

# **Sawing off the branch they were sitting on: the Radicals and the antipartitocracy stance**

“Layers and Connections of the Political”  
International APH conference 2020-2021  
14-25 June 2021

Author: Lucia Bonfreschi  
Università degli studi Roma Tre, Italy

## Abstract

During the Seventies the Radical Party (PR), led by Marco Pannella, was able to conquer political room by introducing in the Italian public debate issues linked to the civil rights. By re-actualising the anti-clerical cleavage Radicals' strategy attempted to dismantle the power of the Christian Democracy and thus build an alternative political majority. But the "historical compromise" between PCI and DC disenchanted the Radicals. Since 1979 they started a discourse against "partitocracy" in which all the other parties were involved. This paper aims at analysing the effects of this delegitimizing discourse on the party itself from 1979 to the end of the 1980s. On one side, the Radicals argued that they were different from the other parties and that a "new" kind of party was necessary to save Republican institutions from the existing parties' clutches. For instance, from 1979 to 1983 the Radical MPs decided not to vote in Parliament. On the other, this claim not only did not bring them closer to the PCI but did not help build a political alternative. Many in the party supported a coalition with the Socialists, one of the main components of partitocracy. At the end of the 1980s the PR was entangled in a cul-de-sac position, the paradox of a party looking for bringing back democratic conflict in Italian politics through an anti-political stance: while the party itself converted itself in a non-governmental organisation, most of its members underwent a diaspora towards the other parties.

## Author information

**Lucia Bonfreschi** (PhD) is research fellow in Contemporary History at University Roma Tre; for many years she has taught History of Political Institutions and History of European Political Systems at Luiss University (Rome). She has written many articles, book chapters and books on post-WWII French political and intellectual history and on post-war Italian political history. Among her recent publications: *Becoming the "Party of Civil Rights": the Radical Party, 1962-1979*, in "Journal of Modern Italian Studies", 2019; *L'obiezione di coscienza come battaglia antimilitarista: il Partito radicale dagli anni Sessanta al 1972*, in «Ricerche di Storia Politica», 2019. She is currently working on a book about the history of the Italian Radical Party.

### Contact Information

[lbonfreschi@gmail.com](mailto:lbonfreschi@gmail.com)

**Friday, 18 June** - Session 6 - **9,00-10,30 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *Delegitimizing party democracy: Italy as exception or harbinger of change in European democracies (1978-1994)?*

**Luiss**  
School of Government

Via di Villa Emiliani, 14  
00197 Roma  
T +39 06 85225052  
[sog@luiss.it](mailto:sog@luiss.it)