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Lucio Urtubia Jiménez, a legendary life

Stuart Christie

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The life of Lucio Urtubia Jiménez (1931–2020), an anarchist from Navarre in northern Spain, is the stuff of legend. As an activist in 1950s Paris he counted André Breton and Albert Camus among his friends, worked with the legendary anarchist urban guerrilla Francisco Sabate (*El Quico*) in attempting to bring down Franco's fascist regime, and carried out numerous bank robberies to fund the struggle to free Spain. But it was in 1977, after having his earlier scheme to destabilise the US economy by forging US dollars rejected by Che Guevara, he put his most infamous plan into action, successfully forging and circulating 20 million dollars of Citibank travellers cheques with the goal of funding urban guerrilla groups in Europe and Latin America, and bringing the bank to its knees in the process. In between he was involved in the kidnapping of Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie from his hideout in Bolivia, aided the escape of Black Panthers from the US and not surprisingly was targeted by the CIA. Lucio defends his life's work thus: 'we are bricklayers, painters, electricians – we do not need the state for anything. The banks are the real crooks. They exploit you,

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take your money and cause all the wars.” Lucio, therefore, had no moral scruples about forging Citybank travellers’ cheques. His motivation was not personal gain, but to dent confidence in this powerful financial institution.

Lucio is – and has been – many things to different people, of which I can give three good examples:

The first is the opinion of the noted Spanish theatre director, Albert Boadella, the founder of the Els Jonglars theatrical group whose escape from Spain in the late 1970s was organised by Lucio. Boadella famously described him as ‘A Quijote who tilted, not at windmills, but at real giants...

The second is that of Chief Superintendent Paul Barril of the French police nationale who described Lucio as a criminal mastermind pulling the strings of an international criminal organisation of anarchists, like some latter-day Montecristo – a Moriarty of global terrorism with access to infinite funds from the international anarchist war chest and dedicated to promoting and funding terrorism and agitation against the established order around the world...

A third opinion is that the examining magistrate in the last and biggest of the criminal cases against Lucio – Louis Joinet – who scandalised *commissaire* Barril by praising Lucio saying he represented everything the magistrate would have loved to have been – Joinet, incidentally became the first Advocate General with the French Court of cassation – and has had Lucio round to dinner twice, first in Matignon, which is the French equivalent of 10 Downing Street, and more recently at the Elysee, the French equivalent of Buckingham palace...

None of these opinions accurately capture the man, certainly not *commissaire* Barril’s, which is bollocks – he was clearly grossly exaggerating Lucio’s role as the most dangerous criminal he has ever met in order to enhance his own professional standing. As for Boadella’s comparison of Lucio and Don Quijote, Quijote was a fruitcake and a loner who refused to recognise that the golden age of his dreams had passed – and failed.

Lucio, however, is not crazy, nor is he a loner and has always been able to tailor his actions to whatever the technological level of society required – and he was successful, for a time anyway.

Joinet’s opinion of Lucio is, I would say, probably closest to recognising the essence of Lucio inasmuch as in him he sees a man of generous spirit who values freedom and justice above all else, even above his own life.