

Political education at Lorenzo Milani's School in Barbiana

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The political education of Lorenzo Milani in Barbiana was an education for peace. Its main goal was to shape a learner – an individual not guided by violence, i.e., one who believes in himself/herself and in other people, who has a creative attitude to the surrounding reality and the capacity to modify it in a more human manner. It was also supposed to form a man committed to solving conflicts without the use of violence, through the ability of persuasion, and who would keenly participate in voting and organizing a strike. Milani taught his pupils to “walk a tightrope” by helping them think independently and listen to their own conscience. On the other hand, he thought how to become free, independent citizens, able to discuss issues concerning injustice according with their own beliefs.

From the ethical and political point of view, an education of peace was simultaneously an education of change and justice, solidarity, the coexistence of cultures and nations. The education of peace, proposed by Milani, emphasized the ability of learners and the supporters of various political parties to discuss and – above all – coexist one with another.

Keywords: Lorenzo Milani, Barbiana, school, politics, political education, community involvement, education for peace.

Introduction

Lorenzo Milani was born on 27 May 1923 in Florence, in a wealthy and sophisticated family of Albert Milani and Alice Weiss. His father, trained as a chemist, had a variety of literary interests and knew six languages. His grandfather, Luigi Adriano, was a highly-respected archaeologist, and his great-grandfather was a world-famous Italian philologist, who at the age of twenty-four had held the chair of Greek literature at the University of Pisa (Fallaci, 1974, p. 14).

Members of the Milani's family were Agnostics. However, Lorenzo's parents

were married in the Catholic Church, and their kids were christened after many years of marriage, in order to avoid the spreading of fascist persecution.

After passing his classical high school finals, Lorenzo did not continue studies at a university. He wanted to become a painter. For a short time, while living in Florence, he attended the studio of the German artist Hans Joachim Staude (Fallaci, 1974, p. 66).

After returning to the country, he met and became friends with the Italian priest Rafaele Bensi. Under his influence, he converted to Christianity and, to the great surprise of his mother, who was a Jew, Lorenzo joined the seminary. After taking the

priestly vows in 1947, he began working in Calenzano, Tuscany. At that time, this region, which had been typically agricultural until then, slowly became an important industrial center. First, as a vicar, he taught religion to children in school. There he stated that his parishioners are missing the fundamental tools to understand the word of God. He founded the people's school for working urban and rural youth, which was a "specific" concept for those times.

The manner and nature of pastoral activity that was carried out had caused problems. He exposed himself to the authorities of the Curia and the politically correct-thinking secular people. In 1954, he was transferred to Barbiana, a small mountain town lacking even the basic commodities of running water and electricity. There Lorenzo continued his activities as a teacher, by organising a new school for the children of workers and farmers from the surrounding villages, who in a state school, located a few kilometres from their place of residence, did not achieve satisfactory results in learning. Thus, they repeated grades and resigned from education as they did not receive promotions.

In 1958, Milani published a book on which he had been working during his stay in Calenzano. It was entitled *Pastoral Experiences*. However, shortly enough it was withdrawn from the market with the command of Sant'Uffizio, because it was considered "improper".

By 1967, another publication associated with his person had appeared. It is regarded as a famous work even now, titled *Letter to Military Chaplains*. It brought publicity to the school of Barbiana, not only in Italy, but in many European coun-

tries as well. It was the work of Milani's students, whereas he was just a coordinator in its creation. A month later, i.e., on the 26th of June, Lorenzo Milani passed away due to an incurable disease (Fallaci, 1974).

Policy in terms of Lorenzo Milani

In the common belief, politics is the business of the party or the government. Therefore, politics, perceived as the actions of rulers or means to realise the interests of the government, was not taught. It was eliminated from school curriculum as an impeding and not exemplary element, since what counts in pedagogics is primarily universalism (Cristofanelli, 1975, p. 80).

Milani was a bright and critical observer of the socio-political life, and his knowledge of the works of classical authors allowed him to formulate his own definition of the policy. Showing certain denaturalizations of the term "politics", he indicated its true meaning, namely as an interest in social problems. Not by chance, then, the motto of the school in Barbiana was "I care", which was supposed to mean "I am concerned", "it presses heavily on my mind" (Milani, 1996 p. 34). It was the opposite of the fascist motto: "I don't care." For the students of Barbiana, their motto was a tool of an active and altruistic relationship with another human being. "I Care", written in capital letters on one of the walls, was to develop the awareness and responsibility of each student in their relationships with other people (Pancer, 1987, p. 103). Milani was well aware that it was one of the most neglected areas of education: "Say that this is the subject, that you do not know. You know the trade un-

ions. You have never eaten at home of the worker. You know nothing about the dispute of the means of transport. Only traffic jams disturb you in your private life. You have never dealt with these problems, because they result in anxiety” (Milani, 1997 p. 123-124).

The involvement of schools should be expressed in its interest in social problems by exposing conscious and unconscious mechanisms applied by the authority in order to maintain the established order. Using strong words, he sharply criticized apolitical and noncommittal persons and those who considered themselves independent, and in fact supported one of the contemporary political groups: “Most of my friends from Florence do not read newspapers. Whereas anyone who reads, chooses a newspaper representing the interests of power. I asked once a man, does he know who is funding the newspaper that he is reading: ‘It is independent. I don’t want to hear about politics.’” (Milani, Scuola di Barbiana, 1996, p. 108).

G. Pecorini, referring to Milani’s critique of apoliticism, explains that the fear of taking up the subject of policy issues, the lack of political commitment and the lack of criticism had become a ground for fascism: “A criminal is both, the one who steals, as well as the one who throws the stone” (Milani, 1996, p. 50). Similarly: “A fascist,” explains Pecorini, “is the one who wears black shirts, [...] as well as the one who in civil clothes, without weapon, not wanting to stain his hands, gives permission to others” (Pecorini, 1968, p. 95). The seeds of fascism, which society carefully cultivates, are perfect citizens, as further explained by Pecorini:

[...] Who through their offspring immortalize classes and race, and request them not to be reached by the disorder that is a harbinger of universal collapse. Therefore, apoliticism is a natural seed of fascism. “Is it possible,” derides one of the students of Barbiana, “that you still do not understand it? Your appearance commands respect. Maybe you do not have nothing to do with the crime, but only with the Nazi crime. Obedient and loyal citizen, who precisely counts boxes with soap and too careful to be mistaken, does not wonder, whether the soap has been done from the human body.” (Milani/Scuola di Barbiana, 1996, p. 78; Pecorini, 1996, p. 95).

Addressing the teachers, he wrote: “You are deformed, because you teach in a school such as mine. By malice you do not distinguish children from wealthy families. Unfortunately, you spent too much time with them and you came to like them. You also started to like their families, their world [...]. Who loves such people as them is apolitical” (Milani, 1996 p. 92). He wrote about the apparent discoveries and technical inventions: “For the crime of Hiroshima are responsible thousands of people; direct jointly liable: politicians, scientists, technicians” (Milani, 1996 p. 83).

Milani was aware that the past and the future are closely related with each other and that is why he cultivated a novel spirit within his school students, proposing for them the prospect of a better life. In this way, the school became a promoter of the new situation and joined the process of transforming society. Therefore, the involvement of school should be expressed in its interest in social situation by exposing conscious and unconscious mechanisms used by the rulers of the regime (Pecorini, 1968).

According to Braccini and Taddei, the abovementioned method to perceive policy results in three consequences:

1. In solving “other” problems, the commitment and contribution of everybody is required. This political aspect refers to the culture without which the sovereignty of the society, guaranteed by the Constitution, would be only a tragic mockery. Hence there is the priority and responsibility of the school. The task of the teacher is to teach political commitment.

2. Finding a solution to the political problems will be possible only if the state (without excluding anyone) will be able to respond to the problems of all citizens. Hence there is the obligation to take position for and pronounce on the behalf of those who have become the victims of injustice; apoliticism, the lack of involvement in politics is in fact pronouncing for injustice, fascism and the oppression of the poorest.

3. Policy is the realization of the common good in specific historical conditions. It results in the importance of democracy, as Milani attributes it, which is understood as a tool to simplify the peaceful solutions of problems. It is also a rejection of any ideology, one which may suggest a definitive solution to historical problems as the answer to all the urgent problems of civil life, and thereby legitimize the use of any measures, including the oppression or the elimination of the weaker ones to expedite victory. In times of Milani, a policy of social justice was only supposed to be built. The crucial role in this process was supposed to be played by the trade unions; therefore, Milani tried to direct his students primarily to activity in profes-

sional organisations, and by order next in traditionally understood political activity (Braccini, Taddei, 1999, p. 143-144).

An analysis of Milani’s thought allows to determine that policy did not lie in supporting any of the running parties. However, it meant for the engagement of men in a broader sense; it meant to promote the individual in every area of one’s activities. The political education of Milani served to shape opinion on policy and encouraged to take part in it. Therefore, it was about preparing a student who could notice, formulate and solve social problems. Milani wanted to shape the personalities of his students so as to make them capable of following the goodwill of others and controlling their selfish needs. An active citizen cannot be educated in any other way than by an early involvement in social tasks, in which respect to the common welfare is more important than personal needs. He also wanted to arouse political awareness within his students, as well as the love for another human being and – as the ultimate goal – faith (Braccini, Taddei, 1999, p. 144).

Political education as an education for peace

The political education of Milani has been determined by many authors as an education for peace (Drago, 1990; Corradini, 1989, p. 113-126; Pati, 1983, p. 8-11; Guzzo, 1987, p. 21). One of the main goals of the education for peace was the shaping of a student as a human, one not guided by violence – *nonviolento*, i.e., a man who believes in himself and in others; who creatively approaches the surrounding re-

ality, turning it into a more human one. As a teacher, he had clearly defined objectives, towards which he led his students: "I'm not a social and political dreamer: I am a teacher of alive people. I teach young people to be good, responsible and independent citizens. I taught them love for each other, extracted hidden sensitivity, community involvement, the rebellious instinct, dignity, the desire to serve God and anyone outside Him" (Milani, 1977, p. 246). Education for peace is also aimed at the formation of man who gets involved in the solutions of conflicts without the use of force. The factors which ought to help in it were these: the ability to persuade, participation in polls and strikes. It is explained in more detail by Milani:

I will not discuss here about the concept of Homeland. I do not like such divisions. However, if you usurp the right to divide the world for Italians and foreigners, I must tell you that, according to your concept – I do not have a Homeland. Therefore, I demand the division of the world, on the one hand for the dispossessed and oppressed people, and on the other hand for privileged people and exploiters. The first ones are my homeland, others are foreigners. If you think that the Italians and foreigners can kill each other, I demand the right to speak that the poor can and must fight against the rich. At least in the choice of measures I'm better than you. The weapons that you approbate are cruel means, machines that kill, hurt, destroy [...]. The only weapon which I recognize is harmless and noble: it is strike and voting (Milani, 1977, p. 12).

It is also a rejection of any ideology, one which may suggest a definitive solution to historical problems as the answer to all the urgent problems of civil coexistence. These ideologies impose sanctions

concerning the use of any measures, including the oppression or the elimination of the weaker ones to expedite victory (Braccini, Taddei, 1992, p. 144). Moreover, a man – according to Milani – should be able to live every day without isolation from global problems and constantly seek the truth. In *The Letter to the Judges*, he wrote:

The school is different from the courtroom. For you, judges, things that matter have been established by law. However, at school, the past and future are equally important and existing. The ability to teach how to walk a tightrope is a very difficult art: on the one hand, shaping the sense of being critical (this is similar to the function which you perform), and on the other hand, the desire for better rights (this is different from your function) (Milani, 1973, p. 36).

He taught his students to walk a tightrope by helping them think independently. He also taught to listen to the voices of their own consciences, also becoming free, independent citizens, who are able to discuss issues of injustice in accordance with their own beliefs. The most important thing for him was to inculcate "the connection between culture and faith and raising in them a desire for self-criticism, which is the fruit of a mature personality" (Acerbi, 1983, p. 124-145; Martinelli, 2005, p. 17).

From the ethical-political point of view, education for peace was also bringing up to changes and to justice, solidarity and coexistence of cultures and nations. This meant the ability to take up and pursue the discussion and, above all, the ability of coexistence of different political groups: "The problem of others is my problem. Policy means being together" – he wrote

in a letter to a professor (Milani/Scuola di Barbiana, 1996 p. 14).

Processes of education for peace, analyzed with paying special attention to the objectives, were characterized by an “offset” from the cognitive area to an interpersonal relationship. In other words, education for peace was not to transfer a certain skill set, but to learn a variety of relationships (with the same as I, with others, with nature, with supernatural being, with each other). Curriculum programs and education for peace did not consist of “topics”, but rather “problems”, with a special focus on “conflicts” (racism as a rejection of another man, division for the North and the South as a way to isolate the industrialized countries from the third world countries).

Education for peace in the school of Barbiana aimed at modifying certain common beliefs in relation to topics related to the war, racial divisions, violence, homeland, peace, aggression, conflict, enemies (Fabbretti, 1972, p. 154), again, as argued by Milani: “You shall seek the truth without fear. Strict school, such as ours, that does not know what is rest and vacation, it has time for studying and reflection. Therefore, it has the right and duty to speak about things that others do not say. It’s the only entertainment that is allowed to my students” (Milani, 1973, p. 34). Thus, the citizen, whom Milani wanted to shape, is a man of full and responsible social engagement, who, although independent, is aware of the law, and yet who does not allow the law to dominate him, obeying the law so far as it respects man and his rights (Milani, 1973 p. 34).

Challenging blind obedience, which was required by the fascists, Milani ironi-

cally claims: “*l’obbedienza non e più una virtù*” (obedience is no longer a virtue) (Milani, 1973, p. 51). In his opinion, virtuous is the obedience to our own conscience. He considers that we need to have a lot of courage to remind young people that they are independent, sovereign and therefore obedience (blind and uncritical) is no longer a virtue, but only a weakness, which should not be used to protect foreign interests. It is the time when everyone shall feel responsible for everything. Only then we will be able to talk about the progress of morals, proportional to technical progress (Milani, 1973, p. 51; Drago 1979, p. 36-38).

According to Pati, the position of Milani contains a precise educational contribution, since it expresses the idea of man having the duty to take a critical position towards the world as well as to reconsider already adopted decisions without the influence of conformity, habits and stereotypes arising from ignorance.

Furthermore, the correct critical preparation is an essential element of social, civil, political and religious life. Consequently, we can consider that the statement “*l’obbedienza non e più una virtù*” results from the need of Milani to shape free and responsible people, ones who are able to challenge arbitrarily enforced rights and regulations and oppose injustice so as to pronounce for true justice (Pati, 1983, p. 8-11).

Balducci maintained that the famous defense of the clause of conscience, in which Milani and the school in Barbiana were involved, was not the effect of protesters’ individualism, but an act of fidelity to moral imperatives (Balducci, 1995,

p. 52). Galeazzi is also of the same opinion (Galeazzi, 1994, p. 729-738), he agrees with the view that Milani did not persuade obedience as a matter of principle to free the conscience of automatism, the weight of tradition and stereotypes by offering a completely different kind of responsibility of free citizens. Milani wrote:

I can't tell my students that the only way to love the law is passive obedience. I can only tell them that they should respect the human right only when it is just (i.e., when it defends the weakest). However, when you are convinced of its injustice (i.e., if it provides sanctions for the abuse by the strongest), then they should insist on its amendment (Milani, 1973, p. 32).

According to Milani, we deal with the real "clause of conscience" at the moment when we realize this difference and implement it in practice. There is no better school than the moment of test, when a man pays for listening to the voice of his own conscience, i.e., when he opposes the law knowing that this law is wrong and he accepts the consequences (Fabbretti, 1972, p. 168-169).

Galeazzi emphasizes that Milani's concept of education for peace contains two concepts: firstly, education for peace understood as the control of aggression; secondly, education for peace understood as a radical rejection of aggression. The joint goal of both opposing positions is the harmonious shaping of an individual according with his or her nature, teaching one inner peace, serenity and a tendency to show positive feelings (Galeazzi, 1994, p. 729-738).

Consequently, peace is understood not only as the lack of conflicts, but also

as the ability to solve them without using violence. The problem does not lie in the suppression of aggression, but in giving it right direction, because aggression (which should not be confused with violence) is the internal energy that counteracts the passive submission. Milani was opposed to conformist attitudes, he tried to destroy uncritical thinking, which manifests itself in adapting to the current or fashionable trends and giving up everything what is creative and independent.

Galeazzi also draws attention to the bi-directional character of Milani's education for peace. Even if the pedagogy of Milani lacks the psychological and methodological analysis of the problem, there are two forms of struggle: first, one of against social injustice (which is the objective cause of wars); second, one of against submission to an unjust law (which is a subjective cause of wars). In short, you can say that for Milani peace did not always mean taking the passive attitude against social injustice, thus it meant commitment and responsibility (Galeazzi, 1994), p. 729-738).

Milani understood that the raising of an individual, who consciously participates in the construction of a better future, can take place only through education, provided that the science is to not be drawn on the verbal gaining of knowledge, but on aiming at the development of one's own personality. The second tool of education in adopting students to change an existing fact was the suppression of selfish instincts and the development of cooperation with others. This complicated process of political education – which prepares the ground for changes within social relations – was linked by Milani with the fight against

selfishness and the shaping of altruistic attitudes.

To sum up, we can conclude that the innovative approach of Milani to the subject of political education focused on the development of social attitude, the shaping of reasonable opinions on policy and on encouraging individuals to partake in its processes. Therefore, it is all about the adequate preparation of a young citizen who shall be involved, who will observe social problems and resolve them in a peaceful manner. Therefore, the aim of the political formation was a responsible and involved citizen fighting for a better tomorrow. It was supposed to create, and, above all, fa-

miliarize one with the rules and the law, because it is impossible to respect and fight for something that is not known or not understood. The school of Barbiana has become such a place (Gelazzi, 1974).

Milani, through his life and work, contributed to the creation of the culture of peace by indicating values such as democracy, cooperation, respect for one's fellows, justice, freedom. He was the promoter of justice and freedom, truth. His teaching was liberating from the serfdom of stronger ones; it was also the protection of minorities, diversity and the weakness of the poorest (Guzzo, 1987, p. 21-22; Balducci 1995, p. 116).

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POLITINIS UGDYMAS LORENZO MILANI MOKYKLOJE BARBIANOJE

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje aprašomas Lorenzo Milani politinis ugdymas, kitaip apibrėžiamas kaip ugdymas taikai. Svarbiausias šio ugdymo tikslas – ugdyti smurto nepripažįstančią asmenybę, pasitikinčią savimi ir kitais žmonėmis, turinčią kūrybišką požiūrį į supančią tikrovę ir ją keičiančią laikantis žmogiškumo principų. Taip pat buvo siekiama ugdyti žmogų, galintį spręsti konfliktus be smurto, gebantį įtikinti, dalyvaujantį balsuojant, organizuojantį streiką ir pan. Milani mokė savo mokinius „eiti įtemptu lynu“, skatindamas juos savarankiškai galvoti, klausytis savo sąžinės. Be to, jis mokė mokinius kaip tapti laisvais

ir nepriklausomais piliečiais, gebančiais svarstyti problemas, remiantis savo įsitikinimais.

Etiniu ir politiniu požiūriu, ugdymas taikai taip pat buvo ugdymas pokyčiams ir teisingumui, solidarumui, kultūrų ir tautų sambūviui. Milani pasiūlytas ugdymas taikai kvietė įvairių gebėjimų mokinius, įvairių partijų šalininkus diskutuoti, o svarbiausia, sugyventi vieniems su kitais.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Lorenzo Milani, Barbiana, mokykla, politika, politinis ugdymas, ugdymas taikai, bendruomenė.

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