

16 NOVEMBER

## *Adolfo Sansolini*

---

15 NOVEMBER 1966—

### *Animal Activist*

**A**NATIVE OF ROME, Sansolini has been an animal rights advocate since he was a teenager. Horrified at the violence involved in the factory farming and slaughter of food animals, he has waged many campaigns for more humane treatment of them. But his most dramatic campaign was in 1999, when he fasted to protest the use of egg battery cages.

In an egg battery system, hens are confined in tiny wire mesh cages not much larger than a sheet of ordinary-sized paper. The cages are stacked on top of one another, and the birds are fed hormones to keep them laying eggs at a continuous and unnatural rate. Because of the filth and confinement, the hens suffer from osteoporosis, infections, and blindness, and display uncharacteristically aggressive behavior toward one another.

In 1999, a European Commission met to determine whether or not to outlaw egg batteries. Sansolini feared that Italian egg producers would pressure the Italian government to instruct its representatives on the commission to vote against a ban. So he went on a hunger strike to exert some counterpressure. Recalling his decision years later, Sansolini said, “I knew I was risking a lot. But living is about using life. If you believe in something you should invest in it to make it happen. What I could invest at that moment wasn’t anything else but putting my life on the table.”

Soon alarmingly weak from his highly publicized hunger strike, Sansolini was called to the Italian prime minister’s office, collapsing twice in route. A glass of water was placed on a table next to him. If he ended the strike, he was told, Italian commissioners would be instructed to vote for the cage ban. But Sansolini refused. “If you do something before I leave,” he replied, “I’ll be happy to drink it. But I won’t drink it now.” Worried about the public outcry if Sansolini’s strike continued, the appropriate phone call was made, Sansolini ended his hunger strike, the Italian vote swayed the commission’s final decision, and three hundred million birds across Europe were rescued from battery cages.

Sansolini believes that the concern for animal rights is closely linked to concern for human ones. As he sees it, Christians and members of the LBGTQ community in particular—the first because of the teachings of Jesus and the second because of their own experiences of persecution—should be especially attuned to the sufferings of animals. As he says, “I oppose all violence, be it violence against animal victims in the laboratory or violence towards people outside the laboratory. The differences between races, sexuality, or religion have long been used to justify prejudice and exploitation. The argument that we have the right to experiment on animals because they are a different species is just the same.”

In 2004, Sansolini was called to London as the first non-British CEO of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection and Chairman of the European Coalition to End Animal Experiments. He is currently an independent consultant focusing on the impact of trade rules on animal welfare.