CHAPTER NINE

“... WE MUST SAVE OUR PEOPLE”
ON AN UNREALIZED PROJECT FOR A RUSSIAN JEWISH WEEKLY IN PRE-WAR PARIS

Vladimir Khazan
(Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

A biography of the noted Russian Jewish journalist, political publicist, writer, and dramatist Samuil (Solomon, Zalmen) L’vovich Poliakov (pseudonym Poliakov-Litovtsev; 1875–1945) has yet to be penned. Throughout his life, Poliakov-Litovtsev maintained a passionate commitment to the Jewish cause, and his contribution to Russian culture is in fact inseparable from his achievements as an activist in Jewish society. Despite this, the name of Poliakov-Litovtsev has never yet been deemed worthy of inclusion in Jewish encyclopedias. Consequently, his Jewish-related activism has remained obscure. In the present article, I focus on an unknown chapter of Poliakov-Litovtsev’s life—his energetic, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to found a Russian Jewish weekly that, as he believed, would resist the waves of anti-Semitism washing over Europe in the 1920s and the early 1930s.

S. Poliakov-Litovtsev was born in Krichev, a town in the Mogilev Oblast, into a poor Jewish family. He first learned Russian at the age of 17. Even so, diligent, persevering, and gifted, he became a leading Russian journalist, working with some of the largest Russian newspapers of the day: Rech’ (Speech), Russkoe slovo (The Russian Word), and Sovremennoe slovo (The

---

1 Hence, for purposes of faithfulness to the authorial intention, the present article will refer to him by his penname.


3 And yet, Poliakov-Litovtsev worked as the typesetter for F. Chaliapin’s memoirs Maska i dusha (Mask and Soul) in 1932.
An attendee at the State Duma (Parliament) as a political correspondent of *Rech*, Poliakov-Litovtsev proved an honest, intelligent, and quick-witted observer and reporter.

In addition to journalism, Poliakov-Litovtsev became well-known as a playwright, the author of *Chuzhaya skazka* (Alien Tale, 1911), *Labirint* (The Labyrinth, 1913), *Ognennoe kol'tso* (Ring of Fire, 1913), *Grekh* (The Sin, 1914), and subsequently, with P. Potemkin, co-author of *Don-Zhuan—suprug smerti* (Don Juan: Husband of Death, Paris, 1928).

During World War I and prior to 1917, Poliakov-Litovtsev served as a foreign correspondent for Russkoe slovo, the second leading daily in Russia, owned at the time by Ivan Sytin (actual editor V. Doroshevich). Poliakov-Litovtsev later recalled his experience as a journalist in his émigré memoirs *Iz vospominanii zhurnalista* (From the Memoirs of a Journalist) published in the Parisian Russian magazine Illustrirovannaya Rossia [Russia Illustrated] and in the Poslednie novosti [Latest News] gazette. Some chapters appeared in the Novoe russkoe slovo (The New Russian Word) in New

---


6. Russkoe slovo continued under new titles after the Bolshevik coup d’etat: from January 16 to April 2, 1918, it appeared as the Novoe slovo [The New Word]; from April 11 until it was definitively closed down by the Soviet authorities on July 6, 1918, as Nashe slovo [Our Word]. Cf. Charles A. Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur: Publisher Ivan Sytin of Moscow, 1851–1934* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).
