was recalled to Paris, where at the end of October he conveyed his impressions of the situation in Russia to French President, Raymond Poincaré.

In the midst of these comings and goings, Peshkov also found time to offer a more generalized impression of the Russian situation to the American public: he published an article, "A Few Glimpses into Russia," in *National Geographic* in September 1917. It repackaged some of the material from his "The Changes in Russia" lecture, but also discussed Russian cultural achievements, student and village life, as well as the cooperative movement. It did not mention the instability of the Provisional Government, preferring instead to end on a note of reassurance. Peshkov again told readers that "the Russian people are ready to endure in this

⁷² The contents of the speech are summarized in "Pechkoff Has No Fears for Russia," *The Sun* (New York), 5 April 1917, 5. Pavel Miliukov was the head of the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) party in Russia, i.e. the liberal party.

⁷³ "Russia Not seeking Peace, Says Pechkoff," *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), 15 April 1917.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Details about Peshkov's time in Russia from 1917 to 1921 can be found in J. Delmas, "Legionnaire et diplomate, le capitaine Zinovi Pechkoff," *Revue Historique des Armées*, 24 No.2 (1968): 149-53.

terrible war still greater sacrifices that they, in common with our Allies and with our new great ally, the United States of America, may establish in the world righteousness, truth, and liberty.” He could not have been more wrong.⁷⁶

After the War

Peshkov went on to have a long career after the First World War ended. That career also would not have been possible without the changes to his reputation that were solidified during his nine-month speaking tour of America, which proved his value to the French government. In other words, his bodily suffering and loss of an arm allowed him to rise like a phoenix and be taken very seriously as a pundit and later diplomat. Briefly outlining his career trajectory over the next forty-five years shows just how successful the reinvention was.

Peshkov, having long ago put to rest any sympathy for the Russian revolutionary movement and broken with his brother Iakov Sverdlov, did not support the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917.⁷⁷ Instead, he found himself sent by the French government to advise the White armies during the Russian Civil War. In March 1918, Peshkov was appointed as an assistant to Captain Paul Pelliot, who had been tasked with assisting Ataman Semenov in his efforts to raise an army south of Lake Baikal. Peshkov and Pelliot journeyed to the Far East via the United States and Japan. During that trek, specifically during his stop in Washington, DC, Peshkov met with officials at the State Department and encouraged the American government to intervene in the Russian Civil War.

Once in Siberia, Peshkov and Pelliot decided Semenov was an adventurer and there was no hope that he would ever successfully fight the Bolsheviks. Hence, in July 1918, they encouraged the French government to cut its ties to with the Ataman. Peshkov stayed in Far East for another month or so, briefly aiding Admiral Kolchak with the organization of his forces in the Urals. After these were defeated, Peshkov moved on to the Caucasus, but he did not play a significant role with the men under the command of General Wrangel. When Wrangel’s forces were evacuated via the Crimea, Peshkov left the country of his birth for the last time.

Now in Paris, the French government rewarded Peshkov’s services by granting him the permanent rank of Captain in January 1920 and he cut quite a celebrity figure in society at the time. In January 1921, Peshkov became a naturalized French citizen. He then made yet another visit to the United States in the first few months of 1921 before being appointed as the secretary of the French delegation of the International Commission for Russia. In that capacity, he publicized the appeal of his adopted father when Gorki desperately tried to raise international food aid for people facing starvation in Russia.

From 1922 to 1925, Peshkov commanded troops in the French Foreign Legion in Morocco, sustaining an injury to one of his legs during an attack at Bab

⁷⁶ Zinovi Pechkoff, “A Few Glimpses into Russia,” *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 32 (September 1917), 253.

⁷⁷ Sverdlov served as Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, effectively head of state, in the Bolshevik government. He died in March 1919.

Taza. That was followed by a three-year stint at the French Embassy in the United States, although he also took time to visit his adopted father in Italy during his vacations. The same years saw Peshkov write memoirs about his time in North Africa (published as *The Bugle Sounds: Life in the Foreign Legion*) and have a quick failed marriage to Jacqueline Delaunay-Belleville.⁷⁸ When the Second World War broke out, he was commanding the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd Foreign Regiment in North Africa.

After the fall of France in 1940, Peshkov cast his lot with General Charles de Gaulle. By the end of 1941, the latter had promoted Peshkov to the rank of colonel and tasked him to head a mission to South Africa. Later he was sent to French West Africa, where he rallied colonial troops for the war effort. Three years later, Peshkov embarked on a new adventure. He was appointed Brigadier General and sent as a delegate of the French Committee of National Liberation to the Republic of China. There he met with Chiang Kai-shek who had just broken off relations with Vichy France. Peshkov was formally named ambassador to China in November 1944. Beginning in mid-May 1946, he was appointed to represent French interests in Japan – a position that required a delicate touch given that the Vichy government had been allied with the Japanese during the war.⁷⁹ It was Peshkov's job to remind the representatives of the other allied powers that the French also had resisted the Nazis, in other words, shift the narrative from one focused on collaboration, while Peshkov also had to represent the French government when it came to the questions of Japanese reparations and the conduct of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE). While in Japan, he forged a strong relationship with the head of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur. Peshkov retired from his ambassadorial position in Japan in 1949. Two years later, a grateful French government presented Peshkov with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, the highest military honor that it can give. His final diplomatic mission came in 1964, when Peshkov was sent to Taiwan to explain to Chiang Kai-shek why the French government was going to recognize the Chinese government.

Zinovi Peshkov died in Paris in November 1966. Even though he had long ago cast his lot with France, his adopted country, Peshkov ensured that his ashes would be housed in the Russian necropolis of Sainte-Genevieve-des-Bois cemetery, alongside the bodies of such titans of the émigré community as Ivan Bunin, Zinaida Gippius, Prince Georgy L'vov, and Felix Yusupov. While, per his request, Peshkov's tombstone says only "Legionnaire," referring to the identity that he had claimed decades earlier, it is still meaningful that he chose to rest in perpetuity alongside the remains of people from his country of birth, many of whom also rejected the Bolshevik revolution.

⁷⁸ See Zinovi Pechkoff, *The Bugle Sounds: Life in the Foreign Legion* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1926).

⁷⁹ On Peshkov's posting to Japan, see Yuichiro Miyashita, "Pechkoff et le Japon, 1946-1949," *Relations internationales*, 158 No.2 (2014): 59-74.

Conclusion

Whereas a decade earlier, leaders of the Progressive movement had welcomed key Russian revolutionary figures into their homes and onto the stages of America's most important public venues, now, as the First World War raged in Europe, it was members of the established elite who embraced Zinovi Peshkov. American views about what was best for Russia and the rest of Europe had clearly changed. But so too had the man who has been at the centre of the story here. Peshkov was born to a Jewish family that lived in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. As such, his prospects – educational and economic – were limited. A kind of emancipation occurred when Yeshua Sverdlov was adopted by well-known writer Maksim Gorki. That act removed the legal barriers that kept the younger man confined within the Pale, but it brought a different kind of parameters to his life. Zinovi Peshkov, as he renamed himself, became an integral part of Gorki's family and network of acquaintances. He spent time with cultural luminaries and revolutionaries alike, and his connection to Gorki also brought him under Tsarist police surveillance. In other words, he had every chance to become a full-fledged political activist like his brother Iakov, who went on to play a pivotal role in the early Bolshevik government.

Instead, after years spent travelling the world and working all kinds of jobs, Peshkov joined the French Foreign Legion and became a respected figure of a different kind. He distinguished himself in combat and his deeds were recognized with medals and awards by the French government, which found a new role for Peshkov once he could no longer fight at the front. It is worth remembering Peshkov's own words – the ones that opened this article – here because they encapsulate the transition that was about to happen, the one that made Zinovi Peshkov a household name in United States and paved the way, in the long run, for a distinguished career in international diplomacy: "It is because of my wound that I became someone."

Peshkov's empty sleeve garnered Peshkov unending status as a martyr because there could be no cure for amputation and he opted not to use a prothesis. Instead, his missing arm, like the medals that adorned the uniform that he wore during his public appearances, offered poignant visual testimony of the suffering he had endured. And for what? For the fight against the Germans. While most of his engagements raised money for the American Ambulance in Neuilly, the medical facility Peshkov credited with saving his life, Peshkov also appeared at events that supported Belgian refugees and Russian POWs. Every time he stepped foot on a stage, his presence sought to increase the United States' connections with the Allied powers, and he became a respected pundit.

As we have seen, the response to Peshkov's 1916-1917 speaking tour was overwhelmingly positive. Audiences had no trouble seeing the legionnaire as a heroic figure. They readily opened their hearts, their homes, and their wallets. The wealthy and powerful, as well as those who aspired to be both, made sure that their names were connected with Peshkov's in the newspapers. But the greatest transformation was Peshkov's for his months in America ensured that everyone

forgot Zinovi Peshkov had ever been associated with Russian revolutionaries. His speaking tour led to mainstream social acceptance and eventually a glittering career in international diplomacy.

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