

Petliura's Assassination

May Picqueray

Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman sent me a telegram. They were arriving in Paris to stay a while and they strongly wished to meet me there. At their demand, I book a room for Emma, on the Sorbonne square, and for Alexander (who we all call Sacha), rue Royer-Collard near the Luxemburg.

Emma will only be staying for 48 hours, people are waiting for her in England for a series of conferences. Sacha has a lot of work. He wishes me to help him for a few days with the writing of his Memoirs. I feel very comfortable around this, good, generous man, who carries with him the stigmata of the fourteen years he spent in prison.

Contrary to what I have read about him afterwards, on his pessimism which would have led him to suicide, Sacha was very jovial, very easy to get along with. We often had our meals in either restaurant opposite his hotel, one was Russian, the other Polish. Musicians and singers performed there, which livened up our meals. And Sacha hummed the old tunes they played.

He received the visit of a young Russo-American blouse-maker who was going on holidays in Israel. It was an occasion to reunite a few comrades around a borch, in a restaurant of the rue Racine; Mollie, Senya, and Schwartzbard, who held a small shop as a jeweller-clockmaker on the boulevard de Belleville, joined us.

We were discussing merrily while having lunch, when a group of men entered the restaurant with a lot of noise; the outbursts of their voices attracted the consumers' attention. Suddenly, Schwartzbard turned livid, he had just recognised in this group the former ataman of the Ukraine, Petlioura, the author of many bloody pogroms against Jewish people, who became famous for his uncountable murders, rapes, and acts of looting. Fifteen members of Schwartzbard's family had been hanged on Petlioura's orders.

He came back to the restaurant the next day, armed this time; that is how on May, 25th, Petlioura fell under Schwartzbard's shots, who had come to avenge his people.

Gravely injured, Petlioura was taken to the Charité hospital, where he died upon arrival.

Schwartzbard was sent to trial in Paris, on October 18th, 1925, his trial lasted for a week. Mr. Henri Torrès defended him brilliantly. It was one of the most famous legal cases of that period.

Many famous people testified in his favour, such as Séverine, the countess of Noailles, Maxime Gorki, Joseph Kessel, Professor Langevin, Vicor Marguerite, who all put on trial the pogroms and Petlioura the murderer.

Schwartzbard then declared at his trial:

“I am happy I did what I did, I avenged my people, I killed a murderer!”

He was discharged.

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