

My Prison

It was December 4th, 1963, a Wednesday, when, at 6 a.m., I woke up to the sound of strong blows on the door of Rua Vasco da Gama, no. 112, in Aljustrel, the house where I lived with my parents.

Immediately, I got up and, when I opened one of the windows of the door, I saw a young man who appeared to be a little over 20, and without greeting me, he immediately told me that a friend had sent him and that he was very interested in talking with Mr Raul Rosa, to which I replied that it was me, and since he who owes nothing, fears nothing, without hesitation or any other words, I opened the door and was, to my surprise, confronted with a "badge" and the information that I was in the presence of an agent of the International Police who was ordering me to accompany him.

Faced with this situation, I was somewhat astounded, I manifested my dissatisfaction for the hypocritical manner in which he penetrated my house, and then I tried not to lose my temper and told him that, first of all, I would have to wash myself and get dressed, to which the agent of the PIDE, without any opposition, agreed.

As I went to my bedroom, the PIDE agent followed me and would not leave me alone, and when he noticed the existence of some books on top of a small piece of furniture, he nearly ran to the findings, searching everything very thoroughly and, at the end, confiscating one of my books and asking me to put a letter he had found next to the books, which I had received days before from a friend immigrated in Canada, in the pocket of my trousers.

In the aforementioned room, there was also a washbasin where I, as a rule, did my morning hygiene, and a bedside table that, among other things, kept an issue of the newspaper "Avante".

With as much serenity as I could gather, to be able to overcome the insult I was facing, and to end the police search manoeuvre, I went to the backyard and washed myself there in his presence, no longer returning to my bedroom.

Before leaving my residence, I passed by my parents, who were already awake, and told them what was happening, and with incredible courage, for they were accustomed to these damned provocations which had already happened with my brothers, they hugged me, and we exchanged words of strength, good health and luck.

When I arrived at the G.N.R. station of Aljustrel, already certain that I was not at risk of being compromised due to the issue of the newspaper "Avante", because if the PIDE had found it, it would cause me serious complications, I began to face the event naturally.

Still at the G.N.R. station, on the orders of his commanding officer, a Lieutenant named Firmino, he took everything I had in my pockets, including my own watch.

Then, I was transported in a light vehicle to the P.S.P. station of Mina and there, to my surprise, I found my brother João, also detained, accompanied by a vast group of friends in the same conditions.

When the Police completed the proceedings for our arrests, we were transported, in light vehicles to Milhõros, near Rio de Moinhos, where a collective transport, called "Ramõna", expected us, and then we were sent to the Fort of Caxias.

During the trip, which counted with the presence of many PIDE agents, they took the opportunity to gather some identification elements, and I remember that sitting next to me was Dr Hersílio- -(Municipal Veterinarian) and at some point, one of the PIDE agents asked him his name and after he responded, through a glance, the veterinarian realized that his name had been misspelt, so he told the PIDE agent, in a very sarcastic way:

My name is Hersílio, but... with an (H).

The PIDE agent then asked him if he was graduated, mishearing him, the veterinarian replied: Retired me, no... I'm still working!...

The PIDE agent insisted: Are you a veterinarian?

He replied: Yes I have a degree in Veterinary Medicine!...

This episode gave me a certain enjoyment and, in a way, strengthened my adaptation to the new reality that I was beginning to face.

When we arrived at our destination, we were divided into two groups and incarcerated in underground dungeons with vaults and cement soils.

On the same day we arrived, late at night, we started being heard in a preliminary formality, where, besides identification, they only asked if I knew why I had been arrested, to which I replied I didn't and added that certainly, the police would have that information, from those who had reported me.

It looked like the Police hadn't appreciated my attitude, and a month later I received its reprisal with a prolonged isolation in a cell.

For several days and due to our isolation, we could only deduce that it was continuously raining outside, which created a desperate situation for us, because the water trickled from the vaults of the dungeon and ran in abundance through the walls, hitting the ground, at times, from the height of a few centimetres.

Despite our protests about the serious situation we were going through, they only provided a few buckets for us to drain some water through a "latrine" that existed in the dungeon.

The situation became so complicated we had to jump over the beds, due to the large amount of water on the ground, but... behold, the morning of our first Sunday in captivity arrives, we protest again and, for that reason, we were received by the chief of the prison guards who authorized our transfer to another area, under one condition, which he blamed on the lack of available staff: that we moved our own beds.

We accepted this condition, and I remember the spectacle this caused, us crossing a large courtyard, with mattresses on our backs, under the watchful eyes of dozens of G.N.R. guards who, lined up and equipped with machine guns, pointed them at our Pacific Parade.

How sad!...

This new room, which had better housing conditions, was in a new building, with a large living area, wooden floors, windows and sanitary facilities equipped with showers.

After almost a month of captivity in the fort of Caxias, one afternoon, information arrived that I was to gather my things and leave.

Contrary to what it may seem, I was not happy because, even though I had little experience in these matters, I understood that the information transmitted was being distorted and that I was, in fact, being transferred to another prison.

Transported in a prisoner transport vehicle to my new destination, the prison of Aljube, I was welcomed in the hall by a prison guard who, with a bell, called another colleague that was on one of the upper floors to tell him, in a provocative tone, to come and get the new merchandise.

I readily understood that the merchandise in reference was me.

As I got to the upper floor, I came across a long corridor and several doors corresponding to compartments of the famous cells; immediately, they ordered me to undress, and then searched me thoroughly.

Afterwards, already dressed but prevented from wearing a belt or shoelaces, I was deposited in a cell, in a regime of incommunicado detention, which prevented me from reading, writing or receiving visitors for many days. In addition to all this arbitrariness, I confess that I was very confused by the picture that I came across, which I will describe:

The cell was a small compartment that was, approximately, one meter wide, two and a half meters long and three meters high, with dark and very dirty walls, very similar to a "Curro" (bullpen).

The furnishings of the cell included an articulated bunk bed attached to the wall with a pallet and a stinky grey blanket; on the ground, there was a similar set destined for another prisoner; the rest consisted of a chamber pot, a nightlight and an electric bell.

The bell was only used when you had to dump the content of the chamber pot or when you had a pressing need to use the "latrine" that was in a contiguous compartment, which was also equipped with a shower that rarely worked.

The entrance of the cell consisted of two doors, the first had a small window and opened to the corridor, the other narrower door had an iron railing and opened to the intermediate space which had the same width.

The first hours spent in my new cell were very complicated for me, for a few moments, I was torpid, I could barely believe the situation I was in; deprived of freedom, of interacting with my companions and of basic hygienic conditions; it all seemed like a "black" dream, so my mind took me to remote times.

After observing, in a door frame of the inner door of the cell, a scale of twenty risks corresponding to the days passed there by another prisoner, I remained very upset, and I thought that, certainly, I would not be able to resist such extensive isolation.

It turns out that, days later, in a moment which I will call of reflection, my brain calmed down, I started to feel completely lucid and not only able to overcome the bad moments I initially experienced, which were still ingrained in my mind, but also of finding the strength to endure the cynical manoeuvres that the Police used on me, namely, placing people in my cell that I found very strange, several times, who were very weak and who presented symptoms of amnesia and mental illness,.

These companions that I did not know and who only remained in my company for a few hours, or between one and three days, created situations that were very complicated for me and which required a greater mental effort and, within my reduced capacities, a psychological analysis of their reactions to be able to act in accordance with my conscience.

I should point out that, of all the prisoners who shared the cell with me, I had only previously met one in Caxias, a guy called Ferrão, from Coimbra, who was twice my age, and, with due respect (an excellent person), I must confess that the most complicated situation I had to face was his passage through the cell. This friend was very psychologically disturbed and fell in a lethargic state which was very difficult to overcome, reaching the despair of admitting suicide as his best solution.

Tough times, but... we overcame them!...

In the meantime, after the period of incommunicado, I returned to the normal regime of detention (inside the cell), and I was allowed to read and write.

I immediately remembered that I was now able to contact my brother João, who was still in Caxias, a task that would be very difficult to accomplish, but... in my simple writing which I believed was convincing, I sent my brother a postcard telling him that the package his wife (my sister-in-law Fernanda Patrício) had left in Caxias on the day I had been transferred to the Prison of Aljube had arrived in great conditions.

If everything was very well thought out... it was even better achieved; the postcard I wrote in the Prison of Aljube passed through the police censorship services and was handed over to my brother João in the Prison of Caxias.

No doubt that this episode starring my brother and me marked pretty well our passage through the fascist prisons.

At the end of the corridor, next to my cell, there was a small office which they called the secretariat, from its door, the guards listened for the smallest noises emitted from inside the cells, and the only contact they had with the prisoners was through silence or simple gesticulation.

One day in the morning, my companion in the next cell, contradicting the precepts of jail, spoke to a guard in a higher tone, he was immediately interrupted and threatened with reprisals.

This conversation between the prisoner and the guard was, for me, enough to realize that my cell neighbour was my friend Conceição, and in the afternoon, I couldn't resist, so I tried to contact him through "Morse" code - (knocks on the wall) and told him; "I'm Raul."

My friend Conceição understood my message and tried to answer me immediately, but he was a little deaf, so he didn't have a proper perception of sound, he knocked on the partition with such strength, he almost threw everything away, creating a very complicated situation with the guards that, fortunately, didn't have any consequences, but which still ended our short contact.

With the exception of 4-8 hours, period in which I was being interrogated in the police headquarters, I endured terrible isolation inside that miserable cell no. 11, for 45 days.

So many days that seemed like an eternity!...

As for the interrogation, I must mention that it occurred within as much normality as possible, they kept asking about my political convictions and if I had been invited to participate in a revolutionary action; of course I always replied negatively; I was not assaulted or offended, but they always kept me in a constant state of vigilance, and I was forced to remain standing.

My greatest punishment was the days passed inside the cell!...

They never questioned me about the book they had confiscated from me, which was about life in the Soviet Union.

The same happened with the letter from my friend José Perdigão, immigrated in Canada, they never asked anything about it, which undoubtedly provided me with some tranquillity, because a section of the content of the letter was very compromising, since he mentioned I should tell another of our friends that the package had already been sent and that soon, another would follow.

It should be noted that the aforementioned package consisted of money, which had been gathered by our immigrated friends in Canada to help the families of political prisoners.

After my troubled permanence in the cell, I was finally transferred to a common room, and there, in a memorable meeting, I found and embraced many of my friends.

I was with my companions only for 15 days, to recover from the debilitation caused by the cell, then, I was transported to the Police headquarters, where my release process was formalised, and I returned to freedom on March 3rd, 1964.

For a few days after my release, I stayed in Lisbon to comfort my late father who had been admitted to the Hospital de S. José.

When I returned home and took notice of the correspondence I had received during my prolonged absence, I found a letter sent from Coimbra by my friend Ferrão, who had thus fulfilled what he had promised when, still in the cell, he told me farewell.

This letter had been addressed to my parents, and part of its content was dedicated to his expression of profound appreciation for my conduct towards him during the difficult period we had spent in the cell.

After three months, it was my brother João's turn, who, after six months of imprisonment without ever being subjected to any interrogation, finally walked free, which made us all very happy.

Days later, in conversation with me, my brother informed me that the Police had instructed him to tell me the following:

Tell your brother Raul not to convince himself that he eluded the Police because we know everything about him.

I was very concerned about this message, but remained confident because I knew that nothing corresponded to the truth, admitting even the possibility that this could be some strategy of the PIDE; in the meantime, I found out that two of my friends, who had been arrested after me and who had been tried and sentenced, certainly in a situation of great despair and physical exhaustion, had been driven, by the police's tricks, to make false statements about me, which were added to their respective proceedings and pronounced in the Court that judged them.

Faced with this fact, I endured the weight of a strong nightmare for ten years, always aware that, at any moment, I could again become a victim of the wicked PIDE.

Finally, the 25th of April of 1974 arrived and... the nightmare ended...

My thanks to the honourable Military men of April!...

To conclude my testimony I must also mention that after the glorious date of April 25th, I was notified twice by the Military Court of Elvas, where I made statements during the trial of some PIDE informants ("Bufos" - snitches), which were related to my process, and in one of the hearings I also learned that my name, along with many others, was part of an elaborated list produced by the police, of all those who were to be arrested on the eve of May 1st, 1974.

Aljustrel, 25 April 2003

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raul Rosy". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script.