

From pickpocket to bank robber

MARCO ANTÔNIO COELHO



Picture by Jorge Santos/Associated Press - 8.6.2006

Prisoner Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho, also known as Marcola, is taken to the room where he was heard by the Arms' Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (CPI), at Presidente Bernardes Penitentiary, in São Paulo's inland.

THE STENOGRAPHY REPORT IS straightforward. The recorded speech of a prisoner reveals no feeling at all. Only facts and more facts. That is all in the declarations of someone with an unknown name – Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho –, but very well known for his nickname – Marcola. Exactly him who is charged, among several crimes, of being the leader of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), in São Paulo.

He simplifies everything when he sums up – “*I came from misery*”. He’s been an orphan since he was nine years old and was raised at Praça da Sé, in São Paulo. When he was a child, he took his bath and slept leaning in one of the Cathedral’s walls. His mother drowned to death. He can’t remember his father. He has two sisters and his brother was killed. His daughter is just over seven years old. His wife was murdered, but he charges no one for that crime. His body has stabbing scars. He claims that life is also too short for the arms dealer. He believes he won’t live twenty or thirty more years. He’s convinced that those who are tied to violence tend to be killed by it.

He was arrested for the first time when he was fourteen years old, as a pickpocket. Later he became a bank robber. He’s been in jail since 1999 and

has already escaped five times from different prisons. He lived in Paraguay for six months. When he came back, he was found by chance by the São Paulo police, when he was in a stolen car.

He was sentenced to 44 years in jail and stated that in the penitentiary he has already been for five years in the Differentiated Disciplinary Regime (RDD), in which the inmate gets the roughest treatment. He thought about suicide, but then he was not brave enough to put an end to his own life. He wishes to die old, but he has no motivation at all to live.

He doesn't believe in God and has declared himself to be agnostic. He states that his life changed when he began to have access to books. He became a self-taught man, studies his rights and has read several books about politics. His favorite authors are: Nietzsche, Victor Hugo, Saint Augustine, Voltaire and the Bible.

Deposition to the CPI of the House of Representatives

His deposition to the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission of the House of Representatives, in charge of investigating the arms traffic, lasted for four hours and thirteen minutes. That private meeting took place on June 8, 2006, at Presidente Bernardes penitentiary (SP). The President of the CPI was Representative Moroni Torgan, and its reporting member was Representative Paulo Pimenta. Eight Federal Representatives participated in that hearing.

Its transcription is available on the internet – www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/cotidiano/20060708-marcos_camacho.pdf. Several publications disclosed parts of that document and comments on it. A picture of that meeting was taken from the door of the room where the deposition took place.

Since that hearing occurred right after the uprising that took place in several penitentiaries of São Paulo, besides assaults and violent actions against police stations and São Paulo's police cars, the CPI members raised many questions about those events.

One Representative asked about life in the prisons. Marcola confirmed the existence of prisoners' organizations, adding that they go beyond the boundaries of a penitentiary. He revealed that *“there is a rule for living together in all penitentiaries, regardless of the PCC and of any other organization, criminal or not”*. According to Marcola, *“in every jail there's an internal discipline created by the prisoners themselves*

... a discipline, because otherwise the guy will want to have sex with the other's wife, for example. If he's stronger and the other one is weaker, naturally he would be able to do that. Nevertheless, the very rule that exists inside the prison forbids that attitude”.

He gave other examples of rules that were accepted by the prisoners – end the use of crack, a decision reached by consensus. He explains what happened: *“Someone presents an idea, thinks and says – ‘guys, what do you think about abolishing crack?’. That was transmitted by cell phone to the other*

penitentiaries”. And Marcola goes on:

“The majority also decided to abolish homosexuality, that is, a guy raping another prisoner, which often occurred in the São Paulo penitentiary system and the authorities were never able to put an end to that. It was the organization that established rules for living together to cope with a practice that offends human dignity”.

Misery and violence

When he felt that he could use the opportunity to defend the prisoners’ interests, Marcola stated: *“Since we’re children we get used to living with misery and violence. In any slum there are daily murders. Violence is natural for the prisoner. That’s why the prisoners’ organizations oppose that violent nature. What do they do? They forbid the inmates to take certain attitudes that would be normal to them, but that invade the other guy’s space. Do you understand that?”*

One Representative asked for information about the counterpart that the organization demands from the prisoner. Marcola replies: *“No one pays anything inside the jail. That’s over. There was a time when some prisoners paid US\$11.17¹ per month to a certain organization. It was petty cash so that they could hire lawyers and legal assistance... But that was abolished”.*

Marcola says that solidarity is common among the prisoners and their relatives: *“Our idealism is that of solidarity, of the prisoner knowing that there’s great injustice in the penitentiary system and that the guy who’s inside needs legal support, as well as the visits of his relatives for him to survive inside. That’s because food is often awful. And if he depends on medicine he won’t be able to treat himself”.*

When one Congressman observed that the growth of that prisoners’ organization took the authority away from the government and that it won’t be easy to re-establish that authority, Marcola agreed, stating that this really happened. Several times, during the deposition, Marcola contested the version, even presented in the newspapers, that he was the leader of PCC, stating that *“even though the press romantically fancies about such leadership this is all a great lie. There are well-informed people inside the jail who obtain the confidence of other prisoners. Why? The prisoner comes to you with a certain problem, you offer a solution, show a logic, show how he’s being treated and how he should be treated”.*

When Representative Raul Jungmann stated that he considers a policy to re-socialize the prisoner to be essential, Marcola seized the opportunity to discuss that issue: *“Excuse me, but don’t you think that, when repression laws are made, taking advantage of this sensationalist moment and everything else, shouldn’t laws be made to re-socialize the inmates as well? Why do you have the option to restrain and you don’t have the option to re-socialize? ... Where’s the interest in that, doesn’t it provide votes?”.*



Talking to the Representatives, in the Presidente Bernardes penitentiary (SP), on May 8, 2006, Marcola admitted that every inmate that comes into the jail system gets “protection”, including assistance to the families. “We try to be solidary”.

Marcola asks: *“How will we stop being outlaws? I would like to know. I will tell you that if I knew it, I would have already tried to leave crime somehow, do you understand? The penitentiary system doesn’t have any rehabilitation policy...”*.

How are the inmates used? Marcola answers: *“Everybody, somehow, earns money at our expense. When dozens of prisons are built, don’t you think that there are people inside who are making money? ...There are many ways for them to explore us. And the inmates are easily explored. They can’t speak up. They don’t have the right to do something, to speak and vote. Nothing ... Therefore, they do what they want to us...”*.

The mistake of politics among the inmates

A topic is quickly brought up in the deposition – cell phones. Marcola confirms that the inmates use those devices to communicate from one penitentiary to another. One of the Representatives said that the government will turn the use of cell phones among the inmates more difficult.

Marcola doesn’t believe that this prohibition will come into being. According to him *“that intimidation stuff – that the inmate who is caught with a cell phone will stay three or four years in the RDD has never worked in São Paulo...The guy comes to the penitentiary, stays one year without having sex with his wife and without watching television. Last time I stayed like that for two years. Most of the people who come here come back to jail and are not afraid to come back, or to be transferred to a Federal penitentiary, or anywhere...That way of solving the problem won’t work. It will only throw sand into the eyes of society, saying – ‘we solved the penitentiary problem, building the world’s roughest jail’... But how many inmates will fit in that penitentiary? Two hundred? How about the thousands of others who are all around? What will they create? A bunch of monsters, a bunch of revolted people who won’t get intimidated either. That’s wrong! I think that the inmates should be given decent conditions first”*.

An elucidative dialogue took place between the CPI reporting member and the inmate, concerning the prisons' employees:

Representative Paulo Pimenta – *“Marcola, why do you talk so easily, for example, about the corrupt policeman, but you don't talk about the corrupt penitentiary employee?”*

Marcola – *“Because those are different levels of corruption, as I see it. The penitentiary employee has a miserable life, very similar to that of the inmate. Therefore, the inmate ends up identifying himself with him, or the other way around. Because they come from the same slum. With policemen, however, it's all different...The penitentiary agent won't be able to earn US\$ 279,329.60, unless he helps me to get out of here. But he won't be able to do that.”*

Marcola's criminal record

Another side of the story emerges when Marcola's criminal record is verified.² The first time Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho was convicted was in 1987, for the armed robbery of a young lady in the previous year. He was convicted for two other robberies – of a bank and of a security firm – in the beginning of 1986, but he was acquitted in four other cases. The other successful charges against Marcola refer to two millionaire robberies: in July, 1998, Marcola and his accomplices kidnapped the director of a value transportation firm in São Paulo and took almost two and a half million dollars. Nine months later, he participated in an action inside an agency of Banco do Brasil in Cuiabá, in which the group earned another almost four million dollars.

Marcola's total sentence as a result of those five convictions is of 39 years, eleven months and four days in prison. He has served less than half of that total. However, his punishment might increase in the next few years. He's indicated in several lawsuits as the instigator of the assaults that took place in May and July, 2006, including the murders of security force agents and assaults to public buildings, besides the murder of Retributive Judge Antônio José Machado Dias, for which he has already been indicted.

Notes

- 1 The exchange rate used in the conversion of reais into dollars (US\$1 = R\$1,79) refers to December 6, 2007.
- 2 Research made by Leandro Bessa Souza, lawyer who graduated from USP Law School, criminal analyst of the Information Management Aid of the Public Prosecution Service of the State of São Paulo. @ – bessasouza@uol.com.br

Marco Antônio Coelho is the executive editor of *Estudos Avançados* journal. He's the author of *Os descaminhos do São Francisco* (Paz e Terra, 2005).
@ – macoelho@that.com.br

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