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Political change through the culture of the Radical Party (1962–89)

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Abstract

The article aims to sketch out the main features of the political culture of the Radical Party (PR). This political culture is paradigmatic of a much broader phenomenon that has affected the politics of Western democracies since the 1970s: the critique of traditional parties in the name of a party model formed by spontaneous groupings of society; the extreme emphasis placed on individual choices in political action, and the programmatic tracing of the latter back to the former; and the call for a less 'mediated' relationship between citizens and institutions. Yet, this culture contained certain ingredients that would distance it from the populist forms of the twenty-first century. After grafting anti-authoritarianism onto its liberal matrix the PR identified the promotion of civil rights as the goal and battle for the transformation of the relationship between politics and the citizen. This transformation emphasised the sphere of individual freedom and the liberty to participate in community decisions, and thus implied a transformation of the ways and means of doing politics. In the late 1970s, the PR deepened its critique of parties and partitocracy and, at the same time, emphasised a supranational view of politics, eventually becoming a 'transnational transparty' party in 1989.

Keywords: Radical Party; political culture; anti-authoritarianism; antimilitarism; civil rights; 'anti-partitocracy'

The political culture of the 'new' Radical Party (PR), which emerged in the early 1960s from the crisis of what was later called the 'first' PR, and which transformed into a 'transnational transparty' party in the late 1980s, was a singular hybrid. Its matrix was a liberal one, which nevertheless conceived of participation in politics as a continuous 'taking to the streets' to engage with others. At the same time, it claimed to be close to socialism and contained elements of anti-politics, which emerged especially from the late 1970s. It was analysed by contemporaries, especially in the 1970s (Cofrancesco 1974; Matteucci 1974; Corleone et al. 1978), when the PR emerged as a political novelty to a wider forum of public opinion, but it has been much more rarely the subject of analysis by scholars, who have privileged the study of its organisation (Gusso 1982; Ponzone 1993), the biography of its leader[1] and the anti-politics of the 1980s (Tarchi 2015; Satta 2022; Bonfreschi 2023).

Yet, this political culture, although characterised by internal contradictions which emerged dramatically in the 1980s, was paradigmatic of a much broader phenomenon, which affected not only Italian politics but the politics of all Western democracies from the 1970s onwards. Indeed, not only was it representative of issues and problems raised by the new political actors from outside the institutions, who, since the late 1960s, had been criticising the forms that liberal democracy had taken in the postwar period and the limits it had placed on politics; it also condensed the features of the very evolution of advanced democracies, in particular the disintegration of the institutional dimension (Offe 1987; Chassaigne 2008; Müller 2011; Orsina 2018). Emblematic of this disintegration and the transformation of the relationship between state and citizens were the proposed 'secular' and 'federative' model of the party, up to the transformation of the party into a 'transparty', the extreme emphasis on individual choices in political action and the programmatic reconnection of the latter to the former, and the demand for a less 'mediated' relationship between citizens and institutions. At the same time, radical political culture contained certain ingredients – notably the emphasis on human rights and the rule of law and the identification of democracy with Western representative institutions – that would distance it from the populist forms of the twenty-first century.

This article thus aims to sketch out the characteristics and main features of the political culture of the 'new' PR, while at the same time keeping in mind its evolution over the nearly three decades of its existence. We show that, just as a prism breaks down light into its chromatic components, so observing the characteristics and features that distinguished the political culture of this party allows us to grasp the cultural elements that, on a broader level, marked the transformation of Western democracies themselves in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The new PR was created at the end of 1962 when, after its founders abandoned the party, the young leftist current (Radical Left) found itself alone in pursuing the project of a political party. Thus began a period of transition that, five years later, would lead to the re-founding of the PR, together with a new statute. Although this crisis of 1961–2 represented a watershed in the life and political culture of the party, several elements of continuity remained between the political culture of the 'first' and 'second' PR. This continuity was often claimed by members of the Radical Left, who drew on the legacy of Mario Pannunzio's *Mondo* and the political battles of Ernesto Rossi and Gaetano Salvemini (Pannella 1982), and was symbolised by the retention of the PR's symbol, the goddess of liberty crowned by the Phrygian cap, the headgear of the French revolutionaries in 1792–3.

The goal of the early Radicals was to dismantle, through the elimination of monopolies and caste privileges, not only the political but also the economic and corporate foundations of Fascism, which they believed had been preserved almost intact under the Republic. To this end it was necessary to implement the constitution and to establish an effectively 'secular and liberal' state, a guarantor of the rule of law, without any kind of discrimination against citizens, and of freedom from the arbitrary actions of government and the police.[2] The first PR was thus a left-liberal third-force party that sought a secular alternative to what had become an irredeemably clericalised centrism, but that also condemned communist totalitarianism. The majority stuck to a pro-centre-left position.

The Radical Left and then the 'new' Radicals distanced themselves from the older generations on the key question of judging the centre-left, which in their view was to be read negatively: the Christian Democrat party (DC) was building a new majority without substantial changes in a democratic sense – that is, without any real intention of effectively changing state structures and power relations (Spadaccia 1962). To beat the DC, and substantially erode its positions of power, it was therefore necessary to build a leftist

alternative. This was the road taken by the group that took command of the PR in 1962, formed by Marco Pannella, Giuliano Rendi, Gianfranco Spadaccia, Angiolo Bandinelli, Massimo Teodori and a few others. It was a narrow road, based on the judgement of the unsuitability of Marxism as the system within which to build such a left alternative, a judgement matured a decade in advance of other political forces.

Two structural features contributed to making it sometimes difficult to define the political culture of the 'new' Radicals. First, the PR was a party that did not promote an ideological vision, a *Weltanschauung*, but instead championed individual issues; moreover, it put action before theory. Even those who did not necessarily share its political culture or political project in its entirety could, therefore, approach the PR. This was one of the reasons for its turnover of militants, as well as for the PR's openness to countless associations and movements that only partly belonged to the radical 'galaxy'. Second, the presence of charismatic leadership prompted the identification of the political culture of an entire group with the political positions of Marco Pannella. Despite the existence of this leadership, which was always recognised by all members and lasted until Pannella's death in 2016, it would be wrong to make this identification *tout court*, both because there was an evolution of the influence of the Pannella leadership on PR members and because Pannella lent his face, body and words to a political culture to which so many others also contributed ideas, battles and political initiatives.

Against the 'regime': anticlericalism and antimilitarism

It took a few years of elaboration – roughly, the 1960s – for the political culture of the Radicals to take on the traits that would characterise it in the following decades. At the beginning of that decade, Radical Left culture revolved around an analysis of the world's historical-political situation in terms of the involution of democracies. In different parts of Europe, movements, ideas and parties that had an entrenched vocation for authoritarian and bellicose solutions were regaining strength: the 'military semi-dictatorship' of de Gaulle, the Iberian dictatorships, 'the advance of German militarism', the abandonment of European economic organisation entirely to large private monopolies (Rendi 1962). The solution to this entanglement of authoritarian structures lay in overcoming nationalism, in the creation of a European federation or supranational institutions of equal effectiveness, in the atomic and conventional disarmament of the entire European continent, in the denunciation of NATO, in the 'proclamation of the right to insubordination and civil disobedience', and in the 'common organisation of all socialist, popular and revolutionary movements fighting for the establishment of a regime of democracy and freedom in Western Europe' (Pannella and Rendi 1979).

The Radical Left derived from this a clear indication of political action: 'the democratic trench against the forces of non-freedom' stood for 'the unity of the antifascist forces of the left'. It was therefore necessary to pursue a process of rapprochement between the communists, who were to continue the process of de-Stalinisation and the rejection of confrontation between East and West, and the Western democrats, whose task was to bring communism closer to political democracy in Western Europe (*Sinistra Radicale* 1962). Nevertheless, it was almost impossible for the 'new' PR, which consisted of only a few dozen militants and was practically non-existent on the political scene, to pursue this political line. Therefore, picking up on some of the themes that had characterised the old PR, the leaders of the new focused on a series of investigations that could fuel divergences between the DC and the leftist forces. These investigations looked closely at ENI's 'state capitalism' and its influence on democracy, and on the power entanglements between religious (Catholic) aid agencies in the capital and the Christian Democrat political class.

Over the years, the PR's political culture was defined by two experiences: contact with European new leftist forces, particularly the British CND, the German (and American) anti-authoritarians and the civil rights movement; and the growing perception of the explosion of a new culture of individual freedoms, which led the party to explore new battles and new instruments of political action. It was with this sentiment, in the second half of the 1960s, that the PR observed the new student movements, applauding their anti-authoritarianism and their revolt against the stultifying practices of parties and their student associations. They thought that the student movement of 1968 posed the question of the 'crisis of leftist ideology in Italy', which was to be recreated on the basis of the 're-evaluation of the individual, their freedom and dignity (the ultimate goal of all true politics)', of giving back a voice to the individual and the small group 'in the face of the seemingly ineluctable suffocation of every dissenting expression in the conformism of an authoritarian and consumerist society' (Oliva and Rendi 1969, 8). Yet, it was soon clear to the Radicals that the student movement ended up reproposing the 'traditional vices of the Italian left: abstractness, maximalism, verbal revolutionism, sectarianism, dogmatism', as well as exhuming the 'struggle against the system' – that is, the 'search for a total and final clash with the class opponent' (Spadaccia 1968).

From the mid-1960s, the two main themes of this 'gestating' mixture of libertarianism and anti-authoritarianism were anticlericalism and antinationalism. The former, which had its roots in nineteenth-century radicalism (Galante Garrone 1973) and explicitly picked up the legacy of part of the early PR, particularly that of Salvemini and Rossi, for a long time constituted the main 'key to the interpretation of the objective reality' of Italy (Bandinelli, Pergameno and Teodori 1967, 61).

According to the Radicals, in the transition from Fascism to the Republic, through a colossal transformist operation, the temporal power of the Catholic Church had been restored. The Vatican, the ecclesiastical hierarchies and a large part of the Catholic world had picked up the legacy of the twenty-year Fascist period, particularly with regard to the conception and instruments of the state's intervention in society and the type of state constructed, an ethical state that contributed, through its own articulations, to the spread of the Catholic religion, which in turn was conceived as the main instrument for maintaining power. The Republic had slipped towards a 'regime': the classes that controlled political power exploited the social order in their favour and, through such exploitation and the stretching of legal institutions, prevented alternation in power. In other words, the DC had built a colossal legislative and administrative apparatus through which it influenced the daily economic and social life of the country, and the years of the centre-left had strengthened the intertwining of public and private interests, through nationalisations, the economic planning exercised by the government, the financing of various institutions and agencies by the state, and the welfare system (Pergameno 1971). The 'regime' clashed with the transformations of Italian society, through which, according to the Radicals' interpretation, a modern, secular majority had taken shape, tired of the control exercised over it by the Christian Democrat state. Bringing this majority to the political level was the PR's grand project: the construction of an alternative secular government, necessarily implying the involvement of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano or PCI), could be achieved by undermining the regime 'from below', through battles on individual issues.

The first anticlerical battle that had a wide national resonance involved the introduction of divorce into family law. It was in this battle that the Radicals experimented with new forms of political aggregation and mobilisation compared with the traditional party organisation, which until those years had been the only channel of expression of political demand. In December 1965, the Radicals set up the Italian League for Divorce (Lega Italiana per il Divorzio or LID), which was made up of members from different parties;

these were not designated as party representatives, but were individuals interested in the battle at hand. The LID, led by radical Mauro Mellini, appealed directly to citizens to build, through direct individual and collective mobilisation, a group that would put pressure on parliament. The campaign also relied on the support of the popular weekly *ABC*; this was evidence of the Radicals' openness to new means of political communication and their willingness to appeal not only to the educated classes but also, and especially, to 'ordinary people' (Spadaccia 2021, 150–151). The battle for divorce was conceived by the Radicals as an anticlerical one and was placed in the context of broader analogous struggles, culminating in the declaration of 1967 as an 'anticlerical year'. The passing of the divorce law at the end of 1970 did not, in fact, mark the end of anticlerical initiatives. In contrast, the Radicals intended to continue on the path of 'secular conquests' with their campaign against the concordat between the Catholic Church and the Italian state. In order to abolish it, several times in the 1970s they promoted the collection of signatures necessary to activate the abrogative referendum, as laid out in the Italian constitution, but regulated by law only in 1970; in 1977 they succeeded in the enterprise, but the initiative was rejected by the constitutional court.

In the 1960s, the antinationalism of the Radicals underwent an important evolution: from the unilateral disarmament and pro-European federalism of the beginning of the decade to antimilitarism. Putting it in different terms, this meant the struggle against military structures, which were seen as the main cause of wars in international relations, and as a crucial factor in supporting authoritarian structures within states. The Radicals put the issue of disarmament, including unilateral disarmament, at the forefront of the reform of international structures and organisations, an approach which echoed the plan of Hans Thirring, the Austrian Social Democrat, in 1964. Different elements contributed to the Radical antimilitarist position: the rejection of military and militaristic values, as opposed to libertarian ones; an aversion to the Jacobin myth of the 'people at arms'; the evaluation of the influence in Italy of groups headed by the army and the secret services (Teodori, Ignazi and Panebianco 1977, 115); and, more generally, the diagnosis of militarism as an ideological, institutional and political way of managing contemporary societies.

The Radicals were committed to promoting antimilitarism within international and national pacifist movements, such as the Consulta per la Pace, the umbrella body of Italian pacifist and antimilitarist associations created by Aldo Capitini in January 1962. Beginning in 1964, first within the Consulta, which the PR left (Martellini 2006, 142), and then in the context of the demonstrations against the escalation of the war in Vietnam, disagreements with the PCI deepened: in the eyes of the Radicals, pro-communist organisations, such as the Partigiani della Pace, hijacked the pacifist struggle purely in order to show solidarity with the North Vietnamese (Bandinelli 1971, 137). The Radicals' political culture could not admit any compromises on the anti-democratic nature of the Soviet Union and its satellites, and in September 1968 a small group of Radicals demonstrated in Sofia to show solidarity with Czechoslovakia, following its occupation by Warsaw Pact forces. Between 1967 and 1972 the PR focused on the battle for conscientious objection to conscription, conceived as the first concrete step on the road to dismantling the military, the pillar of the system of national and international repression. From the Radicals' point of view, conscientious objection was no longer a moral issue but a political one and could become a right of the individual that would powerfully contribute to undermining military structures (Bonfreschi 2021b).

Beginning in 1967, the Radicals engaged in antimilitarist marches along the routes from Milan to Vicenza (from 1967 to 1971) and from Trieste to Aviano (until 1975). These marches had their origins in the collaboration with other nonviolent and pacifist movements, such as the Dutch *provos* and anarchists, and were modelled on those organised by Capitini in Italy and CND in Britain. After the failure of the international

disarmament conferences which proposed general, simultaneous and controlled disarmament, the marches advocated unilateral disarmament as a method to achieve general disarmament. The marches aimed to have an impact on public opinion and, at the same time, allowed the participants to get to know each other, plan new actions and create new networks of antimilitarists on the international level. Not surprisingly, in 1976 the antimilitarist marches became internationalised, in response to what the Radicals considered to be the transnational reality of economics, finance and militarism, and took place in Metz and Verdun and then Sardinia, on the island of La Maddalena. Subsequently, it was decided to cross the border from France to Germany; in 1979, a train was organised (from Brussels to Warsaw) that would, it was hoped, symbolically open up a dialogue between the 'people' of the West and the 'people' of the East. This dialogue would demand not only the unilateral disarmament of the countries involved, but also the abolition of the military blocs NATO and the Warsaw Pact (Fabre and Jaccarino 1980, 38–42).

Anticlericalism and antimilitarism grafted onto the liberal matrix of Radical culture pushed the PR in search of spaces of freedom that the citizen had the right to regain, against the expropriation it had suffered from the state. And so it was that, in the second half of the 1960s, the Radicals came into contact with the cultural contestation movements of the beats, the *provos* and the situationists, with whom they conducted a number of battles on issues such as antimilitarism, sexual liberation and drug liberalisation (Teodori, Ignazi and Panebianco 1977, 101). In particular, sexual freedoms, including the right to abortion – understood as a tool for the liberation of women and, more generally, for the conquest of a 'secular and libertarian sexuality' – were configured as a privileged terrain for combating the influence of the Catholic Church on Italian legislation and for restoring to the individual the sphere of self-jurisdiction that the ethical state built by Fascism and the DC had taken away from them.

Civil rights

The demand for civil rights became central to a political culture that aimed to broaden the sphere of freedom of individuals and to oppose any form of 'sacralisation' of power. In this culture, society and politics were often conceived as the opposite poles of a binomial and politics, as the holder of coercive force vis-à-vis the first, inevitably tended to overrule and exercise violence against society. The violence against institutions that emerged in Italian society in the 1970s was portrayed by the Radicals as the violence of the desperate, of those who experienced first-hand the restriction of spaces of freedom by the 'regime', and the despair and anger that resulted; the revolt, therefore, was produced by the institutions themselves, which had no intention of providing any channels of outlet other than clientelism and paternalism (Strik Lievers 1977, 6; Bonfreschi 2021b). The Radicals, in contrast, intended to prepare political outlets for these revolts by denouncing the 'violence of institutions' against citizens.

In the Radical vision, citizens had to constantly monitor the state and the political actors in the institutions; the danger of an overpowering of individual freedoms constantly crept into political power. The libertarian imprint of Radical culture never went so far as to deny the necessity of political power, and therefore also its function and legitimacy. The Radicals certainly argued for the limitation of the political class's interference towards citizens, but, on the one hand, they called for government intervention in the active defence of the sphere of civil liberties, while, on the other, they believed that participating in politics was in itself a form of organising society. At the opposite end of the spectrum of *qualunquism*, distrust of political power led to a permanent mobilisation of the citizen, conceived by the Radicals in 'Rousseauesque' terms. As has been noted, throughout the tradition of European radicalism, 'ordinary people' are 'politically active

citizens' who feel sovereign and treat the political class as their proxies, exercising the control from below that is necessary for a democracy not to lapse into mere management of power by the ruling class (Matteucci 1974).

Restoring freedom in the ruling class–ruled class relationship – both as 'negative' freedom (the sphere of individual liberty protected from arbitrariness) and as 'positive' freedom (the freedom to participate in community decisions) – thus not only affected the private lives of citizens, but also had crucial repercussions on the quality of the democratic arena, in relations between power groups in civil society, as well as within the political sphere, which was made more accountable to the ruled class. This transformation of the relationship between political class and citizen, which has been termed 'democratic revitalisation' (Cofrancesco 1974, 589), was considered an inescapable step in governing democracy, without which society itself would become uncivilised, with despair and thus violence prevailing in it.

Within this framework, civil rights' battles played a central, and continually developing, role for the Radicals' culture and political action. These battles were based on two 'pillars', which were often linked and overlapping. The first was the defence of the rights officially recognised by the Republic, which implied, at one level, the correct enforcement of laws by the judicial authorities and, at another, the elimination of laws that did not respect constitutional rights, such as the retention in the penal code of the crimes of insult and offence of public powers, or the Public Order Law of 1975 (the so-called Reale Law, named after the minister who promoted it). In fact, according to the Radicals, in everyday life the fundamental rights of citizens were being stifled by legislation and the practices of those agencies that enforced the law, as well as by the public administration, which, in all areas where the individual had to deal with the constituted powers of the state, made the exercise of such rights problematic and subject to authoritarian impositions. In fact, in their view, through the laws and practices of the police, which were considered particularly repressive towards leftist political minorities, a veritable 'police state' was taking shape in Italy.

From the late 1960s onwards, the Radicals' political action was frequently characterised by initiatives aimed at undermining such a 'police state'. In the 1983 general election, they put forward philosopher Toni Negri, in order to denounce the unconstitutional nature of the emergency legislation that allowed preventive incarceration for years. Later, Enzo Tortora ran in the 1984 European elections. The trial and pre-trial detention of the popular TV presenter, accused of drug dealing in statements by Camorra 'collaborators of justice', was the emblematic case on which the Radicals built their battle against the shortcomings and dysfunctions of the administration of justice, not only because of the judiciary's power over citizens, but also because of the aberrations of laws. On the back of this case, the referendum on the civil responsibility of magistrates was initiated; this was held in 1987 and won with 80 per cent of votes in favour. Negri's and Tortora's candidacies were thus intended to be read as a 'scandal', in opposition to the real scandal of the 'barbarity' of the emergency laws (Bonfreschi 2021c).

The second pillar of the politics of rights was the modification of existing laws in the name of civil rights that were denied by them, and that were not directly referenced in the text of the constitution. The introduction of divorce and conscientious objection into the Italian legal system had been the goals of the first civil rights battles. Others followed, such as the liberalisation of 'soft' drugs and especially the introduction of abortion, against the law establishing it as a crime; this was one of the PR's main battles in the 1970s. Through its own direct action and through an alliance with the Women's Liberation Movement (*Movimento Liberazione della Donna*), the PR identified the issue of the decriminalisation of abortion as a key battle in the struggle to alter the situation of women's social and psychological subordination, which in turn was part of the larger

project of challenging clericalism, authoritarianism, patriarchalism and capitalist exploitation.

Democracy and nonviolence

In Radical political culture, citizens not only did not shut themselves up in their own private sphere, but they actively participated in politics. Moreover, the Radicals sought to interpret the widespread demand for participation in political life that they sensed in Italian society (Pannella 1966). Their conception of politics rejected the Schmittian friend/enemy dichotomy as structuring the political sphere itself: the very foundation of civic and democratic life was the rejection of all demonisation, in politics as in every other moment of human activity, and the offer of dialogue especially to those who denied its value. In the 1973 text that Pier Paolo Pasolini called the 'radical manifesto', Pannella explained, 'I do not believe in the gun: there are too many wonderful things we could/can do, even with the "enemy", to think of eliminating them' (Pannella 1973, 8). Since, in their vision, politics was traced back to the interaction between human beings, one could dialogue with the enemy, who, after all, shared with their interlocutors a common humanity.

This conception was closely linked to the acceptance of an inherent pluralism of positions in political life; society, composed of individuals capable of self-determination, was itself a plural society. In a democracy in the full sense of the term, if institutions defined the arena in which politics took place, each contender recognised the legitimacy of the opponent to become a political majority, and thus to define the political direction through the assumption of governing responsibilities. Conflict, as long as it was regulated, had a necessary and positive value, as the opposition performed a function of control over the majority. In contrast, the 'national solidarity' agreement of Enrico Berlinguer and Aldo Moro, the design of the convergence of all political forces in the so-called 'constitutional arch', and the resulting lack of open clashes (characteristic of consociational democracy) were seen as some of the causes of the Italian crisis.

However, the relationship between citizens and politics was not completely subsumed in the institutions and channels of representative democracy – and even less so in the party forms that European democracies had known until the 1970s. The Radicals questioned the traditional party model as a means of aggregating, channelling and organising society's interests and demands. As was shown by the case of the 1974 referendum on the law that had introduced divorce (*Liberazione* 1974), abrogative referenda were conceived by the Radicals not only as instruments that polarised the political dialectic, by rekindling the clash between political forces, but also as tools that allowed the emergence of the deep orientations of Italian citizens, which were often more advanced than party leaders expected. The calling into question of the traditional parties was also reflected in the 1978 referendum against the public financing of parties: through this referendum, the Radicals wanted to suggest that the state's financial contribution to citizen participation in politics should not be reduced to financing the central apparatus of hierarchical and bureaucratic parties.

Above all, the main instrument for revitalising democracy was the creation of an 'anti-authoritarian' party – anti-authoritarian not only in the political goals it pursued, but especially in its own internal organisation (Spadaccia 1967). The party was understood not as an instrument for organising and educating the masses, but as a political expression of the aggregations of society. For this reason, the type of party outlined in the statute, approved at the Bologna congress in May 1967, was proposed as a model for the entire left and as an instrument of its aggregation. It created a federative party, centred on autonomous entities, regional parties, radical and non-radical associations, free associative formulas, individual memberships, with the possibility of double membership, and

collective memberships that were also limited in time. Furthermore, the statute prescribed federative national congresses which would deliberate on a few points considered binding for all members, and an annual work programme not subordinated to any ideology or theoretical systematisation (Gusso 1982). What was clear, then, was the desire to break with the model of 'the party church' – in other words, parties associated with 'political religions' (Nicolosi 2006, 353) which provided a bureaucratic apparatus, a hierarchy and a *Weltanschauung*, in opposition to which the PR defined itself as a 'secular party'.

Other constituent elements of the Radicals' political culture converged in the conception of this 'new' party. First, their pragmatism led them to focus on defined battles, and not on the aim of overthrowing the whole system. Then there was the desire to experiment with new forms of politics, entailing the direct involvement of individual citizens and temporary associations (often in the form of leagues, or else groups mobilised to achieve a single goal). The Radicals resorted to various unconventional means of doing politics, largely borrowed from the experiences of the new American and British left: sit-ins, marches, hunger strikes, but also new forms of political communication, which often subverted their codes and customs, at a time when the increased diffusion of television in the homes of Italians multiplied the impact of images.

This search for new tools in the 1970s sedimented in the culture of the Radicals the notion that politics had to be done concretely, in the first person and with one's physicality, to 'give body' to the struggle. Beginning in 1969, the tool that the Radicals – and particularly their leader – made extensive use of was the hunger strike, which was part of the repertoire of nonviolent struggles inspired by Gandhi. The effectiveness of this tool was also influenced by television: thanks to it, the hunger strike took the form of images, multiplying its impact on opinion. By the end of the 1970s, the Italian public became familiar with Pannella's French cigarettes and his turtleneck sweaters.

If democracy should be revitalised by increased and constant citizen control over elected officials and by the loss of exclusive access to the means of political mediation by the parties, the mass media played a crucial role. The media's importance was related to the fact that the supply of correct information to citizens – above all about the decision-making processes of the institutions themselves – was decisive for the formulation of everyone's political choices. Above all, television was central to the creation of political consensus; access to broadcasts on public networks by political forces not represented in parliament, and on issues the parties in parliament were unwilling to confront, was a necessary condition for the supply of the correct information to citizens. As early as 1968, the Radicals accused the parties of enjoying exclusive use of, and access to, television broadcasting, and they saw RAI as the embodiment of disinformation, and thus violence, against the citizen. According to them, the problem of access to the electorate, and the closely related problem of information on issues raised not exclusively by parliamentary parties, concerned all democracies but affected Italy with greater gravity. For a small political group such as the PR, it was a matter of imposing on public attention issues that affected the whole of Italian society and that, if properly posed, would find a majority to support them. Precisely in response to this need in 1975, when radio concessions began to be deregulated, the Radicals founded a radio station, Radio radicale; this was not intended to be a party radio station, but instead to provide a public service according to its slogan 'to know in order to deliberate', broadcasting all current political events in full, without making journalistic selections or mediations.

The Radicals' progressive definition of the tools and ways of doing politics found itself, from the late 1960s onwards, confronted with the re-evaluation of revolutionary violence that was spreading within the extra-parliamentary left. Faced with it, the Radicals began a long journey of redefining the relationship between violence and politics. Until the end of that decade, they practised nonviolent methodologies, a term that was not synonymous

with legal methods, but without making nonviolence the only possible method of struggle, and without theorising it in a moral or ideological form: violence was rejected because it was ineffective in the face of the repressive instruments at the regime's disposal – it only reinforced them (Spadaccia 1968). Later on, also via the suggestion of the various nonviolent movements, the Radicals came to anchor, on the theoretical level and on the level of political initiatives, nonviolence as an instrument of political action for antimilitarism and, more generally, for anti-authoritarianism, as a 'libertarian and revolutionary weapon' to build 'a new secular and peaceful socialist society ... a politics of the new left and of democratic class affirmation'.[3] In other words, in the years when political violence, of both the extreme right and the extreme left, raged in Italy, the Radicals rejected 'revolution by way of the gun, or even just by way of the fist' (Pannella 1973, 10). For Panella, violence was simply the reincarnation and continuation of the 'system', to use an expression dear to the extra-parliamentary left, and he asserted that only with nonviolence could there be a real break from the authoritarian state. It was the only tool that did not replicate its violence, and thus did not reinforce it.

In the late 1970s, the radical conception of nonviolence underwent a further major development, enshrined in the approval of a preamble to the statute by the XXIV congress in November 1980: 'the Christian and humanistic imperative of "thou shalt not kill"' was given 'value as an historically absolute law, without exception, not even in cases of self-defence'.[4] Moreover, the preamble refused obedience to any ruler who violated or failed to apply the fundamental laws expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Nonviolence became an ethical and pre-political value, just as 'civil' rights became 'human' rights – in other words, pre-existing the construction of the *civitas*. In the wake of Thoreau and Gandhi, the Radicals conceived the 'supreme forms of nonviolent struggle', such as non-collaboration, conscientious objection and disobedience, as the only legitimate tools for 'the affirmation of life, rights and the law'.[5] Even further, they took up and expanded the conception underlying conscientious objection to military service: they anchored the legitimacy of institutions to respect for human rights, leaving it up to the conscience of the individual to make up their own mind on the issue.

In the 1980s, the promotion of human rights implied increasing Radical attention to the claims of dissidents of dictatorial regimes, particularly from Eastern Europe. Indeed, the demand for the abolition of military blocs did not mean the full equalisation of the political systems of the West and the USSR. When, beginning in 1979, relations between Washington and Moscow became strained again, initially the Radicals demonstrated together with various Catholic, communist and pacifist movements and associations against the deployment of American missiles at the Sicilian military base in Comiso. They soon distanced themselves from these mobilisations; while they reproached the West and the Soviets for wasting money on arming themselves, and being essentially complicit in disregarding the problems of the Global South, the Radicals drew a clear distinction between Western European democracies, for which authoritarianism and militarism were a 'disease', and communist political systems, in which these were the 'normal condition', and thus responded to the same militarist and totalitarian logics as had happened in Nazi Germany (Bonfreschi 2021a).

Although, beginning in the late 1980s, Pannella often emphasised the deep 'religiosity' of those who lived politics through nonviolence, for many Radicals this evolution of the conception of nonviolence remained an essentially political choice: to transform the culture of political nonviolence into 'the civilisation of our time' meant breaking with the traditions of both liberal and socialist cultures, 'which postulated the duty to take up arms against the enemy of the homeland or class, and so inextricably associated the affirmation of justice with the decapitation of the unjust' (Cicciomessere 1989). Yet the

pre-political conception of nonviolence expressed in the preamble never met with unanimity among Radicals, nor did it lead the leadership to radical pacifist positions that rejected the use of force altogether even in the event of aggression at the international level. In the 1980s, the Radicals' reflection on the international scenario deepened, and while they attached more and more importance to this scenario in determining the politics of individual countries, they increasingly differentiated between states that to some extent respected (or tried to respect) the rule of law and states that trampled it underfoot. Respect for the rule of law thus became their absolute parameter: if it was clearly violated, it was also right to take up arms. This would be seen during the Gulf crisis in 1990–91, when the Radicals, who were still in parliament, ended up supporting American intervention (Ciglioni 2022).

The aporias of the 1980s and the transformation of the party

In the second half of the 1970s, the Radicals continued to explore avenues unheard of for the 'traditional' left in Italy, developing themes that would characterise their political culture, particularly in the 1980s. The first was that of opposition to nuclear power. This battle was initially fought in the name of the issue, close to the heart of the Radicals, of correct information for citizens and transparency of political decisions: it was a matter of filling a 'vacuum of reliable information' (Signorino 1977b), and not leaving 'to a few ministers and a few officials' the choice on the issue of nuclear energy and the location of nuclear power plants, which not only constituted 'the most gigantic public expenditure ever made in our country' but affected the quality of life of all citizens. Moreover, the battle was clearly 'anti-authoritarian': nuclear programmes required the maximum concentration of 'energy power', as well as the need for active and passive defence from the danger of attacks and theft led to 'an authoritarian and paramilitary organisation of the nuclear sector, with a tendency to make it a separate body' (Signorino 1977a, 28).

Active inside parliament and outside (through the Italian branch of Friends of the Earth), within a few years the Radicals enriched the antinuclear battle with environmentalist content. According to them, the issues of local, national and global energy choices and pollution in turn intertwined with the broader issues of production choices, land management and patterns of living and consumption, allowing for the politicisation of issues that would lead to a reversal of the patterns with which the problems of the economy and society had hitherto been considered, and which were shared by the 'traditional' right and the left. As was clear from the proposed 'green' referenda on the location of nuclear power plants and hunting in 1980–81 and in 1986–7, in the 1980s environmentalism, which had entered through the door of anti-nuclearism, became an integral part of the political battles of the PR. Indeed, starting in 1979, and for about a decade, the PR called itself an ecologist, green and environmentalist party. Radical environmentalism, while questioning Italy's type of capitalist development, was not conceived in anti-capitalist, anti-Western, anti-developmentalist terms, and it soon differed from so-called political ecology, whose supporters came largely from the ranks of Marxism. It was combined with the anti-centralist sensibility of the radical galaxy, and thus with the desire to enhance local competencies and powers, particularly in the regions.

The second theme that grafted itself onto the political culture of the Radicals from 1976 onwards was that of world hunger. Introduced in early 1979 by Pannella, its centrality was enshrined in the 1980 preamble, along with the ethical principle of nonviolence. According to Pannella, who imposed the theme on the party, the capitalist system in its industrial-military version, which linked the West and the countries of so-called real socialism (dominated by militarism even more than America), allocated to military expenditure a figure that condemned millions of children a year to malnutrition,

starvation and even death (Pannella 1979). The new battle, which engaged the PR until the mid-1980s, was intended to bring this issue to the centre of attention of Italian and European public opinion; it was also played out at the European and international level by Pannella and Emma Bonino (both elected to the European parliament in 1979), who were constantly involved in formal European requests for development aid for the so-called 'Third World' countries. In 1981, the Radicals succeeded in involving numerous Nobel laureates, politicians and scientists from around the world on the issue, who signed a manifesto condemning the indifference of developed countries to Global South hunger. The goal, according to the UN, was to push all industrialised countries to allocate 1 per cent of their gross national product to save the dying, and another 1 per cent to initiate a new kind of development in poor countries.

The issue of the fight against world hunger, which Pannella and a part of the Radicals supported throughout the 1980s, was perceived by another part of the Radical galaxy as a leader-imposed distortion of the party's original philosophy. Nevertheless, this initiative led to a central pillar in Radical political culture: an interest in international issues, with Italian political life reframed within a global vision, an interest that increasingly pushed the Radicals to engage in 'transnational' battles from the late 1980s onwards. In the early 1980s, their focus on the supranational and their antinationalism took the form of full support for Altiero Spinelli's project to strengthen the powers of the European parliament and the European institutions (vis-à-vis the nation states that were members of the European Community). Their support to this project was not to give institutional form to a European culture or identity, but to provide political strength to liberal-democratic civilisation, in particular to the protection of the 'rights of the individual' and the safe-guarding of the rule of law.[6] In the course of the decade, they increasingly embraced the battle for a United States of Europe and a strong pro-Europeanism took root in their political culture.

Finally, the battle against 'partitocracy' represented the third theme that marked the radical political agenda from the late 1970s onwards, defining its image and action throughout the following decade. It was rooted in both the denunciation of the Christian Democrat 'regime' and the critique of 'party churches', which had characterised the second PR since its inception. Until the mid-1970s, the PR advocated the need to build an alternative political majority to Christian Democrat domination; this majority was intended to include the leftist parties, essentially communists and socialists, based on the model of the coalition that François Mitterrand was building in France at that time. It was no coincidence that the Radicals borrowed from Mitterrand's Socialist Party the symbol of the rose in the fist, which, from 1976, replaced the traditional symbol of the woman with the Phrygian cap. However, the 'historic compromise' between the DC and the PCI and the governments of national solidarity (*non-sfiducia*) in 1976–9 marked for the Radicals a change of pace in the regime itself, which had now managed to get its claws into the PCI.

This involvement of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano) and the PCI in the 'regime' was read in retrospect by the Radicals as a 'natural outcome' of a process that, throughout the twentieth century, had led the state to expand its functions and spheres of intervention at the economic and social levels. Combined with this had been the institutionalisation and expansion of the role of political parties, which conceived of themselves more and more as part of the state itself and less and less as 'vehicles for the representation within the institutions of the demands of social groups' (Corleone et al. 1978, 18). The formation and channelling of political demands had become distorted by the increasing organisation of consensus from the top down. However, this development, typical of advanced industrial countries, had accentuated the illiberal and corporatist features of Italian politics, and had involved all the parties of the so-called

constitutional arch. Within this system, according to the Radicals, the DC and the PCI had predominant roles and were committed to intensifying and dividing up control over every economic, social and institutional aspect (the process known as *lottizzazione*), and claimed that political mediation was the exclusive responsibility of the political parties represented in parliament.

In the early 1980s, criticism of what was now called the 'partitocratic' or 'syndicalistic' approach to democracy' intensified (*Notizie Radicali* 1984). In the Radicals' eyes, the margins of democracy in Italy were shrinking and partitocracy had emptied the constitution. In a context that they read as one of total closure of the 'regime', the Radicals insisted on their own distinctiveness from other political forces, on the difference of a party 'which did not play the game', which intended to represent the diversity of the country's real politics as opposed to that represented in parliament, and which intended to provide a political outlet for the Italian public's estrangement, not so much from politics as from those specific political forces. Yet, in a few years, they drew up a reform of the Italian political system centred on a political proposal: the introduction of the one-round majority electoral system. The 'British electoral system' would transform the relationship between citizens and parties, lead to changes in the political parties themselves, trigger a dynamic of alternation in government between majority and opposition, but also push the PR itself to join forces with other parties to win in individual constituencies (Bonfreschi 2023).

Weakened by the lack of consensus and the poor results that the battle against world hunger had brought (Spadaccia 2021, 388–391), and trapped in a denunciation of partitocracy that failed to tune in to the growing discontent of Italian citizens with politics, the PR embarked on a rethinking of its party form, which needed to adapt to the challenges of the late twentieth century. The 'greenhouse effect' and environmental transformations; international drug networks, rooted in different continents; the spread of diseases, such as AIDS – these all showed that people were facing an epochal change in politics, no longer capable of being incorporated within the old patterns of the nation nor governable by national institutions. Believing that the major issues of national political life could not be understood and dealt with according to the old national logics, the PR, pushed on this path especially by Pannella, intended to adopt a global political perspective. At the Budapest congress in April 1989, the PR transformed itself into a nonviolent, transnational transparty, with a new symbol, in which Gandhi's face took centre stage. This approach did not mean the abandonment of historical battles, but implied their inclusion and reinterpretation within new horizons of theory and action (Pannella 1989).

After this transformation, the Radicals did not disappear from the political scene, but their battles were pursued on different fronts and with different instruments. Some became involved at the international level through NGOs, particularly against the death penalty and for the establishment of an international criminal court to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Another part continued to engage in politics at the national level, spilling over into different parties and continuing to meet in common battles. Many of them continued to respond to the appeals that, until 2013, just a few years before his death, Pannella launched to set up lists for elections (in national political and European elections). Despite their successes in European elections (such as the 8.45 per cent for the Emma Bonino list in 1999), they failed to return to being a stable organised presence on the Italian political landscape and remained divided into multiple political structures.

The transformation of the PR and its subsequent vicissitudes show how its political culture had been characterised by gaps and inconsistencies that the Radicals struggled to deal with adequately. These challenges included the fact that, while they clearly recognised the European and global dimension of increasingly important issues, to a large

extent they still adopted an essentially national approach to building and organising popular consensus. They launched a critique of the traditional parties, championing an approach based on spontaneous groupings in society, but at the same time they needed the party to operate in a traditional way in order to carry out their actions and maintain their existence over the long term, and they proposed a *political* reform of Italian and European institutions: this reform would have changed the parties, but also revitalised their role. They criticised the 'regime' and the 'violence of the institutions' in the name of individual choices and rights, but were fully aware of the pressing need for institutions in order to protect individuals, their rights and the rule of law. They impugned the sclerotic and bureaucratic nature of the means of political mediation and attempted to introduce forms of direct democracy, all the while maintaining a substantial respect for representative democracy and for minority rights. These are the main contradictions that have characterised the political life of advanced democracies since the late 1970s, and still seem unresolved.

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Notes

1. The most recent of many studies are Vecellio (2010) and Galli (2016).
2. 'Dichiarazione programmatica del Partito radicale dei liberali e dei democratici italiani', 10 December 1955, Fondazione Marco Pannella, Fondo Marco Pannella, b. 4.
3. 'Mozione generale approvata dal XI Congresso del PR, Torino, 1, 2 e 3 novembre 1972' (in Griffo 1985).
4. 'Mozione generale approvata dal xxiii congresso (straordinario) del PR, Roma, 7–8–9 marzo 1980' (in Griffo 1985).
5. 'Mozione generale approvata dal xxiii congresso (straordinario) del PR, Roma, 7–8–9 marzo 1980' (in Griffo 1985).
6. 'Progetto preliminare di documento di lavoro sulla costruzione del Partito radicale trasnazionale', April 1987, accessed 23 January 2023, http://old.radicali.it.

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Italian summary

L'articolo intende delineare le caratteristiche principali della cultura politica del Partito Radicale (PR). Questa cultura politica è paradigmatica di un fenomeno molto più ampio che ha interessato la politica delle democrazie occidentali a partire dagli anni Settanta: la critica dei partiti tradizionali in nome di un modello di partito formato da raggruppamenti spontanei della società; l'estrema

enfasi posta sulle scelte individuali nell'azione politica e la riconduzione programmatica di quest'ultima alle prime; la richiesta di un rapporto meno 'mediato' tra cittadini e istituzioni. Tuttavia, questa cultura conteneva alcuni ingredienti che l'avrebbero distanziata dalle forme populiste del XXI secolo. Dopo aver innestato l'antiautoritarismo sulla sua matrice liberale, il PR individuò nella promozione dei diritti civili l'obiettivo e la battaglia per la trasformazione del rapporto tra politica e cittadini. Questa trasformazione enfatizzava la sfera della libertà individuale e la libertà di partecipare alle decisioni della comunità, e implicava quindi una trasformazione dei modi e degli strumenti di fare politica. Alla fine degli anni Settanta, il PR approfondì la sua critica ai partiti e alla partitocrazia e, allo stesso tempo, accentuò una visione sovranazionale della politica, finendo per diventare un partito 'transnazionale transpartito' nel 1989.