

# Simón Radowitzky and the People's Justice

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Here we offer an outline biography of the young anarchist who, at as young an age as 14 had been wounded in Kiev (Russia) in 1905 for his participation in popular campaigns: who spent 21 years in prison over Falcón: who fought alongside the Republicans in the battle against Francisco Franco's fascist uprising: and who, with the passage of time. was to become a legend and a symbol of working class integrity in the face of adversity.

# Introduction

*By the reckoning of the oligarchy, the military, the police, the clergy—which is to say, of all who stood for the system of exploitation—the young anarchist who gave the hated police chief Colonel Ramon L. Falcón his just deserts in November 1909, belonged “to that caste of helots who veg-etated on the steppes of Russia, eking out their wretched lives amid the inclemency of nature and the rudeness of an inferior status.”*

*As far as the people were concerned, though, his had been the avenging hand that, in an individual act separated from the masses, had carried out an act of revolutionary legitimacy: avenging all the workers whom the police had massacred just weeks before. Here we offer an outline biography of the young anarchist who, at as young an age as 14 had been wounded in Kiev (Russia) in 1905 for his participation in popular campaigns: who spent 21 years in prison over Falcón: who fought alongside the Republicans in the battle against Francisco Franco’s fascist uprising: and who, with the passage of time, was to become a legend and a symbol of working class integrity in face of adversity.*

The first of May 1909 dawned cold but sunny: later, around noon, clouds began to gather as if a storm was brewing: a storm that featured not thunderclaps and lightning but bullets, bloodshed and hatred.

There was little in the way of news in the newspapers, except notice of the birth of Juliana, heiress to the Dutch throne, and at the Odeón Casa Paterna was playing, with Emma Gramatica at the top of the bill. But more than one bourgeois will have read with a touch of anxiety two small ads, every letter of which seemed, in their fearful imaginings, to give off a whiff of grapeshot. Two labour meetings were announced: one was organised by the (*socialist*) General Union of Workers and was scheduled for 3.00 p.m. (“A. Mantecón and Alfredo L. Palacios will speak”): the other would be a FORA (*anarchist*) affair, for which people were invited to assemble in the Plaza Lorea for a march down the Avenida de Mayo and Florida to the Plaza San Martín and on to the Paseo de Julio (*today’s Paseo Leandro N. Alem*) and the Plaza Mazzini.

There will be no problem with the socialists, of course—the more nervous of them will have been thinking—but the anarchists?

## A Killer Called Falcón

1909 was a rather fraught time in Argentina. Figueroa Alcorta was in government of a world that appeared to be changing thanks to an irreversible invasion: the flood of new Argentinians, immigrants and their offspring. Direct action, scientism and, economic ideas all were having their impact on Buenos Aires, which was increasingly coming to resemble a European city.

Later, after noon, the Plaza Lorea began to fill with folk not habitues of the city centre: lots of moustaches, berets, neckerchiefs, patched trousers, lots of fair hair, lots of freckled faces, lots of Italians. lots of “Russians” (*as the Jewish immigrant was called in those days*) and quite a few Catalans.

Along came the anarchists with their red flags: “*Death to the bourgeois! War on the bourgeoisie!*” were the first cries heard.

The preference was for gold lettering on red banners, spelling out the various anarchist organisations.

By 2.00 pm the square was crammed with people. There was enthusiasm, shouting “*Vivas!*”, singing, and a murmur that grew like a wave. The high point came when the “*Luz al Soldado*” (Enlighten the Soldier) anarchist association showed up. They had come down the Calle Entre Rios and seemed to be the noisiest group. Later, the police report (*and we all know how the police have always needed to invent excuses for their own brutality*) would say that this column: as it passed, smashed the windows of bakeries that had failed to close their doors to mark their support for the Festival of Labour, bludgeoning the trams conductors and drivers and destroying hire cabs and unhitching the horses.

But worse was to come. In the Avenida de Mayo, a vehicle unexpectedly drew up. It was Colonel Ramon Falcón, the chief of police, arriving in person to direct the forces of repression.

People recognised him and began to shriek: “*Down with Colonel Falcón! Death to the Cossacks! War on the Bourgeoisie!*” And defiantly the flags and banners were waved. Falcón, only metres from where the anarchists were massed, looked on impassively, as if taking the measure of crowd. It looked as if he was taking stock of the enemy’s strength, like a general before battle. Falcón was regarded as an officer “*of the old school*”, a “*priest of discipline*”. There he stood, spare and gaunt, resembling a falcon, opposite workers who were in his view, as in the eyes of much of the ruling class, “*foreigners, without discipline, without tradition, without roots, anti-Argentinians*”.

Nothing happened during the speeches, but afterwards, as the crowd set off on the march westwards along Rivadavia, the carnage erupted. After a quick word with Jolly Medrano, the commander of the security squad, Falcón gave the go-ahead for the attack. First in were the cavalry, riding over the people, then the shooting.

Many decided to run for it, but not all. The ones who decided not to beat a retreat did not even bother to take cover behind a tree but boldly faced the repression. But after a half hour of tough and unequal fighting, the square was cleared. Leaving the pavements littered with berets, hats, walking sticks, neckerchiefs, and thirtysix pools of blood. Three corpses and forty seriously wounded were removed immediately. The dead were Miguel Bech, a seventy two year old Spanish

street pedlar living at 92 Pasco; José Silva, a twenty three year old Spanish shopworker living an 955 Santiago del Estero; and Juan Semino, a nineteen year old Argentinian hod carrier. A few hours later, Luis Pantaleone and Manuel Fernández (*a thirty six year old Spanish tram conductor*) passed away. Virtually all of the wounded were Spanish, Italian, and Russian.

## Same Old Story

On the morning of the following Monday, the bourgeois sighed with relief: *the newspapers had come out as usual even though the Buenos Aires Printing Federation had joined the general strike. Which means that the government had managed to break the unity of the movement.*

But there was no lessening in the pugnacity of the workers. At 3055 Cochabamba, a band of workers tried to seize the Vasena factory (*the very same factory that would be the scene of the Tragic Week, tens years on*), but were repelled. Blood was spilled: but even then the morale of the workers was unbroken. And every act led to further mobilisation. Thus, some five thousand people assembled outside the morgue to claim the bodies of the dead anarchists. To the workers' demand that Falcón resign, President Figueroa Alcorta emphatically replied:

“Falcón will resign on 12 October 1912, when I complete my presidential term.” Then the police reported the arrests of “further Russian nihilists”. And La Prensa—the system's journalists always used the same ploys—carried a pathetic account of how the wife of one of the anarchists killed in the Plaza Lorea (Antonio Rey de Fernández) had left her husband “on account of the latter's violent ideas”.

As the days passed, the strike weakened. However, the politicians and the upper classes were startled by the extraordinary display of mourning in the shape of the sixty thousand workers who escorted the remains of their fallen comrades to the cemetery.



## People's Justice

And it was in fact just by the exit from one cemetery—the La Recoleta cemetery— that the main event in our tale was to take place.

Colonel Falcón was returning in his barouche from the interment of his friend Antonio Balve, the governor of the National Penitentiary and a former police official. Falcón seemed downhearted, but in fact he was mulling over the report that he had to submit to the Interior minister on the basis of inquiries carried out by the superintendent of the Social Order branch, Jose Vieyra. Subject: *Anarchist activities*.

A few days earlier, an anarchist attack had been thwarted just as Pablo Karaschin was about to plant a bomb in the main nave of the El Carmen chapel. Falcón had a file on Karaschin as leader of a group of activists who lived at 971 Junín, at the “*La Española*” laundry along with his wife and two little daughters: and in view of the report and the aborted attack, the chief of police was considering the measures that he would put to the minister, Avellaneda, measures which were in his view, essential “*if similar acts are to be prevented*”. Meanwhile, his coach was travelling slowly down the Avenida Quintana. It was driven by the Italian Ferrari, a driver who had joined the department in 1888. Alongside Falcón sat 20 year old Alberto Lartigau, the only son of a family of nine children, for whom his father had secured a position as Falcón’s private secretary with the rationale that working with Falcón would “*make a man of him*.”

The coach turned into the Avenida Callao, heading south. It was at this point that two men—the driver José Fornes, who was at the wheel of the car behind Falcón’s vehicle, and the War Ministry clerk Zoilo Agüero—spotted a foreign-looking strapping lad starting to run flat out behind the police chief’s carriage. He had something in his hand. Quickly, as he drew alongside the coach, the stranger ran obliquely at it and tossed a package inside. There was an explosion a half second later and the youth looked all around him before setting off at a run towards the Avenida Alvear.

After his initial surprise, Fornes got out of his car and, with Agüero’s help, began to chase the stranger who had a head start of some seventy metres. They raised a great alarm and more people joined the pursuit, among them police officers Benigno Guzmán and Enrique Müller. Their quarry ran desperately on, straining to add some distance, because he knew that he might well be lynched or gunned down on the spot.

As he ran, he could taste death on his tongue and in the lungs that were fit to burst from the strain. He raced along the Avenida Alvear and spotted a building site. He made for it as if it might have offered some refuge, a bolthole where he might at least get his face out of sight. He stopped. His pursuers were almost on him. He drew out a revolver and set off again on a run.

And then, as he raced on, he was shot in the right breast and fell on the ground.

## “A Bomb For Every One Of You”

Meanwhile Falcón and Lartigau lay bleeding on the street.

They would both be tended at the central police department. The Argentine Army and police—even in the outlying areas, from where delegations were sent— would look upon this as an “*af-front*”. Deeply imbued with an esprit de corps, they all pledged that “*there will never be any pardon for the assassin*”. Many years were to pass but the watchword never altered: “*No forgiveness for the killer of Falcón*”. A watchword that it took Hipólito Yrigoyen over two decades of dogged determination to break down.

The anarchist, too, had collapsed in the street. But they pulled him up by his hair and clothing. They turned him over so that his face was turned to the sun. It was, as a reporter noted at the time: disagreeably pale, a little reddish moustache, half-shaven, bony features, boxer’s jaws, watery eyes and big, prominent ears: without doubt, he is a Russian, an anarchist, a worker.

There he lay writhing “*panting like some wild boar cornered by hounds*”.

They heaped abuse on him, calling him a “*Russian swine*” among other things. His eyes were wide open, staring, awaiting that first kick in the face. “*Long live anarchism!*” he shouted: and when the policemen Müller and Guzmán told him, “*Wait and see what is in store for you now*”, he replied in his broken and nasal Spanish: “*I don’t care. I have a bomb for every one of you.*”

## Caste of Helots

Due to one of those sometimes unaccountable contradictions of the system, on this occasion the police failed to abide by the unwritten law whereby they took immediate revenge for the death of one of their own. Maybe it was because they wanted to find out if he had had any accomplices, but the material fact is that the sudden arrival of assistant superintendent Mariano T. Vila from the 15<sup>th</sup> precinct prevented summary execution. Vila ordered that he be loaded aboard a cab and taken to the Fernández hospital because the anarchist was losing a lot of blood from the right breastbone. A search of his clothes revealed a second weapon: a Mauser handgun in his belt. He was also carrying a polished belt with twenty four revolver shells and four clips of fresh shells, all of them of .9 calibre. This guy had been ready for anything. At the Fernández hospital, the duty doctor looked him over and the diagnosis was that he had suffered a slight wound in the right chest area. The prisoner, temporarily bandaged, was removed to the cells at the 15<sup>th</sup> precinct, and held strictly incommunicado. Interrogation followed but the anarchist said nothing except that he was Russian and aged eighteen. That was all they could get out of him.

All that could be added to the police file was a list of the prisoner's clothing:

Navy blue jacket, black trousers, calfskin boots, black broad-brimmed soft hat, green necktie beneath the folded collar of a coloured shirt, carrying no papers affording any clue to his identity.

Meanwhile, the government was ill at ease. The president, the ministers and high ranking military commanders were placed under guard *"to save them from becoming the victims of further attacks"*.

Figueroa Alcorta imposed a state of siege and the press was emphatically forbidden to release any information about the prisoner and anarchist activities. After several days of frantic activity, the police managed to identify him: he was Simón Radovitzky or Radowitzky, a Russian residing in a tenement at 194 Calle Andres (*today the Calle José Evaristo Uriburu*). He had come to Argentina in March 1908 and gone to Campana, where he was employed as a mechanic with the Argentine Central Railway workshops.

Later he returned to Buenos Aires to work as a blacksmith and mechanic. Immediately, Argentinian embassies were asked for background information and the then Argentinian minister in Paris, Doctor Ernesto Bosch, replied that Radovitzky *"was involved in riots in Kiev, Russia, in 1905, and for that was sentenced to six months in prison."*

*In those "riots"*. Simón had received wounds which left him scarred. In addition, the report contained something very interesting. It noted that Radovitzky belonged to the anarchist group run by the intellectual Petroff along with the well known revolutionaries Karaschin, Andrei Ragapelloff, Moisés Scutz, Josef Buwitz, Maxim Sagarin, Ivan Mikhin and the lecturer Matrena: *all of these were names to raise the hairs on the necks of the comfortable Buenos Aires bourgeois of the day.*

*“With the prisoner identified and having acknowledged the crime, it only remained for him to await the day and the hour when he would be shot.”* Because no one believed that he was just eighteen years old. Eighteen meant that he was a minor. And, without exception, all of the newspapers were taking Radowitzky for a man over twenty five years old.

There was no one to defend him. Not even La Protesta, the anarchist daily which had been silenced by a parapolice gang made up of fellows from the Northern barrio. *“Fellows”* who had forced the doors of the paper’s printworks at 839 Libertad, smashing every thing that the anarchists were working on.

Nor was there anyone in influential circles to speak out against Radowitzky’s being dealt with so severely. Military, politicians, officials—they all favoured *“exemplary punishment”*. And it did not need saying that the age of the prisoner had to be ignored in this case if the death penalty was to be imposed.

Moreover, the statement from the prosecutor, Doctor Manuel Beltrán, was quite explicit as to what it was intended to do with the prisoner. *“Simón Radowitzky”*—Beltrán opined—*“belongs to that caste of helots that vegetate on the steppes of Russia eking out a wretched existence amid the inclemency of nature and the rudeness of an inferior status.”*

And in the regime’s press columns there was no forgiveness for the foreigner, especially when the prosecution was also saying things like: *“At his first arraignment the prisoner stood before the investigating magistrate arrogant, determined to obstruct all questioning relative to his personal identity: he refused to answer the questions put to him, but, in contrast to that intention, he readily admitted responsibility for the act under investigation, bragging of its origin and gloating over Señor Lartigau’s having perished too.”*

At all costs too, he strove to depict Radowitzky as a cunning and accomplished assassin:

*“The sangfroid and arrogance with which he speaks betray the exhibitionistic intent and sectarian posturing in that first confession, wherein the pride in his accomplishment is visibly in contention with fear of punishment. Thus he brags about an act which he cannot deny and yet at the same time he conceals his personal details, in the belief that he might thereby keep the investigation in the dark.”*

## Cousin Moisés

Those words showed enormous self-contradiction on the part of the prosecution. Because Radowitzky was telling the truth: *he really was eighteen*. Furthermore: he acknowledged that he alone had committed the act, covering for a comrade who had been at Callao and Quintana at the time of the attack, but whose identity has never been established. And all this despite the “*encouragement*” to which the police subjected Simón Radowitzky. The telling report from the prosecutor went on to say:

“The killer’s physiognomy boasts morphological features which display, in exaggerated form, all of the tell-tale signs of the criminal. Undue development of the lower jaw, prominence of the zygomatic and superciliary arches, depression of the forehead, ferocious gaze, slight facial asymmetry, these are the somatic characteristics that betray Radowitzky as the classic criminal type.”

The prosecutor saw Radowitzky as a born criminal, like the ones who murder in order to steal. He failed to recognise that he was a product of despair, born in a land where serfdom and the knout were the rule for the poor, where terrible punishment awaited any who disobeyed the absolutist rule of the tsars. And, although he had a few words of mitigation in the light of the prisoner’s Jewish origins, these were spoken with profound contempt and repugnance:

“Outcasts from the political absolutisms there, prey to the mas-ter’s discretionary powers, harassed and butchered by the ignorance and fanaticism of a people that looks upon the Israelite as an enemy of society, in the end they emigrate, like Radowitzky, after suffering imprisonment merely for subscribing to subversive ideas.”

Finally, Doctor Beltrán, after requesting in his opening address that “*for reasons of social prophylaxis*” the verdicts “*be verbal and speedily applied*”, asked for the death penalty for the anarchist. The only obstacle in his path was the “*minor*” matter of his age. In the Argentina of that time, there was no death penalty for minors, women, or old folk. But Doctor Beltrán devised an original method to surmount that difficulty. He had “*medical experts*” calculate the prisoner’s age. Some of them estimated that he was twenty, whilst others said twenty five. Then the prosecution counsel stated: *Twenty plus twenty five makes forty five, and, halved, that makes twenty two and a half. Radowitzky is twenty two and a half. Which makes him old enough for the firing squad.*

Blithely, he read out his assessment:

“I have to say here that, although this is the first time since I took up office that it has fallen to me to seek the maximum penalty for an offender, I do so with neither scruple nor undue hesitation, but with the firmest belief that I have done my duty, because I reckon that there is nothing so counter-productive in the social and juridical order as the squeamishness of wrong-headed philanthropy.”

And to squash any misgivings which the hesitant might have had, Beltrán finished:

“In the light of society’s defenses, we have to see Radowitzky as an incorrigible element whose dreadfulness is in direct proportion with the crime perpetrated, and which cannot but provoke the utmost aversion because of the savagery of the cynicism displayed, even to the point of bragging this very day about the crime and gloating over its memory.”

Everything went badly for Radowitzky.

No one wanted to believe that he was just eighteen. The press, under the sway of powerful sections of the populace, called for the death penalty. And that is how things stood until, one fine day, on to the scene stepped a singular personage with a hint of the rabbi and second-hand dealer about him. He said his name was Moisés Radowitzky and he was cousin to the anarchist. Wrapped in a scroll of brown paper, he brought with him a document that was about to turn the trial around. It was Simón’s birth certificate. A curious document in Cyrillic script. In its report, *Caras y Caretas* stated:

“Radowitzky gets younger every time. To begin with he was credited with twenty nine years, and those twenty nine have been whittled down until he had just necessary for the firing squad: twenty two. He always claimed to be eighteen and seemed ready to get no further than that shortly, but who believed him? Doubtless not even the anarchists. It was to be expected Radowitzky would try to pass himself off as a minor. Has the matter of Radowitzky’s age been cleared up once and for all? Señor Vieyra, Chief superintendent, has just received a document which we reproduce in facsimile and which, judging from its appearances, is an authentic copy of Radowitzky’s baptismal record. According to what Señor Vieyra’s translators say, along comes this document with so much scribbling and outlandish characters on it to state that Radowitzky was born in the hamlet of Santiago, province of Kiev, Russia, on 10 November 1819. According to which Radowitzky would now be eighteen years and seven months old.”

# The Long Night

But the document was not to be acknowledged, for want of legal authentication. All the same, it would have a direct impact upon the minds of the judges, who were not minded to despatch a minor to his death. They would abide by the principle of *“if in doubt, refrain.”* Radowitzky was spared the firing squad. But was sentenced to a lingering death: *“penal servitude for an indefinite term, with solitary confinement on a diet of bread and water for twenty days every year around the anniversary of his offence.”*

And so began the long night for the young anarchist. His entire youth would be spent behind bars and in walled silence. Twenty one years he was to spend—ten of them spent in solitary in the cells—surrounded by the dregs of society. He spent nineteen of those years in Ushuaia, a prison whose very name, unadorned, was enough to instill fear. But Radowitzky would not be forgotten by public opinion. Instead, as the prison gates closed, a second chapter opened in his life, in his lifelong adventure. A chapter reminiscent of the Count of Monte Cristo.

By 16 January, 1911, Buenos Aires had something to talk about at some length: *“the Feast of the Three Kings had brought sensational news. Thirteen convicts from the National Penitentiary had tunneled under a wall and escaped.”*

Two famed anarchists had escaped; Francisco Solano Regis (*served twenty years for having attempted the life of ex-president Figueroa Alcorta*) and Salvador Planas Virella (*who was serving ten years for attempting to kill President Quintana*). The other eleven escapees were common criminals. But there was another anarchist who had not made his escape: Simón Radowitzky. Just minutes earlier he had been marched off to the prison print shop.

The anarchists had help from outside in that just before the break-out (*at 13.30 hours on a day of sweltering heat*) several bundles of trousers, shirts, and jackets had been dumped from a cab and left between the railings and the wall. The inmates escaped through a tunnel in the shape of a U, which is to say, a straightforward excavation for no purpose other than to evade the guards on the walls. Access to the tunnel was through a flower garden and, obviously, it was dug by hand, fistful by fistful, with the dirt being scattered over the garden to avoid mounds. The exit came up in some scrub growing between the wall and the railing. There was a lot of speculation that the anarchists might have dug it with the connivance of the guards, these being conscript troops from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. The tunnel emerged in the Calle Juncal, virtually on the Junction with the Calle Salguero. The anarchists Regis and Planas Virella, after changing their clothes, climbed into a cab which was waiting for them, and vanished. The common criminal prisoners who seized their chance and availed of the tunnel had to make their way still in prison uniforms: others dressed in the clothing apparently destined for Radowitzky's use.

## “Russian Mystic”

Naturally the break-out brought “*huge disgrace*” upon the prison authorities, with reports being asked for, officials transferred, and guards facing charges.

And somebody had to be made the fall guy: the “*Russian*” Radowitzky. No prison governor wanted to risk the anarchists’ coming up with another planned break-out to rescue their imprisoned colleague.

Also, something out of the ordinary in the prison had been observed: Radowitzky was well-liked by all, inmates and guards alike. No less a person than the governor of the National Penitentiary in the Calle Las Heras pointed that out when he asked that Radowitzky be transferred out of his establishment:

“Only if I were myself to stand watch in person over Radowitzky could I ensure that sentence was carried out, for this is an inmate who has the sympathy even of the fire-fighters and conscripts. By that time he was being described as the typical Russian mystic who, even in prison, could not imagine that men might do evil, and above all, that they should behave in a fashion injurious to their neighbours.”

On one occasion he asked to be given a less damp cell, and as the only one available was one that was in the process of being replastered, the governor suggested that he finish it off himself. But the bricklayers’ union was out on strike at the time—as Radowitzky was aware—so the anarchist opted to stay in his damp cell out of solidarity with the strikers.



## Bound for Ushuaia

That year it was decided that he should be transferred to Ushuaia penitentiary. It was the last time in his life that he trod upon the soil of Buenos Aires. Never again would he return to his tenement apartment at 194 Calle Andes (*today the Calle José Evaristo Uriburu*), which he had left that November morning in 1909 to execute the murderous police chief. Imagine what a transportation of prisoners to Patagonia must have been like in 1911. Many years later, in 1947, a warder, Martín Chávez, when he quit the prison, described a similar transport. It reads like something lifted from a Dostoevsky novel. His article was serialised in the March and April 1947 editions of Clarín. Let us cite a few paragraphs:

“We had been told that fifteen days’ sailing was enough to get us to Ushuaia. Our trip took twenty nine. I sailed with the ship’s officers and one day I went below to see the convicts. I shall never forget the sight that awaited me. It was Hell. The dampness, the heat, the sores. The vessel had stopped off at Bahía Blanca, to take on coal which was stored in the hold beneath the compartment where the convicts were. The coal dust got everywhere, imperceptibly, persistently, like some curse placed upon these shackled men. It stuck to their faces, they breathed it in, spat it out, and it left rings around their eyes. Phantoms, spectres, I know not what I saw. I walked away from that torture chamber heart-sick, wondering whether the prison governors, the judges, the ministers had not been alerted to this barbaric ordeal. But fate held an even more bitter experience in store for me. At the dock in Ushuaia the prison governor was waiting for us. As were some clerks and lots of guards who took up strategic positions to oversee the disembarkation of the prisoners. And the spectres emerged into the open air, into the light, after 29 days. And how they emerged! To say that they were filthy and sick is scarcely to hint at the condition of these men. Shrunken, unshaven, their ankles raw from the chafing of their leg irons, their thighs scratched and bleeding, their clothing wrinkled like handkerchiefs or towels. They had arrived in the white Hell, a thousand times preferable to the transport hulk.”

By the time that Radowitzky arrived in Ushuaia, nine years had passed since its foundation stone had been planted and its construction had been carried out by convict labour. It had been the brain-child of the engineer Catello Muratgia, who had made a reality of what was to become the notorious Ushuaia penitentiary for repeat offenders.

This mountain of cement and stone de-signed to hold “*the most savage criminals*” and all who were held to be “*incorrigible*”, which is to say, those who were three time losers, had been erected at very little cost, with convict labour.

Thus Radowitzky’s fellow inmates would be, not merely murderers but also incorrigible thieves, swindlers, and the whole “*dregs of society*”. But of course on more than one occasion the prison gates opened to admit hundreds of political prisoners.

People who were reading Dostoevsky's "*The House of the Dead*" or "*The Tomb of the Living*", sharing with the author in the sufferings of the condemned, had no idea perhaps there was an exact equivalent on Argentinian soil, a place from which very few emerged alive or returned to society with their normal. mental faculties intact.

## “Loathsome Goons”

Year followed year for this man Radowitzky. All of them the same. Every one with a November. As 14 November approached, there were those ghastly 20 days in the hole, on bread and water, with the cold and damp of the cement seeping into his aching bones. And his mental state? Was Radowitzky broken by the endless punishments, the meaningless existence lived out among these brutes? If only he had at least had some reading matter!

But from Buenos Aires he was dogged by a joke devised by some “petty dictator” on duty in the prison. “*Radowitzky feels like reading, does he? Give him a Bible.*” That is how it was in Ushuaia as well. Whenever Radowitzky sought to withdraw from the underworld and asked for reading matter, they brought him a Bible. And they reveled in it, the jailors and convicts alike.

What of his comrades in Buenos Aires? Had they already forgotten their movement’s martyr, as they termed him? The Great War had sapped the strength of the nation’s labour movements. However, the Buenos Aires anarchists were to prove themselves good friends. Although nine years had gone by, their dearest hope was to free Radowitzky. In May 1918, the city was flooded by a pamphlet printed by the newspaper *La Protesta* and written by Marcial Belasoain Sayós. It was called *Ushuaia Penitentiary* and was dedicated “*To my friend Simón Radowitzky, as a tribute. And to the loathesome goons, as a slap in the face.*”

The pamphlet was very well-informed and, in a style typical of the anarchists of the day, it denounced the tortures to which Radowitzky had been subjected. The focus of its attack was the deputy governor of the prison, Gregorio Palacios, and he was told:

“Like the tiger, like the hyena, you make your kill with the sinister slowness of the degenerate: what voluptuousness you must have felt in the slow murder of Convict 71, whom his suffering drove out of his mind. That same hysterical thrill of pleasure will have made you quiver at the sight of the suffering of Radowitzky, once strong and self-assured, now melancholy, decrepit, and ailing, through your fault. Loathsome assassin! Damn you to death!”

Plainly a more than forceful style.

## “Infamous Sacrilege”

Under the heading “*The Sodom of Tierra del Fuego*”, the pamphlet’s author charged deputy governor Salacios with having perpetrated sex offenses against Radowitzky and went on to detail the punishments inflicted upon the latter by the guards Alapont, Cebezas, and Sampedro.

“Whilst Simón Radowitzky was confined in his cell, these three sought to enjoy the hysterical sensation of watching a man suffer and made their way to the cell of the martyr, the man who offered up his life on the altar of his ideal, this selfless, saintly man: they drew near to his pain so as to add to it. He was confined in an airless dungeon, without light or sunshine, without food. What had he done? Nothing! He is always punished for being who he is, no reasons are needed. He was weak from fasting when the barbarians swooped to complete their heroic feats. They attacked him from behind, their whips slicing his skull open and their fists marking that sacred face. The captive’s blood ran red, but they failed to spill it as he had done, with valour, in his unforgettable feat: brandishing weapons, they fell upon a man weakened and defenseless. They left him prone, and in agony upon the ground, unconscious in the wake of their brutal beating. He resembled a corpse, livid and sprawling on the ground. Then, seeing him thus, Cebezas, the Loathsome, unsheathed his weapon and stabbed him in one arm. Whereupon he withdrew, satisfied and smug, to recount his exploit and celebrate it with others as vile and loathsome as himself. To raise one’s hand against a man in that condition, against someone like Radowitzky, is a sacrilege that cannot ever be forgiven by anyone. Therefore I shout my reproach in these lines: on its account, I charge them with being loathsome cowards, flinging my fearsome curse, my cry of vengeance in their faces.”

That pamphlet made its mark on public opinion. The anarchists scored a psychological success: so much so that the Yrigoyen government ordered an official inquiry to establish the facts about mistreatment. In its findings the three jailers named were to be described as “*persons of poor conduct and worse background*” and were to be suspended.

Finally, the pamphlet hinted at some-thing that was to be put into effect six months afterwards:

“Selfless friend, Simón, soul companion, you live without hope, in the gloomy night of your suffering, beset by wild beasts that badger you, without a ray of sunshine to warm you, but with the hearts of your friends, of those who understand and love you: there you are enshrined by the zealous cult of remembrance: thoughts of rescuing you are forever before us. So, since you seek no oblivion for what you did, there will be no shortage of those who will do it for you. Everything humanly possible must be done to secure your release and there will be someone to see to that task. These lines go out to you with the affection of those beings who love you: those who are

beginning to lay the groundwork for the great event of your being returned to life, snatched from the savagery of the criminal jailers who have made you suffer so.”

# The Escape

On 9 November 1918, Buenos Aires was hit by a news item that caused a greater sensation than the news coming from Europe about the Kaiser's abdication and the German workers' revolution: on 7 November Radowitzky had escaped from the prison in Ushuaia. The public was hungry for details. Public opinion in Buenos Aires, even among the petite bourgeoisie, delighted in Radowitzky's having beaten the curse of Ushuaia. Enough is enough, they said. He has served enough time for his crime. Would he be able to escape from the region? Nobody ever had before. The prison's creator, Catello Muratgia, had assured the president of the republic: *this prison is wholly secure against escape. No one will ever pull it off. The escapee will perish of hunger or of the cold or will be forced to give himself up. Especially the likes of Radowitzky after nine years behind bars, weakened by punishments, and the lack of a proper diet.*

But it was feasible. Radowitzky was already on his way to freedom through the Beagle Channel a board a small cutter. Already breathing pure air and leaving the prison further and further behind, with that stench characteristic of all prisons, the stench of man degraded and filthy of body and soul.

Yes, the Buenos Aires anarchists were good friends to have. They had drawn up plans to do the impossible and collected the money.

The man selected for this exploit was neither a Russian nor an Italian nor a Catalan. He was a purebred native son: *Apolinario Barrera*. *He was to have help from Miguel Arcángel Roscigna, who would later take "the soft and shameful option of criminality"*. The anarchists traveled down to Punta Arenas. They came "recommended" to the leaders of the Workers' Federation, the Chileans Ramón Cifuentes and Ernesto Miranda. In Punta Arenas they hired the cutter "*Ooky*", which belonged to a Dalmatian. The crew also was made up of Dalmatians—Austrians in those days—well versed in sailing the channels of Tierra del Fuego. The schooner, painted white, put in at Ushuaia and dropped anchor on 4 November, at a little port on the bay where the prison sat. On 7 November, at 7.00 am a guard strolled across the prison guard lines. It was Radowitzky, disguised as a guard. No one had recognised him.

# The Meeting

Eduardo Barbero Sarzabal, a reporter with *Crítica* who was later to write a sensational piece on Radowitzky offers this reconstruction of the escape:

“At the time, Radowitzky was working as a mechanic in the prison workshop. It had all been worked out mathematically. There was a substitute guard there who would supply the clothing. A quarter of an hour after Radowitzky entered that workshop, he walked out of the prison, passing through the line of armed guards. He was just another new guard in uniform. He crossed the cemetery containing the dead, pressing on to where the cutter was waiting in a prearranged mooring. Over a hill, behind an aged tree lurked Barrera. The two men came face to face. The rescuer, not realising that Radowitzky would be dressed as a guard, reached for his revolver, fearing that he had been betrayed. A shout brought the scene to a rapid standstill. Apolinario! said Radowitzky. Simón! answered Barrera, understanding. Such was the password between two men who had never met.”

Once aboard ship, Radowitzky changed clothes. Barrera was of the opinion that once they had put a few miles between them and Ushuaia, Radowitzky would be put ashore in one of the many settlements along the coast. There he would be left with supplies for two months until the chase and the searches had died down. After which they would venture out to pick him up or leave him fresh supplies.

But Radowitzky did not agree to this and here he made the mistake that was to cost him twelve more years in prison, twelve years of his freedom. He persuaded Barrera to press on to Punta Arenas. There it would be a lot easier for him to pass unnoticed than on some lonely island.

## Capture and Frustration

Meanwhile, no one in the prison gave Radowitzky away. The inmates did not report his escape. It was 9:22 am before the guard Manuel Geners Soria presented himself before the governor to report the disappearance of the imprisoned anarchist.

In a later report the Tierra del Fuego national commissioner noted that the chase was launched on the basis of "*valuable information supplied by the clerk Miguel Rocha*" and a search party boarded a "*steam launch generously made available by Señor Luis Fiuchui*". But the cutter had a greater turn of speed and increasingly pulled away from the pursuit team. It left the Beagle Channel, followed the Ballenero Channel and then the Cockburn and emerged into the Straits of Magellan. So dawned day four at sea. Then, suddenly the smoke of an approaching vessel could be seen on the horizon. Radowitzky sensed danger and asked the cutter to pull in as close as possible to the shores of the Brunswick peninsula, Chilean territory. It stood about 200 metres offshore. Whereupon Radowitzky dived into the icy waters and swam ashore before vanishing. The approaching black smoke belonged to the Chilean coast guard cutter, the "*Yanez*", a ship intent upon arresting Radowitzky following a telegraphed appeal from the Argentine authorities on "*Tierra del Fuego*".

The cutter's crew swore that they had not seen the escapee, but the Chileans towed them all back as prisoners to Punta Arenas, where, after cross-questioning, one of the crewmen, a machinist, confessed the truth and indicated where the runaway had gone ashore. While the "*Yaftez*" had been alongside the cutter, Radowitzky had flattened himself on the ground to escape detection. The tension was such that not even the cold could make him budge. Once the vessels had moved off, Radowitzky, with all of his clothes soaked, set off walking towards Punta Arenas, where he hoped to find shelter. He had no idea that the Chilean authorities already knew the facts. Meanwhile a squad of Chilean naval police set out from Punta Arenas: *after seven hours Radowitzky was discovered in a place called Águas Frias, just 12 kilometres from Punta Arenas*. He was exhausted and his clothes were frozen. He was taken back in handcuffs to the Chilean port where they placed him in the brig of the warship the "*Centeno*".

News of the recapture of Radowitzky came as something of a disappointment to the average Buenos Aires citizen, but was soon eclipsed by another event: the race of the century, Botafogo versus Grey Fox. 23 days after his bid for freedom Radowitzky was back in Ushuaia. They brought him in by night to avoid rioting by the convicts. But these waited up by their window grills for their mystic of the cells. They screamed and thumped their cell doors: Long live Simón! Death to the mangy dogs!

That night the guards were given a free hand with Radowitzky. On account of his escape, they had been severely reprimanded. And there was no question of this Russian, Radowitzky getting off scot free with that. But the attitude of the convicts was so menacing that that night "*Rasputin the Good*" escaped the inevitable beating. But their vengeance took a much more refined form. Over a two year period, up until 7 January 1921, they were to hold him isolated in his cell, without a glimpse of sunlight and on half rations. In 1963 the author of this article spoke at some length



with a warder of Spanish extraction who had served in the Ushuaia prison for years and who let me in on various aspects of Radowitzky's life there. Unwittingly, the anarchist was a highly dangerous person: the other inmates always turned to him whenever they were punished or had some problem. Arrangements were made to see him in the workshops or else some other inmate passed on their grievances to him.

Radowitzky always heard them all out and became a sort of spokesman for the men in striped uniform. At the first opportunity he would raise the grievance with the governor or some Government visitor. He did so clearly and persuasively and was always creating some problem for the authorities or the jailers. Whenever his requests were refused, he organised resistance in the shape of a hunger strike, a sitdown strike, or chanted protests. Naturally reprisals followed and he always seemed to be the target.

He soaked up all their punishments and they never managed to break his spirit, nor did he ever apologise or ask for mercy. He was an odd sort, a Dostoevskian character, always surrounded by a mystic halo and an unfathomable predisposition for suffering. A mixture of Russian muzhik and ghetto rabbi. Always good-humoured and with a cordial answer to every question.

For many a long year, Radowitzky's life was to be shrouded in silence. Nobody spoke his name, as if his escape bid had been the final chapter. But in anarchist circles the myth surrounding him grew year by year. In 1925—7 years after that abortive escape bid—a journalist from the daily *La Razón* secured an interview with Radowitzky in Ushuaia.

Aside from the subjective comments he includes (the product of his own bourgeois upbringing), the journalist's account is interesting:

“Simón Radowitzky is a person of average height, thin, alert of face, and slightly balding, with a thrusting jaw, bushy eyebrows and small, lively eyes. His face is pale and there are a few red veins visible in his cheeks. He is thirty four years old and has spent the last sixteen in prison, where he turns his hand to anything. His cell is a model of cleanliness and it contains a few family portraits. When we meet he is somewhat feverish and has a blue muffler wrapped around his neck. He talks readily, we might even call him loquacious, but sometimes, not being accustomed to lengthy conversation, he repeats what he has said already. He expresses himself simply and from time to time the odd criollo slang term slips out, but he promptly corrects himself and offers apologies.

He knows that, as an anarchist, he continues to enjoy popularity, and that his fellow believers have woven him a martyr's crown, but he says that such labels irritate him and that he did not kill Falcón to make himself famous but rather under the prompting of his beliefs. He receives assistance from the *Afinidad* group in foodstuffs and medicaments, especially tonics.”

## A Judge Always Belongs to the Bourgeoisie

The years passed and the myth continued to grow. In the eyes of anarchists, Radowitzky was a saint fallen among heretics. And that view was spreading through the working class as a whole, and through public opinion in Buenos Aires generally.

For that reason all of the petitions and all of the rallies held to press for his release enjoyed enormous support and sympathy.

In 1929 and 1930, his name could be seen on the walls around the city: “*Freedom for Radowitzky*”. And La Razon argued that his very name “*was like a surge of energy with which protests were closed when capital and labour clashed over conditions.*” When Hipólito Yrigoyen was inaugurated into a second term as president on 12 August 1928, the various labour organisations pressed him for a pardon. Whereupon a debate erupted in the press and in political and legal circles regarding Radowitzky’s “*crime*” and how it was to be interpreted. There were plenty of bourgeois who pontificated that: “*Radowitzky may not have killed in order to steal, but kill he did.*”

In our view, the writer Ramón Doll best captured the controversy and the vacillations of the system, in a pamphlet published that same year.

Doll describes Radowitzky’s action using the precise terms “*repugnant and senseless crime*”, but he adds:

“This was not a crime of passion or the act of a mercenary: *it was a social crime that was born, or rather, was aborted, like some amorphous or monstrous spawn, in the deep gulf that transcends all societies and cleaves them into the modern class war.* That is why the judges in such court cases—which appear as inevitable aberrations from the whole social phenomenon, but which nonetheless signal the awakening of the exploited and the coming spilling over of the whole contents of society into the moulds of the new state and the new law—customarily handle them with double severity: first because they are crimes and then because they are committed by an individual from the class opposed to the one to which the defendant belongs. Obviously a judge is always a member of the bourgeoisie and therefore his interests, prejudices, and simple convenience will lead him to identify with his class and not with those from, the proletarian class, in such a way that the intolerance by which any crime should always be greeted, is matched by that greeting the criminal who is also an adversary.”

The proletariat—adds Doll—has its own presence in the economic and political conflict: the class struggle shocks no one except maybe the parasites who find themselves defenceless and atrophied under the rough and ready rule of labour. Already there is no problem, nor is one sought, with the socialists, communists, and anarchists, and the law students who in 1909, slaving with servility, lobbied for posts as honorary detectives with the Department, in order to put libraries to the torch, have today on the campus indicated their revulsion at the “*academic interference of*

*the military into the lecture halls.*” And Doll adds: “Radowitzky’s crime is no more and no less horrendous than the crimes being carried out daily in Argentina’s election campaigns. And yet no one involved in those crimes received even a quarter of the sentence imposed on Radowitzky.

Doll concludes:

“Behold the bourgeoisie’s attitude to two equally nauseating crimes: an anarchist attentat and a murder under cover of darkness. There may well be heated comment and criticism in the case of the robbery with murder, but in the end it is always left to the ‘serene majesty of justice’: in the case of the anarchist attentat, the bourgeoisie takes part in its re-repression, there are police round-ups, and the White Guards spring in to action. And it seems that whilst the ordinary crime is digested by the well to do as a welcome distraction and a good digestive, the anarchist attentat causes constipation, upsets the gastric juices, and gives rise to later difficulties.”

Doll, himself a nationalist by inclination, also pointed out that were the president to pardon Radowitzky this very day, he should merely be stealing a march by granting as a favor that which, strictly speaking, Radowitzky might obtain by rights in 1930 by applying for conditional release.

With his sometimes contradictory, sometimes vehement ideas, Ramón Doll spoke for the feelings of many Buenos Aires residents who, whilst not on the left, let alone revolutionaries, analysed the “*Radowitzky Case*” from a different angle than the angle employed by the traditional right.

## Report in *Crítica*

In January 1930, the ‘Monte Cervantes’ sank in the channels of Tierra del Fuego. The survivors—largely individuals from influential quarters in Buenos Aires— were lodged in Ushuaia and the inmates displayed exemplary behaviour in sharing their blankets and food with this unexpected influx.

The daily newspaper *Crítica* sent one of its best reporters, Eduardo Barbero Sarzabal south aboard the vessel that was to bring home the shipwrecks. The reporter availed of the few hours that the ship spent in Ushuaia to visit the prison there and he contrived to secure an interview that was to result in a report that proved a sensation. Let us look at Barbero Sarzabal’s experience:

“Your special correspondent secured a written order to speak with the convicts. The acting mayor, Señor Kammerath, in office for 20 days, issued orders that Convict 155 be brought to the mayor’s palace.

The Mayor’s office was on the left of the en-trance hall. Through the window a little light filtered.

-155 is here. May he come in.”

— Yes.”

A startled Radowitzky crossed the threshold, carrying his cap in his hands. And he stepped forward, determinedly, dressed in his blue and yellow striped uniform, with the huge numbers on jacket and trousers. This was convict 155. Medium height. Vigorous in his movements. Head held high, his fine-featured face with its prominent bushy eyebrows. Short black hair with the odd grey streak. Broad forehead with receding hairline. And, on being informed that this was an editor of *Crítica* that wanted to speak with him, he reached out a hand to give a firm handshake. Smiled rather sceptically. In a few short words, the journalist persuaded him that this really was a *Crítica* editor that was talking to him.

Barbero Sarzabal himself told us in 1967 that the magic word that secured Radowitzky’s trust was “*I bring greetings from Apolinario*”. Apolinario Barrera— manager of *Crítica*—who had figured in his escape bid in 1918.

And, among other things, Barbero Sarzabal’s report of the interview with Radowitzky stated:

“Simón’s words echoed around the mayor’s office like hammer blows. Radowitzky radiated a virile dynamism. When he speaks, it is as if he is screening his words. And out they come, short and concise, like a hammer. His jaws look as if they are made of iron. The fact is that, viewed from any angle, this person boasts a ro-bust and effervescent mind. Has a personality of his own. And he tells our newspaper:

‘I am very pleased to be able to speak, through you, to the comrades who take an interest in me. I am reasonably well. I am still a little anaemic even though I have not

been on punishment for a year now. During November and December we spent 20 days on hunger strike by way of protest at the inhuman behaviour of a superintendent by the name of Juan Jose Sampedro who punished a convict over some trifling matter and left him marked. (This was the same Sampedro who led the beating of Radowitzky at the start of 1918.) That protest by hunger strike—Convict 155 went on—bore fruit. Sampedro has been suspended.

The mayor who has been listening in on the interview, nods agreement. And Radowitzky adds: 'I do want strife between workers. In such affairs there is always a police provocateur acting as a cat's paw. Even though I was very young at the time, I have a very vivid recollection of the pain of that tragic day, the first of May 1909, which brought sadness forever in to many proletarian homes. I seek justice.'

Radowitzky seemed tormented by the memory of the sacrifices that his comrades have been making on his behalf for four years. And after a short silence, he adds:

'Yes, tell the comrade workers not to sacrifice themselves on my account. You can say, too, that I am well, let them concentrate on other comrades who may not be in this prison or some other one, because they too deserve help, maybe more than me.'

Radowitzky mentioned them softly, striving to make the characteristic timbre of his voice less rough and he went on:

'I received 500 pesos a little while ago. 'That's true'—the mayor confirmed. And Radowitzky adds, 'I spread the 500 pesos around the prison's sick. One had liver trouble and needed special treatment. The other, a poor chap by the name of Andres Baby, is crazy. The care we obtained for them by means of that financial aid led to an improvement for the former. And now they will take Baby away to a hospice. Our library here is dismal. We need more books. What few we have we know by heart from reading them so often. In Buenos Aires I have a cousin called Moises. The rest of my family are in North America. I mean those linked to me by blood ties, because I also count the worker comrades who suffer the injustice of contemporary society as very much my own. Despite my incarceration, I belong to the proletarian family. My ideal of redemption endures.'

Finally the *Crítica* correspondent obtained a message in writing from Radowitzky:

"Comrade workers, I avail of the kindness of the representative of *Crítica* to send you fraternal greetings from this faraway spot where fate toys with the victims of the present society."

There follows a signature: in an uneven hand, rough scratches, laboured handwriting. But what is surprising is the contents: for all his twenty years in prison, the basic ideas underlying his ideology have suffered no erosion.

The report which filled a full page made quite an impact in Buenos Aires.

By now no one doubted that Radowitzky would have to be pardoned. The anarchists spared no effort: through their sister organisations in the United States, they managed to trace Radowitzky's parents and these wrote to President Yrigoyen:

*"Before we die we should like to see our son a free man."*

## Radowitzky Free

The Radicals around Yrigoyen urged him to pardon Radowitzky two or three days ahead of the Buenos Aires parliamentary elections on 2 February 1930. Were he to do so it was virtually assured that most of the workers would vote Radical. Yrigoyen heard them out but said nothing. For one thing he knew that there was a lot of disquiet in the army and police over any such pardon. The days passed and the President made no decision. Along came 2 February and the Radicals were defeated by the Independent Socialists. The Radicals were in despair: yet again, the old man had let a chance go a-begging.

But 'El Peludo' knew what he was about. He had a good memory and recalled that in 1916, before he was elected to his first presidential term, he had promised a delegation of anarchists that he would pardon Radowitzky. And he was one to keep his promises. True, it was a little late, for 14 years had gone by. He had bided his time: *nobody could say anything to him. But now his colleagues were beginning to tell him: "Doctor, this would not be the time to pardon Radowitzky... there is a lot of unease among the military."*

On the morning of Sunday 13 April 1930, there was a huge rally held in the Moderno cinema—at 932 Boedo—"for the release of Simón Radowitzky": it was organised by the Argentinian Regional Workers' Federation (FORA) and the Buenos Aires Local Workers' Federation. The speakers were J. Menéndez, H. Corrales, J. Gracia, B. Aladino and G. Fochile. Their speeches were peppered with difficult words and a very special vocabulary: *"In order to convict Simón. it was necessary to set aside all of the gains of positivist science in terms of criminal accountability and the judges had to close their minds to determinism."* But the public paid emotional heed and its silence was more than religious.

That Sunday was Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week. A time for talk of the Lord's sacrifice and forgiveness of men's sins. Forgiveness for those who go astray and loving one's neighbour as oneself are the basis of Christianity. This was the opportunity upon which Yrigoyen seized. He was about to strike at the very heart of those who opposed any forgiveness for Falcón's killer.

On Monday 14 April 1930, Yrigoyen quietly summoned his secretary and told him:

"Son, fetch me the draft of that decree on pardons."

And six editions of that day's papers bore the great news: *"Simón Radowitzky pardoned."* The edition was a sellout. It was all the talk of the Avenida de Mayo, the cafes, the tenement yards. The atmosphere in the anarchist locals was one of triumph. The old leaders—the ones whose trousers might have been patched but who could quote from Anatole France—hugged one another and shed a few tears. It was, perhaps, the happiest experience Argentina's anarchists had ever had.

## “Avenger of the Honour of the Humble Classes”

Those passengers who had just been speaking to Radowitzky looked at one another, somewhat disappointed. Was this Radowitzky? They had imagined him to be demonic, sinister, someone of terrifying appearance and destructive demeanour. And the fact was that he was only a rough and ready sort, with a bricklayer's face and hands, smiling, making apologies, and amiably answering questions.

But the passengers were not the only people to suffer disappointment.

The ‘Ciudad de Buenos Aires’ docked in Montevideo. And there they were: about a hundred comrades who had got wind of his arrival. There were people from Buenos Aires among them: Berenguer (*of La Protesta*), Eusebio Borazo (*who had also served time in Ushuaia*), Cotelo, and others. And there were police pickets on foot and on horse-back. It was 7.15 am. Immigration officers went on board. All of the passengers could proceed ashore, except Simón Radowitzky. A disagreeable surprise awaited the Uruguayan authorities: *the deportee had no papers to authenticate his identity.*

They left the ship. The negotiations began. Anarchist leaders traveled by taxi to Uruguayan government offices. At 9.00 am, the chief of detectives, Servando Montero, came aboard. Minutes later, the director of Immigration, Juan Rolando, arrived and it was he who gave permission for the anarchist to come ashore.

Now all doubts were banished: *this really was Simón Radowitzky “best-loved comrade,” “victim of the bourgeoisie”, and “avenger of the honour of the humble classes”.* He wore a light-coloured three-piece gabardine suit, a scarf wrapped around his neck and a hat. All items bought from a pedlar in Ushuaia, with money sent to him by anarchist sympathisers.

He hailed his comrades by waving his hat. “*Long live anarchism!*” “*Long live Simón!*”, they cried from the quayside.

Police horses began to prance. The comrades began to come to life and the six main leaders climbed on to the landing-stage. Nobody made a move to stop them. This was Uruguay. Everything was different there. They all hugged Simón at some length. Whenever they made to take him ashore, two immigration service doctors politely stopped them: the passenger had to undergo an examination. Regulations were regulations and had to be complied with.

Further delay. The examination was thorough. They took him into a room and twenty minutes later they gave their findings: “*He can be brought ashore, but his left lung is seriously infected.*”

And so Simón Radowitzky stepped on to Uruguayan soil. He, in his broad-brimmed hat, was surrounded by a sea of people wearing berets, neckerchiefs, and sandals. The scene was a little off-beat. There he was in the flesh, the myth, the martyr, the avenger.

He grinned and slowly gestured his thanks. Then came the first press reports. And their disinformation led them into their first mistake: *it was said that he would spend a few days in Uruguay, and then travel on to Russia. Russia?* The anarchist leaders looked at one another. Was he perhaps

ignorant of the Stalinist massacre of the anarchist sailors in Kronstadt? Was he unaware that in Russia anarchists were labeled enemies of the State? Had Radowitzky emerged from prison with the naïve intention of talking to all the leaders of the proletariat and uniting them?

In fact, Radowitzky had not dreamed of a trip to Russia nor did he ever make the trip. Maybe it had been just a throwaway reference to his desire to bring unity.

In any event the questions continued and Radowitzky painstakingly answered them all. Until, with a smile, but with determination, he was escorted to a taxi by the anarchist leaders, and taken from there to 2058 Calle Justicia. The taxi set off and Radowitzky waved to the applauding workers.

The myth grew. And the man, the working man, his self-education restricted by twenty one years of incarceration, began his return to normal life.

Ironically, Radowitzky was now living on Justice Street, and reporters visited him there for interviews. His eyes twinkled as he told of the day in Ushuaia when he learned of the pardon. Regarding his release, he opined:

“My release was secured by the worldwide proletariat and in appending his signature to it, Doctor Yrigoyen performed an act of justice demanded by the people.”



## Helping the Comrades

Once the initial curiosity subsided, Radowitzky endured a period of exhaustion and nervousness. The hustle and bustle grated on his nerves. He felt at a loss like a monk transported to the centre of a city after twenty years of monastery life. But he learned to adapt, and instead of retreating into himself, he gradually fell in with the rhythm of his new life.

When the feting and welcoming of Radowitzky had finished a job was found for him. As a mechanic, what else? He handled the light work, for his lungs ruled out heavy exertion. And so several months passed, But the change of climate led to a notable deterioration in the anarchist's health, so his comrades decided that he should do even lighter work. These "light" tasks were to arouse police suspicion and prompted them to intervene. Radowitzky was to make a number of trips to Brazil, "*for rest and recreation*", as his anarchist friends put it. "*Carrying messages and co-ordinating actions*", the police argued. The Uruguayan journalist Luis Sciutto (Diego Lucero) has told us that when he, while still a boy, was working for Italcable, he was one of the first people to board the sea-going vessels coming in from Buenos Aires.

This was in 1930 and 1931, under the Uriburu government, when the residency laws (deportation from the country) was being used against all foreign anarchists, Those seagoing vessels always bore a few deportees. They would put into Montevideo for a few hours and he had to seize his chance: the anarchists knew that Sciutto was ready to receive the list of anarchist deportees handed to him while he was on board and would take it to a nearby cafe where two or three comrades—Radowitzky among them—would be waiting impatiently: *as soon as they got hold of the list of names, they hot-footed it to the government where they obtained the appropriate asylum permit.*

In this way a lot of Italians and Russians, instead of ending up in Mussolini's Italy or Stalinist Russia, got to stay on the welcoming soil of Uruguay.

Radowitzky was one of the people picked for this task, Sciutto remembers him as a man of average height, a touch lame, burly, with a receding hairline that made his forehead look larger and with his hair long at the sides "*like Einstein*". He had a youthful look about him, with pinkish skin, perhaps on account of the southern clime that he had had to contend with for so many years.

## A Prisoner Once More

But the democratic system in Uruguay was drawing to an end and along came the Terra dictatorship. It boded ill for all on the left by early 1933.

All of 1933 and for much of 1934, Radowitzky was virtually unnoticed as he made his trips to Brazil and engaged in minor organisation business. Up until a warm 7 December that year, when a police report placed him at 1159 Calle Rambla Wilson. They identified him there and politely informed that he would be under house arrest. They posted a guard at the door of his digs and off they went. Apparently, Radowitzky was cursed by fate. He had endured all those years of imprisonment only to wind up in the same old way: *harassed by the authorities*.

Three days before Christmas, which he never celebrated in that it was a bourgeois feast, he was visited by the punctilious chief of Uruguay's detectives, Señor Casas, who told him that he was deeply sorry but that he would have to leave the country with some urgency since he was subject to the "law on undesirable aliens". Radowitzky had no option but to take the hint and he replied that he would be leaving Uruguay just as soon as he could. But his friends raised his case with Doctor Emilio Frugoni, the socialist leader, and perhaps the most brilliant jurist Uruguay had ever had.

And Frugoni agreed to act for him. He advised him not to quit Uruguay because his case would provide a precedent for many others suffering political persecution. Alerted to this, the chief of police ordered that Radowitzky be arrested forthwith. Along with many another leader of the Uruguayan left, Radowitzky was arrested and interned on the Isla de Flores, off Carrasco. Conditions there were dire. He had to sleep in a sort of basement or cellar that had formerly housed sheep. His lawyer, Frugoni, protested and demanded that he be made available to the proper legal jurisdiction. But all that he managed was to ensure that the detainee was allowed to bed down in a lavatory instead of a cellar. Several weeks passed and the political tension in Uruguay lessened.

One by one the prisoners on the Isla de Flores were being freed. Every departure provoked shouts of delight, singing and revived hopes of release for those left behind. But that prospect looked increasingly remote for Radowitzky. He and four other leaders stayed locked up.

Frugoni pressed on indefatigably with his case. On 21 March 1936 (*after 15 months of imprisonment in the land which had granted him asylum*) Radowitzky was granted his yearned for freedom. The anarchist packed up his three or four prisoner's items and set off for Montevideo. There, with the utmost courtesy—a courtesy only too familiar to him, so that he preferred a beating to such honeyed treatment—he was told that he would have to remain under house arrest. But the fact is that he no longer had a home, because he was still living in digs. The police were emphatic: he would have to remain in prison "pending further instructions". "Further instructions" took their time coming. The cell doors opened six months later for the last time. From then up until he died, Radowitzky enjoyed his freedom although it was only in his final years that he had any rest.

It is interesting to read the final release order handed down by Judge Pitamaglio Buquet, in that it fully captures the idiosyncrasies of Radowitzky, in the time he spent in Uruguay at any rate.

The finding in his favour reads:

“Montevideo June 25 1936. Hearing: in strict conformity with the proofs adduced by the defence and the information provided in the book of evidence, it has to be stated unhesitatingly that Simón Radowitzky is not an undesirable: ever since he settled in this country the police authorities have had dealings with him only in connection with simple suspicions, only too readily explicable given his history as a very hotheaded anarchist: and, although he gave public talks here of an anarchist tenor, his conduct has at all times been proper, the conduct of a thoroughly decent man who sought contact with persons beyond reproach, many of them dissenters from his philosophical creed.”

This marked the end of one phase in Radowitzky’s life, the prison phase. He was now to embark upon far-ranging travels with his less and less numerous fellow-believers.

## Against Franco and Fascism

The challenge issued to the Spanish Republic on 18 July 1936 by Francisco Franco was construed by anarchists the world over as a matter of honour, a matter of life or death. And they all set off on a long march: *Madrid would be the rendez-vous*. Among the band of men who came from Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay bringing nothing with them but determination and courage, was Simón Radowitzky. They came to gamble their lives and confront their enemies, face to face this time. The ex-convict from Ushuaia was to render sterling services in assisting the anarchist troops on the various fronts. He was in Madrid virtually all of the time, attached to the anarcho-syndicalist command. Radowitzky believed that the Spanish civil war had made a reality of his old dream of unity among all on the left. That is, until, in 1939 he was the eye-witness to an unwelcome truth: *In Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona, the shootings of anarchists began*. Not at the hands of the Francoist mutineers, though. But at the hands of the communists who, “*in order to forestall indiscipline*” and impose their own united command, ruthlessly wiped out anything reminiscent of anarchism. Hundreds of boys and men inured to battle were forced to dig their own graves and were then mown down by their own “*allies*”. This, without prejudice and opportunity. Radowitzky must have thought more than once that the bourgeoisie had at least afforded him the chance of a trial and the chance to produce a birth certificate, and that a president described as senile, weak, and irresolute had pardoned him regardless of everybody. But the communists did not: they gunned people down in the name of dialectical materialism.

By the time the civil war ended, there were very few anarchists left. Scarcely one tiny group that managed to cross the Pyrenees into France and thence on to Mexico. Simón Radowitzky tirelessly followed his star, his ideal. His vitality was nothing dented by the awful defeat in Spain.

In Mexico he had occasion to make periodic trips into the United States and visit his relations, whilst swapping views with the anarchist organisations there. The Uruguayan poet Angel Falco found him work there in the consulate which he headed. Radowitzky was to change his name, going by the commonplace name Juan Gomez and was to share his boarding-house apartment with a woman, the first woman he had known in his whole life.

And so his last sixteen years of life slipped away: *amid work, talks, and lectures with his fellow-believers and at home*. Until, on 4 March 1956—at the age of sixty five—he dropped dead from a heart attack: *death was instantaneous*. His friends paid for a simple funeral. His name is as vilified by repressors as ever it was—to the extent that the cadet school of the Argentinian police is still called after Ramón L. Falcón—and venerated by those who still feel some attachment to the anarchist ideal.

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