

In 1930 the thriving anarchist movement in Argentina was repressed by the first in a series of military dictatorships. This repression also destroyed the Federation of Russian Labour Organizations of South America (FRLOSA) and its organ *Golos Truda* [The Voice of Labour], which had published for 12 years in Buenos Aires. The following letter was published in the underground journal *Golos iz podpolya* [Voice from the underground] and was written by G. Krivovazy, the last editor of *Golos Truda*. Only two issues of *Golos iz podpolya* appeared.

From the letter of a deported comrade

Montevideo, November 24, 1930

Dear Comrade D.

I received your letter . . . and I'm starting to answer it so that I can describe in as much detail as possible everything that happened from the moment of my arrest until my deportation and my arrival here.

At 1 p.m. on October 15, I retrieved the mail from a post office box at the central post office in Buenos Aires, and was about to close the box when suddenly I felt a hand on my left shoulder and heard someone ask: "Is this your post office box number 1752?" Since I was holding in my hands a packet of *Probuzhdenie* and a couple of letters that I had just retrieved from the box, and the key was still sticking in the lock, I more or less had to answer "yes." Then this young man politely invited me to follow him downstairs, where he handed me over to the post office security officer on duty. This guy handed me over to another officer who asked me if I was receiving correspondence from Russia. I replied I had received a package of books and one letter from the Kropotkin Museum



Red arrow points to the prison island of Martin Garcia. Although in Uruguayan waters, it belongs to Argentina and is now a nature reserve.

in Moscow. I was kept there until 6 pm, then moved to the central police station.

I was held there for 26 hours, and then transferred to the prison in Villa Devoto, where I met many political prisoners. Family and friends were allowed to bring food, clothes, and letters, and we hoped that we wouldn't have to suffer too much before being deported. But this was not to be.

It seems that the government was not content with our arrest and deportation, but decided to punish us a bit. So first they loaded us on the transport vessel "Patagonia." When we went on board on this improvised floating prison, we were ordered to leave our bags on the deck and climb down a ladder into the hold. Then the vessel left port and sailed 24 km to an anchorage not far from the cruiser "Buenos-Aires," currently serving as a prison for Yrigoyen, the former president of the republic. The cruiser trained four of its guns on our ship, in case there was some kind of disturbance.

The first day our life in the hold was hellish. An order was issued by the command that we had to remain at all times in the filthy, fetid hold, being allowed out on deck only to relieve ourselves, and that only one at a time. But the absurdity of this became evident during the first night. The hold in which the 84 of us found ourselves had apparently been used for transporting coal, fuel oil, meat, and grease; the rusty walls and the half-rotten floor provided confirmation that nothing in the way of hygienic measures had been undertaken. All of this, combined with tobacco smoke, body odours, plus a single hole through which fresh air entered, and by midnight people began to get sick; many became nauseous, complained of headaches, and one person even had a stroke. We raised a ruckus that was reported to the command. An orderly came and opened a manhole on the other side; fresh air rushed in and the night passed more peacefully.

In the morning, a doctor arrived from the cruiser "Buenos-Aires," inspected the hold, and announced that it was impossible to keep so many people there day and night, and that it was necessary to carry out a general clean-up and disinfecting. We were allowed to stay on deck in the daytime, under guard, until 8 p.m. Meanwhile a copper tube about an inch in diameter was installed from the engine room to the hold -- sailors told us that in case we decided to mutiny, we would be pacified with steam.

The steamship was empty and rolled on the waves; many of us agreed that things wouldn't have been half bad if we weren't on board such an unstable vessel.

After 13 days on the "Patagonia," we were taken off on October 30 and landed on the famous Martin Garcia Island, where we were placed in one of the buildings used to store explosives that had been hurriedly cleaned out specially for us. The outside of the building had been painted, but not the inside. A two-metre-high barbed wire fence surrounded the building with sentries posted at all corners.

Here we were read an order about how we were to be treated, namely, that for the slightest transgression we would be shot, etc. But the first two days passed more or less tolerably. We were all politicals, and everything was calm. But on the third day, 11 people were taken away and replaced with 50 new ones. Of these 50, nine were politicals, and 41 were career criminals and petty thieves, many of whom were extremely perverted and ill with various diseases. Some of these men were worse than the most

depraved street prostitutes. And what happened was horrible, indescribable. When a second contingent of comrades was taken away, they were again replaced with criminals, some of whom were suffering syphilis, consumption, and other infectious diseases. And this whole bunch was tossed into our quarters, where the bunks were arranged in three tiers, where clothing was not disinfected, and where mattresses and blankets were taken from sick people and given to healthy people. We, as the first arrivals on the island, still had all our stuff from the steamer and made use of it, but the new arrivals were in constant danger of contracting some incurable disease.

On November 16, fourteen of us were transferred to the port of Buenos Aires and imprisoned on Demarchi Island; in place of us they brought one political prisoner, A. Barrer, and in place of nine criminals they brought 49 other criminals.

I was held in the port prison for 26 hours, until finally, on November 17 at 10 p.m., we were embarked on the steamer Ciudad de Montevideo, with a warning not to return to Argentina under threat of being sent to the hard labour prison in Ushuaia (Tierra del Fuego) . . .

Here in Montevideo, there are more than 100 of us deportees. But only 25 have found work. There are few jobs available here. Apparently this is because of the elections for president.

G. Krivovazy

Golos iz podpolya [Voice from the underground], No. 2 (Argentina, 1931), pp. 5-6.

Translation from the Russian and editing by Malcolm Archibald with research assistance by Anatoly Dubovik.