

Left theory for the 21st century VOLUME I

# Thinking Left Governmentality: The SYRIZA Experience 2015-2019

Edited by  
Costas Douzinas & Michalis Bartsidis





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# Introduction

1. January 20, 2015 has pride of place in our memory. As soon as the Syriza victory in the Greek elections became clear, thousands of people converged on the square outside the Senate House of the Athens University at the centre of the city. Old comrades, members of the anti-dictatorship organisation Rigas Feraios and the Communist Party (Interior), new friends from the recent resistances and the occupation of Syntagma Square were singing and dancing with Spanish, French, German, Brazilian comrades who had arrived from all over the world to Athens to celebrate the first ever victory of a radical left party. People were hugging and kissing strangers, singing “O bella chao”, “Paidia sikotheite” and “Avanti Popolo”, dancing in Catalan, Cretan and Scottish rhythms. The Greeks had been impoverished, humiliated and demonised for five hard years by the European elites and mainstream media. The emotional outburst, the huge sense of liberation, the overwhelming feeling of dignity regained was palpable. Outside the Greek Academy’s building I met an elderly couple. The man was crying softly. “Why are you crying?” I asked. “We did not expect to live to see such a moment, my friend”, the woman replied. “Now I can die happy”, the man added. It was a magical moment.

History was being written. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Left had suffered defeats and disappointments all over Europe and the world. The anti-globalisation movement at the turn of the century rekindled a sense of optimism; the financial collapse in 2008 had indicated that neoliberalism was not invincible. But capitalism absorbed the collapse, re-assembled and continued its world domination as if nothing had happened. When the financial collapse developed into multiple economic and political crises in the south of Europe and the eurozone Greece, weakened by decades of elite mismanagement, cronyism and clientelism, was at the forefront of the disaster. The centre-left and centre-right governments agreed to two bail-out loans and the accompanying reform programmes which, like the Platonic pharmakon, proved worse than the disease. Between 2010 and 2015, Greece lost 26% of its GDP, the debt to GDP ratio rose from 120% to 180%, unemployment was 27%, youth unemployment 60%, salaries and pensions were halved. But the Greeks resisted. Within a short but extremely dense five-year period, they helped Syriza, a small party of the radical left hovering with about 4% of the vote jumped to 37%, to government and a promise to reverse the austerity policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union.

In the first few dramatic months of 2015, it became clear that negotiations with the EU and the IMF were bound to fail due to the creditors intransigence. In July, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras asked the Greeks in a referendum, to reject the latest European humiliating offer. The 61% referendum victory against virulent domestic and international propaganda and closed banks was one of the most important instances of popular resistance. Tsipras, despite being armed with a large popular mandate, faced an unprecedented blackmail that became known worldwide with the Twitter hashtag “this is a coup”. The Prime Minister was forced to compromise, accepting a better deal than the one rejected at the referendum. It nonetheless continued the austerity agenda, abandoning many of the class-based Syriza promises. In September 2015, Tsipras, who had lost his majority, called new elections, fully disclosing the hard measures of the third austerity memorandum. The Greeks chose Syriza again, preferring a party that disagrees with neoliberal policies to manage those imposed, instead of a party for whom neoliberalism is a declared ideology.

2. Why did Syriza lose? Two broad interpretations have dominated the debate. It was either the inescapable outcome of the European and international elites determination to not allow a left government to succeed and have a radical ‘contagion’ spread all over Europe. Or, it was the inevitable result of Syriza’s superficial radicalism that dissolved when faced with determined superior forces. Lack of will or the immovable force of political conservatism? Subjective limitations and objective constraints determined the outcome of the journey that started that carnivalesque night of January.

The question ‘failure or betrayal’ has offered the interpretative framework in which the Syriza government has been judged. The western media, not great friends of the Left, tended to emphasize the inadequacies and inexperience of a government under siege from domestic and foreign powers. Parts of the Left, having invested heavily in the Syriza victory and the hopes it gave for a possible return of the Left, turned their backs when the party accepted the compromise of the third reform programme. Many on the European Left, unable to create a successful alternative in their own countries, carry out their radical aspirations and dream-time revolutions by proxy. The Greek Left for a brief moment joined the ranks of Cuba or Venezuela as the harbinger of hope. After the compromise and the forced change of policies, the left abandoned it and indulged the tergiversations of Yanis Varoufakis.

Fast forward to 2021. After four difficult years, Syriza lost the July 2019 elections and entered a long period of introspection. It handed over a country that was in much better shape than the one it received in 2015. Tsipras delivered on his promise to “end the memoranda”, reduce the debt and start a new epoch for the country. Unemployment

fell by 9%, a first even coherent economic restructuring plan moving Greece towards a knowledge economy was drafted. The government operated in a mined landscape between its left ideology and the neoliberal programme of the memorandum. Yet it managed to implement a number of radical reforms. On economic issues and despite the fiscal constraints, it did not abandon its class ideology. While improving the macro-economic performance, Syriza prioritized those who had been hit hardest. Early on, the government tackled the humanitarian crisis by providing free health care to over two million uninsured people; free meals to school children; a social solidarity income and subsidies for rent and transport for the poor; an end to family home repossessions and a restructuring of non-serviced private and small business loans. These class-based measures were complemented by a rights agenda vehemently resisted by the right-wing opposition. This includes citizenship for immigrant children, LGBTQ civil union and fostering, recognition of gender identity, tackling racism and rising fascism, abolishing high security prisons and offering a dignified life to refugees. Reforms in higher education and research, health and public administration were crowned by the start of a constitutional amendment process prepared by an extensive public consultation exercise. Last but not least, the Prespes historic agreement with Northern Macedonia which resolved a festering decades-old dispute over the name of our northern neighbours.

Did Syriza betray its radical left ideology in retreating and accepting the third memorandum? Did it govern as a left reforming party or did it surrender to the sirens of power, the class constraints and the inducements of the state? These questions have been discussed since the defeat of 2019 in the sickly environment of the pandemic, the restrictive conditions of the state of exception and the revanchist and neo-conservative direction of the New Democracy government. The party adopted a broad account of its operation over the previous period. A few books by Syriza members who lived through those turbulent years have been published and were discussed before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> But the proper discussion about the experience and lessons of government has not started yet. Partly, the pandemic restrictions have created physical and social hurdles. Partly, the leadership keen to avoid much blood-letting and personal recriminations, has not encouraged such a debate.

A full account of the government will probably await the pen of the historian and the political scientist. But the debate on Syriza's response to the neoliberal and neoconservative government and its future cannot wait. A party congress was planned for 2020

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<sup>1</sup> Costas Douzinas, *Syriza in Power Reflections of an Accidental Politician* (Polity, 2018), Από την Εδρα στα Έδρανα: Έργα και Ημέρες μιας Αριστερής Κυβέρνησης (Νήσος, 2019); Aristides Baltas, *Εντός Παρενθέσεως* (Πατάκης, 2019); , Dimitris Mardas, 2015: Το Ημερολόγιο του Τρόμου (Καστανιώτης, 2020).

but, as much else, was indefinitely postponed due to the pandemic. This is the context in which the Institute Nicos Poulantzas received a grant from Transform to launch a research programme on 'left theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Syriza experience'. The first task of the two conferences on which this volume is based was to develop the debate about Syriza's government in a theoretical direction. This volume is not a formal account of the Left's successes and failures. But it is the first attempt by Greek and foreigner left intellectuals to place this experience in the context of the contemporary theoretical debate.

3. Syriza, preoccupied by the unprecedented task did not try to inform international public opinion or the Left about the difficulties, the successes and failures of its government. I was often approached by foreign academics and intellectuals who had realized the biased reporting of the mainstream press. The main interest of friendly foreigners and people on the Left was to learn about the experience of a radical government. What was the response of civil servants to Syriza's policies? What was the margin of manoeuvre in the negotiations with the lenders? What resistance and what help did the government policies encounter from social movements and civil society? What were the government's priorities?

More generally, what lessons can the Greek and European Left learn from the Syriza experience? Equally important, how does left theory of classical and more recent pedigree help in this process? Was the party leadership prepared for the tasks ahead? Did left theory and philosophy inform the programme, strategy and policies of the government? This is the second task of the conferences and the collected essays. Not a formal account, as we've said, but a collection of the examined experience of politicians and the reflection of academics on that crucial period in the history of Greece and the Left.

The first part of the book touches on a development of Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, that 'we need to reinterpret the world in order to change it'. **Douzinis** and **Baltas** discuss the preconditions for the emergence of generally applicable theoretical conclusions from the governmental experience. Douzinis argues that the socio-economic conditions of post-fordist capitalism must be taken into account to analyse the record of the government and develop the strategy of the New Left. For Baltas, the Left must act both within and outside the state. Using his ministerial experience, he comments on the way a radical government must relate to the state and public servants. **Spourdalakis** explains the old left dilemma of 'revolution or reform' and argues that the radical Left opts for "revolutionary reforms", a new kind of strategic reformist gradualism. This difficult task calls for a new political party that speaks the language of youth, the unemployed, the language of the poor and uses new communicative strategies.

**Boaventura de souze Santos** opts for a different re-interpretation of the world. Boa has been one of the founders and animators of the World Social Forum and a leading voice in the movement for de-colonising theory and practice. Knowledge is born in the struggles of the oppressed against capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy and this decolonial attitude must inform left theory in the 21st century. **Michalis Bartsidis** analyzes the discourse of right-wing executives and church leaders in Greece, which characterized the immigrants as “invaders”. In close dialogue with Boaventura’s de souze Santos, he concludes that the deepest cause lies in the Western representation of the Other as radically foreign and asymmetric. This is not simply a failure of the European Left but a symptom of the general ideological crisis as a condition of our time.

The second part of this book records some important successes and failures of Syriza’s government. **Achtsioglou** deals with labour rights and records some limited successes. However the room for manoeuvre was suffocatingly small because there is no robust workers’ movement in Greece to assist in the re-regulation of the labour market. **Karamesini** examines the government’s social and labour policies in the context of social state theorisation. They defended popular interests in difficult conditions and started changing the balance of class forces. **Labrianidis** deals with industrial policy and concludes that all left policies must fight inequality. However such policies need multiple alliances: with social forces (workers, self-employed, very small and small entrepreneurs, migrants); with progressive political forces (Green, Socialist and non-neoliberal Social Democrats); finally, with less favoured regions. **Stamboulis** argues that in the post-fordist period a new social contract should plan for full employment, universal social goods (pensions, education, health) and the social economy. This could be achieved through the reduction of working time. **Elias Georgantas** and **Christoforos Vernardakis** offer an interesting description of the negotiations with the creditors’ quartet. Syriza governed under probation with limited fiscal responsibility and policy constraints. In this difficult environment, its negotiators had to learn the language and methods of the negotiations. They managed to achieve peer status and trust with the quartet and this helped achieve some important negotiating successes. For **Tsakalotos**, macroeconomic policy has only a supportive role for a left government that promotes employment, increases subsidies, builds up the welfare state and reduces inequalities. Successes in the housing and child programmes among others reduced fiscal surplus targets and alongside the roadmap for debt relief and structural changes, meant that fiscal policy was a success in difficult circumstances. **Koltsida** moves from economic and social policy to the institutional realm. She shows how neoliberal policies led to a crisis in the constitutional, liberal and popular aspects of democracy. Syriza tried to repair some of the wounds of the democratic retreat. Koltsida examines the preconditions and the hurdles the government faced and indicates what a flourishing democ-

racy needs. **Linaldos-Rylmon** argues that Syriza was right to reject Grexit and carry out limited redistribution through a “parallel programme” of assistance for the poorer parts of the population. However the government continued pre-existing and inefficient methods for creating development policies partly because it lacked the cognitive capacities and political culture to elaborate alternative practices. **Bratsis** disagrees with the modestly positive conclusion of most contributors. The possibility for a transition to socialism was real in 2015 but Syriza’s defeat confirmed the inevitability of neoliberalism and damaged the initial hopes of the left.

This is a first report from the front line of the Syriza government. It is far from complete and does not claim to follow the protocols of academic research. However, it gives a sense of the successes, failures and frustrations of people who were thrown into the deep end and learned the trade while governing. They pursued left policies despite the many constraints. They did not betray their ideology, despite the attacks from the domestic and European elites. Their experience is quite valuable for the Left.

The 2015 compromise and the 2019 defeat that followed, shows that unless there is a change in Europe, isolated left governments cannot survive with their full program intact. The European Left offered limited support to the government. It did not organise a campaign of solidarity with its Greek comrades, but expected Syriza to take on the European establishment on its own. This contributed to the initial heroization and the later partial abandonment of Syriza. We need a realignment of left, green and social-democratic forces against the rising threat of nationalism, xenophobia and the extreme right. This experience indicates that we need a new social compact to bring to an end the policies creating a fertile ground for such anti-European ideologies. We should start a bottom-up process to reform the Left and European institutional structures. At the same time, a new progressive alliance should offer a radical, alternative social and political vision. After the pandemic we cannot go back to business as usual. The reduction of inequality, deepening and extension of democracy at all levels, and greater social justice, must be goals we work toward.

The Institute Nicos Poulantzas will continue the process of collecting and analysing the experience of the first radical left government in Europe. But as politically active academics, we aim to turn this experience into lessons for the future of the Greek and European Left. This first volume starts the process and offers many hints and ideas about the vision, the strategies and policies of the Left. Syriza proved that the left as a government project has returned,+ and will soon be in a winning position again.

*Costas Douzinas & Michalis Bartsides*





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## Leo Panitch (1945 -2020) In memoriam

**T**hanks so much for the invite to this honoring of Leo in a country that has always held a special place for Leo and Melanie. Leo couldn't wait to get into the intense, but always comradely, theoretical and political debates with his Greek comrades, all the more so if this came with platefuls of seafood, and too much to drink.

He and Melanie loved to walk the streets of Athens in the sunlight, and after dark. And Leo walked at a pace that – as his closest of friend, Michalis Spourdalakis, put it – seemed driven by a sense that if he only walked faster, socialism might be reached sooner.

When the invitation came to sit in on this conference, I was writing the concluding paragraphs of an article Leo and I had committed to. This seems an appropriate place to read them...

Leo agreed with the ultimate goal of Feuerbach's 11<sup>th</sup> Thesis that 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'. But what shines through in everything Leo has said, written and done was his determined emphasis that we do not underestimate the revolutionary importance of the intellectual struggle to adequately interpret and understand the world.

Similarly, against the aphorism, perhaps wrongly credited to Gramsci, calling for 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will', Leo stubbornly insisted instead on an '*optimism* of the intellect'. It is our intellectual ability to imagine a different world, come to grips with its reality and contradictions, and think strategically about how to transform it that makes the 'optimism of the will' into a sustained social force rather than a pious hope.

This need to understand the world led Leo to take the *historical* in historical materialism especially seriously. Because the essence of history is not the passing of time, but the uneven evolution of conditions, it pointed to everything being open to learning and modification and this, including constantly renewing our categories of understanding and strategies for social transformation.

In a period following defeats of working classes and the left, the point was, as Marx said in *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, 'to return to glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in the imagination, not recoiling from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making its ghost walk again'.

Socialism might be absolutely necessary *now*, yet it could not be built without the patience to struggle, build, wait. Its first steps are likely to be inherently tentative and will have to be respected, as such. And yet to move ahead, we will, as Marx went on to say, have to 'deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies ... of their first attempts.'

This long march brings an added and even more difficult dilemma. To recruit others to a socialism that might not be won within our lifetimes, yet nevertheless, demands sacrifices and commitments in the present, is an understandably hard sell.

Leo, the sober optimist and the anti-utopian utopian, struggled with this contradiction between the time scale of our lives and the time scale of socialism, but it did not deter him. He died as angry as ever over what capitalism did to human potentials, and as determined as ever to search for how we might best respond.

What could be better than to live life *as if* socialism was possible? What could be more meaningful than to enjoy one's life in all its rich dimensions, while also working with comrades to contribute to the eventual achievement of an egalitarian, truly democratic world that only others will see? Can one get any closer to immortality than this?

*Sam Gindin*

# THEORY CONSTRUCTION





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# Notes towards the theory and strategy of the New Left

*Costas Douzinas*

The European Left entered a serious, almost critical, condition in 1989. The long series of theoretical failures and political defeats made it accept, more than others perhaps, that liberal capitalism is the terminal stage of humanity while publicly denouncing the “end of history” motif. Grand theory and the politics of radical change were abandoned. A certain ‘melancholy’ descended, and the left turned to the politics of identity and culture and to local campaigns, dealing with small injustices and specific grievances, upholding moral principles and human rights.<sup>1</sup> This changed with the economic crisis of 2008 and the end of the “new world order”. Crisis brings to the surface the taken for granted, unspoken premises of thought and action that frame the ways we see the world. Hidden premises are revealed, reified and can be scrutinized, criticized and even rejected. This helped grand theory stage a comeback in the 2000s.

What about politics? The reactionary interval that followed the defeat of the wave of resistances in 60s and 70s, according to Alain Badiou, came to an end in the world wave of resistances in the 2010s. History returned.<sup>2</sup> A new wave of resistance broke out all over the world. It started with the Arab Spring, moved to Spain, Greece and then spread to Brazil, Chile, Turkey and parts of Asia.<sup>3</sup> The American “Occupy” movement came to symbolize this new age of resistance.<sup>4</sup> But it was Southern Europe which reacted politically after the streets went quiet through extensive police repression and tiredness. Greece, Spain and Portugal had been hit hardest by the austerity measures and the reform programmes imposed on them. These hated “memoranda” traded bailout loans for neoliberal measures of economic and institutional transformation, which cut salaries and pensions, decimated labour rights and privatised many state assets. The measures had two aims: to save German and French banks, which had lent huge sums to the bankrupt South and secondly, to impose on the South, a Northern European model of

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1 Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (Verso, 2017).

2 Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History* (Verso, 2012).

3 Douzinas, *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* (Polity, 2013).

4 Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (Penguin, 2012).

economic development with minimum worker protections, deregulated professions and the elimination of small enterprises, the backbone of their economic prosperity.

The victory of SYRIZA in 2015 was prepared by perhaps the greatest wave of social mobilization and acts of resistance anywhere in Europe. It was a sequence of protests and insurrections. It started in December 2008 after the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos, a student, in central Athens and came to an end in 2015, with the electoral victory of SYRIZA in January 2015, and the 62% “No” to the referendum in July. SYRIZA lifted the gloom; the enthusiasm of the world Left was huge. After the government was obliged to accept the third memorandum, however, in July 2015, the new government called, and won, snap elections in September. The new government was caught in a fatal contradiction between its radical ideology and the broadly neoliberal program it had signed. The victory in the September elections led to the realization of the defeat in July. The only victorious Left in Europe retreated.<sup>5</sup> The future looked bleak.

SYRIZA's defeat has been explained broadly in two ways. First, the international environment and the European Union have made any form of radical transformation impossible. There is really no alternative, and SYRIZA badly miscalculated in believing that it could succeed against the EU and the German *dictat*, particularly in the key policy of debt and the Stability Pact. It was the expected outcome of objective constraints, the result of the insurance policy that capitalism has built against radicalism. Second, the SYRIZA leadership did not believe in the radical transformation of society, and superficially only proclaimed its radicalism. Subjective lack of will or ability to challenge the prison-house of neoliberal capitalism had decided the outcome from the start. The defeat resulted from the objective constraints or the subjective limitations that bedevil not just SYRIZA, but also the global Left. Perhaps both.

There is no doubt that SYRIZA's capitulation in July 2015 prepared the defeat of July 2019. Yet, the claim that SYRIZA ‘betrayed’, ‘sold out’ or accepted the neoliberal orthodoxy is absurd. Slavoj Žižek praised what he called SYRIZA's “courage of hopelessness”. Writing against the ultra-leftists who advocated resigning after the defeat and surrendering the government to the right-wing, he wrote: “One has to heroically assume full responsibility for the welfare of the entire people and leave behind the basic leftist attitude of perverse satisfaction in providing sophisticated explanations of why things

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5 Douzinas, *Syriza in Power: Reflections of an Accidental Politician* (Polity, 2017).

had to take a wrong turn.”<sup>6</sup> Žižek accepts that “the left lacks a serious vision of how to re-organize society” and looks around for “any place or particular struggle where there is a chance to *faire bouger les choses* for moments which may trigger the return of history”.<sup>7</sup> But SYRIZA chose the difficult but correct path. It became clear at the end of its rule. Greece in 2019, was incomparably better than in 2015.

The SYRIZA compromise in 2015 and electoral defeat in 2019 have put on the theoretical and political agenda the vision and the strategy of the Left. What does the Left mean as ideology and organization, as a movement and government? No simple answers exist. We have no textbook or recipe to pick from the library shelf, adjust and apply. The permanent theoretical and political uncertainties become harder when the Left gets into power – or, more to the point, when the Left is elected to government. Power and government are not synonymous. The Greek power structure only peripherally noticed the SYRIZA government. This is why SYRIZA’s electoral defeat in 2019 was seen by many as natural, as a return to the usual alignment between capitalist power and political government. Despite this predictable but painful defeat, the left government completed its term when all governments in memoranda countries were obliged to resign early. SYRIZA has acquired a rich experience of governance, social and economic policy-making and party successes and failures.

What does this experience teach us about the Left in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The two models of the previous century have failed. Communism exited history. Social democracy, after the adoption of neoliberalism, has declined and is symbolized by the neologism *Pasokification*, the terminal decline of a previously strong party of government. The German SDP, the French Socialists and the Greek PASOK suffered a similar fate when they promised a neoliberal “third way” out of the crisis. This political failure, however, has not dampened the hopes of those who want to return to a social-democratic management model. In the truncated debate that followed the SYRIZA defeat, many on the Greek center-left argue that, in the absence of a realistic left strategy and the political space to implement it, SYRIZA should drop its radical aspirations and commitment to socialism. A center-left reformism that ameliorates the worst excesses of neoliberalism is the only realistic program for a party of social justice.

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6 Slavoj Žižek, *The Courage of Hopelessness* (Alen Lane, 2017), 70.

7 id. 87.

And yet, this cannot be accepted. The pandemic has brought us to a place of extreme darkness, but also of exceptional clarity. Darkness, because in the midst of disease and the re-arrangement of world capitalism, we do not have a clear line of escape. The future has been suspended in an endless present of fear, and suspension of most civil and democratic freedoms. Clarity, because we know we must have the courage to start over. When an idea, a movement or a party is in retreat, the best defence is to escape into the future. At this difficult time, we must start a public debate about the vision of the Left in the 21st century. The Left has always been “thought in action”, theory tested against and turned into practice. When political practice abandons the wisdom of theory, it risks adopting an unconstrained voluntarism that leads to defeat. A particular type of this failure is the abstract rationalism evident in the Varoufakis-EU negotiations in the first part of 2015. It is the naivety of those who believe that the power of argument can defeat the force of arms, that unaided reason can defeat force. At its peak in the 2000s, it led to the legalistic fetishism, which believed that International Law would stop wars.<sup>8</sup> The opposite problem emerges when theory and philosophy avoid political involvement to maintain purity. This attitude, Hegel’s «beautiful soul”, condemns the Left to permanent protest without solutions or programme. The “dirtying” of hands in action and the assumption of governmental responsibility necessarily risks failure and defeat. But such is the “courage of hopelessness”, exercised by leftists throughout the Twentieth century. The Left has to assume its courage once more. It must start with the courage of thinking. The pandemic has added urgency to the task of the Left. The world cannot go back to business as usual. The Left must reconsider its vision, programme and strategy, mobilising and making permanent the values and institutions the pandemic brought back: the common good, solidarity, the commons, care for others, an understanding of the limits of life.

We must build a New Left using both the best available theoretical resources, our political imagination and the experience of government. It will be a New Left, because we find ourselves in a new socioeconomic and geopolitical landscape. Neoliberalism and neo-conservatism have adjusted the classical capitalist tools to the new environment. We must do the same, and this means starting with an analysis of the world we live in, our strategic goal and the steps that take us from where we are to our destination. Our problem is not that the Left has too much theory and little practice, but exactly the opposite. Many SYRIZA failures were the result of a limited theoretical understanding,

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<sup>8</sup> Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire* (Routledge, 2007).

combined with the lack of planning and preparation for government. We have to abandon old dogmatisms, which no longer correspond to the world we live in. We must build afresh political thought, and give a new meaning to socialism that will give us a new vision for the future

## **1. Theory construction**

The New Left needs a paradigm shift. It starts with an account of the social reality of globalised Postfordist capitalism, it factors in the catastrophic effects of the pandemic, and of the global state of exception that followed. The new paradigm must use existing and new theoretical tools, our history, and experience putting them together into a coherent whole. The new theoretical conception must simultaneously converse with the experience of post-industrial society and move it towards radical democracy.

Left theory faces the problems of the present from the perspective of a future not yet realized. Its temporal mode is that of the future perfect: what will have been the future socialism becomes an active component of current policies. Left and socialist theory must be specific enough in order adjust to the conditions of the country and the social formation it aims to transform. But it must also refer to the universal preconditions and expectations of radical social transformation. This is because, the left operates in the space between the particular and universal, the local and the global, the interested individual and the disinterested subject of a cause greater than any individual. To renew the Left in theory and on the ground, we must combine thought processes that are universal and global with local or specific political experiences. We need to start both from the top and the bottom. We need to concretise and individualise theoretical positions and generalise empirical experience reaching a middle point of convergence and reciprocal correction. We need to examine the experience of left government, link it with the best available theoretical positions and draw flexible rules and strategies for future use.

Marxism assumes a correlation between reality and theory. Social consciousness and political practice emerge from, and depend on, social being. When reality changes, so does the thinking that reflects it. The main lesson of dialectical materialism is to think negativity as a moment in the overcoming of contradictions. Contemporary radical philosophy, however, has partly abandoned the belief that the world and its knowledge move on parallel and dependent lines. The solid theoretical grounds - economic deter-

mination, class, role of party, forward historical movement - have been replaced by plural logics, contingent happenings, unplanned and unintended consequences, the centrality of corporeality, affects and emotions. Radical philosophy accepts openly or implicitly, that truth is no longer a reflection of reality, but a commitment to its radical reform. A New Left theory succeeds, therefore, if it can alter its own conditions of emergence. It not only reflects, but it affects the social situation from which it emerged. Political practice informed by theory, steps into reality to construct the “truth” of radical change. Left thinking, like the “desire called utopia”, is combination of being and non-being. It discloses what reality possesses and what it lacks, in order to imagine a future that does not yet exist. Hegemonic politics means to create the field, the subject and the strategy of change. This paper starts the theoretical effort to examine how political experience and schools of radical philosophy reciprocally inform and correct each other.

We need to reinterpret the world in order to change it: it is the new version of the Eleventh Thesis

## **2. Late capitalism**

For traditional Marxism, social classes are constituted outside politics – in productive economic activities, which distribute people into clearly demarcated class positions. Late capitalism, however, has undermined the solidity of the working class, turning the bulk of the population into salaried workers, multiplying class positions and bringing into politics non-class identities and collectivities full of conflicts and tensions: public versus private employees, high versus low earners, self-employed against salaried, indigenous against immigrants. It is significant that young people, generation Z, are turning left all over the world. In Greece, 38% voted for SYRIZA, in Britain 52% for Corbin’s Labour. The youngsters gave the victory to Sinn Fein in Ireland and the Left in Spain, while 45% of those ages 18-29, supported Sanders. It is predictable, you will tell me. It seems, however, that the progressive turn of the youth is more radical and permanent than the usual idealistic beliefs of youth. The combination of post-capitalism, globalization and new technologies have led to new social stratification. Whatever the classic textbooks of Marxism and sociology say, the productive process, labor and classes have taken on a new intangible form that has nothing to do with what my generation knew, empirically and theoretically. But this is the only kind of work that young people know.

The characteristics of intangible, immaterial production led workers to strong networking and collaborations, but not to close political or trade union relations and convergences. Using the company's computer network or social media is very different from belonging to the same union or party. This analysis is presented as an evolution and radicalization of the concept of "general intellect" in the *Grundrisse* of young Marx. Machines were creations of science and technology, a dead workforce and fixed capital embedded in the forces of production. Today, however, the general intellect - that is collective knowledge, language and communication - has become a main productive force. Science, intellectual work and networking, ideas and words acquire a direct material reality, since they are the main components of post-capitalism. Therefore, the general intellect is no longer embedded in the fixed capital of machines, but in the lives of workers. Power invests in biological and social life that becomes the target of discipline and control of biopolitics. While in industrial capitalism the concrete became abstract, while the value of use, a substitute, in the latter the opposite is true: thoughts, ideas and words go immediately to the market.

These developments led to the fragmentation of class and have contributed to the crisis of political representation by disturbing the old correspondence between class, ideology and party. The direct link between the working class, the communist party and its leadership, guaranteed by Marxist theory, has been broken and cannot be reconstituted. What are the lessons for the New Left? The left party does not represent, but must create socially, and express politically, the largest possible popular alliance. The people become the political subject whenever society is divided politically by the convergence of classes, fragments, sectors and professions in a single pole, and their confrontation with an outside, the elites, rulers, power. Classes and groups on this side, "we", accept that their differences with those on the other side, "them", are more important than internal tensions and sectoral divisions. A hegemonic intervention manages to attenuate tensions and emphasize the common interests of the popular side along the line of social division.

This purified Marxism transforms the contradictions of class struggle into an opposition between the people and the elite. This often takes the form of a struggle between Good and Evil, and is organised around a radical break, a melodramatic confrontation. We hear echoes of Freud's or Lacan's splitting of the ego. The theory of left populism discussed by Yannis Stavrakakis in this volume is the best guide. We learned, however, that

left populism succeeds when the conjuncture and balance of forces allow a hegemonic intervention that creates a vertical social split. The SYRIZA anti-memorandum strategy was the best European example of such division. It succeeded because the conjuncture allowed the vertical separation of the people. Once this line disappeared, the strategy did not work. The 2019 elections showed that after a period of government, changes in the balance of forces make the creation of a dividing line much harder, even impossible. SYRIZA used a broadly populist strategy in the elections under the slogan “the many against the few”. The use of the logic of social division, however, when the inevitable failures of government do not allow the construction of a grand coalition of the people, led to defeat. The 2019 lesson is that left populism succeeds in periods of maximum tension and social polarization but must be complemented with other strategies in normal times. Here the SYRIZA experience helps reorient radical theory. The rest of this article indicates the direction of travel.

### **3. Political subject and strategy**

The working class of Fordist capitalism had similar characteristics in most aspects of life. The networked individual of late capitalism, however, lives a complex reality, with different and conflicting facets at work, at home, at leisure and in the social and identity groups in which she participates. Mutability, horizontal and spontaneous networking, multiple identities and weak relationships, horizontal encounters, physical and social distancing are integral elements of individual identity. Precarious, flexible and part-time work, long periods of unemployment, immaterial production and virtual collaboration characterize modern economic and social life.

Biopolitical capitalism makes people malleable and fragile, aggressively selfish and desperately melancholic, insecure and fearful. We are both free subjects and obedient citizens.<sup>9</sup> The class struggle has been transferred from the workplace where unions have declined, to the whole of society, which has become the contemporary factory, but also the space of political and ideological confrontations. The re-proletarianization of the working class and the decline of the middle class describe a new class composition, a motley plebeian social formation, in which socio-economic and cultural-symbolic aspects are equally important and must be thought of together, as part of left strategy. The economic is no longer permanent, and instead temporary, determining significance in particular conjunctures.

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<sup>9</sup> Costas Douzinas, *Radical Philosophy of Rights* (Routledge, 2019).

Connecting the new social strata with the political subject is not simply a matter of ideological demystification. The Left must go back to its source of success. It must combine the political party with a mobilized “street” and intermediate institutions – local government, unions, associations, chambers of commerce. It must be socially grounded and ideologically accepted. Three types of political antagonism with corresponding strategies, and the associated subjects can help in this direction: class, social movements and progressive populism. A hegemonic intervention must construct the political subject out of the tense, but complementary, alliance of these three.

**i. Class.** The new class subject embraces salaried workers, the unemployed and precariously employed, small and medium-sized enterprises and young professionals. They are the majority of the population. Class policies and programmes can no longer be defensive, as during the SYRIZA government. They become positive and expansive, prioritizing the needs of the subordinate classes and aligning them with the productive reconstruction of the country. Such policy involves the gradual and escalating transfer of resources from capital to labor, and the continuous improvement of the social state and living standards of working people. The Left politically constructs the class subject. But without its alliance with the radical liberal and the popular subjects, the class subject cannot construct the necessary political front.

**ii. Social Movements.** The subject of radical liberalism brings together identity, civil rights and environmental activism, aligning them with social justice. Identities related to gender, ethnicity, sexuality or religion are linked with movements around civil rights and the protection of immigrants and refugees, the excluded and marginalized. Finally, environmental activism and solidarity align with movements that expand anthropocentrism toward an ontologically rich definition of life. Social movements are a privileged terrain for the Left. Its ideology aligns with existing normative expectations. But their effectiveness is limited. They cannot succeed without the other two. Without a coming together of class and popular subjects, social movements risk falling into moralism, localist and liberal individualism.

**iii. Progressive populism.** The hegemonic intervention constructs the popular subject, which encompasses class subjects and radical liberals. It coordinates the struggles, incorporates the different dynamics, gathers and transcends the tensions of the other two. The New Left must address both reason and emotion, popular beliefs and normative expectations. It must re-signify social religiosity towards solidarity and secular

ethics; popular patriotism towards internationalism, and respect for others. Finally, it must re-direct democracy from a method of electing representatives towards a form of life that enters all domains. The New Left does not represent, but constructs the new subject of class, rights and the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **4. The imaginary and hegemony**

Capitalist ideology and the biopolitical control of behaviour have captured popular imagination and determine conscious and unconscious desires. It is not enough to condemn individualism, consumerism or the right-wing ideology of large sections of the population. There has been no successful ideology that has not responded and met certain popular desires and needs. The Left has neglected the contribution of the psychic economy to ideological hegemony. We must take into account the way in which neoliberalism inoculated society, even parts of the Left. Only then will we be able to use existing popular frustration to steer it in a different direction. This makes psychoanalytic theory and its concept of the “imaginary order”, a crucial addition to ideology critique, and the quest of hegemony.

The imaginary compensates for the “lack” in the psyche, the Freudian discontent, for historic and daily failures and frustrations. It creates the image of an ideal “I”, a worthy and successful self that, although imaginary and virtual - not actual - gives coherence to life. The collective fantasy, similarly, tends to present our history as glorious, our present hopeful, our future bright. The central goal of hegemony is to connect the individual psychic economy with dominant collective fantasy.

The imaginary order includes descriptive, ideological and normative elements - facts, ideas and morals. Facts can be proven or disproved, confirmed or refuted. Does a greenhouse effect exist? Do we have a climate crisis? The test of factual claims is truth. Truth claims, with their alleged irrefutability, have increased value. This is why Trump, and right-wing commentators, peddle “post-truths”, violating the rational achievements of modernity. Second, we have ideological elements and the battle of ideas. Lower taxes for the rich, or better schools and hospitals? Is economic growth, or environmental protection more important? The test of success is argumentative success followed by its political implementation. Finally, moral principles, values and virtues. Individual responsibility or care for the other? Self-interest or communal solidarity? The test here is

the universal applicability of the relevant norm. We have, therefore, three components, each with many versions and innumerable possible combinations.

A hard “core” at the centre becomes the “common sense” of the times, what the fictive “average person” believes. It takes the form of a myth or “narrative”, which articulates scattered beliefs, desires and hopes, giving them a minimal inner coherence. A “narrative” succeeds if it convinces the “average person” that it will lead to personal prosperity and success, in a society that is, or will become, wealthy and just. Its vague and porous boundaries allow individuals to add personal preferences and biases. Emotion, mimesis and desire play a central role in conscious and unconscious choices. Individual and collective fantasy are both necessary and deceptive. The collective utopia of prosperity and the individual escape from lack, keep us going. But only as a horizon, or destination we will never reach.

Hegemony links the individual and collective imaginary order. It constructs the common sense of an age. The right wing was always interested in shaping public opinion and cultivating the “silent majority”. The Left, with its emphasis on political ideology and “scientific” superiority, abandoned the imaginary and affective components of hegemony. The New Left must give increased importance to its vision for the future. It must create imaginary associations and realistic expectations, a horizon of national and personal hope, social justice and well-being. In the battle of ideas for the post-pandemic world, the vision, the promise of a radically different society, has greater importance than individual policies and programmes. It gives them rational coherence and creates hope to combat the fear that right-wing ideology creates on the soil of the pandemic.

## **5. Transcending capitalism**

Democratic socialism is not separated from capitalism by a vertical line or a violent rupture. Structural reforms gradually “erode” or overcome class and ideological power. Social democratic policies, macroeconomic planning and left Keynesianism, are all part of the governing Left. What separates the New Left from social democracy, lies in the kind of reforms it pursues. Classic social democracy accepts the inevitability of capitalist relations and grounds its programme on the profitability of capital. The strategy of “erosion” on the contrary, aims at the gradual replacement of capitalist pillars by socialist islets. Socialist elements are grafted into the economic and social fabric, and gradually transform the rest. Capitalism is based on individual property, commodification and

individualism. The Left weakens property and transforms institutions towards non-commodified relations, solidarity and collective projects. The erosion of capitalism takes various forms which include the domestication, disarticulation, and structural reforms of institutions, and the Left attitude to the state. The combination of these, and other forms, depends on the political situation and the balance of forces on each occasion. Flexibility and pragmatism are, therefore, main features of socialist strategy.

**i. Taming or domestication introduces reforms, which mitigate capitalism's catastrophic consequences.** They include progressive taxation, including a wealth tax, supporting families, Keynesian demand management, a democratic reform of property relations. There is no reason why big business must be privately owned, or a small clique of people must control financial resources and make decisions on investment. The debacle over the Covid-19 vaccines is instructive. If the patents were bought or requisitioned by governments or international organizations, or pharmaceutical companies were nationalized, hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved. But the absolute protection of private property over productive assets did not allow this simple action. More generally, wealth and opportunities must be distributed from the few to the many, to the employees, consumers and stakeholders involved in, or affected by, a business or enterprise. This is not just democratically correct. Companies governed by their workers are more efficient and productive than private ones.<sup>10</sup>

**ii. Disarticulation.** It aims to reform economic, legal and political institutions degrading class power and creating the conditions for the next step on the path to democratic socialism. Such reforms transfer power from the state and capital to citizens. Postfordist networked capitalism, and the skills learned for work, facilitate cooperative processes and the gradual replacement of capitalist relations by cooperative ones. Self-organization has always been a key strategy of the Left. The SYRIZA experience was not positive, however. Important initiatives introduced institutions of social, co-operative and solidarity economy. But they were not followed or supported on the ground and sank in the neoliberal sea. Participatory institutions teach people the necessity of collective work and the ways institutions operate. But there was little material and party support for the new initiatives and no general plan for the democratization of the economy. The government did not pursue a strategy of promoting collective forms of work and production. Opportunities were lost. The process for development planning was not reformed, nor was popular participation strengthened.

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<sup>10</sup> Rob Calvert Jump, "Better models of Business Ownership" in John McDonnell ed. *Economics for the Many* (Verso, 2018), 85-97.

The SYRIZA government did not understand that the improvement of working peoples' lives would not result from a revival of Greek state-dependent capitalism, but from new collective forms of work and production. This, alongside the strengthening of trade unions in the private and the public sector, would have started the process of structural reform of capitalism. Again, opportunities were lost. The New Left needs to plan the transition to new forms of collective economy, and the mobilization of people, well before gaining power again.

**iii. Immanent reforms.** The SYRIZA experience indicates that the most difficult obstacle to radical reform is the organization and unresponsiveness of legal and state institutions and personnel. Social reality is experienced in terms of normative expectations that inform actors' perception and construct reality. Institutions shape normative expectations, and the perception of social reality of both ordinary citizens and opinion makers. They reduce the contingency of human interaction, entrench models of social relationships, and, in doing so, hedge in imaginative political uses and opportunities for change.

Transformative or immanent reforms use resources the system makes available against itself. They counterpose institutional promises to material actuality. This way, the overcoming of the contradiction does not restore, but transcends, the "disturbed" framework within which it arose. This leads to the overcoming or transcending of the context that generated it. With transformative reforms, the object will never be the same again - the balance of power changes. Such contradictions emerge when institutions are caught between their alleged universality, which leads to biased distributions.<sup>11</sup>

Consider the creation of an efficient rule of law state. The resistance of the legal system to the modest SYRIZA reforms was an important reason for many policy failures.<sup>12</sup> The legal system must deliver on its promises and comply with progressive reforms. It is a radical demand and a necessary precondition of the democratic road to socialism. Existing rights and entitlements must be fully enforced, normativity and actuality must gradually coalesce. But even in a fully functioning rule of law, as soon as the basic legalistic requirements are achieved, it becomes clear that rule formalism, proceduralism and individualized rights cannot deliver substantive equality. The law must move from equality of opportunity at the entry point, to equality of outcome. Every reform becomes a station in the wider journey of successive waves of radicalization.

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11 Emiliós Christodoulidis, "Critical Theory and the Law: Reflections on origins, trajectories and conjunctures" in Christodoulidis, Dukes, Goldoni (eds.), *Research Handbook on Critical legal Theory* (Edward Elgar, 2019).

12 Douzinas, *Radical Theory of Rights*, Chapter 12.

Or, take socioeconomic rights. They are marginalized because they do not fit the capitalist structure of market reward. If the market distributes value, meeting social needs is irrational. As President Reagan put it, social rights are a “childish letter to Santa.” The Left mobilizes this contradiction to make social rights real, making them “justiciable”: they become legally actionable, remedies attach to their violation, as is the case with civil and political rights. Or consider the cardinal liberal principle of autonomy. It has been confined to individual interests and pursuits while blocking, through the sacred nature of property, reforms that promote collective autonomy. Transformative reforms would institutionalise social, solidarity and cooperative economy initiatives, both realising collective self-determination and eroding capitalism. Finally, take the largely empty constitutional rhetoric of popular sovereignty. The Left fills the void by promoting the continuous and effective presence of constituent power. This return of the power of the people creates the necessary space for direct democracy initiatives, such as referenda, the ability to recall laws and representatives, quotas for the inclusion of women and minorities. Eventually, popular sovereignty can become the foundation for the realisation of a democratic economic plan and wider democratic renewal.

**iv. Acting in and against the state.** SYRIZA ministers reported that they often felt like a “government in exile”, reciting stories of impotence and frustration. They were denied files and data necessary for the development of policy; policies repeatedly failed because officials were unwilling to implement them; anonymous briefings and leaks alerted the press about the planning of a radical policy. SYRIZA inherited a public sector, which combines traditional anti-left bias with a distorted view of strategic selectivity. Civil servants resisting institutional reforms or progressive policies expressed both their class position and deeply embedded vested interests. These wrecking tactics had a single purpose: to frustrate their political “masters” and expedite their departure.<sup>13</sup>

These difficulties could have been predicted. For Nicos Poulantzas, the state is not a single entity, but ‘like “capital”, it is rather a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions’. State institutions, typically the law and the civil service, normalize the balance of social forces and legitimize the overall power structure. The State uses strategic selectivity in order to maintain class domination. The Left has to be both in, and against, the state, it must take over and act against its institutional constraints, strategic choices and ideological direction. This can be done because the class struggle takes place in the state. But

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<sup>13</sup> Douzinas, *Syriza in Power*, Chapter 6.

SYRIZA did not develop sites of resistance in the state before its victory. As government, it did not follow the usual practice of old, to replace the top management of the wider public sector with its supporters. The civil service did not reciprocate the trust shown and became one of the key participants in the attempt to implement the “short left interval” strategy.

The SYRIZA reforms, besides those in the field of civil and identity rights, rarely exploited immanent contradictions, state and capital weaknesses and the force of popular movements. They were easily reversed by the right-wing government. The lack of understanding of the distinction between government and power was behind many failures. For those who believed that government and power are synonymous, piecemeal legislative initiatives should've led to radical reform even though they were not socially embedded, nor had they acquired normative force. They failed. Those who realised that power and government do not coincide were often contented to manage their portfolio, promising a more efficient and corruption-free administration. It was not enough. Both approaches were wrong. The lack of theoretical preparation and strategic understanding must not be repeated. We need a return to theory in order to prepare for the second coming of the Left, if it comes.

## 6. In conclusion

The New Left continuously transfers resources from capital to labor, and power from the state to citizens, gradually transforming institutions and changing the balance of powers. It supports the unfolding of society's autonomous organizational capacities. It broadens the protections and the autonomy of the working people, enabling the potential of forms of social, solidarity and communitarian economy. Every social initiative or cooperative form must find its place and be protected in order to flourish as part of a more general institutional reform. Without a zone of legal and institutional protection, experiments will recede into the hostile environment of neoliberal capitalism.

Left governmentality means that every major policy should be a rupture in the old regime. The balancing point between rupture and assimilation will be achieved when every policy and law is inspired by, and leads to, the horizon of *isodemocracy*.<sup>14</sup> As a horizon, it is a dividing line that moves back and away, as we approach it. A horizon remains open

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<sup>14</sup> Douzinas, *From the University Chair to Parliament's Benches: The Life and Times of a Left Government*

and unreachable, but is integrated as a lighthouse beam or a kind of Kantian regulative idea into everyday practice. We believe and act now in the name of a future “not yet” and still “to come”.

If horizon is the form, its content is double. First, the axiom of equality. Everyone counts as one, and no one for more than one. What matters is not equality of opportunities but equality of results; policies leading to the material equalization of peoples' lives. But equality on its own does not change the balance of power. We need, therefore, the deepening and extension of democracy. *Isodemocracy* means the re-politicization of politics and the democratization of society. The Left extends institutional democracy with national and local referenda, the recall of MPs and other elected officers. Formal democratization is not enough. Democracy from formal procedure becomes a form of life passing from central politics into the economic, social and cultural fields, and into everyday life. Institutional democracy needs to be supplemented by direct, deliberative and collective forms. Successive waves of radicalization keep passing resources from capital to workers, and power from the state to citizens. We gradually reach the core of capitalist power, private property. This is how the balance of forces changes and power passes from the elites to citizens.

Socialism and radical change are nothing more than perseverance in our initial decision to commit ourselves to the axiom of equality and democracy. This is how great love affairs and revolutions happen. After the fact, they are considered necessary, predetermined, and indispensable. But if you get to the rendezvous a few minutes late, or if you delegate the change to others – to politicians, experts, insiders – then what was predestined turns into a lost opportunity, a love affair you will never experience. The political and moral duty of the Left is to meet our object of desire.

*Isodemocracy* is not a terminal station. We will never cry out, ‘here we are’, ‘we reached socialism’. On the contrary, the horizon is embodied in every relationship and struggle, in every victory, but also in our defeats. This is the only way to turn defeat into victory. The pandemic and climate catastrophe have given new meaning to a well-known dilemma. It is now “Socialism or the End of Life as we know it”. The responsibility of the Left is huge.

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(Nissos, 2019), Chapter 3.

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# Syriza in Power: Precepts of Governing and the Greek State

*In memory of Leo Panich*

*Aristides Baltas*

All social experiences are singular. Each takes place at some fixed time and is discharged at a particular location; each is constrained by idiosyncratic factors that work both inside it and outside of it; each is dependent upon specific conditions, social, as well as historical. No one can be replicated, repeated or serve as a prototype. Yet some may lay claim to more general interest for they can be both effective and instructive: a particular social and/or political experience is effective insofar as it transforms things and power relations at this or that scale and thus, assists analogous experiences at different times and places. And it can be instructive, insofar as it demonstrates the capacity of walking on untrodden ground thus, opening new vistas. Vistas coupled to the experience's bringing forth novel ideas, as well as its pinpointing entrenched fallacies that have consistently led to impasses or dead ends.

A social and/or political experience cannot immediately and effortlessly attain the theoretical level. Before achieving it, and in order to achieve it, before acquiring the earnestness of worked out concepts, the experience has to be variously discussed, as such, and copiously elaborated. Its salient features have to be singled out in their own right, become connected to, and differentiated from, the salient features of analogous experiences, be thought out and thoroughly thought, by everybody concerned.

Given these general remarks, the very fact that we are participating in the present conference implies –I take it– that we all share the belief that the experience that can be named “Syriza in power”, is a case in point. But in respect to this experience, we are all still limited, I believe, to levels of reflection coming before theorization proper. We find ourselves still in the process of locating and identifying different parameters and dimensions of that experience, and in particular, those revealing the capacity to bear general interest, at least from the vantage point of the international Left. In other words, we are still at the stage when we have to locate what exactly might be instructive in the above sense, the processes, stances, attitudes and initiatives that can be offered to theorization.

The party of Syriza has proceeded to the clarification and initial evaluation of the experience it acquired in governing Greece for four and a half years. That experience has been discussed, more or less thoroughly, inside the party with the document presenting it (125 pages long) being voted unanimously (with one vote of abstention) by the party's Central Committee. This document, titled *Account of Syriza 2012-2019*, is actually in the process of being translated into English. In addition, the Nicos Poulantzas Institute has initiated a process whereby the experience in question is being discussed and studied at a more detailed level.

In the present paper, I will not attempt to summarize the document in question or the first steps of its deeper discussion. Instead, I take up a few of the points the document raises and examine them in a way that might have appealed to Leo Panich. In other words, I try to renew, as it were, the conversation we had started in 2012 and continued intermittently all these dense years in forcing myself not to succumb to the unbearable burden of his absence. This is a humble, even if only indirect, way of expressing publicly my deepest thanks for all he has done for us, generally, and for me, personally...

To begin with, I will try to make explicit the minimal theoretical framework determining the contours of the experience in question, at least, as I have come to understand both this experience and what has been framing it. This is a framework that is supposed to be general (and minimal) enough to embrace the views that most of us in this conference share, one way or another. It forms, at least according to me, the kind of common ground on which we all stand. Of course, this does not mean or imply that the framework is beyond criticism. Far from it. Each one of its tenets, as well as the way they hang together is up for elucidation, elaboration, interpretation, critical evaluation or even outright rejection. Nonetheless, my formulating it right from the start, even if only as a rough sketch, might be helpful for channeling the discussion with a modicum of theoretical discipline.

## Framework

In an interview given to a Greek newspaper (*Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών*, February 12-13, 2020) the South Korean film director Bong Joon Ho was asked how he explains the fact that his film *Parasite* won the Best Picture Academy Award (Oscar) for 2019. Despite, so to speak, the fact that the film is set in Seoul and conversation is conducted in his native

language, which is largely unknown outside of his country. The reply was disarming in its generality and simplicity: “*We live in a gigantic capitalist nation*”.

If we do not place undue emphasis on the term “nation”, the reply is disarming for it reiterates the obvious: nowadays formal borders and dominant languages cannot erect impenetrable barriers to ideas or sensitivities coming from anywhere across the globe. Concern towards social issues can cross such obstacles and circulate throughout the “gigantic nation”, while forms of reaction, stances, attitudes and modes of action can become generally known and inspirational for others. This is to say that the fates of a film or of a work of art, and by extension the fates of any and all of us, have become interdependent and interwoven, determined to this or that extent by what happens in this or another part, however remote, of the “nation” we all inhabit. To go one step further and to put it succinctly, the “capitalist nation” presently possesses *no outside*.

Of course, this does not mean that capitalism is our inescapable fate: all kinds of struggle against its multiform manifestations have never ceased since its beginnings, they continue and will continue. That it presently possesses no outside means, then, that we are in no position to fight it by being situated, or imagine being situated, at some position allowing us to take it up and confront it as a whole. We can criticize and fight against what it has been doing to the peoples of this earth, and to that earth itself –we start realizing that we live in the devastating *Anthropocene* era—we can unravel its modes of operation and its ways of functioning, we can understand how it was brought about, how it evolved and how it managed to overcome its crises, we can even estimate where it is heading: the destruction of the planet, as we have known it for millennia. But at the same time, we cannot help admitting that all the valiant efforts to overthrow it, despite the staggering successes that have inspired and emboldened us in the past, have ended with capitalism landing back on its feet anew. The vantage point that seemingly allows us –even if only in imagination– to confront capitalism as a whole and from the outside, has evaporated. And this obliges us to take stock of the fact that all that we are, and all of what we are doing –what we eat, what we consume and what we discard or waste, what we work on and how we work, where and how we live or die, what clothes we fabricate and wear, the modes of how we enjoy ourselves or of how we move and travel, what we think and what we imagine– bears a presently indelible capitalist stamp. It is in this sense, too, that the “gigantic capitalist nation” has no “outside”.

On the other hand, our all being inside the “nation” also means that we are all its ‘citizens’. It means that our demands, our actions and our struggles against capitalism’s manifestations and symptoms, as well as our critical ideas revealing what it is, and what it is about, are interconnected in multiform ways and can be shared by all. Shared by all that suffer from it in all countries and in all continents, throughout the “nation”. Shared inside capitalism, but also *against capitalism*. This is how the presently defining condition of the international Left can be summarized: not outside capitalism, but *inside and against* it. *Dentro y contro*. These two unassuming little words made famous by the Italian movement and highlighted by the theoretical labor of Etienne Balibar and Michalis Bartsidis, encapsulate precisely where we presently stand, as well as how we have arrived here. For, in addition to the above, a minute of reflection makes us realize that the very same little words have been silently at work all along. “Inside and against” condense no less than the history of the ‘short’ 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Let me explain. Relatively early in the past century, struggle within capitalism and struggle against capitalism split their ways, so to speak, and embarked upon divergent directions: Reform or Revolution. This has been the fundamental dilemma encompassing, and at the same internally separating, the Left for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But in the era of globalization –the era “making global capitalism” as Leo Panich and Sam Gindin have put it in their classical work– we cannot escape admitting that both of the dilemma’s horns eventually failed to cash out on their original expectations. What has been dubbed “left melancholia”, results precisely from acknowledging this fact. Which is to say that, on the one hand, reformism –or if you like, social democracy– became gradually absorbed, without too many qualms in the political arsenal of capitalism, while on the other hand, successful revolutions fell back on capitalist relations of production and the associated values, even if only with qualifications of one sort or another. Regarding the latter, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the complex evolution of China after Mao situate the corresponding landmarks. These are the political landmarks of globalization, the landmarks making clear that thinking of capitalism from the outside and trying to confront it, as a whole, has driven us astray. In more abstract terms, we appreciate now that we had been silently renouncing immanence to the profit of some kind of imaginary, self-undermining standpoint of transcendence. And paid for it.

Politically speaking, the Left has slowly started to realize during the past decades that such strategic failure has deeper roots for the dilemma, as such had been mostly over-

blown after the First World War or even initially misconstrued. It seems as if the subtle qualifications it had always required, the different actualizations or embodiments in time and place it displayed, the demand for its correct handling in varying circumstances, had been for the most part undervalued, ignored, dismissed or simply pushed under the rug. In other words, we have presently ‘discovered’ that either horn of the dilemma—at least as a dilemma formulated in such starkly divisive terms early on—cannot invigorate lastingly successful social resistance. And since such invigoration is connected, directly or indirectly, with Left theory, the failure in question appeared clearly as such, after the ‘discovery’ that Left theory cannot appeal to inexorable historical laws to cheer up those suffering, cultivate hope and brighten promises for a happy future. By now, we have come to realize that historical laws simply do not exist. What ‘governs’ history throughout, is what Althusser has called “*l’aléatoire*”. Which implies that the Left can rely socially, historically, theoretically and politically, only on a ‘mere’ tendency.

I am referring to a tendency inherent in society, all along and proper to society, as such, a tendency that forms something resembling a historical constant. This is a tendency that has been manifested in history under different names, a tendency that has become more or less explicit in the differently worded programs of those who have risen against exploitation and repression throughout the ages, always claiming freedom, equality and justice: from the slaves of Spartacus to Münzer’s peasants and from the Paris Commune to the successful revolutions or major uprisings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Up to today’s Black Lives Matter movement, lives that should have mattered since the beginnings of colonization, and ever before and after.

The tendency in question can be named the tendency to communism, to honor the *Communist Manifesto*, the womb from which most of us descend, one way or another. But names can vary. Benjamin calls the horizon of this tendency “redemption”, and Derrida calls it “democracy-to-come” or “infinite justice”. Where “infinite justice” forms the horizon bringing together freedom and equality (both social equality and equality, in respect to the law), the two thereby ceasing to be at odds with one another, as is often the case even within the ‘best’ of the democracies having appeared in history. Hence the term “democracy-to-come”, an analogue of Balibar’s “equaliberty”.

To this we may add, I take it, that in the opposite direction, so to speak, we humans do *possess* the *experience* of justice, and this, from infancy: kids in all cultures, and through

all historical periods, can sharply distinguish attitudes that are just, from attitudes that are unjust, either in regard to praise or to reprimand. Therefore, to the extent that the inference is valid, the tendency to communism is not only a historical constant, unceasingly at work within our societies—for all actions of generous, unselfish solidarity (or fraternity) are its manifestations—but also a quasi-anthropological constant, overriding the dilemma we are talking about. What Benjamin calls “heliotropism” of the past towards the present amounts, I believe, to the double nature –historical because anthropological, and anthropological because historical– of this constant. I don’t have the space to delve deeper into the matter here, but I hope the idea is clear enough for the purposes at hand.

To take up the second tenet of general framework I am suggesting, I stress that the experience “Syriza in power” is mainly a political experience. According to Poulantzas, now, the political instance is the instance integrating, condensing and representing the forces at play within any given social formation while, in addition, it is the decisive instance: it is there that resides, *pace* Foucault, decisive power over the formation’s reproduction or transformation. Given this, we cannot subscribe to the, more or less, standard formula that the political, as such, amounts to the administration of the feasible. From the vantage point of the Left, political action cannot but aim at *enlarging* and *deepening* the feasible: a *directed* and *engaged* enlarging and deepening that unwaveringly maintains the pointing of the compass toward the horizon of communism.

Nevertheless, “feasible” should remain in the formula, for we are obliged to take into account the specific circumstances and the power relations that are actually at play, in any given conjuncture; take them into account realistically, and in cold blood. This is to say that we are always obliged to walk on a narrow path between inspired, but thoughtless voluntarism on the one side, and cautious but over-thoughtful adjustment to the forces at play, if not capitulation proper, on the other side. We are obliged to walk, that is, between the twin ‘temptations’ that are always at work, eager to destroy our efforts and engulf our aspirations. The name of this narrow path is, of course, Gramsci’s “pessimism of the intellect”—for in most cases the power relations actually at work are fundamentally hostile to an enterprise such as ours— but at the same time, “optimism of the will”. Of an unflinching will, always prepared to muster the necessary forces to overcome such hostility. Forces, which lie always-already there, if the tendency to communism is, indeed, an historical constant, forces, which are practically invincible, if mobilized.

Here, however, appears an additional question. And this leads to the third, and last tenet, of the framework I am attempting to lay out. For, how can we effectively walk along the path lit by the inherent tendency to communism, if even our richest theories are, in this respect, inadequate by definition? If, that is, they cannot predict or harness the unexpected –Althusser’s *l’aléatoire*– which is always lurking in the shadows of the future and can thus, derail even our best efforts? Since we cannot answer theoretically, we can appeal to “ποίησις”. Not just in the current, but also in the original, sense of the word. Which means that we should not take poetry only as our always-welcome sanctuary, but also assume the responsibility of the *naked deed* each time, the deed that, as Goethe has taught us, is always in the beginning: *Am Anfang war die Tat*. For “ποίησις” originally means doing, performing, creating. It means doing and creating while assuming the relevant, theoretically naked, responsibility. It means doing by replying each time specifically, and by *deed* to Lenin’s canonical question: *what is to be done?* There is no other way, as Antonio Machado makes limpidly clear:

“Caminante, no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar.”

Or:

“Wayfarer, there is no path,  
you make the path as you walk”.

Where, here, the path is not any path. It is the path we make in walking, and while walking toward the horizon of communism.

## Transition

Let me summarize. One: capitalism has no ‘outside’, we can only struggle inside and against it. Two: our political struggle amounts to enlarging and deepening the feasible each time, by walking toward the horizon of communism even as its corresponding tendency is constantly at work and indelibly inscribed within our societies. Three: the path we have to walk is not subject to laws or even theoretically describable but is made just as we walk it. These are the basic tenets of the framework I am proposing, the tenets having emerged from the experience of “Syriza in power”. At least as I have participated in, and understood this experience, and as I have helped compose and have read the document presenting it.

Certainly, these tenets, as well as the ways they are connected, have not been worked out thoroughly. All kinds of questions may –or rather should– be raised in respect to them, all kinds of disagreement, or even of rebuke, are to be more or less expected. This last remark is not a token of modesty or of polite presumption: a very clear symptom of the insufficiency in question is all too apparent in what precedes. This is revealed, among other things, by the unbridled proliferation of direct references, allusions and hints regarding different authors and works, rarely, if ever, associated in one breath, or even appearing to bear readily noticeable relations to one another. Therefore, and at least in respect to such major gaps, legitimate questions, queries, reservations or rejections cannot but arise. If they do, it will be just fine. For then the process of theorization proper, as I tried to explicate from the beginning, will have started. But I believe we are not yet even there. We still have to render explicit the salient features of the experience “Syriza in power” and put them up for discussion in themselves. It is only by proceeding in this way that, hopefully, not only such gaps will start to be filled, but the theorization we are looking forward to, will get into course, uninhibited.

In what follows, I single out and limit myself to merely one such feature. Not only for its inherent importance, but also to renew in imagination, as I said, the conversation with Leo Panich. For this is a feature that we did not have the opportunity to discuss and I believe, would have interested him a lot. I am referring to certain aspects of the Greek State, as they emerged to full view, and became rationally and politically connected by Syriza’s coming to power.

## **Aspects of the Greek State**

The Greek State is a relatively new creation. It was instituted after 1827 when the naval forces of Britain, France and Russia defeated the Ottoman fleet in Navarino thus, obliging the Ottoman Empire to grant independence to a number of provinces forming part of historical Greece. The Greek war of independence –the Greek Revolution– was proclaimed in 1821, and had passed through various difficult stages before finding its resolution in that decisive victory.

The vicissitudes encountered by the evolution of the Greek State from that time to the present, are many and multiform. Here, I cannot even start describing them, whereas for

present purposes, one remark suffices: the fact that Greek independence was achieved through the victory of the great powers of the time has left a lasting mark on the course followed by this State. For, to begin with, these powers took it, as a matter of course, that Greek society was too immature to govern itself. Therefore, they appointed, as a fully empowered Governor of Greece, Ioannis Capodistrias, an ex-Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire of Greek origin. And after the assassination of Capodistrias, they again appointed, as a fully empowered King, the young Prince Otto of Bavaria. After a revolt in 1843, King Otto granted a very defective constitution –the regime thus, becoming formally a constitutional monarchy– but dependence on the great powers had already left an enduring stamp on political evolution and casts of mind. Among other things, the Greek political parties of the time had taken the cue, and aligned themselves even by name, to these powers. Thus, we had the “British”, the “French” and the “Russian” parties whose antagonisms determined much of the political life of the country for decades. The net result has been that the Greek State appeared, and mostly acted, from its very beginning as something foreign to Greek society, as an all-powerful arrogant institution, contemptuous, if not properly hostile, to the ‘natives’ and to their needs and demands.

Waves of modernization ensued from time to time since then, while many important changes occurred. But the DNA, so to speak, of the Greek State did not vary that much. The deeper reasons for this have become obvious: this has been a state not built by the practices and reflective efforts, however internally divided, of a people having gained independence by their own forces alone, as happened, say, in the US. Nor has it evolved to post-absolutism, through the kind of *internal* transformations, however moderately disruptive or radical, having led to the modern states of most major European countries. Instead, the Greek State has been concocted by foreign intervention, in absence of popular aspirations, popular expectations and popular will. And since this inheritance has never been effectively confronted head on, it continues characterizing it in many respects. Thus, the Greek State is still felt as standing above Greek society, as a self-interested, haughty and domineering instance, lending mostly a deaf ear to even the most legitimate of popular demands. Family-based political dynasties that control electoral enclaves run it, nepotism regarding public posts is the rule rather than the exception, labyrinthine bureaucracy reigns unchallenged, corruption at various levels and in various forms and guises has been continuously at work in its interstices and, as it has almost never been defied and punished, has continued to thrive.

The institution of the Greek State by foreign intervention and the attendant absolutism have endowed it, from the start, with disproportionately great power, as well as with a dynamic aim to encompass and regulate ‘from above’ everything social. Which means that civil society rarely gained a real purchase on matters. Control of the State as such, or participation at the higher of its echelons, has been instead the main driving aim for practically all involved in public life. Given the financial means and other privileges at the State’s disposal, such control has constituted the coveted trophy of any political party (and of each of its factions or ‘families’) for its power base was formed and shaped by promises to be honored through dispensing state positions and state funds. Even if elections were at times lost to the profit of some competing party (with its own factions, ‘families’ and electoral basis), there were always the next elections to look forward to. Eventually, switching alternate parties in government through rapidly succeeding elections became a more or less, stabilized political ‘habit’ whereby the power base of each party (and faction and ‘family’) acquired characteristics of a traditional belonging. The unity of the political system as a whole was thus assured, even if ideological differences and political agendas had to be filtered by such traditions and accommodated correspondingly.

In such stable conditions, profitable to all, no interest and hence, no political will to transform the State and change its role and function, has ever been envisioned: the rules of the political game had been set, and no political force was keen on changing them. Excepting, of course, the Communist Party. But this has been either outlawed or banned from the State for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It follows that with the political instance formed in such ways, grassroots movements rarely appeared or, if they did, they either remained extremely weak or soon became mere extensions of the political parties at play. In other words, political parties reigned undisturbed over everything social, while their internal connection to the State (excepting again the parties of the Left, either communist or critically valuing their communist descent) offered a clientelistic handle to individual –or family– aspirations. To make a (very) long story short, it is this kind of State that Syriza inherited and had to govern.

However, as Poulantzas has taught us, the State is not just an instrument of the ruling class; it is itself traversed by class struggle in its various forms and guises, even if most of such forms and guises have been consistently underplayed in popular perception. In any case, the experience of Syriza in government has verified the assertion: quite a

few of those working in the public sector surprisingly 'materialized' individually, if not collectively, not as dull bureaucrats, servile to those above, haughty to those below and arrogant toward the public, at large. They did not appear, that is, in the way they had been traditionally considered through the, more or less, standard experience of dealings with a public agency's representatives. Instead, they quite often emerged as eager to change their 'habits', waive the bureaucratic 'aura', promote honesty and oppose corruption, and participate at initiatives aiming to embody the idea that a ministry, say, is there to serve a particular sector of society, not dominate it. In short, they appeared as having been obliged, rather than willing to conform, to the 'standard' rules of State functioning and thus, as all too eager to change entrenched stances and attitudes, so as to recover real meaning in their work.

The realization that such was the state of affairs led to the design of an obvious policy: insofar as those assuming the political responsibility to run a governmental agency, (a) treated, right from the start, all those working in it as responsible citizens, proud in their self-respect, willing to fulfill their assigned tasks and serve public interest to the best of their abilities, irrespective of political preferences or even affiliations; (b) encouraged the free expression of ideas, proposals and initiatives, irrespective of hierarchical constraints, while appreciating well-defined hierarchies that are being run justly and efficiently; (c) helped create an open atmosphere of freedom, companionship and solidarity across the board; and (d) set an example by working in this way themselves, while relinquishing unjustifiable privileges, symbolic, material or otherwise, no matter how well tradition had entrenched them, that is, in short, insofar as such a policy was implemented, experience demonstrated that most of those working in the agency were all too ready to embrace a renovating spirit, in respect to their tasks, while practically everybody started to literally enjoy their work.

Big deal? Perhaps not, for I am well aware that such a policy may well sound trivial: practically all MBA programs teach as much. However, in a country like Greece, and with a State and a whole political system jealously defending the characteristics I tried to sketch, the policy in question, indeed, nurses the potential of important changes. For it may become a policy by which a governmental agency opens up, becomes directly acquainted and connected without intermediaries to what happens in the sectors of society it is responsible for, can assist and hence, enhance initiatives undertaken in a similar spirit outside its walls, and finally, become a *social subject* in its own right, a sub-

ject aspiring to equality, freedom and justice for all. In the longer run, society at large can come thus, to feel and act as *owning* a State that should be there only to serve its members, whilst the State itself starts to become dissolved within society. This is a tall order, indeed, and the path leading there certainly untrodden. Yet, there is nothing forbidding a Left government, particularly in Greece, to start walking on such a path, deepening and enlarging the feasible with each step taken, correcting its policy when necessary and creating the path by its very walking it. Popular support and the attendant initiatives from 'below' might then deepen the transformations and accelerate the pace.

The document *Account of Syriza 2012-2019* roughly describes this path and gives some examples. However, the same document tries to clarify that the overall surrounding conditions were not particularly propitious to lay emphasis on such an undertaking, while time proved not adequate for the initial steps to bear visible fruit.

Nonetheless a final remark seems to be in order. Very few people or agencies outside Greece, both to the left and to the right, seem to have taken into serious consideration the historically entrenched features of the Greek State I have tried to sketch. They rely on its purely formal characteristics (quite 'up-to-date', in their own right) and thus, tend to perceive it as a modern State more or less like the others. Accordingly, a policy such as the above, cannot help appearing, with all the force of the self-evident, as just a policy of further modernization with no left political bite to speak of. Needless to say, I disagree completely. Without implying, moreover, that we have 'first' to pass through some 'stage' of 'further' modernization so as to put forth 'socialist' demands only afterwards. On the contrary, the untrodden path I have been talking about is a path oriented *directly*, with *no* intermediate stages, to "infinite justice" or "democracy-to-come". That is, to communism.

The only forces having understood that such a policy is of altogether different proportions, are the Greek political forces struggling to wipe Syriza off the political map. And this, for very good reasons. Although they cannot escape estimating that the mild Keynesianism of Syriza's program is not promoting ostensible 'socialist' measures, it's coming to power endangers the very real interests invested in how the Greek State has been functioning since its inception, and for two hundred years. This is certainly worth fighting for, while this fact explains the uninhibited fury against Syriza, raging since 2012.

## Closure or Opening

That Syriza came to power in the first place, appeared as a kind of miracle, even to us who participated actively in the process. What were the forces that brought this about, how they brought it about, and the way they have been faring afterwards, and up to now, are big subjects in their own right, pregnant with essential lessons, all requiring profound examination. This conference tackles some of the issues involved. However, not only us in Greece, but also the world as a whole, is now facing an altogether different situation. The pandemic is in the process of changing everything. What the next day will bring and how each individual, each group of people or class, each country, big or small, each international institution, will fare afterwards, is up for grabs. Fights to that effect are already raging everywhere, either openly or behind the curtains. Of course, we cannot predict what will happen. But our values and our ideas, if exchanged systematically in solidarity, discussed thoroughly and elaborated carefully, are in a position to withstand most shocks, and capable of preparing us to effectively face the oncoming tasks. Once again, optimism of the will, and the 'poetic principle' I have tried to stress, are our best advisors.



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# Mapping new Theoretical Agendas and Ideas: The Crisis of Transformative Politics and Challenges for the Left: Theory and Praxis

*Michalis Spourdalakis*

“Crisis” is probably the most common word of our age. However, it was only during the last great financial crisis (2007-8) that the term was adopted universally, and that it became fashionable. Until then, the term was most commonly used by the left, both politically and analytically. Obviously, the persistence of the crisis, the versatility of the situations that challenged the reproductive capacity of the various concrete economic, social and political arrangements, in combination with the worsening of climate change, has made “crisis” the hyper word of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The recent COVID19 pandemic has only solidified the dominant and frequent use of term.

Inevitably, the inflationary use of the term “crisis” has become the explicit subtext to the most diverse situations. Especially in left jargon, the far too frequent use of the term contributes to a number of false conclusions: either that the generalized crisis is the opposite of a universal regular condition, which in effect subscribes to the mainstream conviction that crisis is just an exception to the usual, and tension-free arrangements; or to a vagueness regarding the specificities of the crisis, which is a precondition if one wants to strategize for the advancement of a post-capitalist society. Thus, while it is essential for the left strategy to understand and take the crisis of the historical condition seriously, its generalized, and at the same time, vague reference and use is politically unproductive since it leads to a desperate and pessimistic dissolution. Only a more specific analysis of the crisis can function as the beginning of a realistic theorization of a strategy that can be inspiring and effective.

As the theme of this article indicates, in the following pages I will argue that the main trait and key problem of the today’s challenge in left theory is not the long-standing dilemma between reform or revolution, but rather the crisis of transformative politics. After a brief analysis of the latter, I will lay out a kind of viable organizational road map for overcoming this crisis-specific crisis.

Given that crisis is not an abstract, or general, and universal condition, it is important to define it so that any strategic choice will be targeted and effective. Clearly, this is a precondition, if we were to set up a proper theoretical and political problematique appropriate to the current conjuncture. To this end, a couple of remarks will be useful.

To begin with, for over two decades we have been in the middle of a constantly intensifying political crisis. If politics means the temporary arrangement of social differences, antagonisms and conflicts at the institutional and administrative level, within a given hegemonic framework, there is no doubt that this crisis of politics is deep, and constantly expanding. It is a crisis that has resulted in a drastic and generally unexpected rearrangement of political and party system configurations. These developments were in some sense to be expected, if one considers the numerous multilateral mobilizations, the density of which has been unprecedented. Strong cases in point include: the so-called “anti- Globalization movement” in Seattle (1999); Genoa; the World and the European Social Forums; the riots in Paris and in Stockholm; the December 2008 youth uprising in Greece; the Indignados; the anti-austerity resistance and the movement in the squares in Greece; the Occupy movement; the Arab Spring; the rise of the extreme right; the Brexit vote; the Referendums around the so-called EU constitution in Scotland, in Italy and Catalonia; the yellow vests movement; and the recent mobilizations in Chile, and elsewhere. These events have added new forms and areas of political activity and have introduced new techniques of political mobilization, which bypassed the given institutions of political and social representation. However, the political innovation and new practices introduced by these developments managed to curb, to some extent, the causes of the political crisis, but did not manage to deal with them by offering more stable, let alone permanent, institutional answers and programmatic orientation.

In order to make a deeper analysis of this crisis, it will be useful to describe some of its key traits. In this way, we will be able to identify the dimension that prohibits it from producing political advances from the point of view of radical left. To begin with, the crisis has been identified as a typical case of a crisis of representation. In other words, it is a crisis that is the result of disconnection, the decoupling of social demand concerns and the overall developing dynamics with the political system. It is a crisis that has resulted in a multiple de-alignment of political parties from their social base. The latter seems to lead people and the sub-ordinate classes to a frequent search for quick and easy answers and prospects from politics. This is a tendency that fuels the rise of

pseudo anti-systemic political forces, most of which further strengthen the already strong radical right. It is in this context that we should understand the increasingly frequent phenomena of what Frank Deppe<sup>1</sup> calls *Bonapartist Democracy*, a democracy that seems to base its legitimation on a cloud of post-truth mechanisms.

Needless to say, at the base of these developments are the multi-lateral perils of rising social inequalities and the dramatic failure of the national and especially supranational institutions, which have somehow been assigned the duty of regulating the extremism of the market and of effectively responding to this challenge. The failure of these institutions has obviously exacerbated the problem, as the political constraints of these institutions was the reason and/or the excuse for many people to turn towards conservative and even reactionary political solutions, the most common of which has been selective protectionism and nationalism. It is in this sense that this crisis is a challenge for both the left and the right.

Of course, given our normative orientation and political commitment, it is important to see it as a challenge to the left. The left should not, or better yet cannot, afford to be absent and/or ineffective in dealing with today's crisis and its causes. After all, historically, it was from the left that this kind crisis was usually confronted, through reforms that somehow managed to change and/or transform the given political and institutional arrangements. However, today, especially after the dramatic impact of the pandemic, it seems that this capacity and possibility is no longer realistic. It seems that there is growing global consensus that after the long fiscal and economic crisis and the consequences of the pandemic, there is no reason to seek a post-crisis social, political, ecological and cultural vision, in previous or past forms. The questions of an alternative new orientation are not on our agenda, in any serious or systematic way. It is this issue that, we can argue, is at the very essence of the crisis, from the point of view of the (radical) left, it is the crisis of transformative politics. This argument brings us to the second point of our analysis: a comment on transformative politics.

A simple definition of transformative politics is the tendency, the will and the power to transform given structures and relations. More concretely, transformative politics entails the collective efforts of an agency to organize, perform and institute arrangements alternative to given structures. The prerequisite of this has to do with the identification

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1 Frank Deppe, (2013), *Authoritarian Capitalism*, Athens, Poulantzas Institute.

of the needed changes, the mapping of the areas where these changes should be performed, as well as the locales of the resistance, which is always the departing point of any effort for social transformation. Of course, transformative politics includes the shaping, on a normative base, of a vision that functions as an inspiration and a mobilizing force, which contributes to the consolidation of social and political alliance, upon which the political agency of transformation is based.

Given the often simplistic and irrational ideas on these issues that exist, I must underline that while this discussion should be organized on the basis of reason, popular sentiments and historical cultural traits should not be overlooked. On the contrary, one must capitalize on the given social situation and constantly try to create space(s) for all those involved in the project of transformation. The latter should clearly include creating the conditions a) for opening the possibilities of the radical democratic transformation of social and political institutions of representation, and b) for the democratization of the state.

As I am an active member of SYRIZA, my arguments should not be seen as a criticism of omissions and mistakes of the government of the party of the Greek radical left (2015-19). Although, admittedly the latter cannot but be in the back of my mind, the point here is different. In fact, if one compares the programmatic proposals of the recent radical efforts (Podemos, Bloco, SYRIZA, etc.) with previous expressions of the left, which were classified as being reformist left in the 1980s (e.g., the Common Program in France 1981, the Labour Party Manifesto of 1983, etc.), one can clearly see that despite today's radical rhetoric, the programmatic ambitions are more timid than the recent past. The mainstream political scientists did, in an indirect fashion, identify the phenomenon, when they pointed out that today, the dominant trend in government politics is "policy oriented", while those policies that are "value oriented", are marginal and moving out of the political and party competition.

The remarks of the previous paragraph should be the departing point for mapping the theoretical agenda and direction of the radical left today. This exercise is not, and cannot be, a theoretical and an abstract one. However, this debate should not revamp the old debate on the dilemmas on "reform or revolution", and the oversimplifications that characterized it, for at least two reasons.

First, this dilemma is, to a great extent, based upon a dominant misconception of the radical left that, reforms are always a deferral of revolution. Some people think that a change in the current is fundamentally opposed to the idea of a revolution, which is rightly conceived as a radical rupture. This misconception lies in the mistaken idea that revolutions are instantaneous affairs. This is the reason that it should be clarified that revolution is not when people come with guns, when they surround a fortress, or take over a city. A perception like this seems to confuse revolution with insurrection. Of course, insurrection is one possible initial stage of revolution, while revolution is much more, as it is a long process.<sup>2</sup> In fact, to have a socialist revolution, you need two things. First, you need the working-class majority to understand what is wrong with capitalism, and to see the need for its replacement. Second, you need the working-class majority to be strong enough to really go head-to-head with capital, to stand a chance at winning. When the left thinks about how to choose its campaigns, it should focus its energy on — we should always be asking whether the campaign serves these purposes — building revolutionary consciousness and confidence, and building working-class power.

Second, even if we choose to ignore the complexities of the dilemma, this long crisis has unleashed a more aggressive face of capitalism, which has resulted in an intense increase in inequality and exacerbated its antisocial contradictions. The social hardships that this development has bequeathed to societies around the world has pushed aside the historical dilemma (reform or revolution) and has brought the task of relieving social pain into the equation. Thus, the question of ameliorating and alleviating immediate social needs should be at the top of the theoretical agenda of the radical left.

This realization fully legitimizes the claim that the left should strive for “revolutionary reforms” and stop thinking that is an impossible and contradictory task. Many inspiring left theorists have alluded to this issue and argued in this vein since the late 1960s. They recognized that there are some reforms that better position us to square off with capitalism. Andre Gorz,<sup>3</sup> in a well-known article published in the *Socialist Register* (1968), came up with a term for this kind of reform: he called it a ‘non-reformist reform’. This is a rather controversial call, but it makes sense, if one takes into serious consideration the recent calamities, which have been exacerbated beyond any proportion during the

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Camejo (1976), *Racism, revolution, reaction, 1861-1877: The rise and fall of radical Reconstruction*, Monad Press

<sup>3</sup> Andre Gorz (1968), “Reform and Revolution”, R. Miliband, J. Saville (eds), *Socialist Register*, London: Merlin Press, pp.111-134.

recent pandemic. Reformism is when your responsibility and mission is to challenge the system, to make people's lives better, but not really to alter the basic structure at the end of the day. And reformists prefer changes that give people a much-needed helping hand, but do not really undermine capitalism. But there are other kinds of reforms, those that David Harvey,<sup>4</sup> calls, in his own words, "impossible reforms". These are reforms that shift the balance of power in a dramatic way, even if they do not by themselves demolish all of capitalism. They are reforms that broaden the popular political imagination, strengthen the confidence of the subordinate classes and give shape and solidity to working-class institutions and political formations.

In a provocative article in the 2020 volume of *Socialist Register*, Steve Maher, Sam Gindin, and Leo Panitch<sup>5</sup> propose in this context a new kind of gradualism, of course far away from the dated social democratic Fabian logic or Bernstein's model of "Evolutionary Socialism." "A first condition for building on electoral success would be to find the space to deliver some material gains for the working classes. In the context of the massive growth of inequality and high profits in both the UK and the US, there is in fact both the ideological and economic space for such demonstrated improvements. But a second condition would be to build on this with a systematic political education program, internal to the party and beyond, based on a sober acknowledgment of the barriers the new socialist movement now faces, and what must be done to overcome them to realize that movement's larger potentials. This would involve explicitly recognizing that reforms and education are not enough. Some gestures towards the future must be introduced and struggled over in the present. This requires politics that is at every step engaged in facing squarely the gradualist dilemma: giant steps are impossible, small steps risk being swallowed into the systemic logic of the system."

To avoid these dangers, the authors propose that "the gradualism involved would rather be a strategic one. The constraints that arise here – like how the reforms would be paid for and the risk of capital outflows, which run up against the powerful forces embedded in transnational financial markets in particular – are intimidatingly real. What would have to be strategically addressed, first, would be how to most constructively use the entry into government to transform state institutions so as render them capable of fully supporting the reforms. But this would need to be combined with how to continue

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4 David Harvey (2014), *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, London: Profile Books.

5 Steve Maher, Sam Gindin, Leo Panitch, (2020), "Class Politics, Socialist Policies, Capitalist Constraints", in L. Panitch and G. Albo (eds) *Beyond Market Dystopia. New Ways of Living*, London: Merlin Press, pp. 1-29.

to build a politically coherent working class, which increasingly understands what it is up against, and develops a growing self-assurance to push ahead. In other words, the strategic orientation of this new gradualism would be above all attuned to how to link policies of reform to the development of the sorts of state and class capacities that together would make the possibility of socialism realizable”.

No one can talk about a political, socialist strategy without serious reference to the political party. Of course, we should not forget that a party, before anything else, means organization. It is within this context that theoretical challenges and new radical ideas have a chance to become real possibilities.

Thus, new manifestos, programs, political strategic planning, do not have a chance unless they are coordinated with the new organizational structure, which is not only in accordance with the new developments of the social division of labor, but is also appropriate to accommodate the materialization of the program and the strategic choices. This process can include at least the following steps: a) critical analyses of the current historical (sociopolitical, cultural) divides; b) a program of “non-reformist reforms”; c) organizational changes; d) concrete strategic planning to do all the above, which will illuminate the dialectic coherence of 1-3; e) the declaration of a manifesto to express all of these in a comprehensive fashion.

The unity of the left is an essential part of the effectiveness of this strategy. Of course, the effective future of the left is based on a serious and systematic analysis of social dynamics, an appropriate organizational structure capable of accommodating both programmatic ambitions and political strategy. However, the radical left is trying to overcome both the divisions between the politics of the social democratic tradition and those of the poly-Leninist traditions on the one hand, and the “non-party” politics of the social movements.

Schematically speaking, my point here is that any realistic and effective “socialist strategy” should refer to the entire left, to the totality of left traditions. The prime condition for this project is, a) to overcome the shortcomings of all aspects of our traditions, and b) to make productive use of the achievements and pitfalls of those very traditions. To put it differently, the much-needed unity should be pursued both “against” and also “beyond” all currents and traditions of the left.

Against and beyond will require different strategies for different traditions. For the poly-Leninist communist tradition, the once upon a time pro-soviet and/or Maoist, we have to deal with its social and particularly its economic reductionism, its instrumentalist understanding of political power, of bureaucracy, its opportunist understanding and use of democracy and civil rights, as well as its anthropomorphic understanding of imperialism. Furthermore, its internationalist rhetoric is usually overstretched only to cover its deep nationalist current and parochialism. And finally, we must address the pretense of its quasi-revolutionary rhetoric, which has paralyzing effects since it puts off every transforming reform until the apocalyptic D-day of grand revolution. However, we must not overlook the strong militancy and commitment that characterize this tradition, which tend to be rare these days.

With regard to the reformist, the social democratic Left, “against and beyond” means that we need to confront its naïve parliamentarism and governmentalism, its abandonment of any reference to the social agent, its defeatist and at the same time naïve understanding of the markets, and its acceptance in essence of “competitive austerity”, as a model of a modernizing ideal and as base for the entire organization of the society. We also need to confront its systematic and wholesale attack on “populism”, which overlooks the fact that behind various populist practices are peoples’ real social needs and demands. However, its tendency not to abstain from its effort to assume governmental responsibilities is something that is not a given for the radical left.

With regard to social movements, we need to deal with the movements’ indifference towards central governmental political institutions, their limited and often single-issue approach to the political, and their privileged response to the so-called post-materialism, which has led to self-indulgent practices or to communal isolationism. However, one should not forget the contribution of this left current to constantly enriching the political agenda.

Regarding the so-called ultra-leftist or the non-parliamentary left, we have to confront this tradition’s sectarianism, its rejection of gradual reform, as well any genuine participation in the existing institutions of political or social representation, its self-containment with its innumerable, almost masochistic splits, as well as its fictional construction of reality, which is usually based upon an imaginary social division of labour. On the positive aspects of this political current, one should recognize its strong capacity to renew the means of political mobilization, something particularly useful nowadays.

For such a project we need a political agent. A political party. A party that will come into being as this project is materialized. This party/political organization will emerge as the coming together of the left traditions. The strategy of left's unity needs a new party that is flexible and pluralistic in its functions, with a strong democratic and participatory culture, while its federated democratic structure would prevent the concentration of power by the leader and its camarilla.

One can think of several tasks/projects for this political agent. It must become a unifying force for the Left, and at the same time, the actual expression of that commitment to unity. These tasks/projects could act as the political and programmatic glue of left unity and the decisive proof that the left is acting "against" its own shortcomings, its own fragmenting practices, and is moving "beyond" its past contributions and achievements. Let us list some of the possible tasks of the left, as conditioned by the current crisis. The new political organization, the new politically effective party, should:

- a. Learn to "speak" new languages: the "languages" of the so-called apolitical youth, of the unemployed, the language of the poor and the destitute, the language of those who live next to us. Their mother-tongue is not ours, and finally the language of the new communicative and mobilizing technologies.
- b. Look back at our history. This party of the entire left will take off, not by sweeping its history under the rug, but by confronting it critically. This is our exclusive obligation, as I already mentioned, to restore our history and the ideas that have inspired us so far. This is a task that can become a unifying, as well as a liberating, factor for our strategy, so long as it is done in a critical fashion and does not affect our political practices and daily struggles in an immediate way.
- c. Bring the new social divides to the fore, in an ongoing effort to facilitate political expression from a class perspective, both at the national and international levels (e.g., EU).
- d. Restore our own political confidence about our ideas and vision. This lack of confidence is paralyzing and politically defeatist. Of course, this confidence should not be the result of a naïve ignorant certainty of the "born-again", but should be grounded in society and never upon our capacity to manage state priorities, needs

and commitments, or upon our skills to use the all-powerful media, although these two are among the much-needed skills that we need to improve upon.

e. Find a balance between practice, rhetoric and programmatic discourse, both in the fields of social struggles and institutional battles and challenges.

All this might well sound like wishful thinking. Many will think that this is “a good idea if you can do it”. Fair enough. However, the economic crisis is in the process of destroying all the false promises of the existing “socialist strategy”, which was set off by demarcating our possible political allies, from pipe dreamer revolutionaries to naïve humanizing capitalist types, and from social movement idealists and self-indulgent post-modernists, new-age types, to all sorts of sectarian extra-parliamentary leftists. Thus, we should proceed with prudence and patience, not only because we have to overcome long established tensions and suspicions among the left of various backgrounds, but primarily because the ruins of the crisis may lead us to hasty initiatives, which might be anti-neoliberal but not anti-capitalist. This is a recipe for failure since our “socialist strategy” will be a strategy without socialism. It is a strategy that cannot create a counterpoint to the crisis of transformative politics and would simply repeat the tragic failure of the left to intervene effectively in the crisis of the 1970s. To do so now, however, would be a “farce” with more far reaching and devastating effects.

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# The new thesis eleven

*Boaventura de Sousa Santos*

In 1845, shortly after he published the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx wrote his *Theses on Feuerbach*. The *Theses* were his first attempt at building a materialist philosophy that was centered on transformative praxis and radically different from dominant thinking, whose main exponent at the time was Ludwig Feuerbach. The famous thesis eleven, the best known of them all, reads: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” The word “philosophers” is used here in a broad sense, as referring to the producers of erudite knowledge, which nowadays might include the whole of humanistic and scientific knowledge deemed basic, as opposed to applied knowledge. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, this particular thesis raises two problems. The first problem is that it is not true that the philosophers’ reflections on the world invariably failed to have any impact, in terms of changing it. And even if that were ever the case, it ceased to be so after the emergence of capitalism or, to use a broader term, after the emergence of Western modernity, especially from the 16th century onwards. The studies on the sociology of knowledge of the last fifty years unequivocally show that the dominant interpretations of the world of a given period are the ones that legitimize, enable or pave the way for the social changes carried out by the dominant classes or groups.

The best illustration of this point is the Cartesian conception of the nature-society or nature-humanity dichotomy. To conceive of nature and society (or humanity) as two totally separate, independent entities, as is the case with the body-soul dichotomy – two substances, in Descartes’s terminology – and to build an entire philosophical system on such a foundation, is quite a revolutionary innovation. It goes against common sense, since we are incapable of imagining any human activity without the participation of nature in some form or another. This is true about the very capacity and act of imagining to begin with, given its cerebral, neurological component. In fact, if there is nature in human beings – human nature, that is – it would be hard to conceive of it as having nothing to do with non-human nature. To be sure, the Cartesian conception has plenty of antecedents, from the oldest in the *Old Testament* (the book of *Genesis*) to the more recent ones of Descartes’ quasi-contemporary Francis Bacon, for whom man’s mission

is to master nature. But it was Descartes who gave dualism the consistency of an entire philosophical system.

The nature-society dualism, according to which humanity is totally independent from nature, just as the latter is totally independent of society, is deeply constitutive of the way in which we conceive of the world and of our presence and rootedness in it, so that it becomes all but impossible for us to think in alternative ways, never mind if common sense keeps reminding us that no part of what we are, think or do can be said to be devoid of nature. Why, then, this dominance and quasi-evidence, both at the scientific and philosophical level, of the total separation between nature and society? It has been fully demonstrated that such separation, however absurd, was a necessary precondition for the expansion of capitalism. Without such a conception it would have been impossible to legitimize the principles of unchecked exploitation and appropriation underlying the capitalist enterprise since it first started. The dualism contained a principle of radical hierarchical differentiation between the superiority of humanity/society and the inferiority of nature. The differentiation was radical, in that it rested on a sort of difference that was constitutive, ontological, and inscribed in the plans of divine creation.

This led, on the one hand, to nature being transformed into a resource, unconditionally available for appropriation and exploitation by man for his exclusive benefit. On the other hand, it allowed for everything that was viewed as nature to be appropriated in similar fashion. In other words, nature, broadly considered, came to encompass beings that, by reason of their being so close to the natural world, could not be viewed as fully human. Racism was thus reconfigured to signify the natural inferiority of the black race, and therefore the “natural” conversion of slaves into commodities. That was the conversion Father António Vieira (the famous Portuguese Jesuit of the 17th century) never mentioned, but which is implied in all the other conversions he brilliantly spoke about in his sermons. Appropriation became the underside of the over-exploitation of the workforce. The same happened in the case of women, and the reconfiguration of women’s “natural” inferiority, which dated from much further back. This inferiority was eventually converted into the condition for the appropriation and over-exploitation of women, which in their case consisted mainly in the appropriation of unpaid work and family caregiving. In spite of being as productive as the other kind, this type of work was conventionally labeled as reproductive so that it could be devalued, and Marxism

never disowned that convention. Since that time, the idea of humanity has necessarily coexisted with the idea of subhumanity – the subhumanity of racialized, sexualized bodies. It is thus possible to conclude that the Cartesian understanding of the world has always been steeped to the marrow in the capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal transformation of the world.

In light of this, the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach raises a second problem. In order to address the grave issues facing the world today – from the outrageous levels of social inequality to the environmental and ecological crisis to irreversible global warming, desertification, shortage of drinking water, the disappearance of coastal regions, extreme “natural” events, etc. – it is just not possible to imagine a transformative practice for solving these problems unless we are equipped with a different understanding of the world. This new understanding has to reclaim, at a new level, the commonsensical interdependence between humanity/society and nature. It has to be based on the notion that between human nature and all other natures there exist relations, not substances; that nature is inherent in humanity and that the reverse is equally true; that it is counterintuitive to think that nature belongs to us, unless we also bear in mind that we belong to Nature.

It's not going to be easy. Militating against this new understanding, and hence new transformation of the world, in the capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal societies in which we live, there are many deep-seated interests. As I have insistently argued, the building of a new understanding of the world will be the outcome of a collective and epochal effort, which is to say that it will take place as part of a paradigmatic transformation of society. Capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal civilization has no future, and its present state makes that so obvious that in order to prevail, it has to resort to violence, repression, wars both declared and undeclared, to a permanent state of emergency, and to the unprecedented destruction of what it continues to call a natural, hence endlessly available, resource. My personal contribution to this collective effort has consisted in the formulation of what I term epistemologies of the South.<sup>1</sup> I do not envisage the South as a geographical place, but rather as a metaphor for the knowledges born in the struggles of the oppressed and excluded, against the systemic injustices caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Nonetheless, many of those who make up the epistemological South lead their lives in the geographical South.

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<sup>1</sup> *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Routledge, 2014; *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*. Duke University Press, 2018.

These knowledges have never been recognized as contributions toward a better understanding of the world by the holders of erudite or scholarly knowledge, be it philosophy or the social and human sciences. That is why these groups have been radically excluded. Theirs was, in fact, an abyssal exclusion, the result of an abyssal line that came to separate the world of the fully human, where “only” exploitation is possible (metropolitan sociability), from the world of the subhumans, *i.e.*, of disposable populations, where appropriation and over-exploitation are possible (colonial sociability). The line and the resulting divide have been prevalent since the 16th century. The epistemologies of the South seek to reclaim the knowledges that are produced on the other side of the abyssal divide – the colonial side of exclusion – so as to integrate them into broader ecologies of knowledges where they will be in a position to interact with scientific and philosophic knowledge, with the aim of building a novel understanding/transformation of the world. Those knowledges, hitherto subjected to invisibility, ridicule, and suppression, have been produced as much by the workers who fought against non-abyssal exclusion (the metropolitan zone), as by the vast populations of racialized and sexualized bodies resisting abyssal exclusion (the colonial zone). By focusing on the latter zone in particular, the epistemologies of the South place an emphasis on subhumans, that is, precisely on those who have been viewed as being closer to nature. Now, the knowledges produced by such groups, their extreme diversity notwithstanding, are foreign to Cartesian dualism. On the contrary, they conceive of non-human nature as being deeply embedded in social-human life, and vice versa. As the indigenous peoples of the Americas put it, “nature does not belong to us, it is us who belong to nature”. Peasants all around the world do not think very differently, and the same applies to ever increasing groups of young urban ecologists all over the planet.

This amounts to saying that the social groups that have been most radically excluded by capitalist, colonialist, patriarchal society, many of which have been considered to be the remnants of a past now in the process of becoming extinct or whitewashed, are the ones that, from the standpoint of the epistemologies of the South, are pointing toward a future that is not only viable but also worthy of humanity, and of all the human and non-human natures of which humanity is made. As part of a collective effort, the epistemologies of the South are a work in progress, and this work has hardly begun. In my own case, I believe that, so far, I have not yet fully grasped all the analytical and transformative richness of the epistemologies of the South I have been putting forward. I have highlighted the fact that the three main modes of modern domination – capitalism,

colonialism, and patriarchy – work in a concerted manner that tends to vary with the social, historical, and cultural context. But as yet, I have not paid enough attention to the fact that this mode of domination rests to such a degree on the society/nature duality that no liberation struggle will ever succeed unless that duality is overcome.

Given all this, the new thesis eleven should read something like this: “philosophers, social scientists, and scholars in the humanities should cooperate with all those who struggle against domination, so as to generate ways of understanding the world that promote transformative practices leading to the simultaneous liberation of the human and the non-human world.” It is a lot less elegant than the original thesis eleven, but it may prove more helpful.

## **Implications for the Left**

1. The Left has lost the capacity for interacting with the working people, for understanding their anxieties and aspirations, their language and their silences. The working people (no longer a single class) are today a highly heterogeneous social entity, including workers from different cultural and social backgrounds and sharing the conditions of precariousness and irreversible impoverishment. The world is today much wider than the European world; the European world is today much more diverse than it was one hundred years ago (the colonial has returned as immigrant or as suspect of terrorism, in both cases falling prey to police brutality). Apparently unaware of this, most left thinking and left parties, both in Europe and outside Europe, go on subscribing to the Northcentric epistemologies and theories elaborated in a few European countries at the end of the nineteenth century, which were indeed adequate to the needs and aspirations of the working classes of the time. The left is totally out of touch today, and the void has been filled by extreme-right groups and reactionary religious groups. The latter live in the same communities where the working people live and speak the same language, while the conventional left lives in more comfortable environments and safer neighborhoods and speaks an obscure, formatted language. The left has given up reaching out. It requests instead to be reached out to.

2. We are entering a period of growing incompatibility between liberal democracy and capitalism. The global rise of the extreme-right is one of the symptoms. The pandemic has further aggravated the living conditions of the working people. Global capital does not feel the need to make concessions. Thus, transformative politics must be premised

upon five conditions: ecologies of diverse ideas/ideals of liberation; pragmatic alliances; memory; social cohesion; institutional/extra-institutional dialectics.

The first condition is premised upon deep listening and intercultural understanding of working people's anxieties, uncertainties, and aspirations. The current political leaders of the left have to undergo a reeducation process, most of it taking place inside the working places and the impoverished communities and neighborhoods.

The second condition implies overcoming a tradition of sectarianism and dogmatism that has led to self-defeatist and counter-productive fragmentation and infighting. The other (only apparently paradoxical) side of sectarianism has been a recurrent misidentification of the real adversaries and an easier availability to form coalitions with right parties than with other left parties. Pragmatic alliances are concrete, time-bound, and limited political articulations with the objective of acceding to power or of governing, once in power. Because of their limited ambit, the parties involved in such alliances never give away their specific political identity. Ideally, such pragmatic alliances should be documented in writing and made public.<sup>2</sup>

The third condition confronts our educational systems, which have been engaged in actively forgetting the dark periods of fascism, nazism, dictatorship, colonialism. Besides, popular education leading to a deeper inter-knowledge among different popular movements and organizations must be encouraged.

The fourth condition calls for robust public social policies, progressive taxation, wealth redistribution. The state is contested terrain and cannot be abandoned to the right. But, on the other hand, the defence of the public and of the commons goes beyond the state and even beyond the national boundaries. Universal basic income is indispensable.

The fifth condition starts from the fact that the left has become too comfortable with working inside the institutions, while the institutions are less and less trustworthy to carry out progressive demands. From now on, it is important to have one foot in the institutions and one foot in the grassroots organizations, as well as in the peaceful protests in the streets and squares, the only places that have not been colonized by dominant ideas

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<sup>2</sup> I have dealt with this issue with reference to Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico in *Izquierdas del mundo, ¡uníos!*. Icaria, 2018.

and interests. This political stance calls for parties and social movements capable of sharing struggles without trying to cannibalize each other. Of course, the left no longer has a monopoly on the streets and squares. The extreme-right is there, as well.



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# European paradoxes of humanness and non-Eurocentric approaches: Refugees as “alien invaders”

*Michalis Bartsidis*

**R**ecently, the former Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, in his speech at the congress of the ruling party, openly characterized the immigrants as “invaders”, by insisting on the term “illegal”. Similarly, the self-proclaimed “liberal”, Andreas Andrianopoulos, wondered if the flows are the product of genuine refugee escape or the result of premeditated - by means of violent coercion, often Islamic - penetration of ‘unable to be assimilated’ “others”. At the same time, the Bishop of Chios, described the refugees as “expatriates of the Turkish occupiers”, referring directly to a foreign invasion aiming for conquest. The use of the notion of the asymmetric, heterogeneous and dangerous ‘other’ as an invader, unfortunately, is no longer limited to the usual TV stars of the extreme right, having expanded to the entire social and ideological spectrum.

The relevant ideological elaborations preceded for some time in the European space and the USA. Viktor Orban, the prime minister of Hungary, followed the line that refugees should not be considered refugees, but rather “Muslim invaders”, further exacerbating the conflict between the countries of Eastern Europe and the EU, while considering the latter as an instrument for globalization, the overthrow of the nation-state and the political disappearance of the countries of Western Europe. The same approach was taken by Donald Trump, the German AfD, Matteo Salvini, the Spanish Vox and “Middle England” during the fruitless negotiations on Brexit. Repeated events confirm that the forces of return to a closed and protected world of like-mindedness, tradition and order prevail over the forces of ‘equaliberty’ and social rights, even if they have been hard hit since Trump’s defeat. If we assess the reactions to the refugee movements and the evolution of European integration, we will see the twisting of the two factors in a downward spiral. But explanations based on economic insecurity are not enough to illuminate the great ideological shift. There is something radical in European ideology that alienates Western civilized natives, the indigenous, from the non-Western refugees, the foreigners as invaders.

## After Europe

Until now, Europe, historically accustomed to divisions and wars, has hoped to be a guiding regulatory ideal, a way of resolving social conflicts and cultural divisions. We considered a new model of integration in Europe feasible, given the complex political and ethical issues posed by the integration process; a feasible new way of eliminating multiple exclusions and inequalities and, ultimately, the anthropological differences that divide and prioritize the notion of human to citizens and non-citizens. It seems that the crisis of the last decade has led this original historical experiment to the brink of disintegration, for ideological rather than just economic reasons. The disappearance and final extinction of the ideal Europe as a place of continuous integration of humanity, reveals what the indigenous believe: “we are people because we are Europeans”. It is this idea that lies behind the erection of fences, walls and Moria-type camps.

Historically, the nation-state has incorporated class struggles for political and social rights. On the contrary, the issue of immigration is particularly crucial to the European identity, as the struggle for immigrants’ rights cannot be incorporated, and therefore, requires some form of integration beyond the nation-state. Immigrants are a ‘residue’ (résidu) that is not integrated into the nation-state and, as we now see, not even into the failing European integration. They are the body that lurks, that is not easily detected, that will always be foreign and brought from elsewhere, an asymmetric threat. Immigration is, after all, shaking up the post-Cold War order as fluxes have since been the largest relocation movements. According to the Bulgarian thinker, Ivan Krastev, the reactions of the inhabitants of the European continent to the refugee fluxes are a revolt against universality.<sup>1</sup> The competition, and the law of the strongest, prevailed as a common policy, the fear of the transfer of “popular sovereignty” to a postnational level, the cultural homogeneity over the heterogeneous trans-national. Politics were blocked, destroying what was needed to be built, that is, a supranational or supra-state structure, in a way that promoted democracy, and so integration led to the “weak super-State”. Europe no longer behaves as a model of a future world.

## Internal exclusion of people

The ideal of classical cosmopolitanism of the civilized man who through Reason is led to progress and to a united humanity, has ceased to function. Integration as interdepend-

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Krastev (2017). *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 34-38.

ence has already happened; it is already a major event, unrepeatable and irreversible, as everyone communicates with everyone due to technology and travel. However, humanity is irrevocably divided by perpetuating inequalities and exclusions. We live in a paradoxical condition, where exclusions increase in conditions of generalized communication (globalization), a condition which no longer means a progressive development. What is the cause of this paradoxical and unprecedented condition of complexity and exclusion? It is due to the crisis of ideology-hegemony-sovereignty (in Marxist terms), or, with philosophical vocabulary, it is due to the paradox that “*globalization*” *develops without a universal ideal*. This is precisely the updated meaning of the Gramscian concept of the interregnum, of the impossibility of producing a new universal ideal capable of *articulating practices and forces into a visible political outcome*. This is why differences and inequalities are transformed into irreducible differences that are not subject to institutional mediation and transformation; they are transmuted into heterogeneous, non-tangent and incompatible identities. The different becomes mutated, an alien coming from another universe, therefore an “invader”, the object only of fear and hatred on the part of the native-indigenous citizen, a non-human.<sup>2</sup> Classifications and hierarchies become completely independent of any factor that has given them some historicity, and therefore naturalize every ability and quality of individuals up to, including the human status itself, humanness. We can only recognize, even at the last moment, that the concept of “humanness” does not refer to the simple concept provided by theoretical humanism, but to a complex concept according to which humanity has always been divided. Moreover, to recognize that the “human” status was at stake in conflicts and struggles, therefore a political outcome. What remains to be done, then, is to consider whether the European ideal can be re-established as a unity of difference instead of a unity of similarity, or, in other words, the question of, what is the meaning of humanness as a difference.

## Anthropological differences

This is the time to move to the anthropological field by exploiting the concept of anthropological differences introduced by Balibar. In this conceptual frame, such differences are those between intellectual/manual labour, the gender difference, the generational

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between indigenous (bodenständig) and nomads by Heidegger was an organizational axis of his own anti-Semitism and Nazi beliefs, see M. Heidegger, *Nature, History, State*. 1933-1934, English translated and edited by Gr. Fried, R. Polt, Bloomsbury, London 2015, pp. 55-56 and Vicky Iacovou, *Living In Dark Times*, p.153. Here we emphasize the historicity of anthropological differences, a politically critical point in any discussion of their genealogy and possible philosophical relevance to Heidegger's category of ontological difference.

difference between young/old, the difference between the mentally healthy and those not. These are differences between two elements that are *heterogeneous* and *irreducible* to each other without, however, being incompatible. These differences cross human nature-essence, combine a biological and a historical aspect of the individual, a real and an imaginary aspect of the unity of the individual. They signify the reality of the imaginary in the human experience, they delimit a horizon before inequalities of interests arise. Anthropological differences are not expressed by the institutionalisation of equality, as long as this remains purely external to them; and, because they are not abolished, they are repelled. They create a barrier to communication and universality, so that we cannot all think the same way. It is the basis of the production of discrimination and hierarchies by racist thinking that treats them as *natural* and *unbridgeable*, but also the possibility for the opposite, that is, to consider them as political-institutional formations. Finally, they highlight the limits of politics and the need to transform them so that not only the human-citizen is included, but also the human with fantasies and desires. These are identity inequalities that require recognition and respect and are exercised not abstractly but in separate, personal relationships.

## Politics of the difference

Critical discussion on the basis of difference refers to the borders and the European identity, Europe's international role and its place in the world, democracy and political unity beyond nation. From the critical debate between European philosophy and postcolonial critique as well as in recent Decolonial Studies, an interesting network of positions on the politics of difference emerges. It is not the place to develop them here but to refer in more detail to one of them, as it seems to promise a better grasp in understanding the advance of meta-fascisms.<sup>3</sup>

Politics have already been proposed that explain Europe's relationship with the rest of the world, such as the "vanishing mediator" of Balibar, the "ex-centric" structure of the world in the analysis of the Global South, the new geographical models of the global space that highlight the geopolitical and cultural "contact zones". These are non-Eurocentric representations that *maintain and preserve each relationship separately* without

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3 Bartsidis, Michalis (2020), "European Paradoxes of Humanness: Discussing Étienne Balibar's work on Europe", *Cultural Critique*, 106, Winter 2020, 155-186.

mixing them into a Eurocentric, overall picture. Whatever exist partly here, may be a whole everywhere else. In the “contact zones”, translation emerges as politics of communication and construction of a global, but internally competitive, public space, as an educational transnational movement; the role of intellectuals and artists is opened up and they - instead of law experts - can act as “translators” for the conception of a new citizenship instead of legal ones. In the politics of translation, we must keep in mind that the moving crowds acting as (the) writers, enter the public sphere bringing with them their own traditions, sensibilities, positions and are “carried” by their language. In this way, they become “spoken subjects” (Spivak and Balibar).<sup>4</sup>

Given the above, it appears that the universal ideal which is vital to structuring and depicting the world today is not the *transparent a priori inter-subjective rationalism* of a conventional cosmopolitanism, according to which all different identities are recognized as its replicas. On the contrary, it consists equally of *different* and *heterogeneous* traditions, and is determined by contradictions and conflicts. The “translators” - mediators belong to different cultures without belonging exclusively to anyone and show a version of politics that intervenes successfully as long as they act positively as “foreigners from inside”. These ideas and practices have emerged and are working, but they are opposed by a reverse model of politics of difference, that interests us most.

## Refugees as “alien invaders”

*“People are strange when you’re a stranger,  
faces look ugly when you’re alone”*  
(Jim Morrison)

Let us now return to the central problem by examining a negative version of “foreigners from inside” that seems to prevail. The shift to authoritarian conservatism does not stem from romantic nationalism, as indigenous endangered majorities have nowhere to return, but from the fear and frustration over the loss of rights, a fear projected on the image of the foreign-born’s invasion (Krastev). We are not talking about the immigrant, in person, but about the idea of the immigrant, the other, the different, as the latent body. A host virus that sticks to the human face and alters it, threatens to alter its physiognomy. A being of unknown origin, who is not located and always remains a “foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, and Étienne Balibar. 2010. “Un entretien sur la subalternité.” *Transeuropeennes*, [http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/223/Un\\_entretien\\_sur\\_la\\_subalternite](http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/223/Un_entretien_sur_la_subalternite)

body” (Sidi Mohammed Barkat),<sup>5</sup> uncanny (Freud), abject and power of horror (Kristeva). As westerners, we can host them but generally, we do not accept that they are like us, or that they can be fully integrated someday. A *secondary presentation* of the Other as heterogeneous, asymmetric and dangerous has been organized and crystallized, independent from the reality of social differences and inequalities. Ideology always represents the imaginary relations of individuals with the real, but what we observe is that now it is locked and confined in this fetishist and emblematic figure of the “alien as an invader”. When there is no operating, classical universal ideal that orients us in history, then, soaring subjects that we are, we remain “stuck” on some *images in the imaginary*. It is wrong to imagine that the “hidden truth” of politics is class warfare, exploitation, and that decrystallization into national and ethnic conflicts is the diversion, the “wrong” focus. If there is, then, a historical impasse as a result of defeat, it is not simply the failures of the European Left, but the general ideological crisis as a condition of our time. TINA is not just about economics; it is not just about revolutionary ideologies. Nor, of course, about the class struggle, as we have been witnessing for years that the working class is also voting for far-right parties, obviously now with the Brexiters, the vote for the German Afd, and everywhere in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Autonomy in the imaginary, the only real mutation, can be understood on the basis of a philosophical anthropology; and that is where politics must work.

The refugees and immigrants are integrated into the European “corps by way of exception”, as a foreign entity whose human nature is ambiguous. The principle of equality is not in question, but its application is postponed. A paradoxical relational schema between exclusion and inclusion is described by Balibar in a brief account. This schema depicts a fluctuated state of “foreigners,” a state that lies somewhere between the human and the inhuman and sustains the position of the foreigner as alien. What has great significance in our society is the retention of a collective representation of the “foreigner”, not merely as different, but also as naturally asymmetrical. The reason for this is that our Western understanding of difference insists on the relational asymmetry between “us and them”, which is used to construct the concept of ‘human’ on a social and political level.

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5 Barkat, Sidi Mohammed. 2005. *Le Corps d'exception: Les artifices du pouvoir colonial et la destruction de la vie*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.

6 In his opening speech at “Left Theory 21st II” Conference, Dimitris Tzanakopoulos reminded us of Nikos Poulantzas’ critique of the “charm” theories of fascism to the working class. This retains its significance, but the current framework of analysis raises the question in a more relativized and more general basis, cf. N. Poulantzas, On the Popular Echo of Fascism, in N. Poulantzas & R. Miliband & J-P. Faye (1981), *Modern State Problems and the Fascist Phenomenon*, 159-173.

An abyssal difference separates the human from the in-human, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, as he describes “an abyssal exclusion, the result of an abyssal line that came to separate the world of the fully human, where ‘only’ exploitation is possible (metropolitan sociability), from the world of the sub-humans, i.e., of disposable populations, where appropriation and over-exploitation are possible (colonial sociability). The line and the resulting divide have been prevalent since the 16th century”. The response from the Epistemologies of the South “seek to reclaim the knowledges that are produced on the other side of the abyssal divide – the colonial side of exclusion – so as to integrate them into broader ecologies of knowledges where they will be in a position to interact with scientific and philosophic knowledge, with the aim of building a novel understanding/transformation of the world”.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, when we negotiate the oscillation from the inhuman to the human, we politicize the metaphysical category of humanness or humanity. Europe’s answer to this question determines its own existence. For example, at a conference in Karlsruhe, Angela Merkel said that “it is not human masses that are coming to us, but individual human beings”. This was an answer genuinely politicizing the in-human, in spite of its clearly theological origin. When the Hungarians reject refugees and throw them out, this is a rejection of the political, of the politicization of the human, and the imposition of an old definition: “we are the humans because we are European.” The inhuman is then the cruelty, the violence, and not the politics. Another attempt at cosmopolitanism! Our role is not just to denounce exceptions but to deepen political action for the transformation of man. The stabilization of the vacillation of the subjects requires action in an “intermediate space”, as a privileged locus for politics: the transnational space. There coexists the tendency of emancipation against dark authoritarianism. There we have the first strong signs that the forces of democracy and “freedom, alongside others who become human beings”, are being reconstituted; of confidence against “law and order”; of the defence of the global commons; for the reversal of climate change against their expropriation; of the critique of patriarchy, alongside women and youth. Perhaps we can define a future of ‘human’, as a result of imagination and cosmos-politics, replacing the utopia of classical cosmopolitanism.

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<sup>7</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The new thesis eleven*, in this volume, pp. 53.. See also other new anthropological approaches of perspectivism and multinaturalism in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014), *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Minneapolis, Univocal Publishing.



# **POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES IN GOVERNANCE**





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# Preliminary thoughts on a left strategy for economic development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: some policy suggestions for SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance

*Lois Labrianidis*

## 1. Introduction

**R**ecently it has become plainly clear that the neoliberal system, rather than bringing sustainable and widely shared prosperity, produces wage stagnation, increased poverty and inequality, banking crises, bubbles and enormous instability, the convulsions of far-right populism and an impending climate catastrophe. The Left must not only construct “big visions” for society in the next decades, visions which will give perspective and hope for the many; but it must also fight to achieve them. The way forward is through a paradigm shift in economic and development policy, strengthening the welfare state, increasing income of lower income people; tackling poverty, discrimination and the climate crisis; strengthening democratic institutions and freedoms, etc. In order to realise them, civil society needs strengthening through co-operatives and citizens associations, trade unions, as well as left leaning co-operations and programmatic coalitions at the national, EU and international level.

Needless to say, the Left’s response to the profound challenges that the world faces today has to focus on all the above issues, and many others. However, in this paper we focus on two such issues (i.e., the importance of industrial policies and the need to overcome existing huge income and wealth inequalities focusing particularly on the enormous economic, as well as political, power of digital platforms) and we will conclude with some policy suggestions for SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance and in general, for Left parties in Europe.

## 2. The need for a new left industrial policy

In the post war period up to the late 70s, states implemented active Industrial policies, and this coincided with a development without major inequalities between, as well as within, nations. But between 1980 and 2010, industrial policies gained a ‘bad reputation’ worldwide. This was because the so called ‘Washington Consensus’, not so much in its formal description by Williamson,<sup>1</sup> but particularly in its actual implementation, especially in the first half of the above years, was meant to minimise government’s pro-active developmental role. That is, positively it was enough to stabilise the economy (mainly through fiscal austerity), protection of property rights and contract enforcement; negatively to deregulate, liberalise, privatise and reduce taxes for the richer classes. The economy’s problems are declared to be the Government’s, while “market” is supposed to be the solution. Current comparative advantage, whatever it was, was proclaimed development’s holy grail, while government attempts to even slightly overcome it were considered violations of economy’s natural laws with deplorable results. Industrial modernisation and development especially, the ‘by default’ industrial policy of the preceding periods, was considered anachronistic and useless.

Overall, an antagonistic zeitgeist, even more a ‘winner takes all’ ethos was a major contribution to our societal ills, guiding in an absent climate of co-operation and free riding. To be sure, during the second part of the above years, a restricted government positive role was reverted to, by implementing mainly horizontal policy measures (not explicitly picking winners and losers at the level of individual firms, industry, sector or capability domain), such as infrastructure investment (especially in education and digitalization), R&D, export and FDI promotion,<sup>2</sup> when a transformed post- ‘Washington Consensus’ was actually established.

Now, judging the above 40 year period for its real accomplishments, a rather grim picture emerges. Development, in the form of GDP global growth, was almost half of the

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1 Williamson, J. (2002). “Did the Washington Consensus Fail?”. *Peterson Institute for International Economics November 6*.

2 This is not the place to fully investigate government’s real role in industrial policy generally, and especially, at the period at hand, which is substantially more active, even from the perspective of “post - Washington Consensus”. See Mazzucato, M. (2013). *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Myths*. Anthem Press) for ‘market creation’ by governments actions-space industry, Internet, etc., and Rodrik D. Rodrik, D. (2004). *Industrial Policy for the Twenty-First Century*. <https://drodrik.scholar.harvard.edu/publications/industrial-policy-twenty-first-century> (Accessed: 15 Nov. 2020) for proactive government role to face information and coordination externalities) and especially so for the advanced economies (USA, etc.) and for the Asian Tigers (Japan, S. Korea, Taiwan, China, etc.). But whatever the real government’s industrial policy was, the ‘Washington Consensus’ ideology and institutions (IMF, WB, WTO, etc.) exerted a real worldwide pressure to comfort with its principles with negative outcomes.

preceding 35 years,<sup>3</sup> the environmental problems were radically exacerbated, people's wellbeing was not improved (or only slightly so, but for a restricted number of countries), societal/systemic endurance was compromised (heavy imbalances, soaring debts, bubbles and crises globally, etc.) and last but not least, rising inequality helped establish a new world order (1%, Behemoth multinationals, giant money concentrations in the form of private equity, the new platform economy, etc., and US imposed political/economic tyrannizing power in global affairs).

All the above negative outcomes were in a sense the outcome of policies formulated within the two 'Washington Consensus' versions. Let's briefly mention some of these policies: tax reductions (not to mention Tax heavens) for the rich/super rich and its corresponding fiscal austerity and social state's diminution, contributed heavily towards the increase of inequality, especially since promised "trickle down effects" proved fairy tales globally. Deregulations, privatisations and liberalisations (in the financial form especially) beyond their increase of inequality and contribution towards power concentration had a critical role for systemic/societal vulnerability and wellbeing stagnation or even reduction, especially in the form of precarious/insecure work. The further shrinkage of manufacturing resulted in decreased GDP and declining technological and innovational updating in the countries adhering to the prevailing orthodoxy. An antagonistic ethos, overall, majorly contributed to negative ecological outcomes and increased rivalries among nations.

All in all, the evaluation of the outcomes of the above policies that were applied during the last forty years or so is negative. However, since the winners and generally, the status quo, doesn't have any interest in favouring changes, except for minor ones, the task for change is on the weaker shoulders. That is, on nations, peripheries, social classes, groups and individuals and on the long-term rationalists and/or empathetic humans. Here, we name them all 'the left' and in the remaining section of this chapter we try to establish some basic truths and guidance for them, focusing especially on industrial policies. *What must be Left's industrial policies – a New Left Industrial and generally Development Strategy NLIDS - after considering the abovementioned shortcomings?* Since the economic crisis of 2008, it has become even more imperative for the poorer and weaker nations to feverishly formulate their own well scheduled proactive industrial

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<sup>3</sup> Chang, H.-J. (2010). *23 things they don't tell you about capitalism*. Bloomsbury Press. and OECD (2019). *Beyond Growth*. Report of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on a New Growth Narrative.

policies, not only for their merits, but also, for two other reasons. That is first, because powerful nations and regional coalitions are currently in a frenzy to impose such industrial strategies. Germany's 'Industry 4.0', China's 'Made in China 2025', France's reposition of the Gaullist planning bureau, and the E.U.'s 'Recovery plan for Europe' demonstrate it clearly—and we must not hesitate to admit that this recovery plan will be adjusted to the needs and will of the northern/western European core, leaving restricted opportunities for the rest. Second, for catching up with developed nations in order to deliver a better life for their citizens, and crucially, to critically equate power between nations and therefore, restrict prevalent imperialistic/chauvinistic tendencies. Hence, *it is imperative for the poorer and weaker nations to feverishly formulate their own new industrial strategies* which must definitely deviate from 'Washington consensuses' in its consecutive forms.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps of critical importance for the success of a NLIDS is its more harmonious character, integrating economy, society and nature, simply put, its *holistic approach*. That means the more general programmatic level must focus on central societal challenges, and within them, in missions,<sup>5</sup> in order to accomplish their important obligations. Such societal challenges are primarily tackling: environmental sustainability; unemployment, underemployment and generally precarious and insecure jobs; inequality/poverty; demographic decline and brain drain; modernizing and strengthening of SMEs; emerging technological revolution, to build a knowledge economy.

Now, most, if not all of the above, are by no means an exhaustive list of how societal challenges and missions interact, usually in new and poorly traced ways. Public administrations, especially in the less or moderately developed nations, aren't in a position to provide this kind of holistic planning. Their structures are outdated, purely hierarchical, horizontally and vertically separated, with little communication between them, and even less with society and its institutional players, overall. To achieve a NLIDS, we must transcend the above structures in many ways. To mention just one, this sort of hol-

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4 Nevertheless, not all of the 'Washington Consensus' toolkit must be denied and especially its newer crop. E.g., important horizontal measures resulting in bureaucratic deadweight diminution, increased transparency, support of exports, R&D, digitalization and education must be persistently implemented, although frequently with different weights from the previously prevailing. E.g., education's care and bias restriction must increase heavily for the poorer, uneducated and discriminated classes, races and gender, special focus to SME's export, R&D, credit and digitalization promotion is also a must, etc.

5 Mazzucato, M. (2017). 'Mission-oriented innovation policy'. *Working Paper, 17-01*, UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose.

tic planning and generally new industrial policies must abandon the typical top-down public programming ‘principal agent’ model (Rodrik 2004) and adopt a new one where information flows circulate between the public and private sector, as well as, at least up to a point, decisions planned ahead are combined. This is because of information and co-ordination externalities (Rodrik, 2004), such as the discovery or even application of new products and technologies and the simultaneous provision of accompanying products and infrastructures, in order to boost these new provisions. Discovery, and its accompanied uncertainty, is always present and a main characteristic of industrial production, especially when innovations and technological and production change are on the agenda. Therefore, industrial policies must restrict it, with measures such as public procurement, guarantees, subsidies and other forms of incentives (e.g., tax reduction for R&D expenditures), but also with more straightforward protections, all of which are obviously more important for weaker and smaller enterprises, which are the natural habitat of the poorer nations. New public structures must be constructed accordingly to tackle the above externalities, and their appropriate knowledge cannot easily be obtained ‘in abstracto’ by these public programming bodies, but in close co-ordination with the private sector.

To fulfill its aims, it is of paramount importance that the *NLIDS have manufacturing at its epicentre: First, in order to reintegrate manufacturing production and its necessary protection (especially for infant and innovative firms) must be included into its toolkit since manufacturing is a vital engine of growth.* Among Kaldor’s growth laws,<sup>6</sup> is the law of manufacturing as an important engine of growth. Kaldor’s key point is that economic growth is based on circular cumulative causation—a change in a variable/institution, etc., will lead to successive changes in other institutions, etc.<sup>7</sup> These changes are, oversimplifying, circular in that they continue in successive cycles, and cumulative in that they persist in each round and happen gradually (not simultaneously, but following the inner logic of things). The main point is that economic growth happens in virtuous self-reinforcing cycles (e.g., East Asia), albeit the same happens with economic disasters (e.g., Latin America, Africa) based in vicious cycles and traps, and manufacturing with its ups and downs is an important part of them.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, *economic growth through innovation and technology adaptation is not only*

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6 Kaldor, N. (1967). *Strategic Factors in Economic Development*. New York: Ithaca.

7 Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy*. New York: Harper; O’Hara, P. A. (2008). Principle of circular and cumulative causation. *Journal of Economic Issues*, (1).

8 Servaas, S. (2017). “The Political Economy of Industrialization”. *Development and Change*, Virtual Issue.

*the outcome of formal R&D procedures, but equally important is the outcome of the 'learning in' process that takes place within production.* Thus, when manufacturing is limited, one can only obtain inferior products, processes and organisational innovations and consequently lower productivity and output growth. Putting it differently and more precisely, economic growth through innovation and technology adaptation, is not only the outcome of formal R&D procedures, happening in public or entrepreneurial specific laboratories, but equally important with 'learning in'<sup>9</sup> ones, which by definition are real production's outcome. As a rule, you cannot easily have the one (R&D, patents, etc.) without the other (production and learning in procedures). Therefore, when real manufacturing is absent or restricted, naturally we obtain an inferior wave of product, process and organisational innovations and technological adaptations and consequently, a lower productivity and output growth. For all the above reasons, NLIDS depends critically on manufacturing and therefore, any postindustrial strategies, which have been advocated widely over the past 30 or so years, are baseless.

Thirdly, *in order to support a move beyond current static comparative advantages so as to allow poorer nations to develop, not to mention to "leapfrog", they must be able to catch up with developed ones.* NLIDS must go beyond current/static comparative advantages and explore new dynamic ones. Although there is no scientific consensus on this topic, there is growing evidence<sup>10</sup> (OECD 2019 *ibid*) that we must move beyond current comparative advantages in order to grow and especially, as it is necessary for poorer nations, to 'leapfrog' so as to catch up with developed ones, something fundamental for a more equal future which is a left's central aim. To be sure this leapfrogging must be neither too small to produce noticed outcomes, nor too big to fail (and this can only be obtained by close co-operation of planning authorities with the private sector, continuously setting a higher but attainable target -OECD, 2019 *ibid* ).

Interestingly, these new dynamic comparative advantages are mainly not the outcome of concentration on specific products or sectors, but rather in capability domains (Chang and Andreoni, 2020 *ibid*), i.e., domains of techniques, productive knowledge and production technologies/equipment that show a high degree of similarity and complementarity. Naturally these new acquired capabilities could apply, by definition, not to a certain product, but to categories of them. And this is perhaps the explanation of the

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9 Chang, H.-J. & Andreoni A. (2020). Industrial Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Development and Change*, 52(2), 324-351.

10 Lin, J. & Chang, H.-J. (2009). "Should industrial policy in developing countries conform to the comparative advantage or defy it?, A debate between J. Lin & H.-J. Chang". *Development Policy Review*, 27(5), 483-502.

stylised facts<sup>11</sup> that countries, which manage to grow, tend to multiply their product bases, something that fits uncomfortably with the theory of static comparative advantage, but fits in easily with the acquisition of capability domains and, therefore, proves that by its nature production is a learning process. And a learning process demands protection: as Chang<sup>12</sup> says, you don't engage a 6-year-old child in a competitive race with an adult PhD holder. Thus, protection must be reintegrated in any NLIDS, albeit with an eye on avoiding usual past mistakes (i.e., permanently provided something by definition impossible and/or inefficient, captured by rent seekers, etc.).

Concluding, as Cherif and Hasanov<sup>13</sup> show, for a middle-income country to escape the 'middle income trap', it is critical not only to increase investment and faster adoption of already existing technologies, which are important at early stages of development, but also to innovate.<sup>14</sup> In other words, for a country to create sustainable growth, it constantly needs to produce new goods and adapt and create new technologies/capability domains. Thus, the Left, in order to support middle income countries to escape the 'middle income trap', has to develop a NLIDS.

### **3. The need for an abrupt reduction of inequality**

#### **3.a. The general scene**

At least since A. Okun's<sup>15</sup> influential view that inequality and efficiency do not go hand in hand, but there is tradeoff between them,<sup>16</sup> a unanimous consensus between mainstream economists and policy makers was established: we cannot have both simultaneously. If we want more from the one, the other subsides. The above view, combined with the income and wealth 'trickle down' dogma prevailing after 1980, a dogma based in reality until the 70's, but not after, guided policy makers to focus on GDP growth, without concerns about distributional items. Furthermore, neoliberal advances reinstated neoclassical theories of income distribution according to one's marginal contribution

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11 Hausmann, R., Hwang, J. & Rodrik, D. (2007). 'What we Export Matters'. *Journal of Economic Growth*, 12(1), 1-25; Rodrik, D. (2007). "Industrial Development". *Industrial Development for the 21st Century*. U.N.

12 Ha-Joon Chang (2003), *Globalisation, Economic Development & the Role of the State*, Zed Books

13 Cherif, R. & Hasanow, F. (2019). "The Leap of the Tiger: Escaping Middle -Income Trap to the Technology Frontier". *Global Policy*, 10(4), 497-511.

14 Aghion, P. & Howitt, P. (1992). "A Model of Growth through Creative Destruction". *Econometrica*, 60 (2), 323-351.

15 Okun, A. (1975). *Equality and Efficiency*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution.

16 Boushey, H. (2019). *Unbound: How inequality constricts our economy and what we can do about it*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

to production, or more explicitly in the words of its pioneer Clark<sup>17</sup>: “[W]hat a social class gets is, under natural law, what it contributes to the general output of industry”. Additionally, ‘supply side economics of the 80’s and, in particular, the well-known Laffer’s curve suggestions, further boosted not only indifference on inequality issues, but also a positive role of regressive taxation on growth. Last but not least, beginning from an early 90’s paper<sup>18</sup> and gaining international fame after the Great Recession,<sup>19</sup> the expansionary fiscal contraction (or austerity) hypothesis, the so called ‘German view’, albeit with strong Italian roots in Bocconi Milan’s private University, gave a strong boost to decreased fiscal spending and/or decreased tax for the rich, therefore heavily deteriorating inequality, especially in Europe among, and within, nations. Overall, beginning from the 80’s, a climate of indifference and/or positive views on the role of inequality on growth prevailed.

It wasn’t until the 2010’s that the above status quo was challenged in theory, although in praxis it remains dominant. The theoretical challenge emerged because gradually a big wave of (mainly) empirical scientific studies demonstrated that, in contrast with the orthodoxy mentioned above, inequality, at least at the prevailing levels nowadays, hinders development in multiple ways. There are many reasons for this: economic, social, political, etc. Below we briefly mention, some of them, which we consider vital, and we admit that our list is only partial.<sup>20</sup>

Inequalities of income, wealth, inferior social (e.g., women, colored minorities, etc.) and educational status and opportunity are major impediments to personal and economic/social achievement. Less educated, underpaid and discriminated labour, with minimal social provisions (e.g., preschool childcare and elementary education) slow down growth significantly by reducing productive factor’s supply, quantitatively and qualitatively. Furthermore, it is increasingly obvious that lagging individual firms, regions, etc., have been a major source of slower productivity growth and therefore, GDP growth, for the last 3-4 decades.

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17 Clark, J.B. (1908). *The distribution of wealth*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

18 Giavazzi, F. & Pagano, M. (1990). "Can severe fiscal contractions be expansionary? Tales of two small European countries". *NBER Macroeconomics Annual*, (5), 75–111.

19 Alesina, A. & Ardagna, S. (2009). "Large changes in fiscal policy: taxes versus spending". *NBER Working Paper*.

20 We heavily base this section on Bushey (2019) and OECD (2019). There is a plethora of bibliographical notes, numbering in the hundreds, and that we obviously can’t repeat here.

Another major growth obstacle in the last two decades especially, the stagnating effect of savings increase and concentration in the hands of the few, with parallel debt bondage of the poorer people, regions and nations. The above combined, resulted in unproductive financing, lower popular consumption, lower system stability, increased volatility, bubbles and crises. A progressive redistribution will benefit the economy, increasing consumption because of the higher marginal propensity of the poorer classes to consume and therefore, demand overall and investments and stabilising it through lower levels of debt and saving in the hands of the few.

Lower tax revenues stemming from tax reductions and tax-evasion exhaust public finance and therefore public goods provision (infrastructure, education, incentives, etc.) and development. Recent macroscopic studies (e.g., one using data from 18 OECD countries, including the UK and the US, over the last five decades), show that major reforms reducing taxes on the rich lead to higher income inequality, but do not have any significant effect on economic growth or unemployment.<sup>21</sup>

But we should not restrict our attention to the effects of inequality on strictly economic issues. A great number of problems, such as poor physical or mental health, violence and crime, obesity, drugs, high imprisonment, low social mobility and capital, etc.,<sup>22</sup> are also outcomes of inequality. Generally, societal wellbeing is strongly correlated with more equal societies.<sup>23</sup> *Thus, reducing inequality on the one hand boosts growth and on the other, has an important impact on both social and individual wellbeing.*

There are some straightforward answers stemming from the above analysis. In order to reverse inequality, we must invert the prevailing tax policies of the last 30-40 years. To be sure, this is easily said but difficult to implement. Capital flights and investment abstention are typical and powerful counter measures (not to mention, explicit political hostility and direct punishment), difficult to overcome, especially by small and medium size nations, sometimes even by big ones. Nevertheless, small to medium measures, carefully taken during recovery and especially expansion periods, may not be coun-

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21 Hope, D. & Limberg, G. (2020). "The economic consequences of major tax cuts for the rich". *Working Paper, 55*, LSE International Inequalities Institute.

22 Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level, why equality is better for everyone*. London: Penguin Books.

23 Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R. & Sachs, J. (2019). *World Happiness Report 2019*. <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/> (Accessed: 5 Dec. 2020).

tervailed significantly, and must be considered then as measures in the government's array, which can be implemented even within a single nation. We can strengthen success possibilities by imposing such measures stepwise, while at the same time we must not leave the middle classes out of the 'meal', although the poorer classes are in real need and will contribute handsomely to recovery (e.g., through consumption multipliers), avoiding, thus, powerful countervailing coalitions.

Otherwise, we must wait for international agreements of certain strength to emerge and we must support local/regional and global movements/parties and nations aiming to increase progressive taxation. Perhaps a window of opportunity may emerge after the pandemic crisis, to impose a tax burden on the rich, or alternatively, for a new stringent austerity to be imposed due to increased public and private debts. Since no moral hazard can be proclaimed in this particular circumstance, and because of its developmental dynamics, it can be favourably heard. The consumption multiplier, especially for the poor, will be a strong boost in contrast with the increased investment incentives for the rich, who are sitting on a mountain of stagnating wealth anyway—the prevailing negative or zero interest rates on state bonds clearly demonstrate this fact.

All in all, progressive taxation, albeit of unrivalled importance in countering inequality and imposing equitable growth, is a measure currently riddled with adversities. Therefore, we must not restrict ourselves to it (although careful undertaking is a must, as well as building political coalitions and consensus toward it).

### **3.b. The need for a drastic reduction in the enormous power of digital platforms**

In this section we focus on one particular example of the implications of excessive inequalities and monopolisation of the economies, i.e., digital platforms. The monopoly power that they enjoy has played a role first, in exacerbating income and wealth inequality, internationally, nationally and regionally and weakening worker bargaining power, and secondly, in slowing the rate of innovation either through acquiring potential competitors or through competing in a marketplace they own. Moreover, electronic platforms influence our everyday life, gathering personal information, which allow them not only to predict our behaviour, but also to influence and modify it. This has had di-

sastrous consequences for democracy and freedom since we end up living in what Zuboff<sup>24</sup> terms a “surveillance capitalism”.

As far as online outsourcing platforms are concerned, they act at the international level as coordinators between employers and employees, offering new ways of dividing the work. They bring jobs to poor nations, thus workers there have a geographically expanded pool of jobs to bid for, which has many, especially short term, advantages. However, by connecting rich and poor into a global labour market, it leads workers to desperately try to underbid each other to attract short-term contracts, *creating a race to the bottom for wages and working conditions at a global scale* in a medium- and long-term perspective. The technical infrastructure of the platforms amplifies an information asymmetry between buyers and sellers of labour that favours buyers.

#### **4. Preliminary thoughts on the role that SYRIZA – PA, as well as parties on the Left in Europe could play**

In the final part of this paper, we elaborate some initial and partial thoughts on what the Left, and specifically SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance, should do within the Greek and EU context.

In conclusion, we see that reducing inequality is no more an option, but an imperative for combined social and productive reasons. All left party strategies must fight inequality with all their means. We know that major impediments lie ahead. In industrial policy, we focus on the necessity and the obstacles for a robust progressive taxation, income and for union empowerment. All the above, combined with increased social programmes for the poorer to tackle unequal conditions (educational, social, etc.) and discrimination, among others, if consistently implemented will have major encouraging consequences. But the road ahead is long, treacherous and not paved with roses. Thus, the most important duty of the left is not so much to identify what should be done, because, to a certain degree this is already obvious due to an increasing wave of scientific and especially economic studies, but how to accomplish it, which social and political coalitions must be pursued and what is the proper transitional programme. And we are afraid that, contrary to the rather well identified targets, the road ahead is almost uncharted.

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<sup>24</sup> Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. Public Affairs

One of their first tasks is to make it clear to the wider public, what the problems on the national, EU and international scale are, and to describe more concretely what the aims of a Left's policy for the next decades must be. The second, and most difficult task, is implementing its strategy, which is an issue that remains largely untouched. This requires an in-depth understanding of the issues at stake, and the creation of a coherent policy of social and political alliances. Alliances with those social forces that are, or will soon be, on the margins (workers, self-employed, very small and small entrepreneurs, migrants, etc.); with progressive political forces (Green, Socialist and Social Democrat political forces distancing themselves from the neoliberal agenda); with less favoured regions and nations; etc.

Since the major policy issues as described, presuppose the creation of international treaties, we must insist on formulating transnational coalitions and alliances. We have to start first with our own house, i.e., the EU, and form alliances at all levels (political, national, regional, sectoral, etc.), keeping in mind that, so far EU policies reproduce the status quo, which is plagued by huge inequalities between countries and regions.

Redressing inequality implies heavily taxing wealth and high incomes, which on a country basis can be done only in a piecemeal and hesitant way, and is not enough. However, since we cannot expect to have unanimity on a global or even an EU scale soon, we must endeavour to have at least a subset of countries sign a treaty whereby they will take a number of tax decisions (such as having a common tax on the profits of large corporations and on high-income / high-wealth taxpayers).

The more developed and powerful EU member-states are nowadays applying new and bold industrial policies for the upcoming technological revolution. Thus, it becomes imperative for the EU as a whole, with particular emphasis on equality and "catch-up", as well as for its less developed member states, to follow suit.

The Left's strategy must face the problems created by the enormous power of the Global Digital Platforms. It is vital to build a wide socio-political response (both at the global, EU and national scale) in order to apply cross-border regulations; to tax them properly; to make them more transparent, ethical and rewarding; to protect platform workers' rights that national regulation fails to protect; as well as to facilitate the creation of plat-

form cooperatives. Finally, the Left must support the SMEs and cooperatives vs oligopolistic situations, in order to enhance the economy, as well as economic democracy.



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# Syriza and the social issue

*Effie Achtsioglou*

## Introduction

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has come to define the terms of every discourse – from the economy and social matters to inequalities, the role of the state and fundamental rights. However, in Greece the pandemic did not precipitate any change in dominant neoliberal politics. Quite the opposite, their implementation continues uninterrupted.

A brief review of the recent history of labour relations will allow us to confirm this continuity. It will further enable us to revisit the role played by the SYRIZA government between 2015 and 2019 as it precisely regards this continuity.

## Recent history of labour relations

Since the mid 90's, and mainly since 2000, Europe is being exposed to intense deregulation of the labour market. The pace and intensity of such deregulation may be quicker or slower depending on the country at issue. It does, however, affect the whole of Europe.

In practice, this plays out in a twofold way. On the one hand, labour rights and protections laid down during the previous years are withdrawn. This process entails the reversion of the protective framework that was being gradually set up during previous decades. On the other hand, new forms of flexible labour, including bogus self-employment, push certain groups of workers outside the protective framework of organised labour. In fact, large categories of working people slip through the cracks of labour legislation while the political forces responsible for their exclusion nod their consent.

Interestingly, this wave of deregulation was primarily driven by social-democratic forces in Europe. In some cases, social unrest succeeded in holding back deregulation processes. However, even in those cases where social resistance decelerated deregulation, it did

not manage to stop it. The intention has been a downward redefinition of the working class' needs, as these have historically developed.

Greece has been following a similar path since 2000. However, the period between 2010 and 2014 has been a watershed in the history of deregulation of the labour market. This is so because deregulation was at the very heart of the first two memoranda of fiscal readjustment implemented in the country. The blueprint is more or less familiar. Low levels of competitiveness would be tackled through internal devaluation, namely through wage reductions and removal of general labour protections. Much like wage reductions, the taking away of protections was itself directed at a reduction of payroll costs. In other words, if the state implemented wage cuts and removed labour rights, so the argument went, the trade deficit would be reduced, the country would attract more investors and so forth.

The results of the above policies are widely known. Unemployment rates during that period shot up to 28%, and to 60% for youth unemployment. We witnessed the creation of a new generation of 'working poor'. The risk of poverty and material deprivation increased not just for the unemployed but also for working people. An unprecedented humanitarian crisis erupted in the country, while at the same time the economy, far from improving, was pushed to even deeper recession.

### **SYRIZA government: reversing the labour market deregulation**

Between 2015 and 2019, the SYRIZA government sought to reverse the deregulatory tendencies that were unfolding since the 1990s, and especially since 2010. Room for manoeuvre to implement such a strategy was not just limited; it was suffocatingly small. This was notably because SYRIZA was called upon to run the country under a draconian conditionality framework. It was exceptionally difficult to promote reforms that ran counter to the rationales of the first two memoranda. Such a strategy of backtracking would provoke the Troika.

Room for manoeuvre was limited for another reason. There was, and there is, no workers' movement in Greece able to shift power balances in a direction that would allow a re-regulation of the labour market. At this stage, it needs to be noted that the

political influence of SYRIZA was significantly larger than the party's social grounding in collective organisations of workers. Any such involvement has been weak. It is worth noting, though, for those not familiar with Greek reality, that since 2000 the power of trade unions has significantly diminished while they have failed to exert any substantial influence in workplaces. Union density in Greece is among the lowest in Europe. At the moment, unions represent a tiny minority of the country's workers.

Things were equally disheartening with respect to the European Left. I would go as far as arguing that, instead of leading a collective pan-European struggle against the establishment, the European Left expected SYRIZA to 'wage war' on the European status-quo all by itself.

Even within this hostile environment, the government of SYRIZA managed to reverse the deregulatory tendencies of the labour market to a significant extent. Timidly and hesitantly at the first stages of MoU supervision, but much more confidently after the exit from the memoranda, SYRIZA pursued a path directly opposite to the deregulation that was prevalent during previous years. On the one hand, it re-established the rights and protective framework previously removed. On the other, it sought to regulate aspects of labour that had never been regulated in the past. For example, it brought within the protective scope of the law some of the widespread forms of flexible and precarious labour.

Within this context, the government restored collective bargaining processes, increased minimum wage, abolished sub-minimum wage for young people, laid down a framework for combating undeclared labour, for protecting bogus independent contractors, and for regulating dismissals and working time.

All in all, SYRIZA's strategy sought to terminate a long process of squeezing the scope of historically developed working class needs. To a great extent, SYRIZA succeeded.

## **New Democracy government: resuming the labour market deregulation process**

When in the summer of 2019, the government of New Democracy was elected, it became immediately evident that they were intending to resume the deregulation process exactly where they left off, at the end of 2014.

The first move was made within a couple of months after the election. ND removed the regulatory framework previously established by SYRIZA almost in its entirety. One of the first actions of the government, carried out in the summer of 2019, was the abolition of protection against dismissal, the cancellation of protections for the self-employed, and the downgrading of the battle against undeclared labour. This was soon followed by a suspension of collective bargaining and of minimum wage regulations. This process of regression was completed within less than four months and, truth be told, its completion did not meet with substantial social resistance. Once again then, it became clear that SYRIZA's labour agenda had been more progressive than the social average. It is precisely this unfavourable balance of social powers that allowed New Democracy to abolish the previous protective framework free from social unrest.

The Covid-19 pandemic was used by the ND government as an opportunity to speed up deregulation, when one would expect that it would halt deregulatory tendencies or at least trigger a so-called Keynesian response. What is particularly interesting is that ND did not even let the deregulatory tendencies of the market unfold by themselves, despite the fact that, in times of crisis, markets generally tend to deregulate without a policy boost. Instead, it chose to intervene with legislative initiatives in order to legally stamp the deregulation.

As such, the neoliberal government also abolished SYRIZA's working time protections, effectively scrapping whatever remained of SYRIZA's regulatory initiatives. At the same time, ND availed itself of the crisis in order to introduce new forms of flexible labour, which now seem to be acquiring a permanent status. These include new systems of suspension from work, new forms of job rotation in tandem with wage reductions, and reductions in Christmas and Easter bonuses. At the same time, new deregulatory initiatives have already been announced regarding individual labour standards and collective rights. As a result of the above, in 2020 Greece ranked third in wage reductions in Europe, while, according to Eurostat, low-paid workers suffered the second largest wage reduction in Europe. Finally, Greece was first among European states in reduction in working hours in 2020.

At the same time, the government of ND chose not to support the income of lower and middle classes, despite the absence of budgetary constraints. Furthermore, its strategy for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) has led those businesses to financial

asphyxiation and a struggle for survival. The result of all this is that at the end of 2020, Greece suffered the deepest recession in Europe , despite the fact that it entered the pandemic crisis relatively late and experienced an exceptionally trouble-free first wave. These policies are obviously no casual mistakes or random and unfortunate choices. They are part of a comprehensive and consistent strategic plan.

## **The neoliberal strategy**

The government's neoliberal strategy becomes crystal-clear in the Pissarides Report, namely, the document in which the government sets out its future 'growth' strategy. That strategy is reflected in four key points of the report.

1. First, further flexibilization of labour with a direct impact on wages.
2. Second, privatisation of infrastructure, health services, education and, last but not least, of social security services.
3. Thirdly, reduction –to the point of elimination– of SMEs which are generally considered as a burden on the public purse.
4. Fourthly, reductions in social spending– in order to proceed to tax reductions for the wealthy.

This approach repeats the rationale of 'reforms' implemented in Greece already before 2010, and which were applied more forcefully between 2010 and 2014.

## **Is there a way out?**

Neoliberal continuity has therefore been prescribing its own evolution. The question then must be whether there is a way out. We must reflect on whether a fundamental break is likely in the dominant economic paradigm, as well as with respect to the 'social issue'. The answer is not as pessimistic as one would be inclined to think.

First, because neoliberal deregulation may have continued uninterrupted during the pandemic, yet the pandemic itself, like a magnifying glass, made the limits of neoliberalism obvious. The Covid crisis has been a blow to the internal consistency of neoliberal arrangements and, mainly, to social consent to such arrangements. The

pandemic exposed the limits of a governing formula that devalued all things public and idolised private initiatives. It showed that the “spontaneous market order” cannot guarantee optimum results. It further demonstrated the significance of state intervention in the economy and of labour protections.

I am convinced that, partly due to the ongoing challenges that the Greek people are confronted with, the need for a fundamental change of strategy is solidifying in the collective consciousness. The pandemic has made people appreciate the value of public infrastructure and of the public healthcare system and its personnel. People have further realised the downside of devaluation of, not only the healthcare system, but also of public transportation and the welfare state, in general. This reshuffling of social attitudes could lead to an urgently needed political shift towards a radical left direction.

I am optimistic for another reason and that is that there seems to be a rearrangement in Europe. I have no illusions and I am by no means claiming that the EU is drastically distancing itself from neoliberal orthodoxy. It is, however, undeniable that the EU’s reaction to the current crisis was fundamentally different to that of the previous decade’s financial crisis. Back then, the European Union’s response was a persistent demand for aggressive austerity. During the pandemic crisis though, it focused on expansionary policies, it suspended its extremely harsh budgetary discipline rules, it financed the largest ever stimulus package, and partially mutualised debt. No doubt, much of the above was driven by the fear of collapse of the Italian and Spanish economies, but the importance of these measures cannot go unnoticed. Of equal importance is an evident disruption in the previously unchallenged European neoliberal bloc.

Do these transformations signify the end of austerity or even of neoliberalism? Obviously not. The cracks are, however, there. There is a window of opportunity that the left must take advantage of. In other words, a whole field of possibilities is opening up before us. First, because the public, having been exposed to the physical violence of neoliberal politics that threaten national health systems, is more open and responsive to a left agenda. Second, because what seemed like an impenetrable neoliberal orthodoxy is, bit by bit, cracking open.

The question we have before us is whether the left will stand up to the new developments, and whether it will capitalise on the momentum to achieve a left-wing turn. Let us not

forget that periods of 'normality' never created opportunities for the left. Opportunities always revealed themselves when the system reached its limits. We are now faced with precisely such an opportunity.



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# Mass unemployment and poverty, and welfare state reform: the governmental experience of SYRIZA

*Maria Karamessini*

## 1. Introduction

It is well known that SYRIZA took over the government under extremely adverse circumstances, amidst a huge economic and social crisis, a financial crisis of the state of structural nature and a deep crisis of de-legitimization of the dominant power bloc and of the bipartisan system of representation. The 25% decrease in GDP is unprecedented in the world economic history of capitalist crises, resulting in soaring unemployment and poverty – at 28% of the labor force and 36% of the population respectively, in 2013. It is therefore self-evident that dealing with the humanitarian crisis and combating unemployment drastically were top priorities in SYRIZA’s platform for the January 2015 election, and in the first government of the Left’s agenda. It is also well known that, after the signing of the third memorandum in summer 2015 and the September 2015 election, the second government of the Left was forced to extend the austerity policy, though of milder intensity compared to the previous memoranda, and enter a regime of strict supervision by the quartet of the “institutions”: European Commission, European Central Bank, European Stability Mechanism, International Monetary Fund. Despite the adversities in those four and a half years of governance, SYRIZA governments managed to reduce the unemployment rate to 17%, poverty or social exclusion to 30%, and income inequality by more than 2%.

The above successes would have been impossible without tough negotiation with the “institutions” for the concrete content of actions and measures included in the third memorandum and the financing “conditionalities” of the European Social Fund.

What can the European and international Left learn from the governmental experience of SYRIZA? Can the critical analysis of that experience contribute to the renewal of the theoretical approaches and tools of the Left in regard to the preconditions of a

radical social transformation? This article contributes to the speculation with a critical analysis of the governmental experience in tackling unemployment and poverty. In the two following sections I present and appraise the policies implemented in these two, critical for the Left and society fields, as well as the institutional reforms intended to lay the foundations of a new model of welfare state. In the last section, I draw upon the governmental experience of SYRIZA in the aforementioned fields to discuss the left theory of (welfare) state and the report of the Central Political Committee of SYRIZA for 2012-2019.

## **2. Policy against unemployment and OAED's reform: what we did, what we came up against, what we learned.**

Tackling unemployment was a field where SYRIZA had a well-prepared program before taking on government responsibilities in January 2015. The detailed Action Plan to Combat Unemployment<sup>1</sup> was the product of a special group appointed by the Program Committee. The spearhead of the proposed labour market policies was public works programs, i.e., the direct creation of temporary jobs in municipalities and regions to carry out projects related to unmet social needs, where priority would be given to the placement of the long-term unemployed, and of the unemployed who belonged to groups with difficulties in finding employment and to poor households. These programs thus explicitly aimed at tackling both unemployment and poverty, along with fostering local development and meeting social needs at the local level. As for the emblematic reforms, apart from the promotion of social and solidarity economy, the Action Plan proposed two more, together with a series of measures for their implementation: the radical reform of the system of initial and continuing vocational training and the reengineering and upgrade of the Public Employment Agency (OAED). At the same time, it suggested costed measures for income support and social protection of the unemployed.

With the Thessaloniki Program, SYRIZA promised that as a government it would create 300,000 jobs through major employment-promotion programs in the public, private, and social sector within two years, while the platform for the September 2015 election did not include any additional proposals or commitments.

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<sup>1</sup> ΣΥΡΙΖΑ (2014), Σχέδιο Δράσης ΣΥΡΙΖΑ για την Καταπολέμηση της Ανεργίας, Σεπτέμβριος 2014. [https://left.gr/news/shedio-drasis-toy-syriza-gia-tin-katapolemisi-tis-anergias#\\_Toc392789971](https://left.gr/news/shedio-drasis-toy-syriza-gia-tin-katapolemisi-tis-anergias#_Toc392789971) (Πρόσβαση 21-2-2021)

## 2.1 Tackling unemployment and the “employer of last resort”

The decrease in unemployment rates from 26% in January 2015 to 17% in June 2019 was a great achievement of the SYRIZA government, even more so because it stemmed from a net increase in the number of employed persons by 10% (353,000 individuals). Two were the main determining factors of that considerable increase: a) the good performance of tourism in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and b) the employment policy-mix adopted by the SYRIZA government, which put emphasis on job creation programs in the public sector. Two special programs of longer duration and with higher wages for the unemployed participants were added to the annual cycles of the eight-month public works programs in municipalities, regions and refugee centers, in order to meet the needs for personnel in the understaffed public sector. These programs reinforced the shorthanded and collapsing national health system with healthcare, administrative, and auxiliary staff and provided young unemployed graduates to civil administration for the implementation of concrete projects. The public works programs initially came up against the European Commission’s refusal to finance them as they considered them “passive measures”. The refusal was overcome when optional training courses, mostly for the acquisition of digital skills, were made available to the participants of the programs.

The role of the programs for the creation of temporary jobs in the public sector was instrumental both in the promotion of employment and in the return to work of many discouraged long-term unemployed older people, as well as in combating extreme and child poverty, by giving priority of participation to unemployed parents with children and to unemployed with low family income. However, the number of jobs created through these programs was in general far lower than the Thessaloniki Program expectations. The new positions created in the public sector by the public works and the special employment programs in the four and a half years of left governance were about 130,000. To this number we should add another 50,000 new salaried or self-employment jobs created in the private sector through labour-cost subsidies, and part of the 85,000 unemployed who received both theoretical and work-based training in private firms.

What do we infer from the above experience? First, we confirmed the validity of the Keynes’ and Minsky’s proposal for the state as “employer of last resort”, on which the spearhead of SYRIZA’s platform for the January 2015 election was also based. With the

economy in recession, stagnation or low growth and private businesses facing low demand for their products, which works as a counterincentive to the creation of new jobs, only the creation of new jobs in the public sector could contribute to a net job creation and to the de-escalation of unemployment, as it did happen. Second, we discovered that the anticipated low absorption of the employment-promotion programs in the private sector was the result of, not only low demand during an economic recession, but also of another critical additional factor: the very low labor costs in the economy, which were the outcome of the measures of the second memorandum fostering internal devaluation. The ease with which businesses could hire cheap and flexible work force greatly reduced the attractiveness of labour-cost subsidies as an incentive for the participation of private firms in OAED's employment-promotion programs addressed to the private sector, particularly for low-wage jobs.

At the same time, a host of difficulties in expanding the scale of public works and special employment programs in the public sector appeared. These were not due to lack of finance, since OAED had high financial reserves coming from the annual cash surpluses imposed on the Agency by all governments during the memoranda, as a contribution to the general government's primary surplus. A significant expansion of the scale of the above programs came up against three obstacles: a) the objective constraints on municipalities and regions in human, financial and administrative resources so that they could drastically expand the scale of their projects, as well as organize and supervise the additional personnel they hired for the projects through the programs, b) administrative and technical capacity constraints on the part of the Ministry of Labor and OAED, c) the narrow margin for increase in public expenditure for financing the programs without the derailment of the third memorandum's primary surplus targets.

Concerning the reforms included in the Action Plan to Combat Unemployment of SYRIZA,<sup>2</sup> there seemed to be different speeds of implementation. Although the completion of the Diagnosis Mechanism of the Labor Market Needs (an unmet commitment of the second memorandum) offered the possibility of a better design of training programs according to the demand for vocational specialties in the labor market, the radical revision of the vocational continuing training system did not go far. In addition, despite the substantial improvements of the institutional framework brought about by the SYRIZA government's new law on social and solidarity economy, there were delays in the cre-

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2 SYRIZA (2014), Ibid.

ation of a network of incentives and of the support structures to promote it. Finally, because of the restrictions on public expenditure that was necessary for meeting the third memorandum's targets for primary surpluses, the revision of the unemployment benefit system was not possible. This was included in the National Growth Strategy (May 2018), as one of the planned structural changes of the post-memorandum period.

In contrast to the obstacles faced by the aforementioned reforms, the reorganization and upgrade of OAED, through the full change in its business model, proceeded quickly and all key actions were implemented or put under way. This was the most important, though still ignored, institutional reform in the field of the labor market under SYRIZA government.

## **2.2 OAED's reform at the service of the new welfare state**

OAED is a large nationwide public agency of six thousand employees and of trilateral participation in its administration (state, employer associations, trade unions), which pays unemployment benefits and other allowances, implements almost all active employment programs and large programs of social tourism, children's summer camps, and free access to theatrical performances and books. OAED also manages programs of vocational training, as well as housing programs and loans, and finances trade unions, institutes of social partners and other organizations of trilateral representation. In addition, it runs a nationwide network of Employment Promotion Centers (KPA), Apprenticeship Schools, Institutes and Centers of Vocational Training (IEK, KEK), and Nurseries.

### **What we found and what we did in OAED<sup>3</sup>**

The ills of the state apparatus that the new administration was faced with in OAED after SYRIZA's rise to government in January 2015, bore resemblance to those in other sectors of public administration: understaffed first line services and educational units, problematic information systems, lack of qualified and experienced IT specialists, obsolete technological and laboratory equipment, absence of a policy monitoring system, bureaucratic and hierarchal administration model, etc. The new administration was also

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<sup>3</sup> See the analytical report for the period of the left governance in OAED (2019), *Απολογισμός Δράσεων (Μάρτιος 2015-Ιούνιος 2019)*, Έκδοση ΟΑΕΔ, Άλιμος. <http://www.oaed.gr/documents/10195/1214556/ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΣ+ΟΑΕΔ+2015-2019.pdf/4c4d8186-16ad-4ea0-88dc-fed0c37d3306> (Access 21-2-2021).

faced, though, with special structural problems due: to the size of the Agency and the large scope of its tasks; the additional activities and responsibilities that it shouldered with the absorption of the Workers' Housing Organization (OEK) and Workers' Fund Organization (OEE) in 2013, which were irrelevant to the Agency's main task; and, the nationwide spread of its structures and first line services, which makes them difficult to coordinate and monitor.

However, the new administration's greatest challenge was that when it took over, OAED was in the process of being reformed in accordance with a program already funded and regularly supervised by the European Commission and specialists from three European public employment agencies. In July 2015 the Program was incorporated in the deliverables of the third memorandum. It combined elements of modernization with neoliberal aims and aimed to direct the Agency towards offering individualized counseling to the unemployed, in order to assist them in their labor market integration, and collaborating with businesses, in order to recommend suitable candidates for vacancies. But OAED did not have the necessary employment counselors to support this new direction in conditions of mass unemployment of historical dimensions. Given the huge shortage of permanent counselors, the implicit aim of the Program was to prepare the ground for private companies to take over from OAED the counselling services and the matching between labor supply and labor demand, a field where both small players and large (multinational) companies had already been operating in the country. SYRIZA in government adopted exactly the opposite political direction.

The pre-election Action Plan of SYRIZA,<sup>4</sup> too, put great emphasis on the reinforcement of OAED's counselling services as a key element of the necessary reorganization and upgrade of the Agency. In order to avoid the one-way street that would inevitably lead to the assignment of counselling to the private sector, the new Governor appointed by SYRIZA from the very beginning requested and promptly secured approval of the recruitment of a large number of permanent highly qualified work consultants to reinforce the Agency, so as to provide these services itself, giving a different and clear political direction to its reform: the reinforcement of OAED and the empowerment of its employees with a vision of a public agency easily accessible, dear and friendly to the citizens and with the central slogan "your OAED".<sup>5</sup> Apart from hiring employment counselors,

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4 SYRIZA (2014), Ibid.

5 For the new political direction of the reformation, see «Πρόλογος Διοικήτριας», ΟΑΕΔ (2019), Ibid.

which was completed at the end of 2018, the SYRIZA administration tried to inspire and motivate OAED's employees in line with its vision in favor of the changes. It launched a new training model for the personnel with targeted training in their field of work, successfully carried out the training of the two thirds of its employees within two years, established a new administration model (change management central office, thematic groups and work meetings of mixed hierarchical levels and units, horizontal collaboration of departments, constant and direct contact and communication of the Governor with local units and staff, internal information network, monthly plenaries of the Local Public Employment Services personnel) and concluding OAED's new organizational structure, which replaced the old one, which had been in use for 60 years.<sup>6</sup> Last but not least, it drastically improved the agency's very problematic information system and proceeded to an extensive digitalization of processes and the technological renewal of the equipment of all services.

The most important legacies of the reform and its first results concern society: faster and better services for citizens, with improvement of information provision, digital transactions, and reception services; better counselling services for the unemployed from a well-trained and highly qualified personnel using innovative digital tools; pilot implementation of a new delivery model of active labor market policies based on integrated and constantly open training, employment, and entrepreneurship programs for the unemployed at the local level, in cooperation with employers and trade unions and the representatives of local communities.

The venture of OAED's reform, under conditions of constant negotiation and supervision in the context of the third memorandum, was not at all easy, because of the great number and the wide scope of the actions that had to be carried out simultaneously in a very short time. SYRIZA's governance laid solid foundations for OAED's transformation according to a new paradigm of the welfare state, which combines benefits with effective and quality public services in an integrated and individualized approach to the needs of the citizens. OAED's reform could be qualified as a "modernization in a left direction" because it invested in the strengthening of the public employment agency, while many European countries have been proceeding in recent years to the commodification of their employment services through outsourcing to the private sector from their public employment services and the parallel development of private employment organizations.

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6 OAED (2019), Ibid.

### **3. Policy against poverty: from tackling the humanitarian crisis to the new welfare state**

Both in decreasing unemployment and in combating the humanitarian crisis, SYRIZA governments can be credited with undeniable success. The general poverty or social exclusion rate went down from 36% to 30% of the population, while child poverty (0-6 years of age) dropped from 31% to 25% between 2014 and 2019. There was also a significant decrease in the percentage of the population that were faced with severe deprivation of essential goods and services, from 22% to 16%. The success is owed largely, but not solely, to the welfare policy.

#### **Determining factors in poverty reduction**

The reduction in poverty, social exclusion, and material deprivation during the left governance is accounted for by the following factors:

- a. The 2015 measures for the humanitarian crisis and the relief of over-indebted citizens and households. The first law of the first SYRIZA government concerned the tackling of the humanitarian crisis and was submitted to Parliament without the lenders being notified. It provided food allowance, free electricity reconnection and provision for the primary residence, and rental allowance for individuals and households that lived in extreme poverty. The second law of the same government settled a huge volume of accumulated tax and contribution arrears owed to the state by hundreds of thousands of individuals and professionals, by cutting the debts and allowing debtors to pay them in 100 instalments. In addition, in summer 2015, the OAED-registered unemployed gained the right to travel for free on means of public transport, while at the end of 2015 the government passed a law that extended and improved the legislation for the protection of primary residence and of indebted households.
- b. The 2016 enactment of the right to free access of uninsured citizens and vulnerable social groups, who were one third of the population at that time, to all public health facilities for medical and hospital care. In the same year, the pilot implementation of free school meals started in schools in poor areas, before the measure was gradually extended in the following years.
- c. The 2017 enactment of the Social Solidarity Income (KEA), which was a mem-

orandum obligation, but in 2018 the SYRIZA government added certain more important benefits (food from FEAD, free access to childcare centers, social tariffs for water and electricity, subsidized participation in training and employment programs). The enactment of KEA was the outcome of tough and successful negotiations with the “institutions”, who had been trying to impose the neoliberal version of the Minimum Guaranteed Income with the abolition and incorporation of all the existing welfare benefits in it.

- d. The rationalization of the child benefit and establishment of the housing benefit in 2011. The changes in the child benefit enlarged the number of beneficiary families to include the middle class, while simultaneously increasing the benefit for families with low income, mainly single-parent families, who appear to be the poorest. The housing benefit was first adopted by the SYRIZA government and is meant only for poor households.
- e. The drastic reduction in unemployment, whose main volume concerned poor households. The reduction in the number of the unemployed by 34% or by 420,000 individuals between January 2015 and June 2019, constitutes a very important but completely ignored factor in the reduction of poverty during the period of left government. In addition, as we have already said, the public works programs gave priority to unemployed people with low family income, and to single-parent families. And to unemployed households with children, aiming to simultaneously combat unemployment and poverty. Finally, KEA beneficiaries were included in all OAED programs as a special category.

The 2015-2016 measures, welfare benefits in kind and the remission of debts, targeted phenomena of extreme material deprivation in conditions of humanitarian crisis. They reflect the effect of the social solidarity movement and the “I will not pay” movement in the period 2011-2014. In 2017 and 2018, the new benefits that were established, and the existing ones that were rationalized, led to an increase in welfare expenditure from 750 million to 3.5 billion euros or from 0.4% to 2% of the GDP.<sup>7</sup>

### **Institutional reform: from the clientelist to a digital welfare state**

Examining things from a longer-term perspective, we notice that the most important achievement of SYRIZA governments was the realization in a short time of a great re-

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<sup>7</sup> Fotiou, T. (2020), Unpublished lectures.

form: a digital welfare state, which replaced the clientelist welfare state.<sup>8</sup> This reform concerned the elimination of patronage networks with the establishment of a Single Authority for the central allocation of benefits and social solidarity allowances, OPEKA (Organization of Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity), the creation of 242 Community Centers to inform citizens on their rights based in the municipalities and connected with each other via a joint geo-information system, and the establishment of a National Monitoring Mechanism. As in the case of OAED, the reform brought about a new mix of welfare benefits and individualized services to beneficiaries at the local level, and had as a precondition the hiring of specialized personnel - 700 people - to staff the Centers.

#### **4. The governmental experience and the left theory of the (welfare) state**

The left theory of the welfare state has come a long way since the interwar times, both in its Marxist and in its social democratic version. In the 1970s, most Marxist theorists (Offe, O'Connor, Miliband, Poulantzas) initially adopted the structuralist approach to the state, which maintains relative autonomy from capital, while it obeys the "logic of capital", either because of the social class position of the higher officials of the state, or because of capital's economic power and political influence, or because of the structural compulsions that tie the state and its survival to the smooth development of capital accumulation. Although they acknowledged social reforms as positive concessions to the working class demands and as potentially contradictory, they treated the social state more as a tool for the stabilization and legitimization of the capitalist system than as a step towards its transformation.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the Austrian-German Marxists of the interwar era (Adler, Bauer, Heimann) as well as social democrats before and after World War II maintained that when the working people enjoy social rights, the balance of class power changes fundamentally because social wage reduces the worker's dependence on the market and the employer and so it becomes a potential source of power, while the working people need social resources, healthcare and education in order to participate effectively in political life.

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8 Fotiou, T. (2020), Ibid.

9 O'Connor, J. (1973), *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, NY: St' Martins Press. Offe, C. (1982), Some Contradictions of the Modern Welfare State, in C. Pierson, F. Castles and I. Naumann (ed.), *The Welfare State Reader*, third edition, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 2014.

Marxist theory of the welfare state stopped developing after the publication of the well-known book of Gough on the political economy of the welfare state,<sup>10</sup> to come back later as a flash through the theory of economic globalization and its consequences for the welfare state.<sup>11</sup> The theoretical revival came from another current: the new institutional approach of comparative social policy.

In 1990, the Danish theorist of the welfare state, Esping-Andersen,<sup>12</sup> presented an ingenious typology of “welfare regimes” in modern developed capitalism (liberal-residual, conservative-corporatist, social democratic), while he interpreted both the historical conditions of their emergence and their prospects based on the class coalitions of power on which they were established, thus paving the way to the study of typologies and particularities of specific welfare states. After Esping-Andersen’s typology, the Southern European social model followed (Leibfried, Ferrera, Castles, Petmesidou), which was still in effect on the eve of the 2008 global financial crisis despite partial differentiations from state to state.<sup>13</sup> One of the features of the latter model was the underdeveloped welfare system, which in Greece was the privileged and permanent source of development of patronage relations between major political parties and marginalized social groups. Moreover, at the beginning of the 2008 crisis, Greece was the only country in the EU that had not established a minimum guaranteed income, while Italy and Spain implemented such systems at the regional but not at the national level. Finally, Greece had one of the most rudimentary systems of income support of the unemployed in the EU, while OAED was one of the most “backward” public employment organizations at European level.

### **Progressive social reforms: modernization in a left direction**

Given all these, the implementation of the reforms to the welfare state and to OAED during the SYRIZA governments in a very short time and in a left direction constitutes proof of the defense of the popular interests even under the most adverse conditions of “guardianship” and the continuation of an austerity policy, by a progressive government

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10 Gough, I. (1979), *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, MacMillan Education Ltd. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London.

11 Gough, I. (2020), *Global Capital, Human Needs and Social Policies*, London: Palgrave.

12 Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*

13 Karamessini, M. (2008), “Continuity and change in the southern European social model”, *International Labour Review*, Vol 147, No 1, 43-70

that put its stamp on the political process upsetting (temporarily) the class balance of power within the state. The aforementioned examples justify – theoretically, too – the decision of SYRIZA in September 2015 to vie for the vote of the Greek people in order to not only mitigate the social impact of the third memorandum, but also to implement a “parallel program” that would lay the foundations for a wider transformation of the state, in this case for a new model of social state.

The second government of the Left was able to shape institutional changes in line with its own political direction that had already been under way from the second memorandum, and had been incorporated in the third memorandum. In the case of the digital welfare state, the government managed to break up patronage networks, while in the case of OAED, it was able to “seal” its contribution to the reinforcement of the Agency with the recruitment of permanent staff and mobilize its employees in favor of a reform of the public sector and the social state to the citizens’ benefit. The method was the rejection/ neutralization of the neoliberal elements and the enrichment and utilization of the modernizing elements of the reforms in a progressive direction towards a transformation of the state, which had the ambition to change the relations between the citizens and the state through the provision of new social services. The transformation was launched but was not completed.

### **Obstacles to the reforms and to the transformation of the state**

In his theory of the capitalist state, Nicos Poulantzas (1978) defined it as “a material condensation of a balance of power between classes and class fractions, which takes on the form of internal contradictions between and within the different sections and apparatuses of the state”, but also took care to clarify that “the state is not directly related to the balance of forces, but displays an imperviousness and resistance of itself”, that “a change in state power is never enough to modify the materiality of the state apparatus without special energy and action” and that only the transformation of the state apparatuses can consolidate the class balance of power that brought the Left to state power.

SYRIZA leaned upon a sufficient number of public administration officials who readily and determinedly contributed greatly to the formation and the implementation of the government project. However, due to the tradition of clientelist recruitment with partisan criteria in the public administration and the state in general, and due to the

partisanisation of the trade unions in public administration, the SYRIZA governments and the heads of public agencies and organizations it appointed came up against reluctance, resistance, or even covert undermining from a large part of the higher and middle personnel of the state, while an unknown number of senior officials in the public administration were in direct contact with the “institutions”. Despite these difficulties, the greatest obstacles to the reforms and the transformation of the state were of structural nature: understaffed and bureaucratic state apparatus, personnel that to a large degree does not combine administrative and scientific knowledge and is unable to plan and implement institutional changes and innovative policies, absence of units of policy design, monitoring and evaluation, hierarchical management that leaves no room for initiatives at lower levels, lack of basic tools for effective management on the part of the heads of the administration and high executives, civil servant mentality and work ethics.

The SYRIZA governments did not attempt to change the state; whatever efforts were made were few and fragmentary. They lacked any significant foothold in the state, nor was this their political priority – absorbed as they were in constant negotiations with the institutions for the implementation of the memorandum commitments, the exit from the memoranda, and the lifting of the guardianship. Moreover, they did not have an alternative plan to the one of the “institutions” had for changes in the public administration and the state; a plan on whose basis they might have mobilized the civil servants and the social movements for the reform of the public sector and the state. As Panitch and Gindin<sup>14</sup> correctly and quite early noted, SYRIZA was not prepared before the January 2015 election to change the state apparatus. This is explicitly acknowledged in the report “Account of SYRIZA for 2012-2019” approved by the party’s Central Political Committee, underlining characteristically that “we did not deal with the state apparatus and the need for its democratic transformation with that combination of political will and sufficiency of knowledge required by the circumstances”, while “the structures and the operations of the state – from administration per se to the characteristics of the ‘deep state’ – did not constitute the focus of our concern.”<sup>15</sup>

As was displayed by the cases of “modernization in a left direction” of welfare services and OAED, a reform of the state, a) ought to combine the changes in public administration with the involvement of civil servants in a new vision to change the relation

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14 Panitch, L. and S. Gindin (2017), Class, party and the challenge for social transformation, *Socialist Register 2017: Rethinking Revolution*, Vol. 53, 35-58. <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/issue/view/1792> (Access 21-2-2021).

15 SYRIZA (2020), *Account of SYRIZA 2012-2019 (Απολογισμός ΣΥΡΙΖΑ 2012-2019)*, February 2020, p. 70.

between the state, society and citizens in the specific sector or branch of the reform, a vision that also changes their role and position in the state apparatus; and b) should be reflected in the “materiality of the state”, such as the change of institutional architecture and function, the creation of new institutions and units, staffed by permanent personnel and open to society, etc.

## **The restrictions of the third memorandum and the progressive reforms**

Here we meet the last structural obstacle in the transformation of the state during the government of Left, which was present even in the positive initiatives that were taken inside or outside the “parallel program”: the fiscal crisis of the state and the memorandum restrictions concerning the primary surpluses and the recruitment of permanent personnel in the public sector. As we noted above, important reforms, such as the revision of the system of benefits [i.e., income support] to the unemployed or a potential increase in the scale of public works programs came up against the fiscal crisis of the state and the memorandum commitments for primary surpluses. The same is true about an increase in KEA (Social Solidarity Income) and its allocation to more beneficiaries than just those facing extreme poverty.

At the same time, the memorandum restrictions on the recruitment of permanent personnel in the public sector limited the strengthening of important functions of the public sector, which would work as a shield against outsourcing to the private sector, and the development of new institutions and public services. The memorandum commitments limited the recruitment of employment counselors in OAED to 360, from 1,260 that the Agency needed, and the Cabinet had approved, while the specialized personnel of 700 people to staff the Community Centers were hired and are still working on temporary contracts. Therefore, the assignment of counselling the unemployed by OAED to the private sector, or the abolition of the Community Centers after the personnel’s contracts have expired cannot be ruled out.

In conclusion, the memorandum commitments to tackle the fiscal crisis, which were implemented under the strict supervision of the “institutions” in order to secure the interests of the hegemonic fractions of domestic and foreign capital and of the lenders, prevented the governments of SYRIZA from either carrying out planned reforms and policies, or including important elements of the enacted reforms in the “materiality of

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<https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/94170/Apologismos-SYRIZA-2012-2019.html> (Access 21-2-2021).

the state”, thus consolidating – in the long term – the class balance of power that had brought SYRIZA to government.

## **5. Conclusion**

From SYRIZA’s governmental experience in the fields of unemployment and poverty, we can draw useful conclusions about both successes of policies and reforms and their confines under the asphyxiating memorandum circumstances of the period 2015-2018 and given the limited period of governance and the lack of plan by SYRIZA for the democratic transformation of the state. One last comment is absolutely necessary. In this article we have not dealt with a critical issue, which the contemporary left theory of the (welfare) state should examine very thoroughly: the role of the EU in the determination of class and social balances of power at the national level, and the required linking of the national and EU level in the prospect of radical social change, which requires the transformation of the state and of its relation to society.



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# Macroeconomics, Structural Change and the Left

*Euclid Tsakalotos*

**T**he relationship of the Left with respect to macroeconomic policy has been problematic, often traumatic. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of Left-wing strategies ended in financial crises and a subsequent reversal of policy towards a more orthodox approach: The Alternative Economic Strategy of the Labour Party in Britain in 1976, the Common Programme of the Left in France in 1983, and, of course, the experience of PASOK in Greece in 1985. These failures were a contributing factor to the rise of neoliberalism, and the turn of most social democratic parties towards what came to be known as the Third Way. The SYRIZA government's experience is somewhat different, in that it came to office after a debt crisis and two structural adjustment programmes that had imposed unprecedented austerity with GDP falling by about 25%, with the result that we faced an unsustainable debt and empty state coffers. But all Left governments face a similar challenge, namely, how to provide a macroeconomic policy that provides a sustainable framework, not only for their social programmes, but also for the necessary structural interventions in the real economy.

Now for most people, I think it is fair to say, a left government is attractive if it promotes employment, increases subsidies, builds up the welfare state, reduces inequalities, while at the same time shifting power between capital and labour by promoting trade union rights or increasing the minimum wage. What does this imply for macroeconomic policy, and is an expansionary policy always the answer? I think that most would agree that it is unrealistic to expect that any government would run deficits of, say, 10% per year for 10-15 years just to be able to finance unemployment benefits or the health system. That just wouldn't be viable. Part of the answer, to be sure, is an increase in taxes, especially on those that can afford to pay, and the recent discussions on taxing wealth, or financial flows, or platforms. But equally important is the issue of sustainable growth, and, from a left-wing perspective, structural interventions in the real economy, which differ both in quantity and quality from those promoted by our neoliberal opponents. The fundamental dividing line between Left and Right remains as valid as it always has. For the Left there is nothing in the capitalist accumulation process that ensures either the optimum quantity or quality of investment.

There are, therefore, some limits on what we can expect from macroeconomic policy. And in this respect, the Left has a distinct position from both neoliberalism and traditional Keynesianism. In a crisis of demand, like the one we are facing now, we are all in some sense Keynesians, and it has been rather amusing to see diehard neoliberals explaining the need for strong public sector intervention to address the economic shortfall from the pandemic crisis. Why, for instance, the countries of the North within the EU, have experienced a road-to-Damascus conversion, so different from their response in 2010, is worthy of study, but beyond our brief here. Suffice it to say that naked self-interest will not be wholly absent from any answer.

So, there is an important role for expansionary macroeconomic policy during large recessions. But that does not imply that we are all Keynesians overall, or at least not in the most common, and conservative understanding of Keynesianism. In particular, we cannot accept, as Keynes argued in parts of the *General Theory*, that when we are at full employment, that is to say when we have sufficient demand, then the market can be trusted to sort out the remaining problems of supply, allocation and so on. In that sense we are very critical of the Keynesian tradition.

Paradoxically, the Left, in this respect at least, is closer to neoliberalism than to Keynesianism in stressing the importance of the supply side or the real economy. Indeed, it was the fact that by the 1970s, the Keynesian social democratic consensus seemed to have very little new to say about production that gave their neoliberal opponents the edge in the battle of ideas. We now know that the promise of privatization, liberalization and deregulation did not lead, as promised by the neoliberals, to a new dynamic phase of capitalist accumulation. Indeed, in many respects – employment, growth, productivity, not to mention overall welfare and the huge increase in inequalities of all kinds – the performance of the economy was worse than achieved in the previous era. But, the neoliberals were able to convince that they had the ideas to transform economies towards a more dynamic direction, and although this narrative has been severely dented in the period after the financial crisis of 2009, they are still dominant in the sphere of ideology, although increasingly not hegemonic.

In short, it is the structural economic interventions which are really important for the Left, especially if they are going to make their social and labour policies viable over the long run. There is no sense in which a left-wing party can become hegemonic with respect to the economy if it does not have a view on production, on growth and the

quality of growth, which can support incomes and social policies. Without the latter, we risk the alternative of the Left being considered attractive, but unrealistic. So, in a sense, a macroeconomic policy for the Left most of the time, outside huge recessions, has what I would call a supportive role. In 2017, as Minister of Finance, I made a joke that I hoped by the end of 2018 I would be the least significant minister in the SYRIZA government. This was not an exercise in false modesty; on the contrary, as Freud argued with respect to all jokes, there was a real point: the really important focus should be on development, dealing with climate change and pursuing the structural reforms that any left government needs to promote, if it is to be considered by the voters as both an attractive and realistic alternative.

What did we try to do in SYRIZA with respect to the above, given the “compromise” of the summer of 2015, and the adoption of a third structural adjustment programme. What we tried to do in the first place was to reduce our fiscal surplus targets, an enormous legacy from the first and the second structural adjustment programmes. Targets were reduced from 3.0% to -0.25% for 2015, from 4.2% to 0.5% for 2016, from 4.5% to 1.75% for 2017 and from 4.5% to 3.5% for 2018. If you add to that the fact that the third structural adjustment programme gave a much more specific roadmap for debt relief at the end of the programme, one can see that the victory of the referendum to reject the Troika’s “offer” implied that, contrary to some criticisms from the left that we turned the “no” vote into a “yes” vote, the eventual compromise created some space for the left to work with. By 2018, that is, after exiting the structural adjustment programme in August of that year, we were able to present to parliament the first expansionary budget after many years. That did not mean the end of austerity, but it initiated a process of reducing its level.

Given the improved, but still restrictive, profile of fiscal surplus targets after 2015, the focus shifted to what we could do with government spending and taxes to be able to change the quality of fiscal policy in a progressive direction. Here, our main goal was to support society, to support the poorest, the people that had suffered most during the period of the first and second structural adjustment programmes. Furthermore, we needed to prepare the ground for increasing the number of teachers or health service workers. Our social policy was thus geared towards the poorest, but also important segments of the middle class.

While negotiating the third structural adjustment programme, and thereafter its implementation, we were often in a defensive mode: trying to limit the worst neo-liberal as-

pects of the programme, which were being imposed on us by the Troika. To give just one example, the IMF, in particular, was very clear that we really didn't need housing and child-benefits, and various other support mechanisms provided by modern welfare state states. Everything could be incorporated into the guaranteed minimum income – a neoliberal strategy that has a long history of transforming a strategy for the poor into a poor strategy. We gave a very important fight against such an approach, and our housing and child programmes can be counted amongst the important successes of the SYRIZA government. This success can be seen in the reduction of both child poverty and inequality in the years 2016-2018. For instance, the percentage of people at risk of poverty was reduced from 21.4% to 17.9%, while the percentage of children at risk of poverty was also reduced from 26.6% to 21.1%. Even more striking is the fact that Gini index -the main index used to measure economic inequality- was reduced from 34.5 in 2014 (the highest value ever recorded by ELSTAT) to 31.0 in 2019 (the lowest value ever recorded).

At the same time, we did not ignore the structural domain. We implemented reforms to increase transparency and combat corruption by introducing an extensive new framework for public procurement. In particular, for the health sector, we established a framework for centralized procurement, which aims at reducing costs by reducing fragmentation and introducing economies of scale. In the same direction were significant reforms to improve public financial management (such as the single treasury account), as well as reforms to establish transparency in the appointment of public sector officials. Significant reforms, that had been stalled for decades, were accelerated – this includes the implementation of the cadastre, forest maps, national spatial planning. For years investments were delayed because investors did not know what could be done, or where. More radical interventions included the introduction of a framework for the development of a Social and Solidarity Economy, aimed at promoting the self-organization of those citizens who wish to do so in «business» units and cooperatives, focusing on the social usefulness of the products or services produced, and the collective and solidarity functioning of the units themselves.

It goes without saying, that there were things we could have done better. In particular, with respect to macroeconomic policy, we were not as prepared as we thought we were, for example, for confronting the enormous, and seemingly intractable, problem of tax evasion. I think one of the lessons we have learned from the first government

is that tax evasion is a much more difficult nut to crack than is often assumed. That is not to say that we did enough on the structural reforms front. More could have been done, for instance, to bolster the social economy and cooperatives, and there are other examples, as well. But the big picture remains: after we negotiated the third structural adjustment programme, slowly macroeconomic policy took a back seat. In other words, macroeconomic policy was there to support both our social policy, but also to support the more important structural changes.

And I think that is the most important message for future reference. A left-wing programme needs to encompass much more aggressive spending in the social area, and in other areas as well, but there is so much that fiscal policy can do. I am saying fiscal policy because monetary policy is not in the domain of national governments for EU member states. We have been criticized, from both Left and Right, for not doing more, not spending more. And there are people who have said that we haven't done enough structural reforms. The criticism is well taken and needs to be discussed.

What SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance needs to do over the next period, and what, in general, the Left in Europe needs to do – given that any Left alternative needs national and supra national policies – is to really discuss the major structural reforms and interventions that can respond to the triple crisis of health, the economy, and that of climate change. That is, for me, the really important issue. Because then, we can discuss the macroeconomic policy to support these. For instance, green development and addressing climate change are bound to be high on the agenda. While everybody is discussing the climate change issue and the appropriate policy response, I think it is crucial that SYRIZA, and the left in general, make clear our different perspective from that of the Right, and what is entailed in taking climate change seriously. Does it have to do with the integral link of reducing inequalities? With seeing links to other crises, for instance, the problematic food chain, which is surely integrally connected to our present health woes– who produces what, and under what conditions? With being much more open to forms of production that are more decentralised, more small scale, that encourage the participation of new actors in collective energy communities? Such issues go well beyond my field of expertise. But such questions are important, not only for the Left to provide an attractive and realistic alternative, but to intervene at the level of ideas. For SYRIZA, the task ahead, not least in its ideological conflict with capital and the Right, is to present three or four emblematic structural changes, and have a macro-economic strategy that will support them.

One of the things that is most worrying since the return of New Democracy is how quickly many of the SYRIZA reforms have been ignored or reversed. The most important reforms that were reversed have to do with workers' rights and collective bargaining, but there are many more besides. Why was it so easy for the New Democracy to reverse some of these reforms? Well, I think there are two main components to any answer here.

The *first component* has to do with ideological hegemony. One must never forget that, on the whole, the Left is working against the grain of “common sense”. For instance, the Left needs to convince that reducing inequality, or increasing the minimum wage, is not just a social policy, but part of an alternative growth strategy, which rejects a model based on cheap labour, or poor labour relations. That it is integrally tied to a growth strategy that is trying to increase the quality of production, to find new markets, to introduce new technologies. And the same will be the case in the field of energy. We have to convince people that dealing with inequality is a *sine qua non* of addressing climate change. The battle of ideas is a crucial front for the Left in the coming years. And such an exercise entails both listening to popular views, anxieties and demands, but also coming into conflict with aspects of the “common sense” of the people. Left wing parties and social movements ignore their educative role at their peril.

And the *second component*, of course, is the whole issue of left wing policy and social movements. When ND reversed the labour reforms, there was no huge labour movement to be able to say no, this is something the previous government did, this is important for our livelihoods, we will not accept a return to capital being so dominant and labour being so weak. So, the Left, apart from its economic policy, apart from its think-tanks and its ideas and its programme, has to also take social movements very seriously. Not least because you can have a law for a structural reform – about energy communities, about collectives, about cooperatives, etc. – but if you don't have vibrant civil society, vibrant social movements to take those reforms and run with them, then you will either not do very well, or even what you do well will be easily reversible.

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# Questioning the SYRIZA approach of economic restructuring and development

*Petros Linardos Rylmon*

**T**he approach of the dynamics presented as the capitalist crisis by the left, by SYRIZA, but also by most of the European left parties, does not really clarify the relation with the neoliberal governance, in the sense that it is not clear if the crisis is managed with neoliberal policies, or the neoliberal policies lead to the crisis. The SYRIZA argumentation about the policies proposed is that the neoliberal choices and practices should, and could, be replaced by the combination of Keynesian spending and Fordist institutional changes, that would lead to a capitalist development capable of solving, after a reasonable period of time, the dramatic problems in the fields of production, employment, the social state, and also, environmental issues.

Neoliberalism is not a diversion from a reasonable and social-minded capitalism, but the expression of the uncompromising will of capital to maintain its supremacy, at any cost, even if the policies implemented lead, for a long period of time, to successive failures not only for the working people and the social institutions, but also for production, itself, and the main macroeconomic balances. The case of Greece is characteristic of the repetition of variations of neoliberal policies that permanently fail, even from the point of view of capital, as a whole. The adaptation of the traditional clientelistic model to the neoliberal European strategy during the 80's and the 90's, led finally to the collapse of 2010, management of the debt crisis by the Troika was a catastrophe from all points of view, the SYRIZA government managed to increase some socially important spending without elaborating and implementing an alternative development strategy, and the Mitsotakis government has returned to the most shameless clientelistic practices and measures in favor of capitalist centers of power.

Such a repetition of obviously negative results after neoliberal reactions to successive failures has been described as the “crisis of neoliberalism”, an assertion that can lead to the conclusion that regimes implementing neoliberal strategies are unstable, and the return to “socially minded” capitalism is a realistic perspective. But the example of

Greece can be used as one proof of the aggressiveness of capital, financial or industrial. And also, as the proof that neoliberalism, as the unifying strategy of capital at the global level evolves from one crisis to the next and can live with the obvious destructive effect of climate change and the destruction of biodiversity. The capacity of capitalist centers of power to maintain control of economies and societies, is proved again and again, since they are capable of taking advantage of the decline of social and political forces expressing the world of work, and popular social groups, refusing the possibility to elaborate an alternative perspective.

The Greek case, is a clear example of the lack of capacity of neoliberalism to implement a balanced capitalist strategy. The establishment of neoliberal institutional changes does not happen in all countries with the same pace when Fordist regimes are abandoned. And if the change towards a neoliberal regime is complete, it becomes impossible to stabilize a process reproducing capitalism. Capital is then the addition of separated profit-seeking activities without a unique dynamic. The clientelist regime in Greece is typical of the establishment of the method of non-coordinated support of economic or political forces, leading to recurrent crises. On the other hand, capitalist economies, which have preserved institutions of planning and coordination of policies and supportive public activities – inherited from the Fordist period – cannot be considered to implement complete neoliberal strategies, even if neoliberal policies are implemented in fields where the social cost is obvious.

These different situations have severe and lasting consequences for the personnel managing the state policies, both by elaborating and implementing them. In the case of clientelist methods, the managerial culture is reproduced, allowing the perpetuation of practices aiming at the satisfaction of demands from persons, institutions or authorities, supported and financed by state policies. The managerial culture in Fordist regimes is closely related to the regulation of the economy, and development, in a broader sense. The “regulation school” in the 70’s, in France, has been an important step towards the understanding of the reproduction of capitalist economies. It gave the possibility to understand how institutions expressing stable social alliances and agreed strategies between the representatives of social classes, offer the possibility to stabilize and reproduce a capitalist regime. Such institutions demand the existence of employees and political personnel capable of understanding and managing the process of elaboration, planning and implementing public policies.

The market, the market forces, is the ideological claim that gives the possibility to private interests to cover, under such an allegation, personified relations with public money, or in the best of cases, the illusion that a unique – horizontal – support policy for all offers the possibility of success to the best. It is the idea that pretends to ignore, or hides ideologically, the paramount importance of state intervention in any capitalist economy. The survival of capitalist relations of production, through the total submission of the working force, was the most important strategic choice made by capital after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship in 1974, and while successive explicit or implicit state interventions gradually weakened the resistance capacity of the working class, the ideology of the omnipotence of the market was a constant factor that led, with the support of the European neoliberal strategy, to the decline of the Greek economy and the resultant debt crisis in 2009.

During the 4.5 years of government, SYRIZA did not manage to elaborate a way out of the paradox of a defeat of social forces after the long process of neoliberal policies, leading to an electoral victory of a left party. The left government chose to expect possibilities to “restart” the economy through public spending mainly, to increase solidarity and social spending, but chose to manage the institutions responsible for development policies, according to the preexisting methods, though corruption was practically eliminated. But the methods of the clientelist regime, which allowed extensive corruption during the previous period, also had negative, if not destructive, effects for development and infrastructure spending throughout the country, not to mention the embedded practices to weaken the presence of social organizations. The inefficiency of these methods remained, and no priority was given – while serious efforts were made to strengthen the negotiation capacity of the trade unions – to the development of alternative forms of organization of production through the solidarity economy and cooperatives, to the planning of local development of production and infrastructure, to the planning of local and national environmental policies, and to the creation of public financial institutions managing the available resources, or the experimentation with local complementary currencies.

SYRIZA was criticized for its failure to realize the initial idea to reduce public debt and have the resources to restart the growth of the economy. No project was available to compensate the consequences of ‘Grexit’ for working people and popular classes, who’s weak situation would have been weakened even more. At that crucial moment, not only

was there no program to manage the economy, but also to change the whole of the relations of the economy with the eurozone and the European Union. The choice made by the SYRIZA government to remain within the existing European institutional framework and elaborate what was called a “parallel program” was much wiser, although, as it was proved, the party did not have the cognitive capacities and political culture to elaborate alternative practices in all the fields where it was possible and necessary. Where these preconditions existed, mainly, the policies to deal with the “humanitarian crisis” and the crisis of the health sector, the government managed to apply successful policies, while in the fields of local development and solidarity economy, inaction was the rule. The government had to face the opposition of sectors of the administration in many fields, and the inadequacy of the programs financed by the European structural funds, but the party was not prepared to elaborate and apply radical reforms to the administration, and to rewrite the “European” programs.

Following the defeat of SYRIZA after the 2019 elections, we have a situation where the destructive effects of neoliberal policies are reaffirmed, while the necessity to apply public policies to confront climate change and health emergencies, becomes evident. In that context, the New Democracy government is taking advantage of the shock produced by the coronavirus crisis to continue to attack the world of work, the popular classes in general, and even the middle class, to expand the economic privileges of the political clientèle of the right, and of capital, in general, and is resisting even to the increase of the capacity of the health system. The policies, for example, concerning climate change, are privileging private interests aiming to produce electricity with natural gas, while ignoring the consequences for the personnel faced with the closing of the activities connected to the extraction of lignite and its use for the production of electricity. And on the other hand, do not prepare rural regions for the consequences of extreme weather events, which are more and more frequent, or for the consequences of the tourism crisis due to the pandemic.

The left must not only criticize and denounce the policies of the right, which aim to transform society into a disorganized field for profitable entrepreneurial opportunities and precarious work relations, but also must question the dependance of growth and availability of resources from private initiatives. And give priority to the strengthening the economic and political presence of popular classes (salary earners, independent workers, small enterprises, farmers), to upgrading public policies - not only in regard

to health, but by all means in that sector, and to establish the institutional framework for planning economic activities at the national level, but also at the local and regional levels. It is necessary to admit that a new regime has to be elaborated and constructed, by the building of institutions that will give top priority to the interests and the needs of popular classes, in general, with the methods of planning and democratic approval of planning. Although such an orientation is absolutely necessary because of the aggressiveness, but also the decline of capital, the productive capacity of the capitalist productive sector must be taken into consideration and incorporated into the planning process.

A superficial approach can consider that a social democratic strategy is appropriate today, but it should be obvious that the capitalist class, which should be a leading factor of a social democratic contract, is proposing and imposing a completely opposite strategy. This means that by proposing a social democratic approach, we choose inaction; that is the preservation of the existing regime. This is the real aim of the political forces or personalities that claim to express such a strategy and suppose that they are the continuation of a social democratic tradition in Greece. Although the two decades of governance by PASOK, from the 80's to 2004, were the years of a continuous implementation of neoliberal policies, and successive attacks against salary earners and the social state, while the method inherited from the clientelist tradition were not questioned.

The left must not just be *one* of the possible alternatives but must be *the* alternative project, which explains in detail the policies and initiatives that can face the challenges and offer solutions. The left is the political force capable of elaborating not just new policies within the existing regime, but a new regime and the path to its constitution. The fundamental strategic options of the left, social justice, equality, sustainability, facing the options of capital imposed by the neoliberal regimes, can only be confronted by a radical project leading to a completely new regime. A regime that can be established through the building of institutions expressing alliances of popular classes and mobilizing all material and immaterial capacities to elaborate and implement a sustainable development project.

Such a project should be based first, on the existence of knowledge institutions in the fields of the economy, society and the environment, capable of studying and predicting tendencies and elaborating policy propositions. On the formation of scientific teams at the regional or local level, undertaking the elaboration of development plans at that

level. And on the formation of representative assemblies of all social groups charged to adopt or modify the development projects. The public and regional administrations and the municipalities should function as the services that support the elaboration of the plans, and manage their implementation. The building of this new institutional framework must be based on the rejection of the faith in market forces and particularly, in the automatic “restart” of the economy, which is expected to realize structural changes after the increase of public spending and the parallel increase of private investments.

The parts of the population in today’s capitalist societies, which have the possibility to constitute knowledge producing institutions, and manage collective plans for the economy, society and the environment, exist everywhere and possess knowledge and experience that permits a leap towards a postcapitalist society. There are those who manage the private sector enterprises and the public services, the professors and students in universities and research centers, people working in NGO’s and solidarity economy structures, participants in cooperatives, and the salary earners, the people with precarious jobs, and independent workers. The role of the political organizations of the left is to actively intervene in the acquisition of awareness concerning the existing needs by all these categories of working people, and in the elaboration of corresponding plans for the whole of society.

The project of the left should implement structural changes, which could be applied gradually, after partial or local initiatives with a transitional logic:

- the disponibility of resources is crucial for the substantial increase of the production of social wealth, and it should be based on the reduction of public and private dept, and the establishment of (even partial) control over the creation of money by public authorities,
- actively support the creation and increase of collective forms of production and economic activity (SSE, cooperatives, commons)
- propose new orientations for SME’s at the local level in the framework of development planning,
- present a national plan for transition of employment in the regions that traditionally produce electricity from lignite,
- present a national plan for the protection of rural areas from extreme weather events,

- support the plan for an efficient public health sector capable of responding to health crises on a permanent basis,
- present a reform of the public administrations, so that they will be capable to respond to new needs and choices.

The left tradition opposing the attacks of capital against labour is based on the organization of the working class mainly in large enterprises, and the possibility to transform class consciousness into a program for the whole of society, implemented by democratic institutions at the level of production and living places and regions.

Now, conscience of attacks by capital and consequences of productivism for the environment and health concern all popular classes, and must lead to the invention of a new organization of production, and new democratic institutions expressing the alliance of popular classes.

The parties of the left must become knowledge production institutions, aiming to influence knowledge production in society, knowledge workers, in general, and managers of private or public entities.



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# State Theory, SYRIZA, and the Antinomies of Left Politics in Liberal Societies

*Peter Bratsis*

The fact that in the end we all die, that only dust remains, in no way alters Man's identity as immortal at the instant in which he affirms himself as someone who runs counter to the temptation of wanting-to-be-an-animal to which circumstances may expose him. And we know that every human being is *capable* of being this immortal - unpredictably, be it in circumstances great or small, for truths important or secondary. In each case, subjectivation is immortal, and makes Man. Beyond this there is only a biological species, a 'biped without feathers', whose charms are not obvious.

- Alain Badiou, *Ethics*

## Return to State Theory

**T**he rise of SYRIZA as a major political force was swift and unexpected, drawing great international interest. Following on the global financial crisis of 2008 and the imposition of extreme austerity policies in Greece from 2010 onwards, many saw SYRIZA's electoral successes as a great danger to the liberal consensus that ruled the political scene across most of the world; liberal-capitalist forces looking on with concern and fear while the various factions of the global left looked on with hope and the desire to know if SYRIZA could serve as a first step in a much broader turn to the left as a response to the ever-growing failures of capitalism. Much of the discussion on the left that ensued focused on the question of whether or not SYRIZA was indeed radical enough to bring socialism to Greece and what the process of transitioning to socialism might look like.

Not surprisingly, much of the discussion that ensued involved revisiting Marxist debates around questions of reform vs. revolution, the fate of social democracy and the current

viability of the ideas of Eurocommunism.<sup>1</sup> One of the most serious and emblematic discussions of that time was the dialogue that took place between Alex Callinicos and Stathis Kouvelakis in February of 2015, during those eventful first months of the SYRIZA-led regime. Although Kouvelakis was much more measured in his analysis and more modest regarding the assessment of the political opportunities of the moment, Callinicos very well summarized the more sanguine viewpoint (not more optimistic regarding SYRIZA *per se*, but of the revolutionary possibilities of the time) regarding the political situation in Greece and the strategic questions to be addressed:

In other words, we were beginning to face a situation in which the great strategic debates that Marxists had crucially in the 1910s and 1920s, but which revived after 1968 particularly in Europe, those kinds of strategic debates, not just about reform and revolution but how you combine different forms of struggles, the different kinds of parties you build and so on, all those debates were returning. And we see that very sharply in the case of Greece.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, there was a common assumption that we were in a moment when the left was in ascendancy, that the possibility for a transition to socialism was very real and we needed to be working on figuring out the mechanics of how that transition might occur. A return to Marxist state theory was deemed vital to this effort and works from Lenin, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Miliband, and Poulantzas took center stage.<sup>3</sup>

## **Authoritarian Statism and the Return of Heteronomy**

The fact that SYRIZA was able to win two elections in 2015 was not, however, an indication that Greek society has adopted more progressive and radical political affinities, and that the question of a transition to socialism was back on the table in the way it was following 1917 or 1968. Of course, it is not possible to predict the future, but it seemed

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1 For an excellent example of such attempts to understand SYRIZA and the political situation in Greece by going back to state theory, especially the work of Poulantzas, see Khachaturian, Rafael (2015) "A New Eurocommunism? The Political Theory and Practice of SYRIZA", Western Political Science Association Annual Conference.

2 Callinicos, Alex, and Stathis Kouvelakis (2015), *International Socialism*, #146, <http://isj.org.uk/syriza-and-socialist-strategy/>.

3 Poulantzas' first major work, *Political Power and Social Classes*, was published in May of 1968. That very fortunate timing resulted in his work becoming a huge hit, readers thinking that the book would contain some key insights for understanding the historic events taking place on the streets of Paris. It is ironic that a return to Poulantzas, having been largely forgotten in the time between his death and the early 2000s, is similarly stirred by unexpected political events and the desire to make sense of them.

apparent then,<sup>4</sup> and is even more obvious now, that the political struggle of that moment was not to create socialism, but to assert the primacy of popular sovereignty. In the face of five years of intense discontent and social mobilizations, a series of intense general strikes, occupations, demonstrations, and protests, the Greek state had proved to be completely inflexible and unable to address popular demands by way of adopting new or reformed policies. Whereas the capitalist state as a factor of cohesion and social reproduction would, ideally, accommodate popular discontent through policy changes and public spending, the Greek state was only capable of addressing the popular movements from below with physical repression. That Greek voters increasingly turned to SYRIZA was a symptom of this failure of the Greek state, it was, in essence, the exploration of the possibility that putting a different and more radical regime in power might make a difference when it came to the responsiveness of public policies, that the severe austerity measures might be undone or, at least, lessened as demanded by the vast majority of the society.

The position of the major political parties in Greece, as with the major political institutions in the E.U and beyond, was there was no alternative Greeks had no choice but to accept austerity and the dictates of its creditors. From Antonis Samaras and Angela Merkel, to Larry Summers and Christine Lagarde, the line was that elections and popular will are of no consequence when it comes to serious public policy; as Wolfgang Schäuble allegedly put it “elections cannot be allowed to change economic policy”. The deeper logic is that human reason is inferior to the calculations of markets, markets determine which policy is the best and no amount of public protest or electoral activity can change that. The foundational assumption that the idea of politics, as such, is based upon (that society is self-created, that we make society and that it is necessary for us to decide upon what kind of society we want to create) was put into doubt, financial markets apparently had overtaken the sovereignty of citizens.

When people returned to Poulantzas for help in understanding the prospects and challenges for SYRIZA, they had mostly focused on the last section of his final book, *State, Power, Socialism*, which was on the democratic road to socialism.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the focus should have been on the previous section where Poulantzas examined the decline of

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4 Cf. Bratsis, Peter (2015) "The End of TINA" *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/01/syriza-greece-election-tina/>.

5 Poulantzas, Nicos (1978), *State, Power, Socialism*, Verso.

democracy and the rise of what he termed 'authoritarian statism'. Already in 1978, Poulantzas had picked up on the core instabilities and legitimation problems that the fiscal crises of the capitalist state had created, and deep problems that the dominance of executive over legislative power, the increasing bureaucratization of the state, as well as increasing dominance of comprador and monopoly capital were leading toward. Indeed, in many ways the situation that SYRIZA and the residents of Greece faced in 2015 was an extreme version of many of those same contradictions and authoritarian developments that Poulantzas had examined so many years previously. Could an electoral victory by SYRIZA do what all those many protests and general strikes could not? Could the power of the dominated classes mediated through the now SYRIZA controlled parliament be sufficient to break the existing selectivities and limits of the institutional materiality of the Greek state? Would Greece be able to resist the imposition of policies by the transnational capitalist class strongholds that constituted the infamous Troika? Perhaps most importantly, would a SYRIZA government be able to break the false perception that this no alternative, that markets, rather than people, decide the character of our society?<sup>6</sup> Could popular sovereignty reassert itself and begin to counter the heteronomy created by the ideologies of global capitalism?

We now know the answer to some of these questions, for others we are still unsure. The SYRIZA government certainly was able to address some problems created by austerity through redistributive policies directed toward those at the very bottom of Greek society and the regime also effected various other innovations, including addressing minority rights, countering far right violence, and, very notably, adopting a set of constitutional reforms designed to broaden the democratic character of the Greek state. However, when it comes to the fundamental questions noted above, the unfortunate reality is that the SYRIZA regime not only failed to achieve the end of austerity but, more importantly in my view, failed to disprove the notion that there is no alternative, that it is not necessary to accept the sovereignty of the markets. It also remains unclear how the power relations that the existing institutions of the Greek state embody, limited the potential for action and reform by SYRIZA. The argument that the SYRIZA regime of 2015-2019 was unable to achieve its goals because of the structural selectivity of the Greek state is not a compelling argument, for the simple fact that there was no policy or

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that it is the society that produces itself, always. There is no external force, no higher power, that determines society. So, the question is never, if a society produces itself or not, and, thus, there is never the possibility of there being no 'alternative'. The question is always if we understand that we are the gods, we create the society, or if we falsely believe that society is externally determined and fail to see how it could be otherwise.

initiative passed by the SYRIZA government that was undone by juridical or administrative resistance within the state or by, more conspiratorially, a 'deep state'. Indeed, even policies as unpopular as the Prespes Agreement were accepted and implemented by the state apparatuses.

## The Subjective Limits of Left Politics in Liberal Societies

The limits to social transformation that the SYRIZA experience uncovered were not structural, but subjective.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that there are not structural limits and hurdles, but the struggle did not get so far as to make those visible (beyond the obvious role played by the Troika, itself). What the SYRIZA experience shows us is that a political struggle that takes as its primary goal the reduction of the suffering and pain of the population, that addresses its population as human bodies that suffer rather than as political subjects, is severely limited and fundamentally incapable of engaging in sustained struggle that may, itself, be a source of suffering and pain. Rather than break with the idea that there is no alternative the SYRIZA experience functioned to confirm it for many.

Let us examine the 'humanitarian crisis' that was Greece in 2015. It is well known that Greece suffered one of the largest peacetime economic contractions in history, in those years between 2009 and 2015, going from just over 350 billion dollars in GDP in 2009, to just under 200 billion in 2015. This was certainly a shock, and resulted in many who were unable to provide for their basic needs, poverty rates and homelessness soared. GDP in 2015, however, was almost exactly what it was in 2003, the large gains in the Greek economy that were made in those interim years vanished, but aggregate levels of consumption were still quite high by comparative standards (Greece has enjoyed the second highest rate of growth in GDP in EU in the 2000's). How is it that, aggregate consumption in 2003 was healthy and sufficient, and the same amount of consumption in 2015 was a great tragedy and crisis?<sup>8</sup> How it is conceivable that even in the midst of an environmental catastrophe, when levels of consumption can no longer be allowed to rise indefinitely without bringing ever greater destruction to our world, it was not possi-

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7 For a fuller discussion of the structural and subjective elements of the crisis see Peter Bratsis (2016) "The Greek Crisis as Concrete Universal: On the Impossibility of Reform and the Impasse of Subjectivity", *Situations*, Vol. 6 #1-2, pp. 69-84.

8 It is obviously true that the economic contraction was not equally felt in Greek society, some lost everything, and others actually increased their wealth. But the solution to this is not to increase economic growth, it is to redistribute the wealth that exists.

ble to understand the dilemmas Greece and so many other societies were faced with, in terms other than those of liberal economism?

Our political horizons and imagination have been so colonized by liberal values that we took the basic measure of progress as economic growth in the strict sense, increased levels of consumption, and we took economic self-interest as the most fundamental of political motivations. When the negotiations with the Troika reached their apex in the summer of 2015 the following choice presented itself, to agree to the continuation of austerity with its well-known economic consequences, plus an added healthy dose of national humiliation, or to roll the dice by breaking with the demands of the financial markets. It is very likely that the economic consequences would be even higher under that scenario, that human suffering would be even greater, in the sense that even less consumption would be likely. People were warned of food and fuel rationing. Some members of parliament warned that the ferryboats that carry food and water to the islands might stop. How can you risk economic security in the name of trying to bring more economic security? How can you accept even more economic losses now on the risky bet that the tactic might bring higher growth in the future? Would the Greek people accept such an argument or would it end in political chaos? There was a fear that what happened in Chile in 1973 could have been repeated in Greece if SYRIZA went down the path of stubborn, perhaps suicidal, refusal rather than prudent collaboration and, ultimately, survival.

We should remind ourselves that self-interest and fear are not values of the left; they are the foundation of liberalism. The liberal mantra on the virtues of self-interest (perhaps best expressed by Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*) and the desire to safeguard the famous trilogy of life, liberty, and property, are well known. From the standpoint of liberalism, the only thing worth risking security for is security. The only thing worth risking your life for is biological life. In this sense, the Greeks did not accept their servility to market principles, and the Troika out of irrationality or masochism, but out of self-interest.<sup>9</sup> For the SYRIZA regime to risk 'death', political, at least, but perhaps other forms as well, by rejecting the sovereignty of financial capital was beyond the range of possibilities. At the least, to allow Greeks to suffer greater consumerist paucity and a further erosion of commodious living, in the name of the principles of popular sovereignty and autonomy was unthinkable.

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<sup>9</sup> Etienne La Boetie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* is a very useful text on this question of how fundamental self-interest is for servility.

Let us go back to the invasion of Greece in the Second World War for a contrast to the present moment. We know that many Greeks collaborated with the Germans and Italians. There might have been some who actually held fascist beliefs, but the vast majority collaborated out of self-interest. Why risk your life? Why pass up on an opportunity to make some money? Just play along and at least you might survive for another day. The logic of collaboration is premised on the primacy of self-interest and self-preservation. It is certainly understandable to us, but it is not an ethic that we hold in high regard. The logic of resistance, by contrast, is the complete opposite. The famous heroic action of Manolis Glezos, for example, is completely irrational from the liberal standpoint. Why risk your life just to take down a flag? It is a suicide mission, better to keep your head down and survive for another day. Another example of selfless political honor is Solon. Whereas Aristotle is usually quite clinical in his language, when he discusses Athenian democracy, his admiration for Solon shines through. Why was Solon so great in the eyes of Aristotle? After he instituted his famous reforms, he voluntarily left Athens as an exile, a political suicide. He was clever enough to understand that, if his reforms were to have a chance of success, he had to leave Athens and he was willing to pay that price.

## **Toward a Revolutionary Subjectivity**

How possible is a Glezos or Solon today in Greece? How possible is it for political leaders, as well as average citizens, to sacrifice self-interests or risk biological life for the purpose of a higher, political, notion of the good? Whereas the notions of honor endemic to traditional society led to a greater affinity for risking security and life, for the individuals produced by modern societies this may be less true. As the tentacles of liberalism reach ever deeper and further into all modern societies, including Greek society, the possibilities for principled political action become more remote and unlikely, but principled action is not impossible.

The surprise vote in the Greek referendum in 2015 was one glimpse of the enduring possibility for principled action. Even when faced with the threat of economic retaliation (the cutting off of access to liquidity for the Greek financial sector, and much more), Greeks chose to defy the command to accept the demands of the Troika. It may have been unclear what the consequences might be or what other options might exist in the

event that Greece's creditors refused to make any further concessions in the negotiations, but the meaning of the vote was very clear. The problem SYRIZA faced is that, it had not articulated a political ethic around which to mobilize and direct the political will of the defiant Greeks. If all we are doing is fighting to bring more economic activity, to increase spending and lessen austerity, how far could resistance go? As we noted previously, only as far as it did not endanger even more economic austerity and suffering. If, however, our goal was not to end austerity, but to reclaim popular sovereignty, to make the Greeks, once again, the critical architects in of their own society, rather than servile executors of markets dictates, then to endure the 'suffering' of lower levels of consumption was something that was much more thinkable and possible. Unfortunately, this never happened, the discourse of SYRIZA was so narrowly focused on undoing austerity that the opportunity to more fully explore the range of possibilities that popular mobilizations and resistance could have led to, was lost.

The implications of the above for the possibility of left politics in Greece, and other liberal societies, are clear. The corrosive and paralyzing effects of liberalism need to be constantly guarded against and attacked. Even more importantly, the parties and movements of the left need to produce positive political visions and goals that provide new ways for people to orient their political desires, new measures of what is success and progress, new and superior models for ways of living. The current pandemic is one example of how new political situations and possibilities can emerge, as well as why we need political vision and values beyond liberalism. As so many around the world, presented with the dilemma of risking their life in order to make a living or protecting their health but risking their economic wellbeing by not working, more clearly see the futility and paucity of modern life under capitalism they are presented with no options. Where are the visions of a society that is more than biological life and private property? Why does being 'free' to not wear a mask or to attend indoor religious services appear to many as the height of liberation? Unfortunately, the existing left is largely still caught in this duality (at times arguing for greater security and safeguards from the virus, and at other times arguing for less restrictions on movement and economic activity). If all we can offer is the promise of jobs and biological health, how is the left in any way distinct from the liberal world that oppresses us?

The SYRIZA experience provides a very stark set of questions for left theory in the 21st century. Can we still identify 'left' values and principles that are distinct from liberal-capitalist norms? Similarly, do we have a vision of what we think it is to be human that

is distinct from our animal substructure, one that goes beyond the fact that we all suffer and can feel pain (we are sentient beings). As Badiou states in the opening epigraph, that we are all mortal, that we feel pain and will all die in the end, does not limit us as humans. We are all capable of going beyond the limited and cowardly liberal fetish of avoiding pain and suffering above all else, security and safety as the highest of values. Left thinking needs to rise again as a way to rethink and reorient our ways of living in the world, to once again emulate the heroic actions of those such as Glezos and Solon, and to dare to be as radical as Karl Marx himself, to go to the root, to engage in the ruthless critique of all that exists.



# Negotiating the quartet: Syriza's policy responses in public administration

*Elias Georgantas & Christoforos Vernardakis*

**T**he Quartet is an institutional setup, but above all, a language; yet a peculiar and opaque genre of techno-language: difficult for bystanders to understand, shorthand versions of laden meanings, signs of a technical expertise warranting peer recognition and, of course, tools of domination. Five years ago, Franco Moretti and Dominique Pestre wrote a fabulous piece in the *New Left Review*<sup>1</sup> about Bankspeak, in which they attempted a quantitative linguistic analysis about how global institutions interact with language. If they ever decide to run an update to this linguistic quagmire, it would be very fruitful to extend the scope of their analysis by including the catch-phrases of the bailout engineers. They all come straight from the discussions with the institutions that oversaw the Greek bailout between 2015 and 2018. Here is a sample of Quartetspeak:

*Mission chiefs, reform package, principals, milestones, tranche, prior actions, state of play, programme ownership, staff level agreement, wage grid, bridge financing, contingency measures, programme review, MoU, non-performing loans, compliance report, cash buffer, debt servicing, package endorsement, fiscal ceiling, technical assistance, review mission, technical MoU, midterm review, policy reform package, budgetary implications, technical assessment, fiscal path, financial envelope, standby arrangement, post-programme framework, growth adjustment mechanism, labour market rigidities, ESM, EFSF, EFSM, SRSS, SMP, ANFA, Eurogroup, Euroworking Group...*

A sea of slogans, an ocean of mantras, yet as the poet exclaims:

Water, water, everywhere  
Nor any drop to drink<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moretti, F., and Pestre, D. (2015) 'Bankspeak: The Language of World Bank Reports', *New Left Review*, 92, pp. 75-99.

<sup>2</sup> Coleridge, S. T. (1909) *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. London: Robert Riviere & Son.

Let us return to the more mundane questions: Who plays in the Quartet? What kind of tunes? Who calls the tunes? The Quartet is also known by the more high-sounding designation “The Institutions”. In effect, it is the ex-Troika, plus one more member on board. They are those Institutions sitting at the creditor side of the negotiating table: namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission – this is the Troika of olden times – plus a fourth player holding the purse of the bailout money, that is the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The ESM was the successor to the EFSF. It was the main vehicle financing the Greek bailout, together with loans from the IMF and the countries of the euro area. ESM, and previously the EFSF, provided Greece with loans amounting to 204 billion euros, and now hold more than 50% of its total public debt. These 204 billions of rescue money were disbursed during the three Economic Adjustment Programmes running successively from May 2010 till August 2018.

These three rescue programmes are otherwise known as MoUs, namely Memoranda of Understanding. Of these three, the Third Economic Adjustment Programme is the one signed by the Syriza government shortly after coming to power. The Programme started in the late summer of 2015 and was successfully concluded after three years in the summer of 2018. It amounted to no more than 62 billion euros or 24% of total European loans given to Greece over the 8.5 years of the Greek Debt crisis. However, the largest by far, and most socially destructive of the Programmes was the Second Adjustment Programme-running from 2012 to 2015- with a “financial envelope” of 142 billion euros or 55% of the total European loans being given as bailout money from the EFSF mechanism.

It is worth mentioning, but also often forgotten, that of the Three Adjustment Programmes, only the Third was successfully concluded, eventually leading to an exit from institutional supervision in the summer of 2018. The first two Programmes or MoUs that were signed before Syriza came to power, amounting to no less than 76% of total European bailout money, were never brought to conclusion, thus leading to a continuation of fiscal captivity.

The Quartet was a panel of creditor representatives overseeing many things, not just the fiscal policy aspects pertaining to loan disbursements. In effect, they were institutionalized external actors supervising a multitude of policy aspects. They had a broad,

sometimes too broad, mandate. Besides monitoring rescue loans, they closely supervised legislation in a multitude of areas, ranging from tax evasion to pharmacy licensing, from energy markets to the land cadastre, and from public sector wages to teacher/pupil ratios. Almost everything that could fit under the comprehensive designation of “public sector reform” was potentially on the agenda.

The Quartet did everything they could, mainly, but not always in a polite manner, to keep as many items on the agenda, as possible. Moreover, any agenda item ought to be translated to tangible deliverables. These deliverables normally took the form of legislation, which was subsequently monitored through its implementation stages. On this basis, the mission members of the Quartet could then tick, or not tick, the boxes and report, positively or negatively, to the Eurogroup and the Council. The whole Programme was subdivided into successive stages with each stage being concluded with an assessment review done by the Eurogroup based on the compliance report submitted by the Institutions. There were four reviews in total and each one of them was tied to specific installments and sub-installments of bailout money (the so-called, tranches).

Often, the Quartet did not limit itself to demanding the agreed deliverables. It also insisted on being notified prior to any legislative initiative being taken by the government. Thus, the so-called “right of legislative initiative”, namely the most essential feature of sovereignty, was substantially delimited. When the Quartet asked for prior notification, the demand, however irritating for the Greek negotiation team members, was firmly based on a clause contained in the conclusions of the Euro Summit Statement made after seventeen hours of negotiations at the eventful meeting of 12-13 July 2015:

“The government needs to consult and agree with the Institutions on all draft legislation in relevant areas with adequate time before submitting it for public consultation or to Parliament.”<sup>3</sup>

As a result, acute policy capture effects came to the fore with policy choices being strictly delimited, and sovereignty further eroded. In summing up the main implications of this burdensome regime for public policymaking, six points can be made:

1. Governing under probation: public policy enters a state of captivity. The Institu-

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<sup>3</sup> The European Council, Euro Summit Statement, SN 4070/15, p.5, Brussels, 12 July 2015.

tions impose a regime of extremely strict policy surveillance.

2. Limited fiscal sovereignty: fiscal autonomy is limited far beyond the limits imposed by normal European standards. Tax revenue collection is detached from the realm of government, under the pretext of technocratic neutrality. Tax expenditure is heavily monitored, and austerity calls the tune.
3. Primary policy capture: Policymaking is captured by external agents. Creditor rights are factored in and the total policy equation cannot be resolved before reaching a common understanding of the issues involved. Extended intergovernmentality captures sovereign governmentality.
4. Secondary policy capture: A variety of domestic agents with powerful vested interests acquire voice in the policy-making process, and attempt to influence the Institutions by projecting their loyalty to them and their hostility (exit) to the governing party.<sup>4</sup> This happens in an extra-parliamentarian, if not counter-parliamentarian, manner. Based on the eclectic policy preferences of the Institutions, certain so-called stakeholders are elevated -by several notches- in the consultation process and become powerful interlocutors. These domestic agents acquire the ability to bypass representative government and establish direct communication channels with the Institutions.
5. Policy constraints: Fiscal capacity is impoverished, yet policy goals do not address the causes of its poverty. They simply seek to optimize the output of its poverty. At the same time, the combination of the abovementioned implications delimits the ability of policy to answer social needs and address inequalities.
6. Enormous opportunity cost: Everyday governmental work, in all its aspects (daily schedules, administrative effort, human and material resources, organizational mental load, legislative creativity) is diverted to memoranda management, deliverables, and assessment deadlines. Negotiation overload impacts objective-setting and aggravates organizational fatigue. The sense-of-purpose element undergoes serious changes as government actors, overtaxed and exhausted, have a limited ability to set the agenda.

With such narrow margins of discretion, and a coercive framework of policymaking, Syriza had to adapt and ameliorate, as much as it could, the external parameters of the political process. When examining the main responses that the Syriza government for-

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<sup>4</sup> Hirschman, A. O. (1970) *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

mulated towards the Quartet in order to improve policy output and address this hostile milieu the following nine points can be made:

1. Behavioral simulation: Syriza was forced to swiftly adapt to the modalities of the Quartet. It was key to develop a quick understanding of the modalities dictated by the imbalances of the negotiating table. Syriza successfully managed to deconstruct and transcend the weak position of the debtor by negotiating *as if* this was not a behavioral determinant. It made it clear that an exploitation of the weak debtor position on the part of the Quartet would be mutually destructive, as it would not lead to a viable and lasting settlement.
2. Europeanization of the issues: It was of critical importance to avoid an internalization of the issues involved, and to endeavour, by all possible means, to keep clear of the trap of “Greek exceptionalism”. At the same time, it was necessary to project the stakes as a common European problem deserving a sympathetic approach.
3. Achieve equal or peer status: It was important to overcome the weak negotiating position and make it understood that a productive dialogue requires an earnest approach. From the early stages of the negotiations, it was established that discussions would take place among peers, and at peer level. Then peers could discuss in more equal terms. Of course, technical knowledge, evidence-based argumentation, and clear demarcation of the issues were *sine qua non* conditions supplementing political debate.
4. Trust and credibility building: It was important to improve the trust bond that was very severely damaged during the previous two memoranda between 2010 and 2015. The negotiating strategy established clear “rules of engagement” between the two parties. Evidence-based methodologies and precise argumentation were to have a substantial contribution. Each stage of the negotiations was tied to tangible results, thus creating trust and credibility for the government. Disagreements were openly discussed and clearly defined and understood by both sides. Common ground took precedence over disagreements. As time passed, both technical teams reached a tacit understanding that it was in their mutual interest to close as many issues as possible, at the technical level. The few disagreements that could not be resolved were elevated to the higher political level. Interestingly, as this process proved its value over time, principals’ trust to their respective technical teams was growing and, as a result, fewer and

- fewer teams were referred, either to the ministerial or the Eurogroup levels.
5. Understanding the Eurocracy: It was key to keep in mind that, as with all bureaucracies, the EU bureaucracy, needs to deliver results and show progress to the political hierarchy. The Greek side could provide the necessary input for such tangible results, and keep the ball rolling. On this basis it was key to develop a *modus operandi* that maximized mutual benefit for both sides of the table. The gradual achievement of win-win situations encouraged both sides to work more quickly and achieve progress that would eventually lead to the successful conclusion of each programme review and, eventually, to an exit from political surveillance.
  6. Pro-active agenda setting: It was crucial to not let the Quartet, alone, set the agenda. It was one thing to raise an issue, and quite another to formulate its parameters. The Greek side did both. Wherever it could, it would intervene in the agenda-setting process, and pro-actively define its final contents. In those cases where it was impossible to deflect a thorny item from entering the agenda, it would pro-actively engage the Quartet in formulating the parameters of the issue in a manner that was more conducive to the Government's views. Defining the precise substance and composition of an issue permitted both sides to separate the ideological from the practical element, and thus enhance the common ground.
  7. Dual-track policymaking: Given the acute policy constraints, it was of paramount importance to keep a dual-track approach in policymaking. Apart from the track that was colonized by the Quartet, the Government managed to develop a parallel track of policy initiatives that fell outside the domain of the Quartet's mandate. Also, there were those cases where the Government created room for a pro-active agenda setting. On these occasions, complementary policy measures were put in place that could either counterbalance undesired effects of some imposed measure or establish an entirely new field of policy intervention. In either case, this strategy proved productive and socially beneficial, as it improved the final equilibrium of policy measures. In this way, policies had a better general impact by improving their social fingerprint.
  8. Never negotiate "with the Quartet": A key policy response was that the government, whether or not deliberately, chose to negotiate not *with the* Quartet, but to negotiate *the* Quartet. Either by instinct or by generated experience, the general negotiating stance of the Greek team underwent a gradual anthropolog-

ical transformation, through which the object of contention was transfixed and disembodied from the Quartet, as such. By exporting the issue from the bilateral dynamic of the negotiating table, both sides gradually acquire the ability to approach it as an external object to their relationship. This proved particularly useful, and very productive, in that such a transposition of disagreement allowed both sides to navigate more efficiently. Once the issues became external to their interaction, the two sides could negotiate with each other as polite car drivers coming from opposite directions on a narrow street.

9. The “get-out-and-get-out-soon” objective: There was a shared understanding in government negotiating teams that certain domestic vested interests had no reason whatsoever to desire an exit from the straitjacket of the MoUs. An externally imposed disciplinarian regime, especially of the IMF creed, suited them just fine and the longer it lasted, the better for their austerity dreams. Had it been in their powers, their best option would’ve been to never exit the MoUs. Syriza policy ran fully counter to this: the only way to get rid of an MoU is to get out of it, as quickly and as cleanly as you can. This is exactly what Syriza did. With just a quarter of the total bailout money given to Greece, it managed not only to get the country out of trouble, but also to bail out the other three quarters of the money that was wasted between 2010 and 2015.

In this conference, Jean-Luc Nancy gave a brilliant keynote speech in which he talked about two kinds of Negativity. In the typed handout of his speech, he reminded that,

“there is the negativity we go through, the one we traverse, and there is the negativity where we stop... It seems at first sight obvious that the first is the good negativity, the one we get through, and the second is the bad one. The first one would be the dialectical, Hegelian negativity, and the second seems to be devoid of all resources”.

In retrospect, it seems that the whole Syriza experiment in government firmly belongs to the first kind.



# Left Strategies for (re)constituting democracy: Experiences from Greece

Danai Koltsida

The Greek experience of the past decade (2010-2020) is a compelling argument on how the imposition of neoliberal austerity policies is closely –although not exclusively– linked to the crisis of representation and the crisis of democracy.<sup>1</sup> It is also a constant reminder that austerity cannot proceed without hollowing<sup>2</sup> or even drastically limiting democracy and, reversely, that the fight against austerity has, at its core, the defence of democracy and popular sovereignty. Besides, the question of the democratisation of the state is central in modern left state theory, and essential in any discussion about socialist transition.<sup>3</sup> It also appears to be central –even if not always explicit– in all discussions about the experience of the SYRIZA government (2015-2019), even if it reasonably enough never put socialism on the agenda. It seems thus that (re) constituting and deepening democracy –both in its traditional liberal form and beyond this– is essential not only for a socialist transition, but also for ‘everyday’ strategy of the left.

Drawing data and arguments from Greek political life during the past decade, the present analysis will try to answer two questions: First, what form did the crisis of democracy take in the Greek case, and what was the impact of austerity policies imposed on Greece;

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1 It is no coincidence, for example, that both in Greece and in Spain – two of the countries that were in the epicentre of the economic crisis and received “rescue” packages by the IMF, the EU and the ECB – the “indignants” movements in 2011 (*Aganaktismenoi* in Greece / *Indignados* in Spain) called for “direct” and “real” democracy, respectively. Besides, this quest for democracy inspired and mobilised hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, in the context of similar movements of this era, such as *Occupy*. See: Roos, J.E. & Oikonomakis, L. (2014). They Don’t Represent Us! The Global Resonance of the Real Democracy Movement from the Indignados to Occupy. In D. della Porta, A. Mattoni (Eds.), *Spreading Protest. Social Movements in Times of Crisis*, 117-137. Colchester: ECPR Press. Simiti, M. (2014). Rage and Protest: The case of the Greek Indignant movement, GreeSE Paper No. 82, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe. In: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Hellenic-Observatory/Assets/Documents/Publications/GreeSE-Papers/GreeSE-No82.pdf> (Accessed: 20 January 2021). London School of Economics, Hellenic Observatory. Ancelovici, M., Dufour, F. & Nez, H. (Eds.) (2016). *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity. From the Indignados to Occupy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Prentoulis, M., Thomassen, L. (2013). The legacy of the Indignados. In: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/legacy-of-indignados/> (Accessed: 20 January 2021).

2 Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the Void. The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. London-New York: Verso.

3 See for example Panitch, L. (2009). *The State in the current Crisis and the Strategies of the Left in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Annual Nicos Poulantzas Memorial Lecture 2008. [To krátos stin trékhousa krisi kai I stratiyikés tis aristerás ston 21o aióna. Etísia diálexi pros timín tou Nikou Poulantzá 2008]*. Athens: Nissos-Nicos Poulantzas Institute [in Greek].

and second, how did SYRIZA try to respond to this crisis, and what was the impact of its governance on the current status of democracy and democratic politics in Greece.

### **The three constituting elements of democracy and its crisis<sup>4</sup>**

The term ‘crisis of democracy’ has been used for decades both in academic and political literature and in the public discourse to describe a complex and even contested phenomenon. Proposing a generally applicable definition being beyond the scope of this paper, we will here use the term in order to describe a retreat of one or more of the constituting elements of democracy, which, for the purposes of this analysis, we consider to be the following:

- (a) The ‘constitutional element’, a term used here to describe the ‘external’, ‘typical’, organisational and procedural aspect of democracy. This includes the division of powers between the organs of the State and the ‘checks and balances’ system, the parliamentary processes, the procedural judiciary rules, etc.
- (b) The ‘liberal element’ that is used here to describe the recognition and effective protection of rights and freedoms, and
- (c) The ‘popular element’ that primarily is the majoritarian principle, but also the *politically effective* participation of the people in the decision-making process.

The crisis of democracy, defined as above, has been manifested differently in different socio-political environments: Whereas in the post-soviet Eastern-European democracies it was the liberal element that was eliminated, resulting in the well-known type of ‘illiberal democracy’,<sup>5</sup> in Western Europe it is the popular element that gradually retreated, resulting in a *democracy without a demos* or in what is explicitly described as ‘constitutional liberalism’<sup>6</sup> or ‘liberal constitutionalism’<sup>7</sup> instead of ‘full’ democracy. As Peter Mair described it, “[b]y the late 1990s, [...] it seemed that neither the citizens,

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4 Many of the ideas presented in this section are inspired by the remarks of Akritas Kaidatzis in the e-paper he wrote for Nicos Poulantzas Institute: See Kaidatzis, A. (2020). Pandemic, Democracy, Rights. The end of Constitutional Law? [Pandimía, dimokratía, dikaiómata: To telos tou syntagmatikou dikaíou?]. In: <https://poulantzas.gr/yliko/akritas-kaidatzis-pandimia-dimokratia-dikeomata-to-telos-tou-syntagmatikou-dikeou/> (Accessed 20 January 2021). Nicos Poulantzas Institute, *Analyses for #covid19* Series. [In Greek]. To a large extent they also follow the aforementioned analysis by Peter Mair (Mair 2013. Ibid.)

5 Zakaria, F. (1997). “The rise of illiberal democracy.” In: *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22-43.

6 Zakaria 1997. Ibid.

7 Ginsburg, T., Huq, A.Z. & Versteeg, M. (2018). „The Coming Demise of Liberal Constitutionalism?” In: *University of Chicago Law Review*, 85, 239-255.

on the one hand, nor the policy-makers, on the other, were keen to privilege the role of political or partisan decision-making”.<sup>8</sup> This process was reflected, according to Mair, in two concurring phenomena: On the social level, political indifference grew – not transforming however into indifference or even hostility towards democracy in itself – and on the institutional level power in the decision-making process was gradually transferred from democratically legitimised organs to ‘non-majoritarian’ institutions (‘de-politicised’ or ‘independent’ authorities) and ‘experts’.<sup>9</sup>

In reality, though, the experiences of both the Eastern and the Western democracies prove that the different elements of democracy are inseparable and that any retreat of one of them poses, sooner rather than later, serious threats to the others, as well, as it will be shown in the analysis of the Greek experience that follows.

### **The Greek case: Democracy in the context of Memoranda**

For many years, in the post-dictatorship era, Greece followed a path similar to the rest of the western world. After a short period of high radicalisation and political polarisation, a gradual transition to what was described as a ‘convergent’ bipartisanship took place. It was not, of course, a convergence towards a Downsian ‘median voter’,<sup>10</sup> but the result of a ‘great transformation’. On the one hand, the accession of Greece to the EU in 1981 and the subsequent Europeanization process brought closer the right– and the left-wing dominant parties (New Democracy and PASOK respectively), as the political priorities were defined by the needs of reaching and keeping up with the *acquis Communautaire* not only on the economic, but also on the institutional and political level. On the other hand, in the late 90s and the early 2000s, the social-democratic party of PASOK embraced the ‘third way’ and gradually dropped its socialist roots, turning to neoliberalism. This Greek version of Blairism, the ‘modernisation’ project,<sup>11</sup> dominated the Greek political

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8 Mair 2013, *Ibid*, 6.

9 *Ibid*, 6-7.

10 Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper

11 Although it is difficult to adequately describe what was exactly this ‘modernisation’ project –as apart from public policy agenda, it also had a deep ideological impact– one could simplistically enough say that it was a combination of neoliberal economic and social policies (privatisations, pension reform etc.) with an emphasis on institutional and administrative reforms allegedly aiming at enhancing effectiveness and institutional capacity of the state. According to the dominant analysis, these reforms aimed at treating longstanding weaknesses, such as the regime of ‘disjointed corporatism’, and cultural practices of clientelism and ‘rent-seeking’, as Featherstone describes it. See: Featherstone, K. (2005). Introduction: ‘Modernisation’ and the Structural Constraints of Greek Politics. In: *West European Politics*, 28:2, 223-241. Moschonas, G. (2001). “The path of modernization: PASOK and European integration. In: *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*”, 3:1, 11 – 24. Spourdalakis, M. (2008). 2007 “Greek

life, thus further contributing to the political convergence of the two dominant parties. The results of this convergence process were also reflected in the political behaviour of the Greeks – indicating a certain withdrawal of the popular element of democracy in its social aspect that was mentioned above. Electoral turnout dropped by almost 2 million voters<sup>12</sup> in less than two decades, and interest in politics, party membership and all other indexes dropped as well (Figure 1).

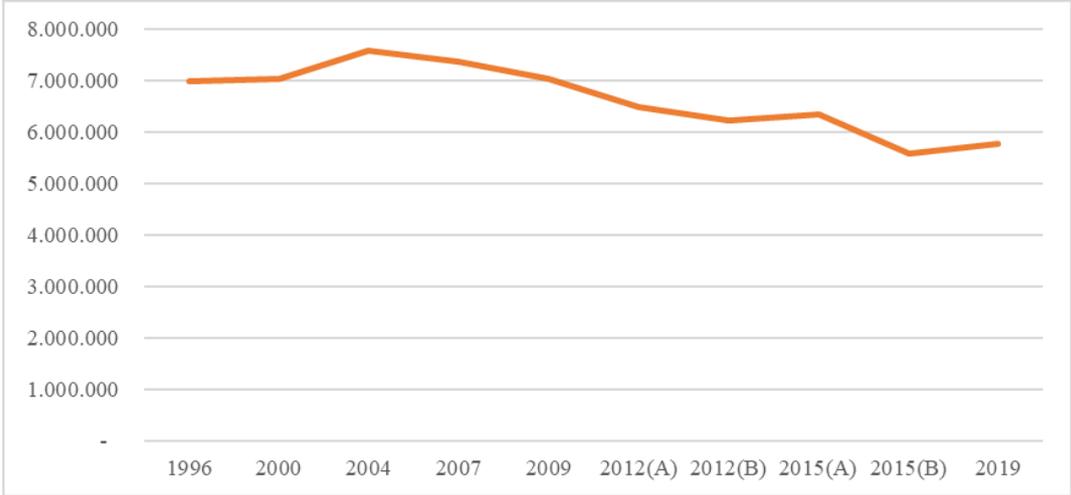


Figure 1 : Electoral Turnout (National Elections)<sup>13</sup>

The imposition however of the austerity policies and the consecutive memoranda after 2010 proved to be a crucial factor for democratic politics in Greece, posing severe challenges or even dangers for all the three constituting elements of democracy in the country.

The first element to be – openly and violently – attacked was, as one might expect, the popular one. All social demands were collectively accused as ‘populistic’, and systematic efforts to present the left as identical to the far-right were deployed. Elections were perceived as ‘trouble’ or ‘danger’ for the financial stability and security, and as a result, after the massive social protests of 2011, the then democratically elected Prime Minister, Yorgos Papandreou, resigned not in order to go to elections, but in order for a technocrat, Loukas Papadimos, to take over, as head of a grand-coalition government, which signed and ratified the 2<sup>nd</sup> Memorandum (March 2012). Moreover, in the early

Elections: Signs of Major Political Realignment, Challenges and Hopes for the Left.” In: *Studies in Political Economy*, 82, Autumn 2008, 171-186.

12 The Greek electorate consisting of no more than 8 million voters in total.

13 Source: Processing of data by the Ministry of Interior, Electoral Results Database (<https://elections.ypes.gr>).

elections of May/June 2012, the vote to parties that opposed memoranda, and especially to SYRIZA, were openly and officially described in the public discourse as dangerous and catastrophic, as almost a threat to the very existence of the nation.

At the same time, the remaining two elements (the ones that were described as ‘constitutional liberalism’ above) were not left untouched, either. Regarding the constitutional element, the ‘formal’, ‘typical’ or ‘procedural’ constitutional legitimacy, one must note that, luckily, the Greek constitution proved to be resilient, and the political crisis did not transform into an open constitutional crisis, however, the constitutional legitimacy did face severe challenges. To mention just a few examples: The most characteristic phenomenon was the clear abuse, especially in 2012, of the constitutional provision for governmental legislative decrees [*Práxeis Nomothetikou Periekhoménu*], normally reserved for cases of emergency, in order to by-pass the normal legislation in parliament (*Figure 2*). There were also other forms of disruption of the normal functioning of parliament: For example, although violation of guidelines for qualitative legislation is a persistent pathology in Greece, the fact that laws of hundreds of pages were designed to have only one article, in order for MPs to be unable to vote against one single provision, was unprecedented. Or, even on the symbolic level, the fact the then Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras (2012-2014) and – to a lesser extent – the Ministers rarely appeared in front of the Parliament in order to answer questions from the opposition was also a clear sign of the role reserved for the parliament during this period.

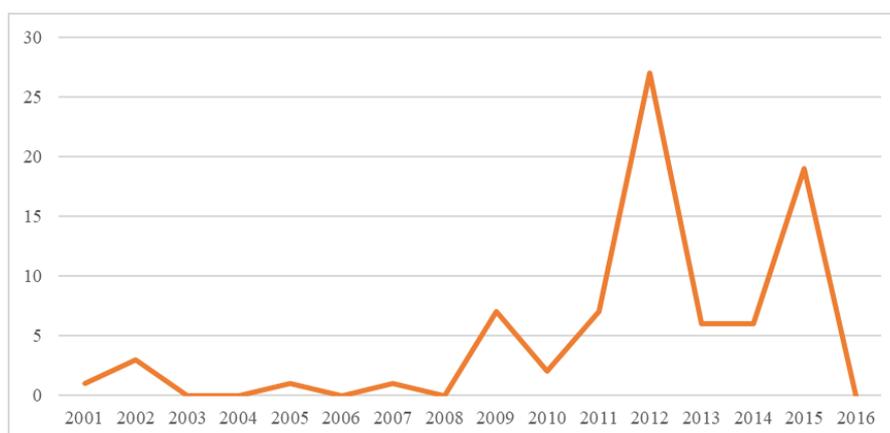


Figure 2: Number of governmental legislative decrees per year<sup>14 15</sup>

14 Source: Processing of data by Sotiropoulos, D.A. &Christopoulos, L. (2017). *Legislative Perplexity, Lack of Quality Legislation and Bureaucracy in Greece. Analysis of Failures of the Past and Proposals of Improvements* [*Polinomia, Kakonomia kai Graphiokratia stin Ellada Análsi Apotikhíontou Parelthóntos kai Protásis Veltiotikón Paremváseon*]. Paper for Dianeosis Institute. In: [https://www.dianeosis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Polynomia\\_Main\\_UPD\\_41217.pdf](https://www.dianeosis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Polynomia_Main_UPD_41217.pdf).

15 The high rate of governmental legislative decrees in 2015 is –contrary to 2012– constitutionally justified, as most of them were issued either for the needs of the consecutive elections (when there is no Parliament) or concerning the closure of Banks in June/July 2015, the emergency in those cases being apparent.

Finally, the liberal element of democracy was not an exception, as it also found itself under threat. Apart from the ultra-conservative legislation adopted during the first half of the decade 2010-2020 and especially between 2012 and 2014, such as the Law on Maximum-Security Prisons (L. 4274/2014), excessive police violence and impunity of officers that misbehaved were an everyday phenomenon, especially during protests, but also against migrants or other targeted groups. At the same time, the neo-Nazi far-right (Golden Dawn) was often used – albeit *not* officially, of course<sup>16</sup> – as a supplementary mechanism of oppression (see for example, attacks in popular neighbourhoods, such as Perama, the targeting of trade-unionists, reports for collaboration with the police during protests etc.). However, the most characteristic example of an illiberal turn of Greek democracy at that time –that also resulted not only in massive protests, but also in the resignation of the junior government partner of DIMAR (*Dimokratikí Aristerá* – Democratic Left) – was the sudden closure of the National Radio-Television (ERT) in 2013.

## **The rise of SYRIZA to power and its impact on the status of democracy in Greece**

Both the pathway of SYRIZA to power before 2015 and its governance from 2015 to 2019, proved to be important for the status of democracy in Greece. Although in reality, this experience should be examined as a whole, one can schematically distinguish three periods:

The first period – from 2011 until December of 2014 – was the period of grand battles over democracy. In an environment of massive and radicalised social mobilisation, SYRIZA actively participated in the movement and was the protagonist of several political and/or symbolic battles over democracy, both in and outside Parliament. The two most important moments were, beyond any doubt, the movement of *Aganaktisméni* (the Greek version of Indignados<sup>17</sup>) in 2011, and the protests against the closure of the Public Radio-Television (ERT) in 2013. Also, the very emergence of SYRIZA to the political forefront revived and re-politicised the public discourse and created a new polarisation on new or renewed divides. Most importantly, it revived the divide between

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<sup>16</sup> Although revelations about the discussions of the then Cabinet Secretary, Mr. Takis Mpaltakos, with the Golden Dawn MPs caused a political turmoil and resulted in the resignation of the former (see the reportage in: <http://www.enetenglish.gr/?i=news.en.article&id=1839>, Newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, 2/4/2014. Accessed: 20 January 2021).

<sup>17</sup> See above, footnote 1.

Left and Right. Besides, even the attacks against SYRIZA are revealing, as two of the main ‘accusations’ against it were about the party’s ‘populism’, and its lack of ‘excellence’ and ‘expertise’ in governing – in other words about SYRIZA being ‘too’ political.

The second period, meaning the first months of the SYRIZA government – from January 2015 until the signing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorandum – can be described as a phase of a new governmental ‘attitude’, since the impact of the governmental shift had strong symbolic connotations (and even some tangible practical results), regarding the restoration of democracy. First of all, from the beginning, negotiations with the *troika* were brought to the public sphere and were conducted on behalf of the government using not only economic, but also, political arguments. Secondly, parliamentary procedures were respected and revived, with legislation passed by the parliament and the government appearing in front of the MPs regularly. Thirdly, phenomena of police violence and oppression halted. Fourth, the conservative legislation of the previous years was abolished during the first months of the new government (e.g. the Law on Maximum-Security Prisons was abolished and replaced by a more liberal penal system that is known as “Paraskevopoulos Law”,<sup>18</sup> named after the then Minister of Justice). Most importantly, the question of popular sovereignty became central, not only in the public discourse of the new government, but also during the negotiations with the *troika* and, of course, with the 2015 Referendum – the importance of which is not yet fully understood and appreciated. Besides, one must not forget that Alexis Tsipras opted to seek democratic legitimacy again through elections after the signing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorandum, whereas in the previous years, governments that adopted Memoranda tried to avoid elections.

During the third and last period –after the signature of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorandum and the second elections won by SYRIZA in September 2015– the political landscape was rather different. There was a complete retreat of the social movement of the previous years and the anti-memoranda rhetoric had exhausted its dynamic and impact. As a result, in terms of democracy, the second government of SYRIZA (September 2015-July 2019) invested more in institutional reforms and prioritised the liberal agenda. Especially during the most difficult and time-consuming negotiations with the *troika* (between 2016 and 2017), but also later –after the signature and ratification of the Prespes Agreement – SYRIZA invested in a polarisation on the basis of the progressive/conservative divide in the place of the previous pro-/anti-memoranda divide. A selection of the most important of these

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18 L. 4322/2015.

institutional reforms would include the new Greek Nationality Code (L. 4332/2015), the new penal legislation (L. 4322/2015 and, most importantly, the Penal Code and the new Code of Penal Procedure), the Law on the Civil Union for Homosexual Couples (L. 4356/2015) and the Law on Sex Self-identification (L. 4491/2017), the new proportional electoral law for national elections (L. 4406/2016), the Reform of Local Government, including proportional electoral law, reinforcement of local communities, local and regional referenda, consultation procedures, etc. (L. 4555/2018), the new legislation on licensing of radio/television stations, with provisions aiming to secure pluralism and independence (L. 4339/2015), etc.

During the same period, SYRIZA initiated the process of a constitutional reform. This initiative was not only important because of the content of the governmental proposal (provision of new rights, constitutionally protected proportionality of electoral systems, popular legislative initiative, enhancement of transparency in political life and new provisions for the prosecution of political corruption, etc.). It was equally – if not more – important because of the new participatory process that SYRIZA tried to adopt for the preparation of this proposal, through a special committee that organised the public debate about the reform, with special consultations, public events, etc. In fact, SYRIZA even considered proposing a consultative referendum on the reform of the constitution – a proposal that was later dropped because of the fierce opposition it met.

### **Impact and limits of a strategy for (re)constituting democracy from a governmental position: Instead of a conclusion**

The first question that one might pose following the remarks above is, what was the impact of the presence of SYRIZA in the political forefront and of its initiatives, once in government? Undoubtedly, SYRIZA ‘healed’ the severely hurt Greek democracy and lifted most of the consequences that the previous period had on it. At the same time, it restored the trust and interest of people in politics: throughout the period during which SYRIZA was marching towards power, interest in politics kept rising (*Figure 3*).

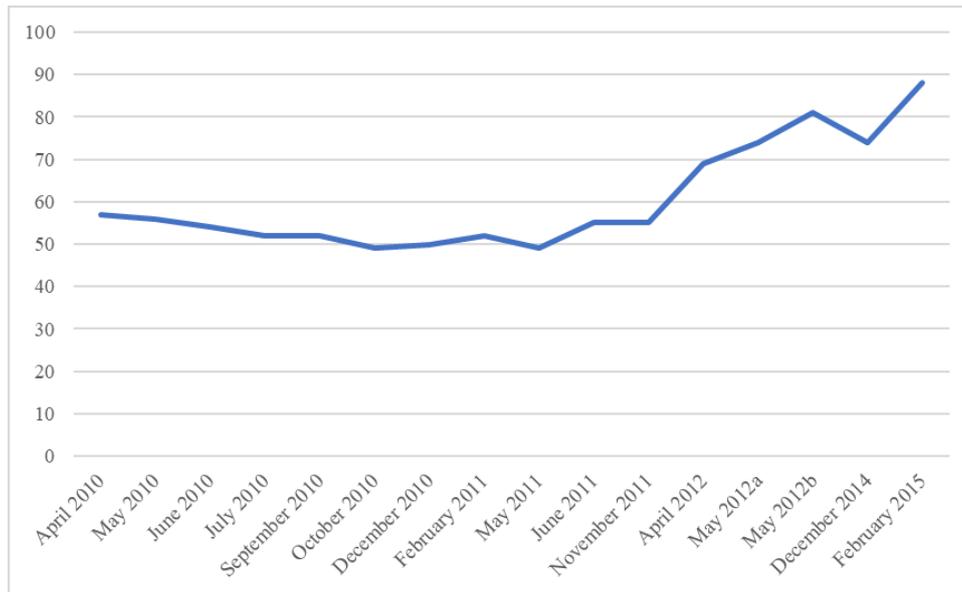


Figure 3: Interest for politics<sup>19</sup>

One can also note that the presence of a party such as SYRIZA in office, and the legislation it adopted, also had an ‘educative’ impact on the overall attitudes of the society, shifting public opinion to more favourable positions on matters of the so-called ‘liberal agenda’, due to the official public advocacy for these matters. For example, when the law on the civil union for same-sex couples was voted on (December 2016), popular support for same-sex marriages was at its highest levels (*Figure 4*).

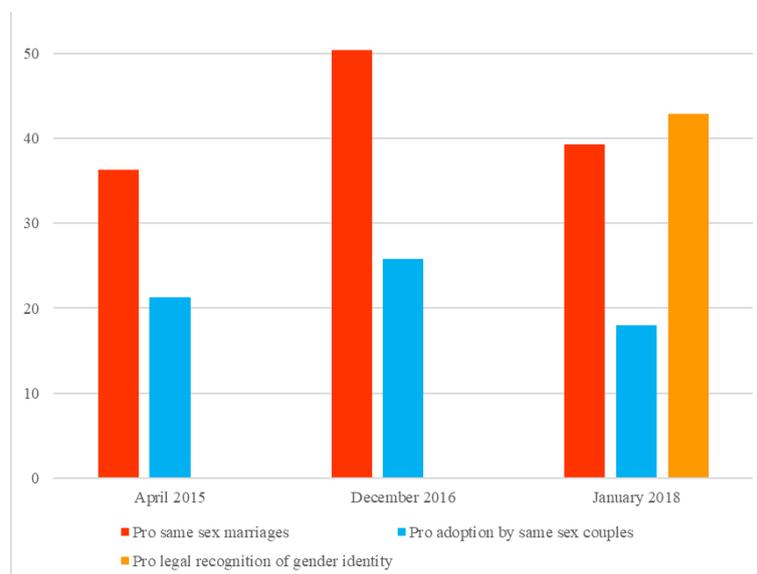


Figure 4: Public opinion in favour of LGBTQI+ rights<sup>20</sup>

19 Source: Processing of data by Public Issue, Barometer ([www.publicissue.gr](http://www.publicissue.gr))

20 Source: Processing of data by Dianeosis/MRB.

However, the aforementioned positive impact of the rise of SYRIZA to power and its term in office, albeit incontestable, had some limits, nonetheless. Once in government, SYRIZA did not go as far as totally overcoming the pre-existing (before 2010) crisis. First of all, the implementation of austerity policies inherently contradicted any attempt for transformative policies on the political/democratic level. Moreover, the decline of social availability, and of support for SYRIZA did not permit more radical initiatives or limited the impact of any initiatives the government did take. One characteristic index is the one of dissatisfaction from the function of democracy: this index was at its lowest levels during the first trimester of the SYRIZA government (March 2015), but 3 years later, in 2018, it had again reached – albeit not the alarming levels of 2012 – but even so, it touched those of 2010, when the crisis of political representation was already in place. The signature of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorandum fuelled once more, a sentiment of frustration. Also, the failure of SYRIZA to successfully politicize even the initiatives it did take, and to create an alternative narrative and a social coalition on a democratic agenda, was apparent. One characteristic example is the reform of the electoral system in national and regional/local elections. SYRIZA voted a proportional electoral system for national elections (in 2016) and for local and regional elections (in 2018). Whereas the majority of the people in all relevant polls was in favour of this reform (*Figure 5-6*), the new right-wing government managed to abolish both SYRIZA laws in 2019 with no resistance at all, which indicates that SYRIZA failed to organise the supporters of such reforms in a more permanent and conscious base.

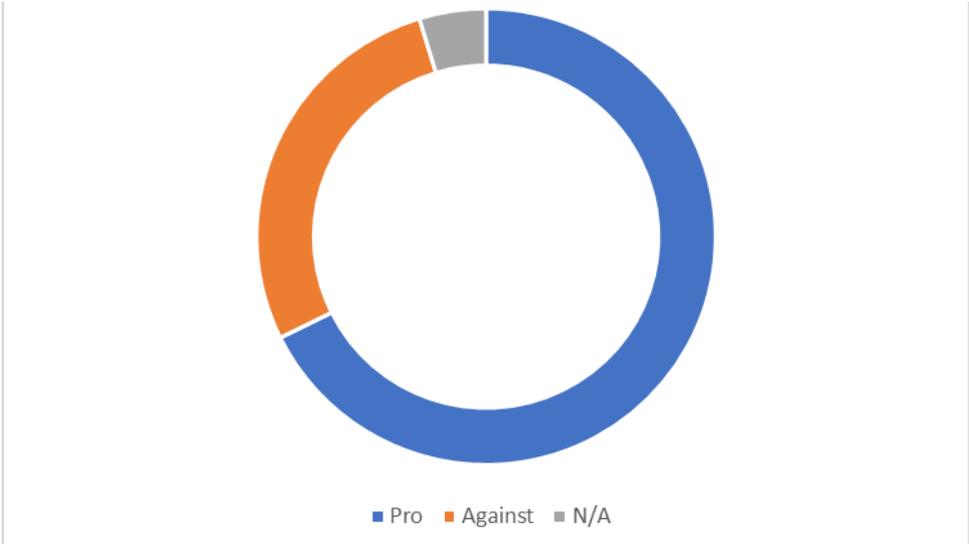


Figure 5: Support for a proportional electoral system in national elections (June 2016)<sup>21</sup>

21 Source: Processing of data from Kapa Research ([www.kaparesarch.com](http://www.kaparesarch.com)) .

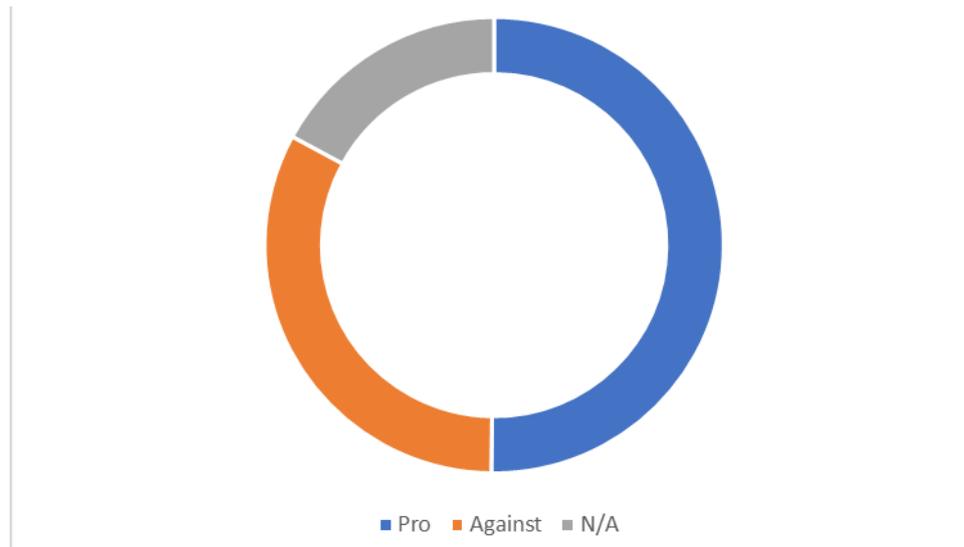


Figure 6: Support for a proportional electoral system in Local/Regional Government Organisations - “even if this risks a break-down of Municipalities and Regions” (March 2017)<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, one should not forget two additional but important obstacles: First, the coalition with a right-wing populist<sup>23</sup> party (Independent Greeks – ANEL) that forced SYRIZA to depend on the opposition in order to pass any ‘progressive’ and liberal legislation and second, the successful strategy of the right-wing opposition to create an anti-SYRIZA bloc that was impossible to break regardless of the political agenda. This deprived even positive initiatives of adequate social support.

## Concluding remarks

Instead of an overall conclusion, we will propose three concluding remarks. First, the Greek case proves that it is impossible to have a ‘democracy without a demos’, as it is impossible to have an ‘illiberal democracy’. Once a democratic element is questioned, the others will, sooner or later, follow when the circumstances allow or demand it.

Second, in an overall assessment, SYRIZA reversed, to a large extent, the damage caused to all three elements of democracy in Greece during the first half of the last decade. However, it failed to take up more decisive transformative initiatives, especially

<sup>22</sup> Source: Processing of data from Opinion Poll ([www.opinionpoll.gr](http://www.opinionpoll.gr)).

<sup>23</sup> In the sense of ‘illiberal’.

because the signature of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorandum deprived it of the necessary social support and mobilisation. One could allegorically say that when SYRIZA, as a governing party, tried to open a more democratic pathway in the state, the society was no longer following it. The total impact of its governance is nonetheless positive.

And finally, the successes and the failures of SYRIZA in its attempt to (re)constitute democracy prove that there is more than one prerequisite for that: A simultaneous intervention at the socio-political level to secure social availability, and at the institutional level with reforms that broaden participation and enhance the popular element, the politicisation of the process and a political actor (party) willing and capable of deploying such a strategy, in order to go beyond a simple revival of traditional democracy and – a *conditio sine qua non* – a rupture with austerity policies.

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# Technological revolutions, development, work, and social rights: pensions and full employment

*Yeoryios Stamboulis*

## Introduction

Well before the economic crisis of 2009, since the late 1980s, pension policy has been at the top of the political agenda in Greece. Several attempts to overcome the pension crisis everybody forecasted failed to gather the required social and political consensus. The common element of all approaches and attempts has been a failure to recognise the reality of the end of Fordism -apart from neoliberal attempts to privatise (at least parts of) the pension system, in accord with the drive for financialization. Public and policy discourse was trapped between the fallacy that this was mostly a problem of demographics, and the reality of demographic clientelist/corporatist politics.

In the early years of the Greek crisis, neoliberal policies climaxed, driving the system to the brink of collapse. The SYRIZA-led government achieved - despite the hostile political environment - a rational progressive restructuring of the pension system, which, however, failed to gather the required social consensus and was – in my opinion – one of the main reasons for its defeat in the 2019 elections. While the restructuring was based on fair and progressive principles, it merely showed the limits of the logic of the current system. Many were dissatisfied: pensioners that had been hurt by previous cuts because their pensions were not restored (especially high pensioners); the self-employed and SMEs because, in recession conditions, the burden of contributions was unbearable; young people, because the prospect of liveable pensions seemed an impossible prospect; workers, because they were forced to collude with contribution-evasion; the unemployed, because the system hindered job creation; and so on. Thus, while the restructuring seemed to be successful, all – with the exception of the low pensioners – remained dissatisfied and disappointed, and mass shortcomings of the system remained. The exercise showed the limitations of parametric solutions.

## Welfare and capitalism

Welfare policies and the relevant policy debate have been around for as long as capitalism exists. Karl Polanyi (1944) argues in the “The Great Transformation” that welfare provisions formed a significant part of the institutional foundation for the transition to capitalism. Poverty benefits were followed by pensions (initially for the military and public servants)<sup>1</sup>. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting from Bismark’s Germany, through to the post-war national welfare systems, pension systems have become a vital foundation of the modern industrial state.

In the mainstream view, the key objectives are “to prevent old age poverty, to enable pensioners to maintain their previous standard of living and to promote solidarity within and between generations...” while “...adapting their pension systems to more flexible employment and career patterns”<sup>2</sup>, but at the same time, to reduce the burden on government budgets<sup>3</sup> thus, raising questions on the feasibility of stated social objectives<sup>4</sup> (Schludi, 2005).

In any form, pensions are a big part of state budgets and the financial system. Although initially, pensions were viewed simply as a part of the social contract (especially in the USA where they were part of union contracts), it is increasingly recognised that they are linked with fiscal policy, social policy, investment, and so on. The mainstream policy debate on the issue of pensions is focused on the dipole between “privatization” according to the capitalization system and “trilateral funding”, where the reasoning of restitution and of capitalization often co-exist.

The pension crisis has attracted attention in the last thirty years, as fiscal pressures gave the neoliberal agenda the excuse to attack in many ways. On one hand,

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1 Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Beacon Press

2 Schludi, M. (2005), *The Reform of Bismarckian Pension Systems: A Comparison of Pension Politics in Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press

3 Council of the European Union (2010), Council Conclusions on “Adequate, Safe and Sustainable Pensions for All European Citizens”, 3053rd Employment, Social Policy Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, ([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lssa/118246.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lssa/118246.pdf))

4 Schludi, M. (2005) op. cit.

pension rights and employer contributions have been reduced, while, on the other, privatization drags pension funds in the sphere of financialization.

Drucker (1976) foresaw that pension funds could be a major factor of financial investment and markets<sup>5</sup>. He considered this a form of worker-via-pension-funds-socialism, but, as Blackburn (2002) noted, a fairer description might be that it was a golden boys' heaven, as pensions evolved into a form of "banking on death"<sup>6</sup>. The drive of capitalization of pension contributions did not feed back into the real economy, but in the financial sphere, as the bankruptcy of several funds in the US and Europe showed in the late 2010s. In some cases, pensions funds were closely tied with their industrial sectors that pulled them down as they declined. In other cases, they have been invested in overseas assets, producing income for the pensioners, but at the same time, undermining the industrial base and employment from which they draw membership.

The debate is centered around the Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) model, where contributions of the currently employed contribute, along with returns from investment and public provisions, towards pension payments. The PAYG model is based on a perception of the pension system as a closed system, without major interactions with the economy. The threat most often stated as a key issue is that of demographic trends towards an aging society. Links to other issues - such as employment and the need to address the impact of technical change - are considered exogenous and practically marginal in the dominant debate<sup>7</sup>, although they are emphasized in policy documents as factors external to the pension system: e.g., "raising employment rates and productivity"<sup>8</sup>.

## **Pensions and employment**

What is missing from the debate is the realization that the pension system is much more than a redistribution mechanism and a social safety net. It is an integral part of the mode of production. Hence, the crisis of the pension system, and the social insurance system in general, is inextricably linked to the crisis of the Fordist mode of production<sup>9</sup>. Still,

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5 Drucker, P. (1976), *The Unseen Revolution: How Pension Fund Socialism Came to America*, New York: Harper & Row

6 Blackburn, R. (2002), *Banking on Death, or Investing in Life: The History and Future of Pensions*, London: Verso

7 OECD (2011), *Pensions at a Glance 2011: Retirement-Income Systems in OECD and G20 Countries* ([www.oecd.org/els/social/pensions/PAG](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/pensions/PAG)).

8 Council of the European Union (2010) op. cit.

9 Hletsos M. (1993) "Analysis of the welfare state crisis as crisis of organization of the social", in proceedings of

while this is acknowledged, it has not been further explored. Here, lies a key reason for the failure to successfully address the pension problem in Greece, as well as in many European countries (e.g., France).

A broader view shows that interactions between the pension system and employment run in both directions (Figure 1). Employment is key to the sustainability of the system, as it is key to both tax revenue and contributions. What is missing from virtually all mainstream approaches<sup>10</sup> is the fact that, as it stands, the PAYG system has a significant impact on employment. All available measures to reduce the system deficit – and thus fiscal (budget) burden – affect employment: raising contributions increases indirect labour costs discourages new hires and encourages contributions evasion; lowering pensions or reducing pension eligibility result in lower consumption (more significantly, as the population ages) thus reducing employment. Hence, while employment is acknowledged as important to the system’s sustainability, attempts for parametric solutions are doomed to worsen the situation.

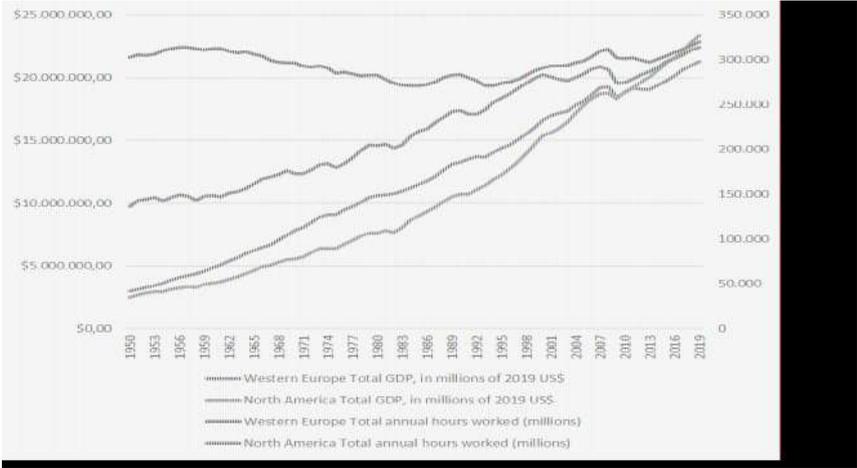


Figure 1: the feedback loop dynamics of PAYG pension systems

The failure to recognise the importance of employment is dual. Not just in terms of the number of workers, but also of their income, as both contributions and taxes are – usually – income related. Thus, most analysts do not realise the fact that while unemployment rates remained low and employment rates were sustained or increased – in most countries – real employment and incomes were decreased. The breach of the post-war social contract resulted in the rise of precarious, part-time employment, lower wages and rising inequalities.

the 3rd Convention of the Sakis Karagiorgas Foundation: Dimensions of Social Policy Today, Athens, pp. 86-94 (in Greek), and Hletsos M and Robolis S. (1999) “The social insurance system against the horizon of 2000”, in Sakellariopoulos Th. (ed) The Reform of the Social State, Volume A, Kritiki Publishers, Athens, pp. 399-430 (in Greek)

10 Tinios P. (2010) *Insurance: A reading method*, Kritiki Publishers, Athens (in Greek)

A pragmatic view of the situation should consider the amount of work, not just employment or unemployment numbers. The historic trend in the post-war Europe and North America shows that working hours did not rise in tandem with GDP (Figure 2).

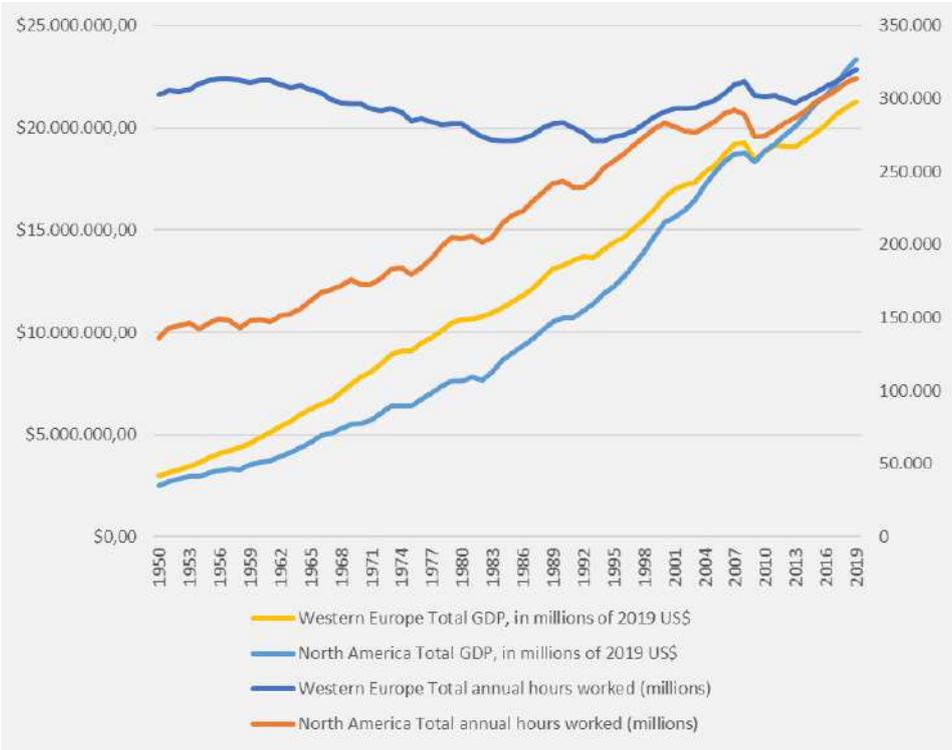


Figure 2: Total annual working hours and GDP at macro-regional level

The prospect that higher growth rates would resolve the pension system crisis is missing the fact that technical change has affected the core of industrial relations and the modality of production. Reduced demand for work was camouflaged in most countries under rising partial employment and precariousness. The reality of jobless growth has been around for some time but went unnoticed, as the erosion of employment relations covered up the fact. It has not been a crisis due to demographics, nor low growth. Since the pension system may be sustainable only under true full employment, any meaningful solution should include a meaningful reduction of working time (with the same or higher wages).

Changes also take place in the nature of work. As investment shifts to intangible assets, so does the mode of value creation and distribution change along with a shift from manual to intellectual and creative labour<sup>11</sup>. Disruptive change would entail the transition to

11 Reich, R.B. (1992), *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, New York: Vintage

new patterns of industrial activity, work organization, skills, and so on. The immediate reduction of working time is also necessary to allow a smooth transition, where current workers will be able to adapt to new technologies and young ones are integrated into existing and new activities. Moreover, the shift to intellectual activity gives greater opportunities for the self-organisation of work in knowledge-coops<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, the reduction of working time is critical not only for the attainment of full employment and a viable pension system, but also for the transition to a learning society that would take advantage of technical change equitably and fairly.

## **On the ethics of pensions**

Before looking at how this may be achieved, it is important to address the ethical issues relevant to the pension system, that any change should also address. Blackburn (2002) notes that welfare policy history bears an element of stigmatizing the poor. In the case of pensions, the discourse has been dominated by a bias of “legitimation through contribution”. Pensions are tacitly considered as an individual right rather than a social right, in the sense that eligibility is based on formal “contribution”, considered as waged or paid labour, not as a right of every citizen to old age with dignity. Unpaid labour, such as housekeeping, informal labour, which is usually the fate of the weakest, involuntary unemployment is not considered worthy of the right to a pension fulfilling people’s needs. Distributive justice is limited only to those formally employed for a considerable part of their lives. The rest are not considered worthy of a full, good pension.

Contribution-based systems are in essence a second tax system exclusive for labour wages, excluding property and income from their social obligations. By treating pensions as an individual rather than a social right, the mainstream view misses the social impact of the pension system. Social security and the eradication of poverty at old age are not valued, nor the relief that such guarantees of safety at old age would bring to people throughout their life.

As Hyde and Dixon (2009) note:

“The neoliberal approach to retirement income provision and distributive justice is in-

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<sup>12</sup> Hodgson, G.M. (1998), *Economics and Utopia: Why the Learning Economy is Not the End of History*, London/ New York: Routledge

herently flawed ... in at least two ways. First, although the protection of individuals from coercion may be an important political ideal, it fails to acknowledge the range of normative principles that could be relevant to the design of just retirement pension institutions. Second, ... it embraces a one-dimensional view of the normative foundations of liberal retirement systems: “liberal” is equated with “neoliberal,” which means that liberal retirement systems must be regarded as hostile to egalitarian concerns.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, most contemporary pension systems exclude women and increasing numbers of the rising precariat. On the other hand, the drive for capitalization fits the needs of the few, in terms of tax evasion<sup>14</sup>. According to Hyde and Dixon<sup>15</sup>, a pension system based on principles of distributive justice should serve three principles:

- Need, i.e., “the social minimum that is necessary to sustain an adequate standard of living for the least advantaged”;
- Desert, i.e., a provision justifying “allocating income in accordance with differentials in work participation prior to retirement”; and
- Equality, in terms of “a normative rationale for universal citizenship entitlements.”

The first principle would be served by a “universal, residence-based, tax-financed coverage of all permanent residents, sufficient at least to ensure subsistence, with criteria-based supplements for particular special need categories”.

The second principle should involve a “mandatory universal work-related coverage encompassing all engaged in paid employment or in unpaid socially valued activities, with property rights vested in the accumulating retirement assets (with regulated asset management), benefits entitlements determined in accordance with past earnings, conditional survivors’ benefits, and progressive taxation rates are applied to the interest earned on retirement assets by future retirees”.

The third principle, which provides flexibility according to the priorities of citizens, should allow for “voluntary retirement beyond the universal age of eligibility, with deferment benefits and broad arrangements for citizens to pursue freely their conception of the good life”.

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13 Hyde, M. and Dixon, J. (2009), “A Just Retirement Pension System: Beyond Neoliberalism”, *Public Policy & Poverty: A Global Journal of Social Security, Income, Aid, and Welfare*, 1 (1), 1-25.

14 Ghilarducci, T. (2008), *When I’m Sixty-Four: The Plot Against Pensions and the Plan to Save Them*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

15 Hyde, M. and Dixon, J. (2009), *op. cit.*

I suggest a fourth principle of mutual intergenerational solidarity. The current system puts the burden of pension benefits on the shoulders of future generations, irrespective of the state of the economy, older generations indebted to new ones. As in the case of the environment, we may say that current generations are borrowing from future ones, thus they bear a responsibility to create a viable economy and enjoy their fair share from it. This could be a significant factor for making policy decisions for the long term and built a culture of long-term perspective in the polity.

It is worth mentioning that the first principle would entail a radical shift away from the “work-now-enjoy-in-old-age morality”. With the stress of old age security lifted people would be allowed to seek meaningful employment, especially in conditions of full employment.

## **The transition to full employment and universal pension**

I have shown above that the resolution of the pension crisis can, and should, take place with the achievement of full employment, and that this can only be achieved through the reduction of working time. A fair and efficient system should address the needs of all citizens, not just those with several years of full formal employment, while making provisions for further benefits from pension savings and allowing the choice of options. The experience of countries such as New Zealand and Ireland, shows that a universal tax-financed pension is more efficient, in terms of budget and total cost (as percentage of GDP), addresses old age poverty, providing high income replacement for low earners and the possibility of added saving for the rest. Such a system fulfills all criteria and is efficient in terms of fiscal burden, old age coverage, income replacement. It is also intergenerationally fairer, as pension benefits may be decided on the basis of the state of the economy.

The remaining question is how we may achieve a simultaneous transition to a universal tax-financed pension system and full employment via the reduction of working time. As I have shown elsewhere<sup>16</sup>, in the case of Greece, such a transition would lead to a sim-

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<sup>16</sup> Stamboulis, Y. (2016), “Dynamics of Transition to Universal Tax-Funded Pension System”, paper presented at the 34th International System Dynamics Conference, Delft, 17-21 July 2016

plification of the tax system (Figure 3), leading to reduced operational costs.<sup>17</sup>

This transition would be viable and efficient<sup>18</sup> (Figure 4 –calculations are based on an annual pension of 9600 Euros, i.e., 800 per month, covering 98%<sup>19</sup> of inhabitants in old age), on the condition of reduced working time (30-hours working week) and thus, near full employment. This will be achieved because the benefit of abolished contributions – replaced by taxes – is larger than the amount directed towards the new employment needed to cover for the reduction of working time. The estimate assumes that the remaining benefit would be shared equally between employers and workers, that only 60% of workplaces would require the addition of new workers (the rest would compensate via re-organization).

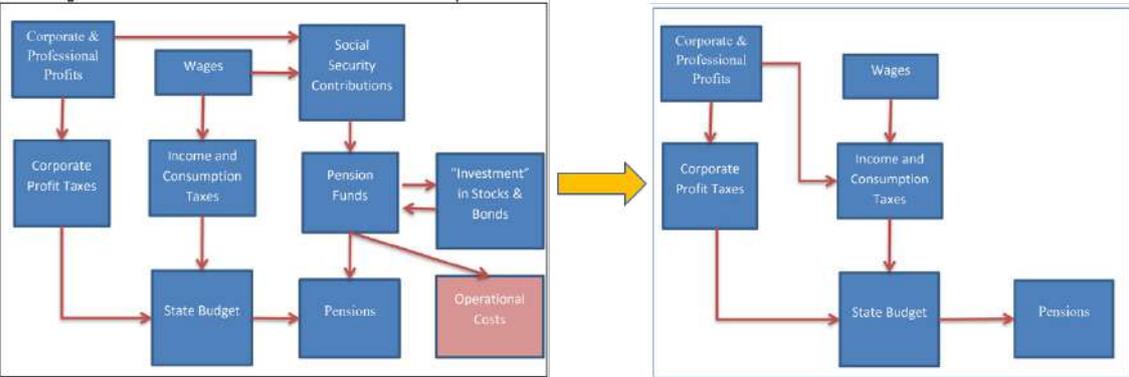


Figure 3: Transition to a tax-funded universal pension system (Source: Stamboulis (2016))

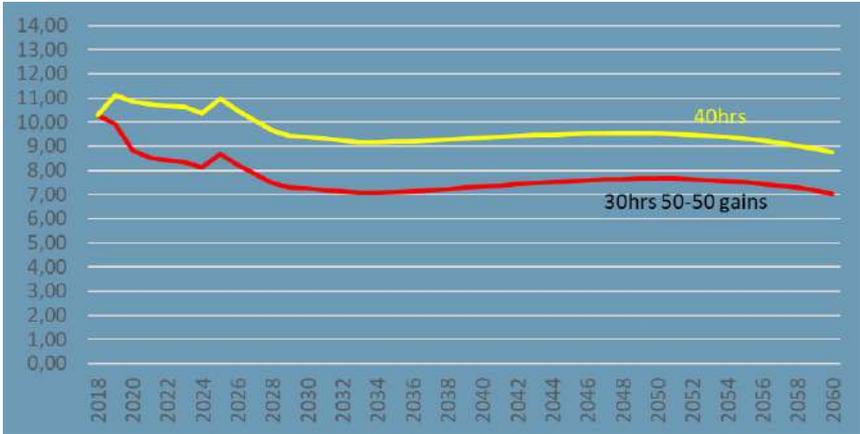


Figure 4: Net fiscal burden of universal pension (% of GDP) (Source: Stamboulis (2016))

17 The proposal includes, among other elements, the provision of a guaranteed flexible superannuation national pension fund, as a second pillar of the system, linked to the national development bank.

18 Estimations have been updated for 2019. Results remain essentially the same.

19 Currently approximately 84%.

The impact of this transition would be manifold. The most important benefits would be:

- Creation of at least 700,000 new workplaces.
- Increased pension for more than 60% of current pensioners, not including the cases where a second pensioner currently excluded would be added to the household.
- 98% coverage of people in age of retirement (67 years).
- Elimination of conditions for precarious employment.
- Elimination of old age poverty, as well as working age poverty.
- Lower welfare costs.
- Improved health and lower social services costs.
- Reduced working time for more than 2.2 million people.
- A boost of 4% to GDP in the first year (based on an annual 1% growth base scenario).
- Reduction of fiscal burden of at least 0.5% of GDP and more than 2% in the medium term.
- Improvement of the employed/pensioners ratio.

The level of pension benefits would change according to the state of the economy, within limits set by legislation (e.g., between 5% and 10% of GDP, depending on the state of the economy), providing for fair intergenerational solidarity. This regulatory change should contribute to a shift of the public discourse towards long term objectives, allowing for the design of further reductions of working time, in order to take advantage of further technical change.

## **Towards a progressive biopolitics**

The changes envisioned here show that there are realistic, radical solutions to complex social challenges. These solutions maybe the basis of broader socio-political alliances. The issue of free time lies at the core of the left tradition of social fights. It is pivotal in a vision for emancipation and alternative biopolitics. In the contemporary context, the historic demand for “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will” can be renewed in a meaningful way to address modern challenges of life and democracy (Figure 5). Modern challenges demand meaningful solutions<sup>20</sup>, in the face of technological change and global problems.

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20 Claesson, A. (2020), “Finland Is Rallying Around a Six-Hour Workday And So Should We”, *Jacobin* 9-1-2020 (jacobinmag.com).



Figure 5: A renewed vision of meaningful life

The demand for a “6 hour work day” would mean a new economy of time, allowing social and political participation. It sets a new standard for democracy, with tangible impact on everyday lives. We will be enabled to actively participate in local and broad political processes, setting a higher standard for democracy in the age of a learning society. Even more, it sets the base for emancipation from a paradigm of progress that has hegemonized the left for more than a century.

It is one of the most concrete demands that can be realised in our times, and a concise political proposal that would be meaningful to a broad audience.





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This volume is the first attempt by Greek and foreign intellectuals and politicians to place the Syriza experience in the context of contemporary theoretical debates. What was the state's response to Syriza's policies? What margin of manoeuvre existed in the negotiations with the lenders? What resistance and what help did the government encounter by social movements and civil society? What were the government's priorities? More generally, what lessons can the Greek and European left learn from the Syriza experience? How did classical and more recent left theory help in this process? Was the party leadership prepared for the tasks ahead?

This is a first report not a formal account from the front line of the Syriza government. A collection of the examined experiences of politicians and the reflection of academics on that crucial period in the history of Greece and the left. The authors use left theory to examine governance and left experience to correct left theory. It gives a sense of the successes, failures and frustrations of people who were thrown at the deep end and learnt the trade of ruling while governing. Their experience is quite valuable for the Left. The 2015 compromise and the 2019 defeat that followed indicate that unless there is a change in Europe, isolated left governments cannot survive with their program intact. We need a realignment of left, green and social-democratic forces against the rising threat of nationalism, xenophobia and extreme right-wing.

