

A slice of sky behind bars

Claudio Pozzi - Italy

I'm Claudio Pozzi from Padula (Salerno, Italy), from April 21st 1972 to September 30th 1972 I was detained in the military prison of Gaeta for refusing to carry out military service as a Catholic. I was released from prison on October 1st and on December 15th it was approved the law which finally recognized the right to object in Italy, as well. I also wrote a book about this titled *Uno spicchio di cielo dietro le sbarre, Diario dal carcere di un obiettore di coscienza al servizio militare negli anni '70* [A slice of sky behind bars, Diary from prison of a conscientious objector to military service in the 1970s], Pisa 2019, Centro Gandhi Edizioni.

On December 15th 1972, the law which recognized conscientious objection to military service passed, thus allowing those who had requested to carry out an alternative civil service to do so; from 1973 to 2004 over 780,000 young people were able to take advantage of this opportunity (since 2005 the compulsory military service has been suspended). Next year will be the 50th anniversary of this recognition.

Since the Constituent Assembly, the problem of recognizing conscientious objection at the legislative level had arisen and numerous bills had been proposed in this sense over the course of 25 years, but none had been successful.

Over the years, there have been individual cases of objectors and important positions that have failed to obtain legislative results, even if they had contributed to 'shake things up' and to involve the most sensitive circles of public opinion.

Many had faced prison [among whom many members of MIR Italy]:

in 1948, Pietro Pinna, who refused to be a soldier "for religious, ethical, civil, social, freedom and justice reasons";

in 1949, Francesco Buraglio and Antonio Pantoni;

in 1950, the anarchists Angelo Nurra and Pietro Ferrua and the Catholics Elevoine Santi and Mario Barbani;

in 1956, the anarchist Libereso Guglielmi, the evangelical Antonio Baldo and the pente-costals Giuseppe Aronne and Felice Torghele;

in 1959, Nello di Stefano, Rocco D'Angelo and Alberto Contini;

in 1962, Gianfranco Ciabatti and Giuseppe Gozzini, Catholics;

in 1963, Adriano Chiamalto, member of the Church of Christ;

in 1965, Ivo Della Savia, anarchist, Giorgio Viola and Fabrizio Fabbrini, Catholics, and Antonio Susini, layman;

in 1966, Luigi Pagliarino;

in 1968, Enzo Bellettante, a Catholic;

in 1969, Piercarlo Racca;

in 1970, Claudio Bedussi;

Giuseppe Bruzzone refused the uniform four times, serving a total of 26 months in prison between 1966 and 1968;

It is also fair to remember the countless Jehovah's Witnesses who silently objected because they have always found military service incompatible with their religion.

All these objectors, with their individual actions, had certainly expressed a gesture of coherence and had contributed to raising awareness, but they had not obtained political results because, with the exception of the cases of Pietro Pinna, Giuseppe Gozzini and Fabrizio Fabbrini, they did not receive a lot of attention among the public opinion.

These were the years in which maximum pressure had to be put in place to get a law on the Alternative Civil Service approved. Italy was among the very few European countries in which there was not yet a law that recognized conscientious objection, even if numerous proposals laid in Parliament: we had the sad company of only three dictatorial states - Greece, Spain and Portugal - and of the Turkey.

Within the nonviolent, pacifist and anti-militarist movements - among which the Radical Party played a leading role at whose headquarters, in via di Torre Argentina in Rome, a liaison secretariat was established - it was decided to intensify the battle with collective objections that were publicized to the maximum with press conferences and public statements.

On February 9th 1971 eight young people (Giuseppe Amari, Valerio Minnella, Neno Negrini, Nando Pagagnoni, Mario Pizzola, Franco Suriano, Alberto Trevisan and Gianfranco Truddaiu), before facing prison, during a press conference, made the first collective declaration of conscientious objection explaining their refusal with social and political claims.

On February 20th 1972, the first national demonstration for the announcement of a collective objection took place in Rome, in Piazza Navona. The demonstration began with a bonfire to burn leaflets praising the Armed Forces which, provocatively, had been made to find in the square; then nine young people - I was also there - expressed their refusal to do military service with a joint declaration; the group was composed as follows:

Roberto Cicciomessere, 25yrs old, from Rome, non-believer, former secretary of the Radical Party;

Alberto Gardin, 22yrs old, from Padua, nonviolent;

Valerio Minnella, 21yrs old, of the nonviolent group of Bologna, (he was at his second objection; at the first one he was sentenced to 3 months in prison);

Alerino Peila, 23yrs old, from Turin, nonviolent, (he was at his the second objection; at the first one he was sentenced to 4 months in prison);

Claudio Pozzi (myself), 23yrs old, of the Shalom Community of Naples, Catholic;

Gianni Rosa, 20yrs old, from Turin, nonviolent;

Adriano Scapin, 21yrs old, of the anti-militarist group of Padua;

Franco Suriano, 22yrs old, from Rome, anarchist;

Alberto Trevisan, 24yrs old, of the anti-militarist group of Padua, Catholic, (he was at his third objection; at the previous two ones he had been sentenced to a total of 9 months and 20 days in prison).

On June 30th 1971 in Rome, during a press conference at the headquarters of the Radical Party, the third collective declaration of conscientious objection was carried out by twelve young people who, in addition to their own document, signed the previous one from February, precisely to highlight the continuity of their refusal with the previous one in order to propose a mass refusal of

the army and avoid "the marginalization of objectors in the ghetto of the exalted or the tarred asocial".

Here is the list of those objectors:

Vittorio Adamo, 20yrs old, from Naples, anarchist;

Claudio Bedussi, 21yrs old, of the nonviolent group of Brescia, (he was at his third objection; he had been sentenced to three months in prison the first time and five months the second time);

Giuseppe Donghi, 24yrs old, from Varese, of the "Lotta Continua" group;

Carlo Filippini, 20yrs old, of the nonviolent group of Brescia;

Antioco Floris, 20yrs old, from Nuoro, of the International Antimilitarist Movement of Turin;

Antonio Pietracatella, 21yrs old, from Novara;

Luigi Redaelli, 20yrs old, from Oggiono (Como), ecumenical Christian;

Giancarlo Reggiori, 21yrs old, from Milan;

Luciano Scapin, 21yrs old, of the anti-militarist group of Padua (he was at his second objection; the first time he had served three months in prison);

Gianfranco Truddaiu, 24yrs old, from Padua, evangelical, (he was at his fourth objection; he had already served a total of 13 months and 20 days in prison);

Giancarlo Vismara, 21yrs old, from Milan;

Luigi Zecca, 26yrs old, from Morbegno, Catholic.

These dozens of objections were supported by strong movements of public opinion, anti-militarist marches, sit-ins, fasting, leaflets, sending thousands of postcards to the presidents of the Chamber and Senate, so, finally, on December 15th 1972, there was the approval of the law.

In conclusion: individual actions are needed but political results are obtained with collective political actions.