

Notes for a History;

## The 'José Ingenieros' Popular Library

by *Vicente Francomano* and *Antonio Lopez*

These brief notes, compiled by using memory and pen, stress the years of a distant past rather than recent ones, which, in the future, will deserve a remembrance at least a bit less disjoint than this one. There are many deeds, situations, *compañeras* and *compañeros* worthy of a much longer commentary, which, hopefully, some future historian will provide.

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In the Library, everything has always been difficult and resolved with many lengthy, hefty debates, and often indeed with temper and anger. However, above and beyond everything else, an undeniably genuine solidarity has been nurtured.

The Library has always maintained the practice that all its public activities and library services be free of charge and condition, although at the same time the voluntary collaboration of those who are able and wish to is requested.

It has often been asked why the Library carries the name of José Ingenieros. One possible explanation is that, along with anarchists, socialists participated in its foundation. Another possible explanation is that José Ingenieros, already deceased for several years, was well seen by the anarchists of that period. In his studies of criminology, he had been a disciple of Pietro Gori, a positivist – a follower of a philosophy then en vogue; this could also be a reason for the choice, it is not known for sure.

### *Conditions of the moment*

The five years of martial law following the fascist coup d'état of General José Félix Uriburu in September 1930 passed by with their sequel of executions by firing squad; Joaquín Penina in Rosario, Severino DiGiovanni and Francisco Scarfó in the penitentiary in Las Heras Street, Buenos Aires; no to be forgotten are the cases of the *compañeros*, of the *Unión Choferes*, the Drivers' Union, adhering to the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*, Argentinean Regional Workers' Federation (FORA), José Santos Cires, José María Montero and Florindo Gayoso, whose death sentences were commuted at the last moment to life imprisonment in the penal colony of Usuhaia, only to be released by the

government of Agustín P. Justo. Hundreds had been confined in the penal colony of Ushuaia and streams of foreigners had been deported.

The Bragado cases of Pascual Vuotto, Santiago Mainini and Reclus de Diago; the cases of the San Martín brick-makers, Celio Conti, Adelino Domínguez, Domingo Perotti and others; and the accusation of Illicit Association made against the members of the Drivers', the Car Washers' and the Bakery Workers' Unions of the FORA are some of the events to be mentioned that overwhelmed the anarchist workers' movement, the victim of repression of terrible dimensions.

In 1935, the conservative laissez-faire government of Justo, enthroned by means of "patriotic fraud" – the euphemism used by the perpetrators of election fraud – mediated the Infamous Decade. This was the backdrop for soaring unemployment, wretched conditions for the people and the corruption of the power brokers. Cases such as the CHADOPYF, the *Compañía Hispano Argentina de Obras Públicas y Finanzas*, the Hispano-Argentinean Public Works and Financing Company, and the sale of land in Palomar, under the Roca-Runciman Treaty, became as wide-spread, well-lubricated and "carnal" between Justo's government and the British Empire as similar ones now are with the Great Empire of the North under the policy of "carnal relations."

Repression continued hammering away at the anarchist movement, which tried to reorganise its groups of militants. In Rosario in September-October 1932, the 2nd Regional Anarchist Congress was held. This congress approved the creation of the *Comité Regional de Relaciones Anarquistas*, Regional Committee for Anarchist Relations (CRRA), which was to give way to the *Federación Anarco Comunista Argentina*, Argentinean Anarchist Communist Federation (FACA) in October 1935, and then later was transformed into the *Federación Libertaria Argentina*, the Argentinean Libertarian Federation (FLA). The FORA held its Regional Meetings of Rosario in 1934 and Diamante in 1938. The periodic publications of "La Protesta," "La Obra" – the former "Antorcha" – and the "Organización Obrera," the organ of the FORA, as also the magazine "Nervio" appeared with difficulty.

### ***Foundation of the Library***

This is the setting, in which it occurred to some socialist and anarchist militants to found a library, the 'José Ingenieros' Popular Library, the opening of which took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1935. It was first located in a small garage on Juan de Garay Avenue between Pereyra Alley and Castro Street. The first speaker was Dr. Alicia Moreau de Justo, who many will remember.

### ***408 Santander Street***

Shortly afterwards, new premises were rented at 408 Santander Street and the socialists withdrew. The first public speaker in the new building was *compañero* Rodolfo González Pacheco.

Amongst the founders of the Library we find *compañeros* José Molido, Lauro Coniglio y Guerra, who also participated as a militants of the *Federación Obrera del Calzado*, the

Shoe Workers' Federation adhering to the FORA, the partner of the latter, Concepción, and the brothers Germinal and Libertario Benito. A year later, upon the insistence of *compañero* Bianchini, various participants in the *Biblioteca 'Cultura Libertaria'*, the 'Libertarian Culture' Library, among others Vicente and Roque Francomano, Esteban Delmastro, his partner, Ciurosa, her sister, Elvira, and Andrés Bracutto, the secretary of the Drivers' Union, joined the Library as active participants along with Luís Bianchi, a shoe cutter and, as time went on, the sisters Lola and Carmen Rodríguez, Mary Britos, Floreal Salas, for many years the library's treasurer, Oscar and Sarita Milstein, Cruz and Vida Escribano, José Devita, Cecilia and Alfredo Seoane, Gabriel Prieto, Antonio López, Gregorio Rawin, Orquídea Escribano, Antonio Ravotto, Osvaldo "Cacho" Santiso, Hipólito Gienaga, Reynaldo, Osvaldo Escribano and so many others not recalled at the moment.

### ***Conferences***

Numberless conferences have been held in the Library; in 1949 by Costar Iscar, an individualist *compañero*, who wrote regularly for "*La Protesta*," and by Italo Américo Foradori, the first to hold a conference after its reopening in 1955. Professor Foradori later became a City representative for the socialist party and through City Hall, donated 100,000 pesos, a considerable sum at that time, to the Library. This caused bitter disputes and the distancing of *compañeros* from one another. The donation was finally rejected.

Another event that caused *compañero* Manuel Santín to withdraw in 1959, was the position held by him and others that the Library should not define itself ideologically, while the large majority held that it should continue as part of the anarchist movement but maintain its own characteristics.

Among many other speakers, we remember Dr. Halina Radecka, Dr. Telma Reca, Prof. Raúl Castagnino, who charged symbolic fee of 20 cents for his talk on González Pacheco's plays and who at present is a member of the National Academy of History, Bernardo Canal Feijoo, Rolando Fustiñana, Pascual Nacaratti, Martín Fernández, Pablo Tello, Horacio Roqué, Luís Di Filippo, Concepción Fernández, Ángel Capelletti, Alberto S. Bianchi, Ruben Prieto, Carlos Kristoff, Alfredo Errandonea and Ural Pérez.

### ***Problematic conferences***

In 1956, the talk given by Amaro Martínez, a *compañero* who sustained that one had to shut oneself in an ivory tower in order to maintain the purity of anarchism, provoked arguments, pushes, shoves and even some punches amongst the attendants.

Because of the speaker's notably negative record, one of *compañero* Jacobo Prince's conferences was prohibited by the police.

The 4<sup>th</sup> May 1969, Lorenzo de Vedia presented a discussion entitled "*Guerrillas in Latin America*." Even though the invitation to the talk had appeared in the newspapers and was announced on the chalkboard on the street with open entrance to the public and free of charge, the police entered the premises without warrant and arrested those present including young children.

### ***Groups to which use of space in the Library was granted for their activities***

There have been numerous affinity groups that have used the Library as their meeting place; the following is an attempt to give some illustrative examples.

During the last years of the '40s, the *Agrupación Estudiantil Anarquista*, Anarchist Student Group, whose organ was "*De pie*," met in the Library. Amongst its militants were Emilio Muse, Oscar Milstein, Armando Socas and not to mention Luís Alberto Murray, who later veered off to positions diametrically opposed to those of anarchism.

Ten years later, within the student movement the *Movimiento Anarquista Universitario*, the University Anarchist Movement, (MAU) was founded. The MAU intervened in the mobilisations for free, lay education during the Frondizi government. Oswaldo Escribano was amongst its participants.

The group that, probably, most identified itself with the Library was the *Grupo Editor*, Editorial Group of "*La Protesta*". Although not all the *compañeras* and *compañeros* of "*La Protesta*" took part in the Library, nor were all those of the Library participants in the Editorial Group, there was a sizable quantity of those in both. A kind of symbiosis was established between both groups. Several *compañeros* of "*La Protesta*" participated with talks and conferences, among others, Eduardo Raúl Colombo, Jorge Solomonoff, Gregorio Naso, Lorenzo de Vedia, Victor Iturralde, Jorge Raúl Peries and Guillermo Savloff.

### ***Other activities***

One of Guillermo Savloff's initiatives was the founding of the *Asociación de Educación Libre*, the Association of Free Education (ADEL), the maxim of which was "to freedom by means of education."

Thanks to the ADEL some *compañeras* and *compañeros* entered the ranks of the Library. Among others were Rodolfo Mariano Pagliera, Rubens Aguilar, Gabriel Prieto and Orquídea Escribano.

Guillermo Savloff was murdered by López Rega's Triple A in January 1976.

Another activity developed by the Library in 1959-1960 was "*Teatro Club*," the "Theatre Club," which performed "*Manos de Luz*," "Hands of Light" by Gonzales Pacheco, under the direction of Samuel Sigal several times. Vicente and Roque Francomano, Francisco Del Dago, Armando Trejo, Carmen Rodriguez, Susy Delmastro as well as others acted.

### ***Closures***

In 1949 Perón's government closed the Library but it was reopened right after the fall of that regime, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1955. During those long years, the library was entered clandestinely from Senillosa Street and meetings of various types were held.

In May 1956 the government of the so-called Liberating Revolution once again closed the Library for around a month, during which *compañero* Esteban Delmastro was imprisoned.

### ***Library furnishing***

At first, three bookcases of the classic sort used around the turn of the century were installed; they had been donated by the *sección Parque Patricios de la Sociedad de Resistencia Conductores de Carros*, the Parque Patricios section of the Wagon Drivers' Society of Resistance and a part of the books were from the *Ateneo Anarquista de Boca y Barracas*, the Anarquist Atheneum of Boca and Barracas.

Once new shelving was needed, donations were collected in order to buy lumber and other necessary supplies and *compañeros* Floreal Salas, Vicente Francomano and Carlos Torres supplied the manpower and built many new shelves and a gallery.

These new installations were inaugurated with a large party of comradeship.

### ***New premises***

Our neighbour, Mr. Antonio Marra, with whom we had a good relationship, then bought the property and he suggested that we move out. Once again in search of help through solidarity, which never diminished, the Library managed to buy the house in Ramírez de Velasco Street. The works of accommodation were long – originally it consisted of four rooms in a row – and after that, public activities had to be resumed.

### ***Relations with the Anarchist movement***

The Library, in its relations with the rest of the movement, formed part of *Relaciones Internacionales Anarquistas*, International Anarchist Relations (RIA), and *Solidaridad Anarquista Internacional*, International Anarchist Solidarity (SAI). Through the *Grupo Gestor Tupac*, the Tupac Administrating Group, it participated in the *Editorial Proyección*, *Proyección Publishers*. Locally, Tupac maintained relations with "*La Protesta*", "*La Obra*", the *Asociación Racionalista Judía*, the Rationalist Jewish Association, the *Centro de Estudios Sociales Anderson Pacheco*, the Anderson Pacheco Centre of Social Studies and others. Later, relations abroad, for example with the *Internacional de Federaciones Anarquistas*, the International of Anarchist Federations (IFA), were assumed by Tupac while the secretariat of the former organisation was in France with *compañero* Guy Malouvier as secretary and then when it was passed on to Italy with *compañero* Umberto Marzocchi as secretary.

### ***The military genocide***

During the years of the military genocide with their 30,000 *desaparecidos*, the Library had the fortune to remain open. It held activities and talks that were perhaps less compromising; nonetheless, the young *compañeras* and *compañeros* of the group "Bardoneón" recited their poetry, Jorge D'Angeli gave talks on "free jazz," Salvador "Juancho" del Priore on tango,

Profesor Noverasco on "harmonizing dance" and three *compañeras*, who were teachers, were in charge of a Children's Creation Workshop.

In this period the *Cine Club Jaen*, the Jaen Cinema Club, was founded, which through the years acquired a well-deserved reputation. Angel Fichera and Cuco Nochetti are two of its protagonists.

### ***Finally***

To finish, it is very important set down on paper that which probably proves to be one of the most important initiatives of the Library in all of its 60 years of life.

A meeting of the delegates of those groups that agreed on the organisation of a commission to come to the aid of prisoners and fugitives in hiding was announced and held – in the thick of the military dictatorship. Shortly afterwards, only *compañeras* and *compañeros* of the Library sustained the objectives of this commission. With the monetary help of *compañeros* such as Castro, already deceased, and Pepe Amado, who thus put their freedom and lives at serious risk, they managed to discover the places where some were detained, to free them and then to get them as well as other *compañeras* and *compañeros* obviously on the wanted list out of the country. The *compañeros* who carried out these tasks were the unforgettable Cecilia Sloane, the dear "Loco" Sloane and the "Gallego" from Santander, Gabriel Prieto.

Tragically, some *compañeros* who frequented the Library were among those flown out over the estuary and thrown out to sea, and others from different groups, for instance the Tello brothers, Fernando (Pata) Díaz and Raúl Olivera ended up in the clandestine detention centre of the *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*, the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA).

Moreover, upon an unpleasant "visit," the caretaker of the moment along with two people present were taken prisoner. Luckily, they were released a month and a half later.

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As said at the beginning, these notes do not mention the activities of the last ten years. Understandably, we leave that for another opportunity, hoping that it be others that continue this history.