

Remarks by
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Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, thank you for your service to our fine city. I am Neil Glick now a former ANC Commissioner for 6B08. I served my community for 12 years from 2001-2013

I come requesting the support of you to rename the intersection of 22nd and R Street NW in front of the Embassy of Bulgaria, 1621 22nd Street NW, as Dimitar Peshev Plaza.

Thank you for taking time today to learn about one of the most amazing stories to come out of World War II in Europe. It is a story of tolerance; a story of good overcoming absolute evil. This is the story of one person taking action and saving lives. This is the power of what one person can do. That person is Dimitar Peshev. Peshev was the Deputy Speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament during World War II, and also was their Minister of Justice.

Bulgaria was a Nazi ally and part of the Axis. Hoping to enlarge their nation, Bulgaria occupied Nazi invaded territories of Northern Greece and a part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, in 1941.

This is a Yellow Star, which the Bulgarian Government, like Governments throughout Europe during World War II, forced their Jewish citizens to wear. It is a mark of intolerance, hate, and was a sign of almost certain death. All over Europe the stars were rather large – as big as a fist. In Bulgaria, the star is the size of a half dollar.

In early March 1943, the Nazis, assisted by the Bulgarian Police in the rounding up and deportation of the Jews of Thrace, in Northern Greece and Macedonia.

Several days later, in the halls of Parliament, Dimitar Peshev heard an account from a fellow Parliamentarian, Dimitar Ikonov who was in Thrace. Peshev in his memoir wrote “[Ikonov] described a distressing scene – Thracian Jews, old people, men, women and children, carrying their belongings, defeated, desperate, powerless people, begging for help as they crossed the town on foot, dragging themselves towards some unknown destination.”¹

This account haunted Peshev. A few days later, a delegation of local Jews – constituents - came to Peshev – people Peshev knew since childhood – and there were deportation orders from the Ministry of the Interior for Jews to assemble and be shipped out. Because of the account of his fellow Parliamentarian, he knew what lie in store for his constituents. He told his constituents not to worry, but leave it all to him.

¹ The Fragility of Goodness, Tzvetan Todorov, Princeton University Press, 2001.

Peshev rushed to Sofia the next day, on March 9, 1943. Peshev barged into the office of the Minister of the Interior. He, along with other Parliamentarians, demanded that the Minister call off the deportation orders all over the country. Peshev remained in the Ministers office until every deportation center was contacted and everyone released.

Though he tried, Peshev was unable stop the deportation of the Jews of Northern Greece and Macedonia and all but 200 people of the communities of 11,500 were murdered by the Nazis.

Because of Peshev's quick action – he mobilized the Nazi Allied Parliament, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and Bulgarians from all walks of life, and was able to save the entire population of 48,000 Jews of Bulgaria.

Dimitar Peshev holds the distinction of being the only Legislator in all of World War II, to successfully fight a Nazi deportation order and certain murder.

Because of this action, 3 weeks later, he lost his position of Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and was kicked out of Parliament.

But the 48,000 Jews of Bulgaria were saved and not deported. That is why I call this Yellow Star, the Yellow Star of Hope.

Eighteen months later, the Soviet backed communists took over the Government, and Peshev was tried as a war criminal with one of the crimes being 'anti-Semitism.' He lost his home, was not allowed to work, and lived the next thirty years in his sister's apartment in obscurity and poverty in Bulgaria until his death in 1973.

Six weeks before he died, the Supreme Court of Israel, after a detailed case was presented by saved Bulgarian Jews, awarded Peshev with the highest title of *Righteous Among the Nations*. This is one of the highest honors of the Israel.

Peshev is documented as the person who saved the second largest amount of Jews during World War II.

Peshev is featured as the prominent Bulgarian who saved Jewish lives in World War II at Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem Holocaust Museum and at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. At the US Holocaust Memorial Museum he is the sole Bulgarian *Righteous Among the Nations* honored with a photo and description of his heroic action.

No one legislator or citizen successfully stood up to the Nazis to save Jews in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Estonia, or Latvia. Even the USA did nothing to stop the Holocaust, and turned away the SS St. Louis which had German Jewish refugees looking to escape. That ship was turned back and half of the people were murdered.

Every nation during World War II has a very dark side, and each nation needs to grapple with their mistakes, which cost innocent lives. Britain did not allow many Jews to immigrate to Palestine during World War II. The US had internment camps for Japanese-Americans. Sweden, which gave the world Raoul Wallenberg, provided iron ore to the German armament industry; Sweden allowed Germany to transit Nazi troops and supplies via their territory². Many countries have amazing heroes from the Holocaust; yet all countries have guilt for allowing the murder to occur.

Peshev is a man that stood up in the face of unadulterated evil, and fought back. Because he spoke up and mobilized and inspired others, 48,000 Jewish lives.

DC is a city of monuments and memorials for inspiring individuals – often people with no connection to our city, but are so important, they deserve major recognition. We have monuments to Jose De San Martin, Simon Bolivar, Mahatma Gandhi, Benito Juarez and dozens of more people and events in DC.

We honored Andrei Sakharov the father of the Soviet human rights movement by naming the square in front of the Russian Ambassador's residence on 16th Street, Sakharov Plaza; we honored Raoul Wallenberg by naming the street in front of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Raoul Wallenberg Place.

As far as I can surmise from my research, this would be the only honor for Dimitar Peshev in the entire United States - and the only honor for him in all of the entire Western Hemisphere. And his work and determination deserves international recognition.

We have many pressing issues in our city, but here is an easy way to give a lasting honor to a person who saved so many in our world.

Dimitar Peshev is a hero of World War II and an international hero of tolerance and an incredible profile in courage.

As issues of equality and the marginalizing of some members of our American society are now a divisive national issue, this would be another great way to show that DC supports the protection of rights for all people.

And most important, it shows that one person's voice and determination does make a difference and hopefully it will inspire others.

I hope this is something you will unanimously support.

² <http://www.thelocal.se/6214/20070126/#.UZVeRoIUv80>

The Holocaust: Sweden's complex legacy. David Stavrou. The Local: Sweden's News in English. January 26, 2007

Thank you.