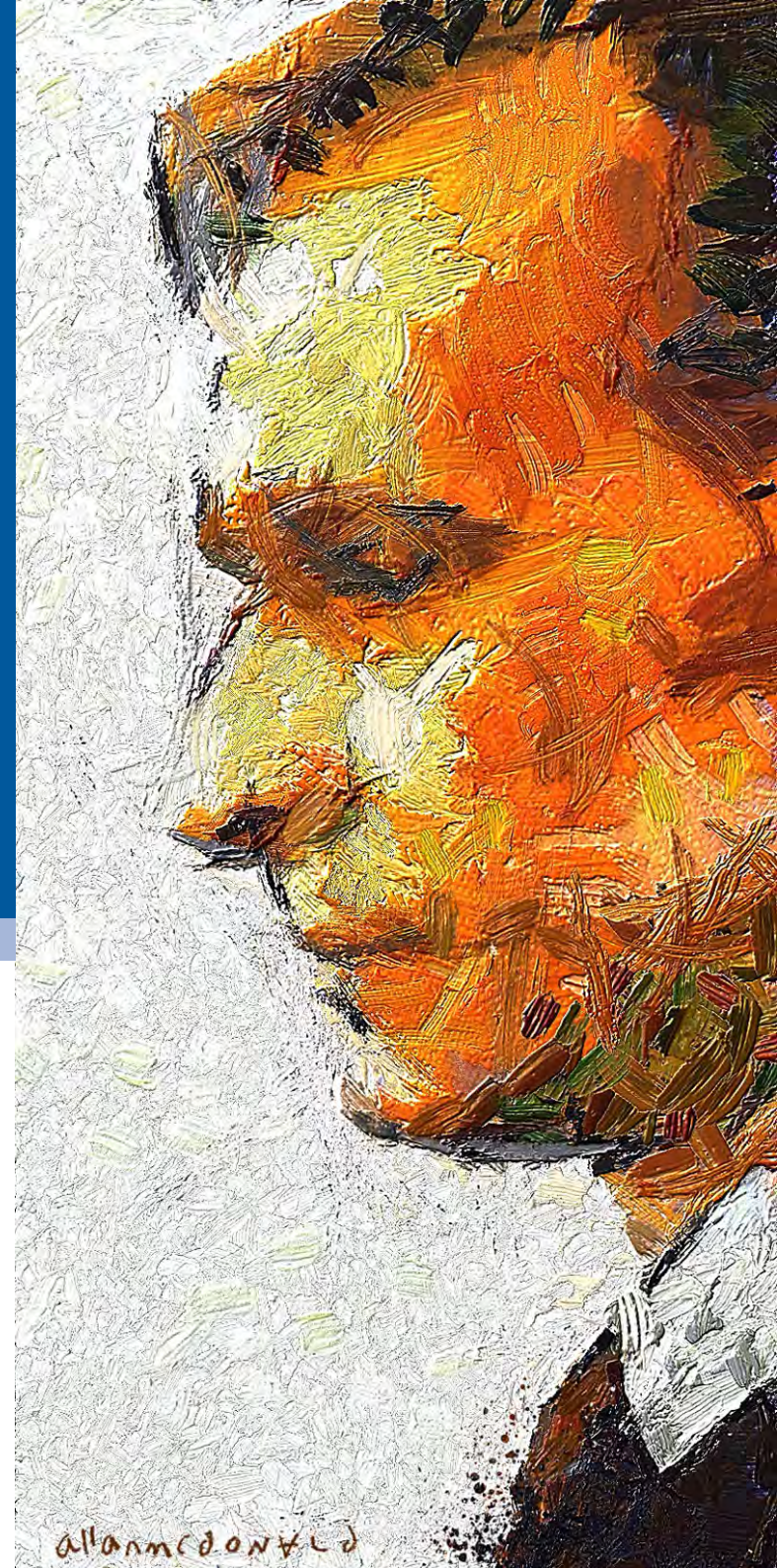


Compañero Harald Edelstam

# His exemplary struggle in defense of life and against fear and neutrality



MOVIMENTO DE JUSTIÇA



## Harald Edelstam... The rest is just words

**Chile** was a huge concentration camp, the National Stadium had been turned into an open-air prison, and the Andes became the longest firing wall in the history of humanity. The action taken by **Edelstam** during those weeks was like a lightning bolt of fearlessness and solidarity tearing through the fascistic black cloak that enveloped the country in September 1973 in an attempt to conceal the massacre that was being perpetrated by neoliberalism and the U.S. empire in this sister nation.

“For many Swedes social justice at home and international justice abroad are one and the same struggle,” **Olof Palme** said. **Harald Edelstam**—who answered more to his emotions than to cold calculations—was who best interpreted Palme, risking his own life to save the lives of others, and even though he enjoyed complete freedom, he chose to endanger that freedom to defend the freedom of an entire people.

Recovering part of who **Harald Edelstam** was and what he did through the voices of the people who knew him and are still alive because he saved their lives, is the best way to learn about a man who knew no borders and who never felt at ease merely working behind a desk.

**Gerardo IGLESIAS**  
IUF Latin American Regional Secretary

**Jair KRISCHKE**  
MJDH President

*¿Who said all is lost?  
I come here to offer my heart.  
So much blood washed  
away by the river,  
I come here to offer my heart.*

Fito Paez



It seems the world has finally decided to pay **Harald Edelstam** the tribute he deserves. He is remembered in **Norway** for his participation in the resistance against the Nazis, in **Guatemala** for his active role in denouncing mass killings of indigenous people, and in **Chile**, for his heroic protection of political prisoners during the first months of the dictatorship. Among the hundreds of people **Edelstam** saved are dozens of Uruguayans whom he rescued from the infamous National Stadium in Santiago. These lines evoke that epic feat, drawing on testimonies that evidence his committed, solidarity-based, daring, and brave way of understanding diplomacy.

**Daniel Gatti**





## Compañero Harald Edelstam His exemplary struggle in defense of life and against fear and neutrality

“There are some people to whom all of humanity is indebted; special, unique, people, who, however, have not received the acknowledgement they deserve. One such person is, without a doubt, **Harald Edelstam**”.

These words belong to **Julio Baraibar**. He is well aware that if he is still “living to tell the tale” it is to a great extent thanks to this Swedish ambassador, who was described as a ‘fool’ by many of his own colleagues, no doubt because unlike them he did not hesitate in “**putting his own neck on the line and risking everything in the most adverse situations, disregarding the protocols and conventions that others cling to as a way of doing nothing.**”

Almost 40 years ago today, in September 1973, **Baraibar**, current ambassador-at-large of the **José Mujica** administration, was one of 58 Uruguayans—for the most part leftwing militants—taken by Chilean pro-coup forces to the National Stadium in Santiago, which had been turned into a concentration camp and a site of summary executions of political prisoners.

“Meeting **Edelstam** saved our lives—**Baraibar** admits—I knew him personally for only a few days, but the intensity of our relationship allowed me to fully appreciate his great courage and integrity. **Not just anyone stands up, as he did, to forces like the Chilean military, a pack of true murderers who acted with complete impunity.**”





## The 58 in the National Stadium

### An open-air prison

When **Baraibar** was taken to the National Stadium, on September 17, 1973, there were already some 15 Uruguayans being held there. “Within less than a week, there were over 50 of us. The vast majority of us, around 45, were militants, but there were also four ballet dancers and relatives of exiles. Whatever Uruguayan they could get their hands, they threw in jail. **For the Chilean military, Uruguayan was synonymous with Tupamaro.**”<sup>1</sup>

**Baraibar** was appointed coordinator of the group by the other members. “In order to survive the chaos and brutal repression we were subjected to in that very peculiar prison, we organized ourselves like a disciplined, guerrilla column, giving each group tasks and putting someone in charge of each group.

We formed ten groups, because they wouldn’t allow more than five of us together at a time. Each person in charge of a group would meet with me in one of the stadium’s staircases where we discussed everything. We divided up to get food, which involved rummaging through the garbage left by the officers, to get our hands on something to smoke, and even for intelligence duty. Intelligence duty was key, just as key as finding something to eat: it involved going round the stadium as best we could, trying to identify any Uruguayans who might be mixed in among the Chilean prisoners.

That was how we found ‘*El mudo*’ (the mute), an 18-year-old boy who had been living in a working-class neighborhood in **Santiago**

and working in a turnery. He had been arrested along with dozens of Chileans and some other foreigners following an intense three-day shootout.

“They took them to an army barracks, they made them line up in the Plaza de Armas, and an officer ordered all foreigners to take a step forward. **Three Argentines did as they were told and they were shot dead on the spot.**

A Uruguayan woman in her late thirties and this boy stayed where they were. The woman could imitate a Chilean accent perfectly and, in a way, that was what saved her. He couldn’t pull off the accent so he decided to pretend he was mute. At one point an officer who suspected he was lying ordered a soldier to ‘Let him have it until he talks.’ And that was what they were doing when a **Socialist Party** brigade assaulted the police station. In the confusion, ‘El mudo’ grabbed a sheet of paper that the other prisoners filled out, picked a name that he memorized, made up a home address and left the paper on the table. After the confusion passed, he gave it to the officers. From there they took him to the stadium, thinking he was Chilean.”

When one of the “intelligence teams” formed by Uruguayans were making the rounds in the field, a prisoner recognized “**El mudo**”, who was curled up in one of the bleachers. “He got lucky a second time: we were able to get him into our group.

**And like all of us, he won the sweepstakes when a very tall, blond, elegant guy appeared, shouting in a thundering voice, practically giving orders to those tough soldiers who were deciding the fate of thousands of prisoners. ‘You’re all murderers. Let me through,’ that figure demanded.**

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1 He means members of the then guerrilla organization Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros.



## In the darkest night: A lightning bolt

It was in one of those intelligence rounds that the Uruguayan prisoners discovered that man, who could only be a diplomat, an international officer, but of a very peculiar species.

“The Uruguayan who saw him alerted us immediately and I ran to meet him,” **Baraibar** recalls. “He was surrounded by people who wanted to speak with him. Over a hundred people, definitely, and the guy in the middle, yelling at the soldiers in an unmistakably Nordic accent: **‘Murderers! History will judge you! Murderers! Crrriminals!’**”

He could have been killed right then and there, but they were stunned, they couldn’t react, in part because of the respect he commanded—low-ranking soldiers are always intimidated by anyone who treats them like that—and in part because they were on the hot seat internationally, as the world was becoming aware of the massacre they were committing and they could not go against an ambassador without paying a very high price. **The Swede was very intelligent and he was taking advantage of the situation.**”

In the middle of that chaos, **Baraibar** was able to get close to **Harald Edelstam**. “We both stood out because of our height, almost two meters tall, and he picked me out in no time.

**‘Ambassador, I’m the delegate of all the Uruguayans who are being held in this field and they’re going to kill us all. I have here a list of 58 people. You’re going to be the first person to see it,’** I said.

I explained that **Uruguay** had been under a dictatorship for months and that they were going to kill us, either in **Chile** or in **Uruguay** if they sent us back. I was surprised when he asked me if we were Tupamaros.

I told him that of course we weren’t, because that was what we told the Chilean soldiers, and he surprised me by answering: **‘Ah, well, then there’s nothing I can do for you.’**

‘Listen to me, ambassador, first get us out of here and then I’ll tell you what we are. We need you to take us to your country or any other country, except **Uruguay**. It’s vital!’ was what I managed to tell him. **‘I underrrstand, I underrrstand, I’ll do my best,’** he answered, and that was when we started to have some hope.”





## Planting the flag “This is Swedish soil...”

Months later **Baraibar** found out the reason for the ambassador’s question. Right after the coup d’état, **Chile** cut off diplomatic relations with **Cuba** and gave the island’s diplomats 48 hours to leave the country. The embassy was surrounded by soldiers armed for battle, who made a hole in one of the building’s walls and stuck a machine gun through it.

**Edelstam** decided then that Sweden would take over **Havana’s** properties and interests in **Chile**, and before the Chilean army could massacre the diplomats and foreign refugees who were in there, he ran toward the building waving a white cloth and planted his country’s flag there, declaring that it was “**inviolable Swedish soil.**”

The soldiers only allowed him a few words with the Cuban diplomats who had already been ordered to leave the country. “The first thing the Cuban ambassador said to him was, ‘**Edelstam**, save the Tupamaros because they’re going to kill them all.’ And he took that as his mission. He was going to do anything in his power to rescue any Tupamaros he found. That was one of his priorities,” **Baraibar** recalls.

## In the National Stadium A risky game

**Edelstam’s** appearance on the scene brought some calm to the group of 58 Uruguayans, but it was a “very precarious calm.”

They were still being held under extreme conditions, and they knew that if the Chilean military wanted and if they thought they could get away with it, they could execute them at any time.

“We decided to play a double game: we told **Edelstam** the truth, that most of us were Tupamaros; and we swore to the Chilean officers that we were simple workers who had been forced to leave our country because of the economic crisis, that **Uruguay** was falling apart, and that **Chile** had dazzled us.

We suggested that they call our embassy because we wanted to return to our country, we said we had been very selfish in abandoning it. We repeated that speech over and over, aware that it was a double-edged sword because we knew what could happen if our embassy stepped in, as **Uruguay** was already under a dictatorship. The important thing was to buy time.

We insisted so much that a colonel in charge drove the Uruguayan embassy crazy. The ambassador was **César Charlone**, a civil lawyer who had been called to Montevideo to meet with the Foreign Ministry, and his wife **Bernabela (Belela) Herrera** was in charge of the representation while he was away. Months later she would be appointed representative of the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Chile** and from that position she saved countless lives. We were enormously lucky to come across her.”



## The contact ...I'm coming with you...

**Belela Herrera** was summoned by the Chilean military to the National Stadium.

- You must come, Ma'am, because we have some countrymen of yours here who say they want to return to their country.

And **Herrera** went, without quite understanding.

“The day she came—**Baraibar** remembers—she asked me outraged: ‘Why did you insist so much, if none of you wants to go back to **Uruguay**? What’s wrong with you?’ And I, really angry, hurled back at her, ‘Because we want you to know we’re here, that there’s 58 of us,

and that they’re going to kill us all.’ And I immediately improvised, ‘We want you to get us out and hand us over to **Sweden**.’

She turned pale, but it was like a magic word. Moments later a fellow Uruguayan who was keeping watch spotted **Edelstam**, who was coming toward us, very agitated.

- Are you going to get us out of here, ambassador?—I asked.
- I can’t, I’ve been told that you can only leave for **Uruguay**.
- So we’re finished. We’ll be thrown in jail or killed there.

And again I improvised:

- The solution would be for the ambassador of **Uruguay**, who’s here right now, to get us out of the Stadium and hand us over to you. Why don’t you speak with her?

**Edelstam**, who wasn’t afraid to act and who loved to find solutions in which he could show his willingness to help in any way, agreed to my plan immediately. I introduced them, and right off he said, ‘Ma’am, my country has the great honor of inviting these Uruguayan citizens to live in peace in **Sweden**.’ **Belela Herrera** struck the same tone: ‘Mister Ambassador, what a great pleasure for all of us. **Would I also have the opportunity of accompanying them?**’

All 58 of us were standing some way back, pressuring, talking all at once. When we heard their words we realized we had made great strides.

A few days later the two of them presented a formula to the Chilean junta: they would release us to the Uruguayan embassy, which would then hand us over to the Swedish embassy, and we would leave the







country. The dictatorship, which was under great pressure from the **Red Cross**, the **United Nations**, and certain European nations, saw a way of getting rid of a problem and ultimately accepted this proposal.

But there was still a long way to go before we could leave, and **Edelstam** would have the opportunity of proving once again his commitment by helping those dozens of Uruguayans who were already grateful to him for what he'd done."

## Double factor Luck and courage

**Baraibar** recalls that the formula agreed on did not sit well with the military officers in charge of the National Stadium, in particular the commanding officer, Colonel **Pedro Espinoza**, **"a fascist killer who years later, when the country was already under a democracy, would become the first officer to be convicted in Chile on charges of human rights abuses, and who is still serving a sentence today.**

They couldn't refuse the junta's decision flat out, but they decided they were going to charge us a sort of toll, and they told us that there were eight of us who could not leave, as they had been charged by the military courts and there was an order for their arrest. It was a lie. It wasn't even a request from the Uruguayan dictatorship, it was something they decided on their own, and they picked out the eight men randomly: **they marked the youngest.**"

The Uruguayans closed ranks: it was all or none. And a new tug-of-war began between two very unequal forces.

"Despite the fact that we were clearly at a disadvantage, two factors played in our favor: the luck factor, and the **Edelstam** factor," **Baraibar** says.

Luck: Colonel **Espinoza**, who was about to be promoted to general, traveled abroad to attend a course and was replaced by Major **Mario Lavanderos**, **"who, despite being there and being the prison's second-in-command, was visibly not at ease, and it was not difficult to guess that he was not in favor of the coup."**

"We made a play to fool a couple of the prison's clerks and all of us were finally able to get out, including the eight who were on the black list, which **Lavanderos** was not aware of. We came out one by one, with a hood over our heads, and filed into a bus that would take us to the Cuban embassy, which was surrounded by the military but under Swedish protection.

A cameraman who was inside **Edelstam's** car, hiding under a blanket, filmed our transfer. It was another bold move by **Edelstam**, who was always pushing the limits, something he later celebrated."

His car, a black Mercedes, was also considered by the Swede as **"territory free of dictatorships,"** immune to abuses. Or that was what he thought.

"If they hadn't been under so much international pressure and hadn't been the focus of world attention, I'm sure the Chilean military would have gunned him down on a side street or in any of his rescue attempts. It wouldn't have been hard to do, and protests over the death of this 'fool' would have probably died down," **Baraibar** notes.

The next day, the diplomat arrived in a state at the former Cuban embassy under Swedish control: "Huge problem: they refuse to give





us the safe-conduct for you to leave.” And he tells us that the military executed the two clerks who were “fooled” by the Uruguayans and that Major **Lavanderos**, “recognizing that mistake,” had committed suicide shortly after, shooting himself in the mouth.<sup>2</sup>

“That’s what they said. Maybe they killed **Lavanderos** too and there’s a risk they’ll kill all of you,” the Swede said.

For 15 days **Edelstam** made great efforts with the junta to get the group of Uruguayans out, while simultaneously **Santiago** was feeling the pressure from various international bodies.

Finally, a convoy of cars and vans drove the group to the airport, where an airplane of the Swedish airline **SAS** was waiting for them.

## One last hurdle? Headlong onto the runway

UA few minutes after an effusive goodbye to **Edelstam**, as he is about to set foot on the airplane’s ladder, **Baraibar** is suddenly lifted from behind.

“It was three guys, who kept insulting and hitting me. The others, who had already boarded the plane, realized what was happening and started yelling. **Edelstam**, who was on his way out, shot out of the

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2 In mid November 2013, a Chilean Judge sentenced David Reyes Farías, a former lieutenant colonel, for the murder of Major Lavanderos. According to the judgment, Reyes Farías had rebuked Lavanderos for freeing the Uruguayans and 13 Bolivians who were also released to the Swedish embassy. After arguing with him he shot him point blank, pressing the barrel of the gun against the major’s upper lip.

car, hurled himself headlong onto the runway, and grabbed me. He wouldn’t leave the airport until he was sure that I was safely in the hands of a Swedish officer, a very young man who took my hand and wouldn’t let go. We were both sweating profusely.

In the end, I boarded the plane, but that day of October 1973 I did not breathe easily until the plane flew over the Uruguayan border into Brazil.”

## Hanging on a thread Odin returns with unbridled fury

**Belela Herrera** remembers **Edelstam** very warmly. “He was one of those people who only come along once, a man with an incredible fearlessness, **who never hesitated in defying diplomatic conventions because he believed saving lives was much more important than following some rules,**” she says.

**“The Swedes were known for their solidarity, but he certainly stood out.**

Everything he did after the coup in **Chile** was fantastic,” she adds, and highlights both the rescuing of “the 58” and the planting of the Swedish flag in the Cuban building that was caught in a crossfire. And she also recalls how he saved the life of another young woman: **Mirtha Fernández de Pucurull**.

**Mirtha Fernández** had also taken refuge in the Cuban embassy in Santiago. One day she started bleeding intensely. The doctor who was taking care of the asylum seekers said she would bleed out if she was not operated on immediately. She had to be transferred to a clinic.





The whole time she was at the embassy, **Harald Edelstam** never left her side, trying to comfort her. He knew, however, that outside the embassy there was little he could do.

But **Fernández** remembers that, “in addition to his soul,” **Edelstam** put “his body” up as an improbable guarantee for her safety.

The girl was eventually taken to Santiago’s Santa María Clinic. Soon after she arrived, the hospital was swarming with uniformed soldiers who tried to take her, and a series of clashes between **Edelstam** and the soldiers ensued. “At one point, **Harald** calls on other diplomats to come to the hospital to help him. The French ambassador **Pierre de Menthon** and **Schlatter**, a Swiss official who was head of the UN Office for refugees, came to his aid. **De Menthon** got his arm twisted and **Harald** was pushed to the ground, before they took **Mirtha** by force,” **Belela Herrera** says.

In a chapter from her book *Colgada de un piolín* (Fin de Siglo, Montevideo, 2006), which she dedicates to **Harald Edelstam** and entitles “**The return of Odin**,” **Mirtha Fernández** describes how the Swede “appeared like a reincarnation” of the Norse mythology god to try to save her:

“**Odin** left his home in Valhalla and flew to **Santiago**. He convinced the indifferent, rebuked the reluctant, trusted his friends, and threw himself against the jackals, defying them. Scandinavian mountain passes, country roads, and lakes had witnessed his transformation into a ‘scarlet pimpnel’ to save thousands who were fleeing from the Nazis. In **Jakarta**, where a million people were murdered, he rescued many others from that fate. He did the same in **Guatemala**, where he met **Che Guevara**. And now **Harald Edelstam** was there, in **Chile**.

(...) The nurses put me on a gurney and started rolling me away toward the exit. The Air Force descended on us. Not from the skies but stomping on the ground. They picked **Harald** up by his lapels and pushed him into a corner. They knew very well who he was, because they went straight for him. Six air force men were unable to overpower him. **Odin** was back with unbridled fury.

The soldiers froze, like toads when they sense a mongoose near. They retreated to the other end of the hall and started arguing roughly among themselves.

They made calls on their radios, consulted, gave each other orders and counterorders. It seemed as if nobody understood anything, because such a deployment was more suited for an attack on a military base than for overpowering half a dozen people.

**Harald** stayed firmly by my side, clinging to my gurney like a limpet to a rock. His hands were shaking, even though he tried to appear composed. He didn’t take his eyes off me and tried to make me feel safe and give me hope that everything would be all right

- To think we’re risking our lives for someone who’s name we don’t even know—one of the other diplomats said. He wore a brown suit.

- **That’s besides the point, what’s important is that it’s a person—Odin** answered with no regard for protocol.

Marines came rushing down the corridor at us. **Harald** moved forward to meet them. They ignored him and went past him. They grabbed the gurney and dragged me toward their base. **Harald** and his group of friends got hold of me again, and that situation went on for ten hours. I felt the barrel of a gun pressed against my head. I heard it click.



### **Nobody move! We're taking her or I shoot. Your choice!**

With the gun held against my head, I couldn't move. I saw **Harald** out of the corner of my eye, and for the first time he looked defeated.

**He had tears streaming down his face. I looked up and saw him. Tall, strong, dark-haired, his pale eyes bright with hatred.**

Two underlings were able to unlock one leaf of the door. But the gurney wouldn't fit through there. The officer in command started yelling out orders and somebody grabbed my ankles from outside. They pulled hard. I fell on the ground, flat on my back.

They lifted me up in the air and threw me inside a police car. (...) I raised my head and saw **Harald** standing firmly in front of the car. He must have been exhausted, but he held his head high like Odin facing his heroes and poets. Somebody knocked me down.

**Start the car and run over that old motherfucker! A hood blocked out the sun."**

Despite the Swede's resistance, **Fernández** was taken away by the soldiers. **Edelstam** denounced her kidnapping. "For my part, I sent a coded telex from the ECLAC office, which was the only form of communication we had," **Belela Herrera** recounts.

"It made a huge impact. The whole world demanded Fernández' liberation, and the military finally let her go and put her in a shelter.

However, they kept on harassing her. For a whole night, gunfire could be heard around the shelter.

**She left for Sweden the morning after. Edelstam had managed to save another life."**

## **Departure and decline**

### **"An odd fellow"**

On December 4, 1973, **Harald Edelstam** is declared persona non grata by the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship and expelled from the country. A day later he was on Swedish soil again. "**Anyone would have thought that back in Stockholm he would be welcomed with honors by his colleagues and by the government. It was completely the opposite,**" **Julio Baraibar** remembers.

As soon as he set foot on Swedish soil, "his slow descent into official oblivion would begin." This was what awaited the man who in **Chile** had just saved hundreds of lives, following a personal "tradition" that he had begun three decades earlier in **Berlin** and **Norway**, during the Second World War, when in his early twenties he did not hesitate in becoming directly involved in the resistance against the Nazis despite his diplomatic status. It was in occupied Oslo that he chose to collaborate with the Norwegian resistance under the pseudonym the "**Black Pimpernel**," a name that would accompany him for the rest of his life.

"After **Chile**, **Edelstam** was somewhat ostracized. They stationed him in far away posts, until he finally ended his diplomatic career in **Algeria** in 1979.

His own Swedish colleagues shunned him. **He acted purely from the heart, because he was committed to protecting life, which he considered a good that was morally very much above any neutrality that his diplomatic position demanded of him,**" **Belela Herrera** says.



“But **Harald** never stopped participating in solidarity events in support of **Chile**, a country where he left so much despite having been there only a year. The last time I saw him was in 1978, in **Spain**, where I was on a UNHCR mission, precisely at a protest rally against the dictatorship in **Chile**.”

**Max Marambio**, a Chilean who **Edelstam** had also rescued from a certain death, says that once back in Stockholm, **Edelstam** took on the mission of convincing his country’s authorities that they could not remain indifferent or neutral, and it was to a great extent thanks to him that 1,500 Chileans made it to **Sweden** over the following months.

“He had a brilliant diplomatic career before he went to **Chile**. His name was even mentioned as a possible candidate for Swedish ambassador to the **United States**. But his career was completely finished and in the Foreign Office he was considered a nonentity,” **Caroline Edelstam**, granddaughter of the diplomat, says.

And **Max Marambio** confirms it: “**He had become a strange character, because he was popular among exiles, but very unpopular in the Foreign Office.**”

It’s funny how they looked at him as an odd fellow, they didn’t care for him at all, and they believed that in doing what he had done, he had behaved exotically.”





## The debt with Edelstam

### A hero the Swedish people must know

**Julio Baraibar** notes that “it is the Swedish people who are most indebted to **Edelstam**. In Stockholm it pained me to see how some colleagues justified **Harald**’s isolation.

They thought him a fool, they said that he had behaved undiplomatically. **Diplomats**—they would say—**have to remain neutral, they cannot become personally involved in conflicts. But Harald thought, and more than that, he felt, the complete opposite.**”

**Baraibar** says that “perhaps his aristocratic origins, which he carried even in his last name (stam in Swedish means family and edel noble), contributed to give him that composure, that self-assurance, that authority with which he commanded respect, and at the same time that distanced him from others.

And let us not forget that the social-democratic **Sweden** of the 1940s, which would later be at the heart of so many gains for the working class and society as a whole, was also the same country that allowed Nazi troops to march through its territory into Norway, precisely in the name of neutrality.

At the time of the coup in **Chile**, **Sweden** was also ruled by a social-democratic government, **headed by Olof Palme, who was known for his commitment to and solidarity with third-world causes.**

Because of these ambivalences, a man who should have had a plaza in the center of the capital named after him was instead called a “fool” and marginalized.

**Today the world is starting to acknowledge him, and Sweden has to accept it while its official representatives thank those well-deserved tributes.”**

In his exile in **Sweden**, **Baraibar** was a labor leader in transportation trade unions. “Once I was interviewed in national television because of my peculiar combination of foreigner, and especially Latin American, and labor leader, and what I focused on when I spoke was on extolling the figure of **Edelstam**.

**‘I want the Swedish people to know him and recognize him for what he did,’ I said, but it was almost like saluting a flag.”**

## Surprising and risky for many...

### The natural thing to do for Harald

**Juan Raúl Ferreira**, current member of the Human Rights Institute in Montevideo, met **Edelstam** briefly in **Buenos Aires** in 1976, a few days before Argentine and Uruguayan repressive forces kidnapped and murdered former senators **Zelmar Michelini** and **Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz**, and the Tupamaro militants **Rosario Barredo** and **William Whitelaw**.

The meeting took place at a lunch organized by **Gutiérrez Ruiz** in a bar in downtown Buenos Aires. “I was only twenty and I went to those meetings with my father.<sup>3</sup>

Barely three years had passed since the coup in **Chile**, and **Edelstam** was already a legend in certain circles, but when he grudgingly told

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3 Wilson Ferreira Aldunate, leader of the Uruguayan National Party, who died in 1988



stories of what had happened in Santiago incredibly enough he did so matter-of-factly.

It amazed him that anyone could be surprised that a diplomat could save lives: **he said that that was the first duty of a diplomat in extreme situations.**

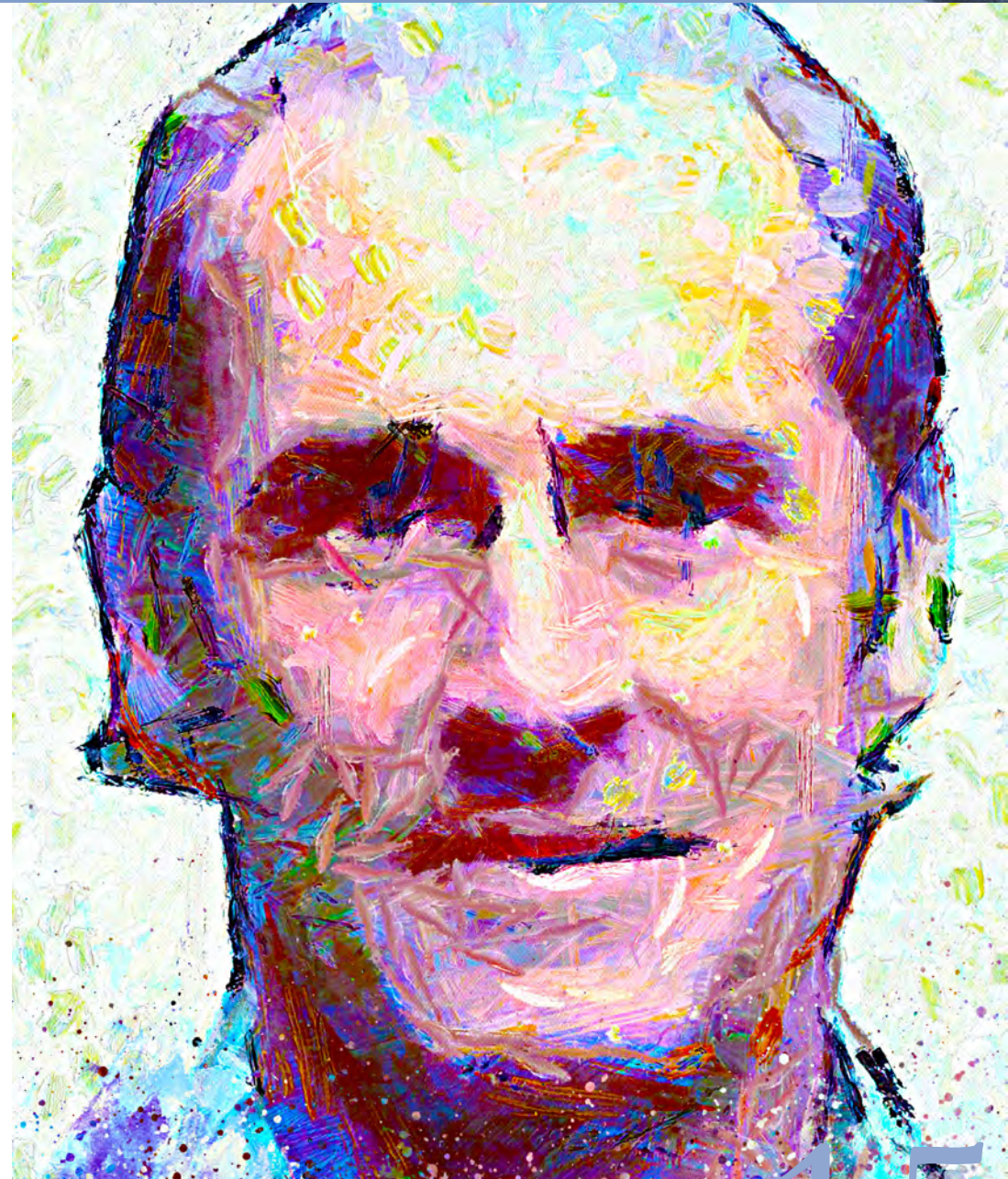
He was cut from the same cloth as **Belela Herrera**: whenever someone compliments them, this kind of character feels embarrassed, and getting them to speak of specific cases of people they saved is very hard.

**Gutiérrez Ruiz** knew many stories involving **Edelstam**, some of them he'd heard directly from the people he saved, who had ended up in Buenos Aires, and through him I learned of many more cases than those told by **Edelstam** himself.”

Of the few cases evoked by **Edelstam** during that lunch, **Juan Raúl Ferreira** remembers in particular the case of the boy he literally pulled out of the National Stadium. “One day he showed up at the prison and said that so-and-so was protected by his country.

It was completely implausible, because it was someone who was already inside and who at the time of his arrest had invoked no protection of any kind, nor did he had refugee status. What was really incredible was that **Edelstam** had never seen this person: he was only able to recognize him because before going to the stadium he had asked his family to show him as many pictures of the boy as they could.

He looked at dozens of photographs, but the stadium was filled with people. He still spotted him and got him out. The military didn't know how to deal with situations like this. They were baffled.





Someone with moral authority impressed them; what he asked didn't sound like a request, it sounded like an order, even though they repeatedly told him that the person he was looking for was not there. He insisted so much that they let him in. I always wondered why they didn't hide that boy before **Harald** arrived."

What was most astonishing about **Edelstam's** attitude, **Ferreira** says, was "**how he defied whatever dictatorship was in power.** His humanitarian work was a byproduct of how he stood up to those regimes. **He had very deep-seated convictions about freedom and social justice, for example. And he had great courage.**"

**Belela Herrera** remembers how in the months that he lived in **Chile** before the coup, **Edelstam** would meet regularly with the authorities of the government of **Salvador Allende** to help in any way he could, and he did the same with social organizations.

**Mirtha Fernández** recalls hearing **Edelstam** mention how he was permanently in contact with indigenous communities during the time he was in Guatemala, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he never stopped denouncing the atrocities committed by the army against Mayan communities accused of collaborating with guerrilla groups.

"These are guys, the **Edelstams**, the **Guy Prims**<sup>4</sup>, whose personal sensitivity makes them realize that their position allows them to go beyond what the law says," **Herrera** concludes.

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4 French diplomat who headed UNHCR in Buenos Aires during those years, who risked his own life to help dozens of people who were persecuted by the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships.

## An unarmed warrior is laid down to rest Harald Edelstam will live on

**Edelstam** passed away in April 1989 in **Stockholm**. As of 2005 part of the avenue that runs along **Montevideo's** riverside bears his name. In **Chile** "he is constantly lavished with tributes, perhaps belated, like the rest, but tributes nonetheless," **Julio Baraibar** says.

The Movement for Justice and Human Rights (**MJDH**) and **Rel-UITA** have also paid tribute to him in **Porto Alegre**, in recognition of the dozens and dozens of Brazilians whom the Swede rescued in Santiago.

And in **Sweden**? "For over 20 years, except in family conversations and Latin American committees, his name was never uttered," the journalists **Germán Perotti** and **Jan Handquist** write in their book **Harald Edelstam** (LML Ediciones, Santiago, 2013).

These journalists also describe how in **Norway**, a country "that should be as grateful to him as the Latin American countries," an initiative to award him the Nobel Peace Prize, which circulated shortly after his return from **Chile** in 1973, was opposed.

"Neutrality and commitment cannot go hand-in-hand, and ultimately the fact that recognition comes directly from those whom he helped and from their people is perhaps the best tribute you can pay someone like **Edelstam**," **Baraibar** concludes.



Compañero Harald Edelstam  
**His exemplary struggle  
in defense of life and against  
fear and neutrality**

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MOVIMENTO DE JUSTIÇA

