

On Francesco Ghezzi

Rudolf Rocker

1951

I cannot recall the exact date, but it must have been in the autumn or winter of 1921 that two young Italian comrades, Francesco Ghezzi and Ugo Fedeli (Treni) arrived from Moscow. They had fled to Russia following the monstrous harassment that had begun in Italy in the wake of the Diana Theatre outrage in Milan, even though they had had nothing to do with it. Fedeli and Ghezzi were two capable young men who shared our ideas and I always enjoyed conversing with them. They were in Moscow at the time of Kropotkin's funeral and brought us photographs which our publishing house published as a special album.¹

As I was saying before, the German police back then did not get overly exercised about political fugitives in the country, as long as there were no particular pressures coming from foreign governments. Ghezzi and Fedeli lived freely in Berlin for some time until the Italian government somehow tracked down their address and applied to have them extradited. Whereupon the pair were arrested and in danger of being handed over to Italy. Tellingly, their arrest came during the Social Democrat Dr Radbruch's term as Justice minister of the Reich and he had already shown himself indulgent of the Italian and Spanish governments in handing over the Italian anarchist Boldrini and two comrades who the Spanish police insisted had had a hand in the assassination of prime minister Dato.²

Social Democratic Justice minister Radbruch had come up with his own theory on "politically motivated offences" and it was not without notable political subtlety. After Ghezzi and Fedeli were arrested, I wrote an article on the subject in which I declared that, under that theory, virtually any political fugitive might be liable to extradition. "Is it not a disgrace that a Social Democratic Justice minister of the German Republic needs to take lessons on *politically motivated offences* from a bourgeois government like the British? Back in the day, the British government had refused to extradite Stepniak (Kravchinsky) who had stabbed the notorious General Mezenkov in the street and then declined to extradite the Russian revolutionary Hartmann, accused of having had a hand in the execution of Alexander II. The British minister of Home Affairs had not offered any sophisticated rationale as to motives, but regarded both incidents as political acts and guaranteed them a safe haven in England. But in the cases of Ghezzi and Fedeli there was

¹ The album is available online <https://archive.org/details/2917627.0001.001.umich.edu>

² Giuseppe Boldrini had carried out the Diana Theatre Bombing (see <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/mkxk6>). He died in Mauthausen in 1945. Luis Nicolau Fort and his partner Lucía Joaquina Concepcion were arrested in Berlin, 29 October 1921. Both were extradited to Spain.

not even the slightest glimmer of evidence that they had had any part in any crime: extradition would have been the only crime.”

We promptly organized mass protest demonstrations and did all we could in such cases. But above all we sought to mobilize the Social Democratic proletariat into getting involved in the campaign and found that support was only lukewarm. And yet the extradition was prevented, but the pair were expelled from Germany. Fedeli was freed first and then Ghezzi, after promising to quit Germany within eight days. Given that France had refused him entry, he applied for a visa from Russia, which was granted. That decision proved his undoing, because he vanished in Russia without trace.

Augustin Souchy who wrote to Fedeli the year before seeking news of Ghezzi got this curt response from Italy in October 1949: “We have not heard directly from Ghezzi from well before the war. Even his family have heard nothing from him. According to reliable sources, he died in a concentration camp in Russia.”

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