

The memory of my brother and cousin's imprisonment

The relationship of my brother José Reis Leitão with students affiliated with the Portuguese Communist Party led the PIDE to break into his residence at Rua Marques de Fronteira, at 7 a.m. on November 25th, 1964.

The alert came from Viana do Castelo to Loriga and from Loriga to Lisbon. I immediately called the house to inquire about what was going on, and my cousin who shared the same residence answered:

- Hey, I have the worst flu, I'm feverish, and I can barely talk, and Zeca just left.

I asked, are there any news? - ***No, there's nothing, but I need you to come by.***

José and our cousin were, at that time, being questioned in the PIDE's dungeons, and I, without the slightest suspicion, had been talking with an agent of the PIDE who imitated his vocal timbre and manner of speaking perfectly.

Accompanied by my wife Maria de Lourdes, I knocked on the door of my brother's house. A guy in his pyjamas told me to come in without answering the questions I asked about his identity. He wouldn't give me any answers about my brother or cousin. In the bedroom, at the entrance, there was another guy and, on the dresser, a pistol.

I was confused; I didn't know if the men there were PIDE agents (the man in the pyjamas confused me) or members of an organisation not affiliated with the regime.

A third man that looked like the head of the group told me to follow him to the last compartment down the hall. He asked me to empty my pockets and put everything on the table. He didn't identify himself nor answered any of my questions. He took my identity card and wrote down every detail. He wanted to know my address and phone number and also why I had a clipping of a French newspaper containing thoughts of a writer whose name I don't remember stored in my wallet and which newspaper it was. I replied that I liked the concepts and that the newspaper was "Le Monde".

He didn't ask anything else and just said:

- If you want to know what's going on with your brother, tomorrow at 9, go to Rua António Maria Cardoso and talk to the agent on duty. You cannot go there now because you are accompanied by your wife. Go home, don't use your phone, never look back and don't tell anyone the police were here because if you do, you will have to answer for it.

Upon returning home, Maria de Lourdes and I were absolutely convinced that the police would soon arrive. We tried to make all possible arrangements.

I had, in my house, several pamphlets and books that I had collected at the Brussels World's Fair of 1958, the book by John Reed "Les dix jours qui ebranlèrent le monde", several books from the collection "Que sais je", many from the collection Cosmos. Of all of them, the one I cared most about was John Reed's book, which was forbidden to circulate in Portugal. And the concern resulted from the fact that if I was, eventually,

questioned using the processes adopted by the police, I might not be able to resist and not reveal the name of the person who had lent it to me. And so they could add more people to the list of interrogated or arrested people. The solution was to tear it up and throw it down the toilet, but the toilet clogged.

That's when my wife remembered to grab a pan and burn the book. As such, a copy of the remarkable book by the American journalist who described the first ten days of the Moscow revolution was lost.

At 9 a.m. on November 26th, 1964, in Rua António Maria Cardoso, I was informed that my brother was in the Prison of Aljube and my cousin had been freed. I could visit my brother Joseph at 10 a.m. on the same day.

The visit took place in a ground floor room with two metal meshes separating us, and an agent in the middle that soon informed us that we could only talk about family matters. I read in my brother's eyes what he couldn't say through his mouth. He asked me to take some clothes, fruit or whatever I thought best, to him.

José was taken from the Aljube to Caxias on January 27th, 1965. The regulations of this prison are contained in a letter from January 29th which I transcribe:

- "Visitors Scheme: daily, with a duration of 1 hour and they start at 12h.

- Only parents, siblings, brothers and sisters-in-law, and aunts and uncles are allowed to enter. The maximum number of visitors is eight at a time.

- We have 1 hour of outdoor walking daily (unless the weather doesn't allow it).

- The reading of a daily newspaper (we have "O Século") is provided.

- There is 1 hour of classical music daily.

- Meals: chocolates are suspended until an order is issued to the contrary. Send milk (tetra pack packaging), fruits, cakes, cheese, marmalade, butter, cod cakes, fillets, rissoles, etc... You can choose among these. There is a stove to warm up whatever is necessary.

Music: yesterday, I listened to a Mozart's concert for clarinet and orchestra and the 8th Symphony of Beethoven on a record. What a delight! After a relatively long absence, the possibility of having music again provides me almost with the same feeling as freedom."

In the prison of Caxias, they allowed the first visit to be in one of the cells, without the wire mesh, and during that encounter, he asked me to contact Dr Salgado Zenha to act as his defence attorney.

In this visit, as in countless others through the bars, my brothers and sisters, my wife and Zeca's girlfriend were present. When he tried, for the first time, to report the details of his arrest, the agent, placed at a short distance, warned him in a peremptory tone, which did not allow a response. "***Mr José Leitão does not have to talk about matters***

that only concern him and the police. If you continue to talk about these matters, I will immediately terminate your visit. To confuse the PIDE agent, we decided to speak in a higher voice, while my brother, in the confusion of so many voices, told his girlfriend the most important things he had to say. The plan worked.

So I went to talk to Dr Salgado Zenha, but he informed me that he could not defend more than two prisoners, advising me to speak with his colleague Dr Cunha Leal who regretted not being able to go to Court because he had been involved in a fight with an agent of the PIDE, in full court, when the latter had beaten up a boy who was on trial and who shouted a hurra to the Portuguese Communist Party. Dr Cunha Leal sent me to Dr Heliodoro Caldeira who, upon seeing that my surname was Reis, asked if I was related to Colonel Reis. I said I was a nephew.

-Well, you should know that I was a revolutionary with your uncle on February 7th, 1927, and prisoner. Dr Heliodoro Caldeira told me that he could not defend José because, besides his son, he had already committed himself to another student who was undergoing the same process, but he soon said:

- I'm going to write a card to my colleague Dr Francisco Sousa Tavares who, although a monarchic, is a true democrat and has made brilliant defences in other political processes. I have the greatest interest and the greatest pleasure in seeing him participate in this process.

Dr Sousa Tavares immediately agreed to take the defence and promised to go to Caxias to speak with my brother as soon as he received the indictment which I reproduce below:

"Regarding José Reis Leitão: He began by reading the press of the party in 1956 or 1957 that was handed to him by a relative. Then, in October 1963, he contacted Mário Neto with whom he began discussing political issues of a partisan nature. Influenced by that Mário Neto, he ended up adhering to the principles defended by him, that is, those advocated by the said party, in the various meetings he held in his home with the person. Thus, he helped Mário Neto in the fulfilling of the tasks he had to carry out, either by elaborating political articles to be exploited by the party, by opening his house for meetings or even as support point for the party press. Connected to Mário Neto, he received the clandestine and subversive press of the party that paid for its cost, namely the pamphlets Avante, the Militante and the Amanhã. In addition, he contributed with 15\$00 for the funds of the aforementioned party. At the time he was arrested, he took responsibility for the partisan press seized at his house, which belonged to Mário Neto. Leitão took advantage of the fact that he had the press in his power to indoctrinate himself since he had already begun reading the pamphlet entitled "Rumo à Vitória".

The trial, in the Boa Hora Court, of 31 people, mostly students of higher education, began on July 12th, 1965, in a plenary presided by the Judge Correia Barreto and with big names of the Portuguese legal practice, among which Heliodoro Caldeira, already in a precarious state of health, Abranches Ferrão, Jorge Sampaio, Acácio Gouveia, Luís

Francisco Rebelo, Adão e Silva, who defended Neto Valente, engaged to his daughter, Salgado Zenha, Mário Soares, Duarte Vidal, Paradela de Oliveira, Francisco Sousa Tavares, who defended my brother, Magalhães Godinho, Xencora Camotim.

The defence lawyers' strategy focused more on attacking the prevailing political system and condemning the authoritarian regime which had no respect for fundamental freedoms and democratic values, and less on the rebuttal of the defendants' indictments.

Instead of a monotonous, repetitive trial, there was an exhibition of a set of remarkable political and juridical pieces uttered by equally remarkable people of the forum, two of which ascended to the highest magistracy of the nation.

The defendants, 31 in number, were accused of subversive activities in the student sector against State security. Among others, António Crisóstomo Teixeira, Sara Amâncio, Pedro Lemos, Teresa Pacheco Pereira, Lígia Galapés Gomes, Ana Masano de Amorim, Mário Maia, Carlos Sabrosa, Alfredo Caldeira, defended by his father, Artur Pinto, Luís Salgado de Matos, Fernando Rosas, Maria Antonieta Coelho, Maria João Gerardo, José Palminha, Maximino Cunha, Aguinaldo Cabral and Filipe Rosas.

Several dozen defence witnesses attended the trial. Only two of the PIDE agents as witnesses of indictment for 31 defendants, which is, let's face it, indeed remarkable! The hearings ended on August 11th, 1965. The vast majority of the students were released on that very same day. All the condemned, including those who were acquitted but had been in jail for more than six months.

My brother, during the police interrogations, always stated that he was not affiliated with any organisation, but he openly declared that he was an oppositionist to the regime. Mário Neto was a colleague from the cine-clube activities to whom he offered free access to the house to use as he understood. José acknowledges that confessing his opposition to the regime was a mistake that cost him nine months in jail, still, it became clear that the PIDE, under the discretionary powers it was given or that it took, was able to incarcerate any person who was suspected of subversive activities, for a period exceeding half a year.

During the nine months of confinement and trial, I was able to personally meet the students' relatives and see their full solidarity and adherence to the ideals that had led them to jail. The relatives would carry, at the time of the visit, food products, which the students would share with all the cellmates. The students never had to resort to the prison cafeterias. And they also took food for the spirit: books, magazines, newspapers and records.

My brother said that the sleep torture during interrogation, which could last for 60 consecutive hours, and the passage through the notorious "Curros" (bullpens) of the Aljube - three steps forward and two to the side - were very painful moments. The excellent camaraderie, the exchange of ideas and knowledge with their fellow prisoners,

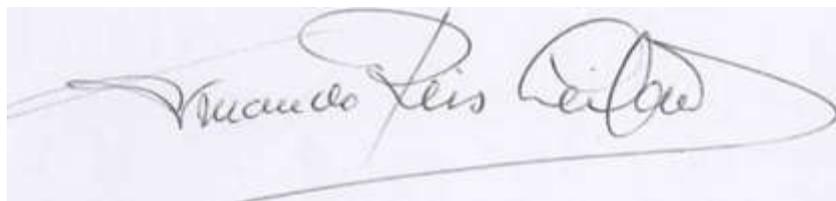
the brilliant oratory, during the trial, of eminent figures of the Portuguese law, were positive aspects of a negative experience.

My brother was systematically elected Room Delegate, and in this role, he took on the administrative area, the contact with the guards and the conciliation of personalities from various educational backgrounds. People affiliated with the PCP, the Leninist Marxist line, and the FAP, the Maoist line, cohabitated in the same room, which was sometimes difficult because they agreed with the ends but differed greatly on the means to overthrow the regime. In the cells, there were also: undercover agents from the PIDE, which were detected, people connected to the case of Beja, illegal immigrants who had jumped across the border, peasants, intellectuals and illiterate individuals. The latter learned to read, write, and count in classes that the prisoners organised in the dungeons. The prisoners were teachers and students in general culture classes, depending on the specificity of their knowledge.

The celebration of events, such as the day of the student and some historical dates, and verses of certain songs, were, for the police, subversive manifestations. Everyone in the room was immediately grounded, and the inmates were deprived of moments of leisure, recreation and music. In nine months of captivity, three months were of punishments.

Arrests and trials of this kind happen in autocratic, anti-liberal and anti-democratic regimes. The students, like any ordinary citizens, were not, as was proven, free to dwell on philosophical or political currents opposing those of the current regime. The police, the censorship, the single book, were repressive instruments of the reigning power and such regimes, as in any other latitude where they governed, always ended in revolutions and counter-revolutions. So, history repeated itself once again.

January 1998

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Manuel Reis Leal". The name is written in a single line with a long horizontal flourish underneath.