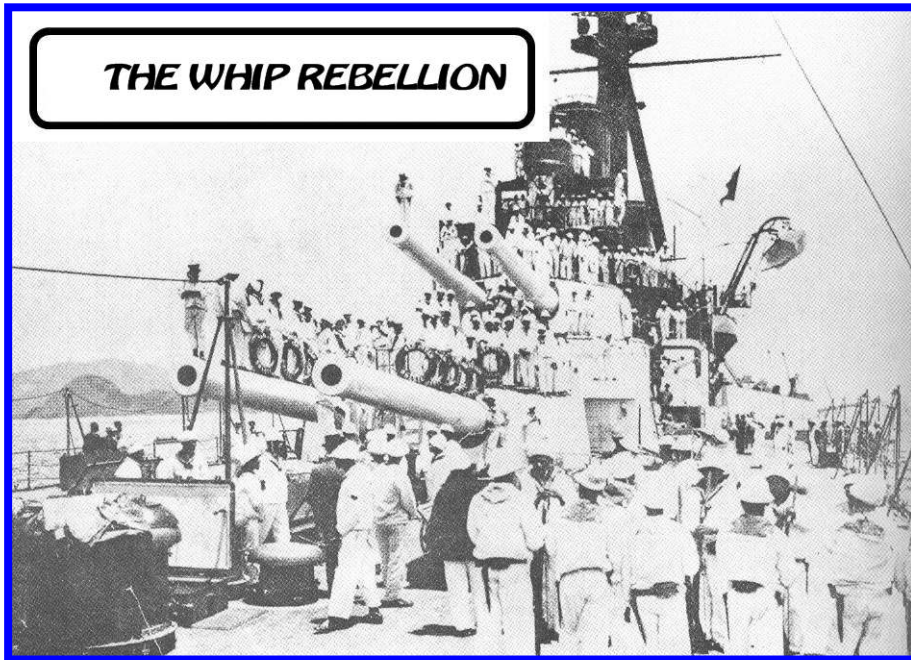


THE WHIP REBELLION



José Luiz Pereira da Costa

The new century, 1900 began with the Brazilian government and politicians taking a decision: To transform the National Navy into one of the might Navies in the world, matching with the Royal Navy of England, this at this time had some centuries of experience in warfare, and building ships for its own and to export. It seems that no one was thinking in metallurgy. Only many years ahead, President Getúlio Vargas preparing to give means for a national shipyard industry, not only considered a complex metalwork plant in Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro, but implemented it with the *Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional*, in 1941.

In 1904, Brazil went to shop sophisticated warships at the United Kingdom shipyards: Three dreadnoughts – UK at this time had only one of such specimen – three cruisers, six torpedo boats, three submarines and one liner. The final deal has ended with the coming of only two dreadnoughts named as “*Minas Geraes*¹” and “*São Paulo*²”, made one by W.C. Armstrong Whitworth & Company, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, and the second by Maxim in Barrow-in-Furness, England.

The Guanabara Bay, in the autumn of 1910, received the mighty “*Minas Geraes*”. At this time, she was the world’s most modern and powerful warship. The Rio de Janeiro press in saluting the new warships says: “*Was the entire Nation which has greeted the gigantic profile of the mighty colossus of the South American seas.*”

Yet, the concept of a bright new Brazilian Navy do not contemplated an updated concept for the treatment of the undergraduate mariners. The rules for draft, the working system, the disciplinary methods and the care with undergraduate feeding, were most the same as in times of sailing navigation searching the way to the India – or at the odious slaves’ ships.

¹ <http://www.naviosdeguerrabrasileiros.hpg.ig.com.br/M/M064/M064.htm>

² <http://www.naviosdeguerrabrasileiros.hpg.ig.com.br/S/S031/S031.htm>

The seeds of mutiny were laid in an ideal fermentation process. And it grownup much more during the time a great number of undergraduate marines stayed – about two years – at the UK shipyards, being prepared to bring to Brazil the warships under construction to Brazil. Working in British ships they learnt that the way they lived inside the Brazilian ships was something inhuman, something lost in the shades of ancient ages.

In fact, it was always crucial the disruption among the members of the armed forces in Brazil, since colonial times. From the Empire era, wide was the gap dividing officials and sailors. The officials, mainly in the Navy, came from the noble classes, sons of rural masters or member of urban upper-class – the privates and general undergraduate were indeed forced against their will to serve at Navy files. The place where the Navy was to draft their involuntary enlisted was in the poorest stratus of the society, where predominate the blacks, dark mulattoes and general mestizos.

Among the sailors at that time was the reiterate remembrance of an important event occurred in Russia, the basis for the world famous picture “*Battleship Potemkin*.” with the story of a sailors’ mutiny aiming better life conditions inside the Russian fleet of warships.

Then, an extremely well plot rebellion started to be organized aiming the most villain symbol of the relations between the officials of Brazilian Navy and the sailors: **The Whip**. Ripe was the situation to emerge inside the Brazilian Navy – borne in the powerful dreadnoughts “*Minas Geraes*” and “*São Paulo*” – **The Whip Rebellion**.

In November 1910, the sailor Marcelino Rodrigues was punished with a total of 250 lashes. It was so terrible the way became the back of this poor sailor that one Parliamentary who visited him, described his back torso as a fish prepared to be salted and cook. The Rebellion was not ready at this time to be launched; nevertheless, because of the trauma for the brutal punishment of Marcelino, the leader of the Rebellion, the 1st Class Sailor, João Cândido, a dark skinned mulatto, took the decision to launch the huge mutiny, as in his words:

“The General Committee, by unanimity, has decided to launch the Rebellion on the day 22nd. At this night, the trumpet does not have asked for silence – the sound that came out was for battle. Each one took his own position at the ships – as the officials were, since long moments ago, arrested in their ship cabins. All moved smoothly, with no rush. Each cannon has received a crew of five sailors, all bearing the command to fire to dead anyone who attempted to stop the Rebellion. It was 10:50 PM, time when the fight in the decks has stopped, I have ordered that one cannon shot was fired, as the agreed signal to know how was behaving the other rebel warships. The first one to answer was the “São Paulo,” the second was the “Bahia”. The battleship “Deodoro” remained silent. I have ordered, then, that all the ships’ spotlights were aimed to the Navy Arsenal, to all the Guanabara Bay shores and to the [Copacabana] Fortress. I have sent a message to the Catete [Brazil’s Head of State office and house, in Rio de Janeiro, former National Capital], noticing that the Navy was under mutiny, with the decision to eliminate any corporal punishment at the Brazilian Navy.

The killed people during the uprising were kept in an improvised mortuary chamber, and early next day I sent them ashore.

After all those events, the remainder was the routine in a warship.”

The battle inside the ships has caused several deaths; among them was the Naval Captain João Baptista das Neves, Captain of “*São Paulo*” warship. Large was the number of injured people. Among the casualties, officials were in one side, and privates and undergraduate loyal to the rebels on the other side.

The rebels conquered, in their favor, one of the most respectable voices in the Country at this time, the Senator Ruy Barbosa (1849-1923) – the powerful voice against the President Hermes da Fonseca (1855-1923 – President between 1910-1914). Ruy Barbosa proclaimed: “*The sailors have followed no other intent, but fight for a better remuneration, and to be freed of the infamous torture of being whipped.*”

The night of the Rebellion is described by the Brazilian historian and journalist Edmar More³l with the following emblematic words:

“As the night fell, Rio de Janeiro knew a new master, João Cândido, just a sailor. The Fortresses stand quiet, motionless. The Government with all the Admirals and Generals at the Ministry was trembling facing the humble sailor, at that moment the chief of an impressive rebel naval fleet, ready to follow unchallenged his orders.”

The reality at that moment was that the most powerful fleet of ships in South America, and one of the most updated in the whole world was pointing their guns to the Capital of Brazil, the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The city run into full panic, as the news has spread out all over. Wealthy families run to the imperial city of Petropolis, in the hills, as families from the Rio de Janeiro South Area moved to suburban districts. It was crystal clear that the government had no means to face the rebels’ power. In support to the Government, stands one Division of Counter Torpedo Boat, and the warships “*Rio Grande do Sul*”, “*Timbira*”, “*Barroso*”, “*Goyaz*”, “*Tamandaré*” and others, amounting a total of 2,630 navy men. Nevertheless, they had no material condition to face the 2,379 rebels, holding the more updated weapons at the time.

The Government attempts to face the rebels, so the Minister of the Navy receives a plan for a counterattack, urging that it must be made immediately and merciless. Then the Minister signs an order to attack “with maximum energy the rebels ships – sinking them without no hesitance”.

The other wing in this crisis defends the amnesty for the rebels, and the end of corporal punishment by the Brazilian Navy.

Senator Ruy Barbosa, in a speech at the House, puts the Government in check by saying:

“Or the Government is capable to finalize with such deplorable movement – then fair would be if the Government uses of such capability to restore immediately the tranquility the Brazilian people deserves; or this capability the Government of our Republic does not possesses – then, the prudency, the self-respect and the discernment advices to accept submission to the actual circumstances.”

Senator Ruy Barbosa move forward in his reason – argument which pushed the Government to bend eventually in favor of amnesty. Said the Senator:

“If now, backed up by few torpedo boats and destroyers, the extermination of the actual movement sheltered inside the might dreadnoughts was accomplished, it would be the sad proof that we have been wrong sometime ago acquiring the mighty ships. The sad proof that in a battle against a foreign power we would be defeat, the same way it would have happened before we bought the new actual navy fleet.

³ In *A Revolta da Chibata*, ed. Graal 1979.

“To sink the warships, shouldn’t be the Government aim, since the acts of preparation for the attack will represent to be in the edge of a more disastrous result. Foolish will be any attempt to confront the rebels by assembling few pieces of artillery in Rio de Janeiro hills; foolish will be any attempt to confront the rebels by sending small boats transporting Army Forces – foolish would be at last to contest and dream to subjugate those might ships; invincible warships. The Land troops are not made to fight over the sea waves.”

The Congress voted the amnesty and it became a law after the sanction of the President of the Republic. The Whip Rebellion has come to an end. But the story of the rebels was only starting. In fact, the Brazilian Navy never more used the whip as means of discipline for the sailors.

Another uprising occurred at the *Ilha das Cobras*, and the fleet in which João Cândido has bent the Government simply smashed the rebellion, because the power of the guns of the dreadnoughts.

The smashed rebellion, nevertheless, was the pretext for the Government to declare the state of siege. And, with the power out of the state of siege a chase to the whip rebels started mercilessly.

Without any notice, João Cândido is arrested immediately after he came ashore, out of the sailor’s transport. The condition he was treated inside the prison, João Cândido himself tells to Edmar Morel⁴:

“It was terrible. We were eighteen at the small cell, and only two went out of it alive: I and Pau da Lira – in fact, he was not a sailor, but a black stevedore assigned to work at the Mineiros wharf, Caju area. The other eighteen simply were burnt alive, because the quick-lime and the water spread inside the cell. The image I recall of some of them, is the picture of frogs, so much swollen they were because of the quick-lime.

The cell is too little, and water pours from every corner. The walls are completely pitched. So we suffer an intense heat. The air to breathe is sultry, unbearable. Our feeling is that somebody is cooking us alive in a huge caldron. Some bent by the thirsty drunk their own urine. Our excrements are disposed in a drum which so full it is that once it spilt spreading feces at the alcove. Pretesting to disinfect the cell, they spray again a large quantity of quick-lime. This product absorbs all the excrements while we look at it; but we do it quietly, motionless, avoiding to provoke motion at the lime powder, so it wouldn’t come to our lungs. We think we can resist along six days inside the dungeon, living only with bread and water. But the heat, around 10 AM is too much suffocating. We cry! Nevertheless, our cries are overlaid by the beat of many drums. We try then to throw down the steel barred gate. Our effort is immense. Clouds of dust rise up from the floor, going direct to our lungs, suffocating us. The darkness is terrible. The only light in the cell came from a dim kerosene chandelier. Then the cries weaken, and a deep silence is installed in this real hell, the place where the Brazilian Government, in which we have trusted blindly, throw eighteen Brazilian citizens, all bearing the guarantees of laws approved by the National Congress, and under the protection of the Constitution. When finally the door of the cell is opened, rotted human beings laid inside.

Afterwards, a terrible and unjust chase was launched against João Cândido. The Senator Ruy Barbosa, at the House, has described what he called as “an honest rebellion” – emphasizing the extreme care that João Cândido and his rebels took maintaining the rebellion under their strict control.

Says Senator Ruy Barbosa:

⁴ In *A Revolta da Chibata*, ed. Graal 1979.

They have thrown out to the sea all the drinking spirits that was in ships' canteens, avoiding the sailors to become drunk. Sentinels stand before safes, in which they have disposed all values carried inside the ships. The same care was taken concerning the official's cabins. Nothing should be violated. Along the whole period of preparation for the rebellion, a rigid pact of silence was made between the rebels, and nothing have spelt in a period of more than two years – something odd for the Brazilian habits. All the rebels have been faithful to the main idea, their ideal. They have been faithful one to the other – bearing no other interest than the final victory of their cause. And, why do not affirm? Instead of to give in for the impulses of the instincts so much developed and so much natural in men of their condition, using immediate and decidedly the power of destruction that at a certain point it was in their hands, instead of it they have made concessions, they marked their fight as if they were regular forces, fighting against regular enemies. Men like this we shouldn't despise. We may eventually blame any deviation, but we must recognize the human value that their action represents.

The oversized reaction of Brazilian authorities to the Whip Rebellion it is largely well recorded in many documents.

Aboard of the cargo freighter from the Company *Lloyd Brasileiro*, “*Satelite*”, 105 discharged sailors, 292 homeless, 44 whores, 50 privates from the Army, they had a common destiny: To be shot along a route to Santo Antônio da Madeira. When the ship arrived to the destiny, 200 men were delivered to a Rondon⁵ Commission, and another 200 delivered to the North-Americans at that time building the Madeira-Mamoré⁶ railroad. The North-Americans owners of the railway have refused to receive them.

João Cândido, however, was not included at the tragic voyage – he was too much well known to simply disappear without notice. He was at that time a kind of national celebrity. The newspapers at the time would spend a lot of space for a disappearance of João Cândido, as it would damage seriously the Government image.

The case against the “Black Admiral” it is absolutely inconceivable, because his rebellion was different from the current type of rebellions in old Brazil. The João Cândido's rebellion was not aimed at the establishment of a new Republic, as it has happened in Palmares⁷; was neither aiming to found a Confederation. João Cândido's rebellion searching for dignity for the life of a parcel of Brazilian citizenship.

And he got it.

Nobody can hide anymore the importance of this Brazilian citizen.

The director of *Museu da Imagem e do Som* (Image and Sound Museum), Marília Trindade Barboza da Silva, over her text in Portuguese this narrative was made, closing the book “*João Cândido – O Almirante Negro*”, published by the *Museu da Imagem e do Som*, Rio de Janeiro, 1999, says:

⁵ Marshal Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon (1865-1958), chief of *Rondon Commission*, body from the Brazilian Army to secure Brazilian sovereignty along the deep West Coast, building a telegraph line between the cities of Cuiabá (MT) and Santa Antonio da Madeira.

⁶ A private owned project, for the transport and export of rubber produced both in Brazil and Bolivia. Tragic is the story of Madeira-Mamoré Railroad building, so many were the casualties, mainly because of malaria disease.

⁷ *Palmares Republic of Slaves in Colonial Brazil*. In this **Projeto Cultural** it is available material in English about *Palmares* and the revolution leader, Zumbi, today a Brazilian National Hero.

“It is a great honor to bring into the official History, João Cândido Felisberto, the Master of ceremony of the seas.

“In the decade of 1970 a violent censorship to the literary production violated a notable poet of popular Brazilian music. The censors forbade that, in certain music honoring João Cândido, the title of Admiral, was included.

“There are a large number of Admirals recorded by the Brazilian history. Yet, João Cândido was only one. After 22nd November 1910, when the value of an Admiral would be measured by the moral status, above the common measurement, aiming to dignify – from this moment on, correct will be to say: ‘This is a João Cândido’.

THE AMNISTY POST MORTEM

Finally, in July 2008, the Brazilian President, Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, approved a Congress Law, by the senator Marina da Silva, giving full amnesty *post mortem* to the deceased sailor João Cândido and the other of his companions at the Whip Rebellion. Among the homage which will be tribute to him, a bronze statue will be set in a public square, in Rio de Janeiro, and one of Brazilian Navy’s warship will bear his name.