"ALL RISE, THE COURT IS IN SESSION"

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Yeghishe Hajakian, New Jersey, 5 May 2015

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Tehlirian gunned down Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman grand vizier (prime minister), for having been the chief organizer and perpetrator of the Armenian Genocide. The shooting took place in daylight in Berlin on March 15, 1921. Tehlirian waited with his foot on the fallen Talaat for the German police to arrive to the scene and arrest him. He was tried for murder but was acquitted by the court. He was defended by three prominent lawyers, including Theodor Niemeyer, professor of law at Kiel University, and prominent witnesses called to the court like Johannes Lepsius, General Liman von Sanders, Armin Wegner, and genocide survivor Bishop Grigoris Balakian, great-uncle of Peter Balakian, the American-Armenian writer and poet. The court came to its decision in less than an hour.

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A full-to-capacity audience stood up to applaud the actors and the technical workers with shouts of "Bravo" for a long time. The Armenian audience had never seen such a serious staging by the Tekeyan Theatrical Group and this time it was not a comedy for a change. This was the Centennial Remembrance of our Genocide. The audience witnessed the revenge of our people and cheered with many tearful eyes

The Greater New York Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group invited

Gerald Papasian from Paris to stage the drama written by Berj Zeytountsian of Armenia. Papasian is a familiar name in Armenian theater circles. He commuted to New York several times to direct the difficult piece. In addition to the veteran actors of the group, the play featured many young actors and young participants in the technical crew. It is of utmost gratification to the Tekeyan Cultural Association that the young are taking control of Armenian affairs, including the theater. There were more than 30 actors and technicians who participated in the remarkable production.

Harout Barsoumian played the role of Soghomon Tehlirian. His impeccable rendition of the role and his soliloquy at the end of the play was moving. The narration of how he had lost 85 members of his own family, how the intelligentsia was brutally crushed and how innocent Armenians were buried in the desert of Der el-Zor, Syria in the hundreds of thousands stunned the audience.

Karnig Nersessian, a veteran actor with the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group, was Talaat Pasha. He was very convincing in the role and in creating the Turkish atmosphere of the times.

The lawyers and the witnesses in the German court displayed their deep sympathy to Tehlirian and the Armenian people by acquitting him. Henry Morgenthau portrayal by Armenag Kurusyan was memorable. Dr Martin Nepage was portrayed by Roy Bahian eloquently, and Dr. Yohannes Lepsius by Hagop Vartivarian. Sarkis Pilavjian, a long-time member of the groups, portrayed Otto Liman Von Sanders. Shemavon Atamian (depicting State Prosecutor Sark Gollnick) deserves this year's best-actor award by the Tekeyan Cultural Association. Dr Lehmberg (presiding justice) by Harout Chatmajian was self-confident and professional. Veteran Missak Boghossian and newcomer Raffi Gulbenk as defense attorneys were very impressive.

Van-born Hovannes Kartalian (90-years-old) was Nazim Bey. Khachig Sariminassian was the 80-year-old Armenian priest testifying on Tehlirian's behalf. Hard of hearing on stage, his condition created some comic relief. Elizabeth Akian was the mother of Tehlirian who reminded him that he had not avenged his family's and his people's murders. She was also the sympathetic German landlady Mrs. Dittmann renting a room to Tehlirian. Her treatment of Tehlirian like a son was greatly appreciated by the audience. It has to be mentioned that although Ms. Akian had broken her foot during rehearsals, showed up on stage unfailingly.

Arpi Cankar, Talin Bahian, and Lena Jinivizian-Guroian portrayed the Three Spirits who talked to Tehlirian and advised him what to do. They brought a feminine touch to the stage. Their enthusiasm was highly noticeable. Talin Karagolian portrayed the wife of Talaat. She is one of the most experienced actors of the theater group. Talar Zokian, Alain Matatian, Sevag Mekhitarian, Kyle Torossian, and Garo Shamamian were on the stage with short or mute acts but their presence was impressive.

Lighting and sound was a priority for the director. It was the first time the American-Armenian theater was exposed to electronic translation simultaneously. The audience could read the English translation on the stage. Kevork Mourad provided the audiovisual drawings in the background. He is

a professional in this field. Harout Chatmajian is one of the original founders of the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group and as such has directed and supervised many pieces on the Greater New York stage. During the preparation of the play, when the director was absent, Harout made sure the actors learned their lines and were present during the rehearsals.

Harout Barsoumian developed the music and the sound for the stage. Helen Minassian was the ubiquitous assistant to the director. She worked tirelessly around the stage and around the actors. It behooves us to mention the names of Baydzig Kalayjian who translated the play from Eastern Armenian and Anahid Kurdian who translated it into English.

The technical crew (Hratch Zokian, Haig and Anoush Gulians, Haig and Serpouhi Vartivarians) were remarkable. Their participation was hugely important, despite the fact that they were not visible on the stage. Armine Minassian was the all-pro make-up artist.

A play of this importance attracted attention from all over the United States. Armenian Ambassador Dikran Sarksian and his wife from Washington DC were present. They said that they were greatly impressed by this production and became very emotional from the presentation.

Mari Zokian deserves special mention for her role in managing every actor and every helper. She provided the wardrobe, props and furniture. Hagop Vartivarian was the general manager of the production. Hagop's work and commitment rendered the play even more enjoyable.

The presentation on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Centennial by the Greater New York Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group is destined to remain a unique achievement that will be indelible in the memories of all those who attended it.