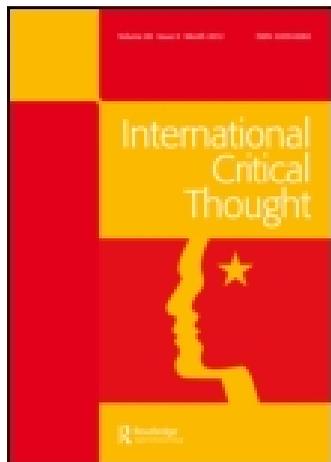


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Publisher: Routledge

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International Critical Thought

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rict20>

The Miraculous Rise of the “ Phenomenon SYRIZA ”

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Published online: 27 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Michalis Spourdalakis (2014) The Miraculous Rise of the “ Phenomenon SYRIZA ”, *International Critical Thought*, 4:3, 354-366, DOI: [10.1080/21598282.2014.931022](https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2014.931022)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2014.931022>

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The Miraculous Rise of the “Phenomenon SYRIZA”

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The article focuses on the rise of SYRIZA, not only on the Greek political scene but also as a leading model for the radical left worldwide. More concretely, the article: (a) analyzes the developments that have brought SYRIZA to prominence on the Greek political scene and to the epicenter of political resistance to neoliberalism; (b) presents its strategy which appears to be leading to a possible, albeit long process of social transformation; (c) presents and analyzes SYRIZA’s organizational initiatives that aimed at consolidating the party’s strategic success; and (d) outlines the challenges lying ahead that may place its radical orientation at risk. Although the article sets off from the Greek political developments, given the tendency for uniformity of social conditions imposed by austerity politics, one can find insights in the Greek for many other settings for socialist strategy.

Keywords: SYRIZA; socialist strategy; radical left; neoliberalism; austerity; Greek politics

The overnight transformation of the Coalition of the Radical Left-Unitary Social Front (*Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς-Ενωτικό Κοινωνικό Μέτωπο*, SYRIZA) from a minor party, which in the 2009 election had barely surpassed the threshold requirement of 3% required to enter parliament, into the leading opposition party in the 2012 elections with a commanding 27% of the popular vote, has been seen as nothing less than a miracle. This miracle seems to be ongoing, as almost two years later polls show that SYRIZA is likely to win the next election. This is particularly significant when one considers the non-stop and ever intensifying daily attacks by the coalition governments¹ and a network of opinion leaders (journalists, academics and self-claimed intellectuals) who have an almost monopolistic access to traditional forms of media. But “miracles” that last cannot be considered miracles or even accidents. Any ongoing miracle becomes a phenomenon and SYRIZA has become an important political phenomenon that has turned heads and elicited interest not just in Greece or the EU, but worldwide. Indeed, the SYRIZA phenomenon, along with the crisis in Greece, has put SYRIZA at the center of international interest both among mainstream as well as unorthodox observers. However, political phenomena, as opposed to political accidents, require analysis not mere description.

In response to the recent interest in the developments taking place in Greek society and politics, many informative reports have been produced (see Laskos and Tsakalotos 2013; Aranitou,

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¹After the June 2012 elections, a three party coalition government made up of the New Democracy (*Νέα Δημοκρατία*, ND), the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (*Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα*, PASOK) and the Democratic Left (*Δημοκρατική Αριστερά*, DIMAR) was formed. The coalition lasted for a year until DIMAR withdrew from it, over the decision to abolish the public broadcasting corporation.

Papavlassopoulos, and Spourdalakis 2012; Kouvelakis 2011; Kretsos 2012; Lyrintzis 2011). However, now it is time to start discussing and analyzing SYRIZA in such a way that will provide us with a framework to understand the party itself and not as a mere byproduct, however important, of the crisis. In this way we will not only have a better understanding of the “miracle” but also a closer insight into the dynamics of Greek politics, in which SYRIZA now plays a key role. Many commentaries and analyses, despite their insights, approach the phenomenon within the context of broader analyses either as part of the electoral dynamics of the Greek party system (see Georgiadou, Kafe, and Pierides 2012; Mavris 2012; Vernardakis 2012; Michael-Matsas 2012), or as the result of structural shortcomings of the ageing system in the country’s political representation (see Constantinidis and Tsakatika 2011), or to a great extent as a development of strategic choices of the left (see Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013).

In the following pages I will: (a) analyze the developments that have brought SYRIZA to prominence on the Greek political scene and to the epicenter of the political resistance to neoliberalism which appears to be leading to a possible, albeit long process of social transformation; (b) briefly sketch the developments and the actions taken since the elections of June 2012; and c) share thoughts on the challenges lying ahead for both SYRIZA, especially after its founding Congress in July 2013, the recent local, regional and European elections, and the democratic political system.

Developments that Led to the “Miracle”

Before we examine the developments during the Memorandum years and subsequent effects of the “Troika era,” it will be useful to underline the fact that signs of the social de-alignment of the Greek party have been present for a long time. This has to do with the shortcoming of the democratization process that began after the fall of the Dictatorship in 1974. More specifically, the political parties from all parts of the political spectrum, which stirred up and controlled the transition process, shaped it to curb social involvement in politics, and later, especially after the rise of PASOK to power (1981) built the institutions of social representation not as a genuine expression of popular will and participation, but rather as a substitute for social inclusion which, through Clientelism, was rather selective. In the 1990s, as the country’s politics became more integrated within broader EU orientation and the signs of technocratic bureaucratization became the rule, society, and especially the lower social strata, felt that the political system had turned its back on them. The weakening of the mobilization capacities of the party system (left parties included), due to the decline in membership, the intensive functionalism, as well as the overall antiparty sentiments made up the preliminary, though clear signs of the political de-alignment and re-alignment that we witnessed in last election.

Within this context, all sectors of the Greek left—the Communist Party of Greece (*Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας*, KKE), Synaspismos of Left Alliance and the Ecology and Social Movements (Synaspismos or SYN) which is the main founding organization of SYRIZA—were faced with various challenges which stemmed not only from the overall crisis of the representation of the Greek political system but also from the obvious question of strategy after the collapse of the so-called “socialist camp.” The question of strategy under the conditions of neo-liberal hegemony, which in the EU was articulated by the Maastricht Agreement (1992) and in Greece was put forward by the modernizers of PASOK (1993–2004) and the government of New Democracy (2004–9), was transformed into a question of survival. There were three answers to the latter question. The KKE chose for its survival a vanguardist strategy. This strategy was articulated in building institutions of social representation with exclusively party members, neglecting any alliances in the social field and ideological references to the deep and most orthodox Marxist-Leninist tradition. Although this gradually resulted in losing some of its social and

political presence in local, regional and even social institutions, the KKE, in contrast to what happened to most orthodox communist parties, not only survived electorally but remained until 2012 the leading party on the left with a comfortable and stable parliamentary presence.

Within Synaspismos, two distinct strategies developed. The first was articulated by the modernizing faction of the party, which, under the leadership of F. Kouvelis, left the party to form DIMAR (2010). The key element of its strategy was participation in governing institutions at all costs. Being very close to the ideas of PASOK's modernizers, this faction saw itself as "the responsible Left," a claim which became a self-fulfilling prophecy with their participation in Samaras' coalition government with ND and PASOK, after the 2012 national elections. The other strategy that was developed within Synaspismos and other independent leftist organizations and individuals had to do with the strategy that led to active presence in the social field. Although it was the outcome of planning and necessary for survival, this became more politically effective given the social conditions created by the austerity policies the government chose to respond to the crisis (see Eleftheriou, Spourdalakis, and Tsakiris 2013).

The developments that have put Greece at the forefront of the most aggressive austerity policies being applied (not only in the Eurozone) are generally well known. However, for the purpose of our argument it will be worthwhile to highlight the developments of the last four years that influenced the rise of SYRIZA and continue to have an important impact on its dynamic.

In the three years that preceded the 2012 elections, Greece had confronted the very aggressive austerity policies imposed by the Troika of the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Community (EC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which were articulated in three Stability Pacts (Memoranda). During that three-year period, the Greek people (workers, the rapidly growing numbers of unemployed, small entrepreneurs, students, and professionals) resisted intensely. They organized more than 20 general strikes (of one or two days), mobilized huge demonstrations in Athens and in other major cities. These activities were accompanied by a strong movement in the squares, which after a few weeks of toleration was confronted by the government with unprecedentedly coercive actions. With the exception of the movement of the squares, most of these mobilizations were initiated by the old/established structures of the trade union movement, with occasional collaboration from the confederations of small business. However, their call functioned as a legitimating base for rank and file trade union locals and for the left parties (SYRIZA, KKE and the Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow [*Αντικαπιταλιστική Αριστερή Συνεργασία για την Ανατροπή*, Antarsya]) to actually mobilize. In all these mobilizations, SYRIZA employed a strategy distinctly different from the practices that characterized the Greek political parties after the fall of the Dictatorship in 1974. During the transition to democracy, political parties, including those on the left, had approached social initiatives and mobilizations with an attitude of control if not manipulation (Spourdalakis 1996). However, this time for a number of different reasons (weakness, choice or even pure chance), SYRIZA simply provided participatory support to the various forms of resistance to austerity and to the new mobilizing practices. The party also made virtually no direct attempt to capitalize politically on these. In contrast, KKE, a victim of its own patronizing practice towards societal initiatives, reacted with a kind of phobia to the multi-lateral resistance. This in fact is the main reason for the fall in its social and eventually electoral support (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013).

As the results of the internal devaluation were being felt and the first signs of social and human crisis became clear, new developments appeared at the level of the political and social scene that set the stage for today's developments and dynamics. Well before the elections of 2012, it had become clear that PASOK was alienated from its social base and despite its efforts to recover through the revitalization of its modernizing discourse it remain the least appealing (Eleftheriou and Tassis 2013). PASOK was seen to be responsible for the economic crisis due to its corrupt practices and its mismanagement of the pressures from the "markets." The formation of a technocratic

government with the support and participation of PASOK, New Democracy and The Popular Orthodox Rally (*Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός, Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós, LAOS*, a nationalist party of the radical right) not only signaled the movement of the extreme right into the mainstream but also accelerated an extensive de-alignment and the subsequent re-alignment of the party system (Vernardakis 2012). This government, at least in retrospect, was in fact a telling precursor of the outcome of the elections and the developments that followed it.

After the two consecutive elections in May and June of 2012, it became clear that the old bipartisan party system in which ND and PASOK shared at least 75% of the popular vote, was no longer in place. ND did not exceed the 30% mark and PASOK just barely managed a fraction of its previous popularity (12.2%). SYRIZA, with a commanding 27%, became the leading opposition party. The shocking and frightening surprise of the elections was the entrance of the militant neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn (*Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος Χρυσή Αυγή, GD*) into parliament for the first time (with 7% of the popular vote). The long-term crisis of KKE was verified by its poor performance (4.5%) (Dinas and Rori 2013).

It was clear that the social and political cleavages opened up by the Memorandum's austerity policies had determined the electoral results and showed that major de-alignment had taken place. Thus the formation of a three party coalition government (ND, PASOK and Democratic Left-DIMAR) was no surprise. In effect, this coalition which lasted for a year was an odd symbiosis between extreme-right wing political figures, modernizers from PASOK's governmental hegemony (1993–2004), and the former moderate Eurocommunist wing that had left Synaspismos in 2010, whose orientation is closer to the “realism” of “governance” of the New Labour Party. These developments have contributed to a further shift to the right of the political discourse, which expresses and organizes political and party competition in the country. The latter is evident from the fact that ND has to a great extent adopted the agenda of Golden Dawn. That is not only the anti-left, anti-liberal, McCarthy like practices but also the xenophobic, anti-immigrant and extreme nationalist attitudes. The governmental move to the right stems from the fact that the people's acceptance and/or the toleration of austerity policies seems to be shrinking, a development that forces the government to extract consent through coercion. In this process, the participation of DIMAR in the government, a party that belongs to the left tradition, has only accelerated this disastrous slipping away from the practices of the democratic rule of law. In fact it was this chopping away at the democratic tradition that forced DIMAR just one year later (June 2013) to withdraw from the government, when the government went overboard and violently silenced the Greek Radio and TV corporation (Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation, *Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία Τηλεόραση, ERT*).

So, from a democratic point of view, the only positive effect of the election was the miraculous and robust advance of SYRIZA. But how did this happen? I will now turn to a brief reflection on SYRIZA's success, which will provide an analytical framework for an understanding of the SYRIZA “phenomenon.”

To understand SYRIZA, one has to abandon the rather popular and superficial idea that the party of the Greek radical left is merely the result of the extenuating social circumstances caused by the austerity measures. SYRIZA's success should not be seen as an argument in support of the naïve idea—shared at least tacitly by some parts of the left and mimicked by the mainstream opinion makers in the country²—that severe economic and social crises are

²The “immiseration theory” as part of socialist strategy has been the result of economic reductionism, a strong trend among the parties of the third internationalist tradition. Although this has withered away and it is only partially present in the rationale of KKE's literature and decisions, it is definitely echoed by the government forces and repeated by mainstream media.

necessarily conducive to radical political mobilization and that they are even capable of initiating processes of social transformation. It is one thing to claim that we have to take the social conditions and dynamic into serious consideration and it is quite another to reduce political developments to these. Politics always retains its relative autonomy. So it is a mistake to assume that social turmoil will have a direct positive/radical effect at the political level. This is a common mistake of the left, which becomes even more serious when it tries to intervene in these dynamics with prefabricated strategic models.

Contrary to this traditional habit of the left, SYRIZA adopted a different political strategy. It took the social dynamic of the conjuncture seriously without theoretical dogmatism and avoided the pitfall of seeking recognition and legitimacy for its practices from the mainstream political establishment. For about eight years now SYRIZA has placed itself close to the social movements. It has benefited from them (social forums, civil rights, environmental movements, immigrant groups, and the new rank and file trade union movement); it has learned their language, shared their technology of political mobilization, but did not submit to the narrowness of their single issue perspective. In other words, there has been a learning process that has contributed to quite a distinct party culture, far away from inflexible dogmatism and/or the governmentalism of the moderate left.

SYRIZA's strategic practice has been a clear departure from the instrumentalism of the traditional left of both reformist (KKE-interior/Eurocommunist) and/or "revolutionary" inspirations. These parties have been preoccupied either with securing public office, without connecting their efforts to mobilizations outside the formal representative institutions; or with an abstract idea of revolution that would initiate the "socialist transformation" as long as it complied with a predefined strategic model. In both these strategic traditions of the old left, in practical terms, the actual social dynamic is almost never connected to their programmatic proposals.

In contrast, it appears that SYRIZA has developed quite a distinct strategy, which, although it is articulated in a dialectic unity, one can identify its four components (Spourdalakis 2013):

- (a) Active participation in the social field. SYRIZA has developed an ongoing practice of genuinely militant yet low-key participation in the social movements. It is a practice that has avoided patronizing the spontaneity and the innovations of the movements and almost never acted as a substitute for them. SYRIZA's activists have been present and at times even became protagonists in every movement of resistance, even before the Memorandum, but never under the party's banner. Even when the government reacted violently against the movement, SYRIZA's activists and Members of Parliament (MPs) provided their political, technical and legal support and expertise, a practice which often resulted in their suffering the consequences of the state's coercive aggression.
- (b) Complete and unreserved presence in the institutions of social and political representation, without strengthening bureaucratic and governmentalist structures and practices. The practices of SYRIZA's representatives in these institutions are not confined to the given framework of these institutions (e.g., parliament, trade unions). There is no social initiative or movement in which SYRIZA's members, officials and even more often MPs, are not present and actively involved. Their presence has been visible and they have often used their status to protect activists from police harassment as well as to legitimate the movements' initiatives.
- (c) Development of a program. This is the outcome of both experience from social struggles and the expertise acquired within the institutions of social and political representation. In other words, it is the combination of (a) and (b) detailed above. SYRIZA's program is not a "static and timeless text." In fact, in the words of the chief party coordinator of the program, Yiannis Dragasakis, the program of SYRIZA is "a political process of

movement building which is designed to cut new paths . . . preclude new dangers . . . make use of new possibilities” (Dragasakis 2012). The main concern is to develop a concrete yet open program, wherein the balance between various defensive struggles is articulated in the principles outlined in the party’s alternative vision. The program has functioned as a concrete alternative to governmental policies and has offered as well a realistic perspective to those active in the movements and to the population at large. The program is not only an answer to the attacks from the established political forces and their propaganda, but has also contributed to a framework in which the idea of “empowering the powerless” appears realistic and the idea of the “society of needs” versus the “society of profit making” is concretized. Finally, the program is the linchpin between the active and militant presence of SYRIZA within and outside the public institutions and its claim to governmental power.

- (d) The call to take governmental power, based on the unity of the entire left. Unusual for a party on the left, this call was made by SYRIZA’s young leader Alexis Tsipras a few months prior to the May 2012 elections. Many thought that it was unrealistic and even arrogant. However, given the unfolding radical de/re-alignment of the political scene, this call became an inspiring response to the widespread disenchantment of the population with the long-standing bipartisan political system.

The success of this strategy was based on some key traits of SYRIZA’s organizational structure. The pluralist and quite diverse composition of the party defined a generic makeup that required a rather loose organization that was far from the Leninist-inspired models of the past. SYRIZA’s organization was closer to what has been described as a “mass connective party” (on this novel idea of party organization see Porcaro 2005, 2011, 2013; Rehmann 2013), which was able to accommodate not only its diversity (as it is composed of more than a dozen organizations and parties) but also the various political and social constituencies outside the Coalition.

In addition to these factors that contributed to SYRIZA’s success, one should also focus on both the ideological and leadership factors. Although SYRIZA is far from being a party with clear and comprehensive ideological framework, this has not proven to be dysfunctional to its unity. This is not so because SYRIZA is a “party of political and not ideological unity,” but mainly because its organizational structure is based on the pluralism of its various factions which created the space for the coming together of all the ideological and theoretical traditions of both the old and new left. It was this rather unique ideological symbiosis that was more conducive to the party’s unity and strength overcoming or in essence bypassing the sectarianism that characterizes most sections of the fragmented left. The other important factor in SYRIZA’s success was the leadership of Alexis Tsipras. Tsipras, who became the leader of Synaspismos, a party that was pivotal to SYRIZA’s development as it represented more than 80% of the Coalition, represented a breakaway from the delegitimized leadership of the established political parties, as he was not only very young, in fact almost half the age of most of the party leaders but his style and rhetoric in combination with his rapidly developed political skills and effectiveness became an unexpected asset in the context of the process of the restructuring of the party system. It was the positive effect of the leadership and the articulation of the burning ideological issues in a way that guaranteed a peaceful and creative coexistence among SYRIZA’s factions, in combination with the above mentioned four components of its strategy and especially the clear call for an alternative future that resonated with people and resulted in its solid connection to society.

A good segment of SYRIZA’s top functionaries, especially during the 2012 electoral campaign, argue that the party’s program is the key for its political effectiveness. This has led to concentrated and systematic efforts to draft and continuously update the party’s program. While the

effort is always very serious and has produced some interesting and innovative results as it evolves hundreds of experts and party cadres in effect, tend to be a communication asset for the political arguments against the party's adversaries rather than a weapon in expanding its social base. That is because traditionally and in particular now, due to the social and political polarization, sober programmatic arguments in the political competition make very little difference. The common saying that "nobody reads party programs" is not far from the truth.

As the social cleavages became deeper it is not surprising that SYRIZA's vote was clearly class-based, something that has been evident from various studies of the electoral results (Vernardakis 2012). SYRIZA's support did not come only from public employees (32%), but also from private sector wage earners (33%), from the unemployed (33%) and from precarious workers (27%). The support which came from the small shopkeepers (32.6%) and professionals (26%) clearly hinted that SYRIZA's "miracle" is based on the fact that it is becoming the political expression of a broad social coalition. This is the social coalition that was formed as a result of the cleavages that developed as the result of the austerity policies. This is the reason for the continuation of SYRIZA's miracle more than a year after the election. However, the relative stability of SYRIZA's social support is not rooted in its relation to the established institutions of social representation, i.e., trade unions, movements around local states, etc. This does not mean that party's social support is feeble. That is because all these institutions were delegitimized and represented the corruption of the old political system.

One Year after SYRIZA's Success

The coalition government, which was formed shortly after the 2012 elections, may have a strong position in parliament (179 seats in the 300 member parliament) but it has become clear, almost from day one that it lacks genuine popular legitimacy. All three of the governmental parties had run on an agenda different from or actually in opposition to the austerity policies imposed by the Memorandum. However, it soon became clear that the new government would undertake even more aggressive austerity measures and would continue even more systematically to campaign against the resistance movement and the left, particularly SYRIZA. This contributed to a further political and party de-alignment. PASOK and DIMAR have ended up with the short end of this stick and witnessed a severe decline in their political support.

This development has not only contributed to the crisis of legitimation but has even more ominously turned the political crisis into a crisis of democracy. This is evident in the systematic violation of the rule of law by the government, which has become a daily phenomenon and the coercive activities of the state habitual actions. The neglect of the constitution in the legislative process and practices of "law and order" (beefing up the police presence, preventative arrests, torture, back to work legislation, etc.) characterize the current state of Greek public life. These developments are so intense that many observers in Greece and elsewhere argue that Greece is displaying signs of a "state of exception" (Athanasίου 2012).³

Within this environment, Golden Dawn has flourished (for the most systematic study of the rise of Golden Dawn see Ellinas 2013). In fact, up until the assassination of an anti-fascist rapper in a working class neighborhood in September 2013, the organization, or as many call it "political formation," had enjoyed unprecedented toleration, if not support from the police force. In fact, well-documented journalistic and other reports as well as electoral analyses have shown the popularity of GD especially among the lower ranks of the police. In addition, the so-called theory of the "two extremes" in which the governmental forces have tried to argue

³The total number of general and/or extended strikes is in excess of 25.

that SYRIZA and Golden Dawn are the two extreme ends of the same political continuum has in fact legitimized it. In this context Golden Dawn's political activity and presence had been expanding and was being consolidated. However, when it was revealed that the above mentioned assassination was part of a GD plan, the party has been under investigation by the public prosecutor as a "criminal organization." The preliminary results of the investigation have clearly shown that GD has been involved in a series of criminal activities, which have resulted in the imprisonment of a number of its members including its leader and another five MPs, who will stand a trial soon. The assassination of two young members of GD in October 2013 by an unknown underground organization curbed to some extent its expanding popular appeal. However, despite GD being cut off from state funding, the organization seems still to have significant resources at its disposal. To this point the most conservative estimates show that its support stands around 10%, which is up by 50% from last election.

As anticipated, the governmental policies have not had any positive impact on the crisis. The economy is completing its seventh year of economic contraction (4.8% for 2013), unemployment has been on the rise (Greece leads the EU economies with unemployment near 27%, and 58% among the youth), bankruptcies of small businesses have proliferated and social perils exceed expectations as the number of people who live below poverty line is now more than 30% and suicides due to financial difficulties have quadrupled in the last four years. Even when one takes into account an undercurrent of popular disappointment and widespread psychological fatigue from the mobilizations and the continued strikes, there is no doubt that people's resistance has been declining since the election. Indeed although, as the polls have repeatedly shown, the Greek people are becoming more and more disenchanted with governmental policies and are withdrawing their support from government policies; on the other hand, intensity of their resistance seems to be lower. A considerable amount of political energy, with the active support of SYRIZA, has been directed into building social solidarity networks,⁴ which provide support to the growing numbers of people in need. Of course, this support clearly falls far short of the actual needs of a society, which is suffering from such drastic internal devaluation. Nonetheless, and thankfully so, solidarity organizations of this kind are present in almost every neighborhood of every city.

Meanwhile, the coalition government appears stable, despite serious setbacks from its repeated failure to meet promises and its subsequent inability to improve its image—especially after DIMAR's departure from government and the crisis with the national broadcasting corporation. This is the result of its strategy to stay in power at all costs, which includes a systematic move away from observing the principles of the rule of law and forced it to move more to the right end of the political spectrum. In this context, the government's propaganda has become more sophisticated and more aggressively polemical than in any other period since the fall of Dictatorship (1974). The prime target of this negative propaganda is obviously SYRIZA. Its strategy against SYRIZA has two axes. The first is the so-called theory of the two extremes, which tries to identify the leading party of the opposition with extremism and the other claims that SYRIZA and its leader are moving to more moderate positions. These aim at creating problems of disunity within SYRIZA. The government has claimed that its policies constitute a real "success story" and that the "worst is behind us" and that therefore economic growth is around the corner. The latter is supported by the artificially created small fiscal surplus and it is staged through the positive effects from the country's presidency of the EU for the first semester of 2014. However,

⁴More than 2500 of these are sponsored by SYRIZA, while hundreds are organized by the Greek Orthodox Church and various local states.

despite strong support for this campaign from the media, the true, disastrous social conditions cannot be hidden.

The Founding Congress and the Challenges Lying Ahead

Since the 2012 elections, SYRIZA has been faced with tasks that emerge from a situation in which radical left-wing parties very rarely find themselves. The party had to: (a) adjust to its new role as a leading opposition party; (b) prepare a sound governmental program, which, given the constant economic and social deterioration, must be constantly updated and fine-tuned; (c) be ready for a possible call for an early election, a possibility that is growing as the government's parliamentary support has become frail after DIMAR's withdrawal and the government now has only a very slim parliamentary majority; and (d) go beyond the federated form of its organization and organize as a unified political party. Indeed, all of these tasks had to be performed while simultaneously maintaining its strategy and basis of its success as well as confronting the governmental, media and opinion leaders' unprecedented attacks and slander.

Meanwhile, SYRIZA is struggling to adjust to its new role as a leading opposition party and a political power in line to govern, without compromising its strategy that has proven so successful. It is constantly updating its program and has taken important steps towards building a more unified political organization. In November 2012, it held a Panhellenic Conference, where the party Declaration of Principles was approved and a Central Committee was elected. It was an organizational development that almost tripled the party membership and unified the local and professional organizations of the party. The latter was necessary as the party has continued its strategy and its active presence in the social field and in actions of resistance. As the leadership repeatedly states, the party had to be "forced into its organizational, political and programmatic maturity."⁵ This was the aim of the founding congress. The congress was called and organized in a hurry and subsequently could not but focus on procedural and organizational matters.

The Congress which took place from July 10–14, 2012 settled a number of thorny organizational issues, such as the deadline for the complete unification of the various organizations and parties of the alliance, the procedural rules for the election of the Central Committee members and finally the election of the president of the party. While the leadership's proposal was for an immediate abolition of the parties and organizations that compose SYRIZA and a single ticket for the election of the Central Committee, a compromise was made with the minority for an acceptance of both a postponement of the complete abrogation of the organizations as well as multiple tickets for the elections. The leader was elected by the 3500 delegates to the Congress. These issues proved controversial and, given that there was not enough time for discussion and deliberation, they led to a false polarization which strengthened SYRIZA's minority tendency (the Left Platform).⁶ As a result, the impression was created that SYRIZA had not succeeded in achieving its much needed unity. The already hostile media blew this internal-party friction completely out of proportion and this overshadowed the fact that in its Founding Congress the party managed to agree upon a common statement of principles, to pass a very radical resolution for its

⁵Yiannis Dragasakis, prominent MP and head of party's program, first used this expression in a radio interview (May 12, 2012). Since then many members of SYRIZA's leadership have used it including A. Tsipras himself.

⁶The "Platform" which registered approximately 30% of the support of the Congress is composed of a small number of experienced members and organizations made up of former KKE members, Trotskyists, as well as a number of former PASOK members of nationalist orientation. The key idea which binds this current is its clear Euroscepticism.

interim political orientation (SYRIZA and the Great Social and Political Movement of Subversion 2013) and adopted a new constitution which guarantees its organizational bonding.

Despite the fact that, both the constitutional and the political resolutions, as well as the organizational arrangements that followed, covered and even reduced the political tension between the majority and minority, there is no doubt that deep divisions separate the two groups. Although the groups are far from solidly unified, there are some clear differences. It is not so much the difference over the EU issues, e.g., the question of the Eurozone, with the minority explicitly eurosceptic. On the contrary, the real basis of division and friction between SYRIZA's majority and the minority factions is their difference on key strategic issues. The minority appears to approach politics in a clearly instrumentalist fashion, far from the practices of the party that had proven successful: an understanding of power that was not all or nothing that avoided a non-paternalistic presence in the social field, and a genuine cosmopolitanism away from any nationalism or parochialism. As the party comes closer to assuming governmental responsibilities, these differences are bound to become more dysfunctional as the party's leadership does not seem to be very effective in fully incorporating them into the party structure. The criticism, the overall rhetoric and particularly the establishment of parallel structures within the context of the party's organizational habits (e.g., separate portal, a separate think-tank, separate initiatives) has given to the Left Platform the status of "a party within the party." In addition, a kind of left nationalism that characterized this group, given the upcoming challenges the country is facing due to the developments in the geopolitics of the region (new efforts to settle the Cyprus problem, the relations with Israel and Turkey) could become divisive and in fact jeopardize the party's unity when it comes to power.

Despite the fact that, since the last election, SYRIZA has consistently tried to respond to the new conditions, it is hardly a surprise that the party is facing some serious challenges within the cauldron of Greek society and politics. The political parties that have promoted or supported the policies of austerity are facing a deep crisis and have experienced a consequent reduction of their popular support (Eleftheriou and Tassis 2013; Mavris 2012). Thus, the challenge facing SYRIZA is not so much whether or not it can win the next election but whether or not it can achieve electoral success without sliding away from the radical strategy that "brought it to this point." So, besides the systematic attacks from all the established social and political forces that are orchestrated by the media, SYRIZA needs to come to terms with a number of external and internal challenges that could push it to more conformist positions. Let us briefly mention some of them.

- (a) **Parliamentarism.** Last year's electoral success has increased the number of SYRIZA MPs sevenfold. The need for the party to adjust to its new functions has not only absorbed political energy but has pushed it into more conventional activity. Historically, a parliamentary presence has been an appeasement for left-wing politics. Although sooner than anyone could have expected, the culture of using the capacity given to MPs for extra-parliamentary activity has become a daily habit for SYRIZA MPs, the formalities of parliamentary procedures might impose a more conformist political practice.
- (b) **Opportunism and careerism.** As SYRIZA seems to provide an alternative to the government, thousands of newcomers have flooded the party's local organizations. As the membership has tripled, it is not at all clear whether the party has the time and/or the means to unify the political culture and behavior of all the new membership, whose intentions are not all that unselfish.
- (c) **Trade unionist inertia.** Due to the crisis, trade unions, the official social representation of labor, are confronting a major de-alignment and re-alignment process. Within this context, SYRIZA is in danger of withdrawing into the political practices of the past, which were confined to calculations of positions held in the leadership and subsequent

symbolic advances.⁷ This could lead not only to a top-down political practice but also to an underrepresentation of the new social dynamics, the main trait of which is the developing of new social alliances of the working people (in private and public sectors, the precarious, and the huge numbers of the unemployed) with the lower middle class strata of the petite bourgeoisie.

- (d) The need to protect democracy. As the government increasingly violates basic rights and freedoms in its effort to confront anti-austerity resistance and at the same time tolerates the militant activity of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, the need for broader democratic alliances could create the conditions for SYRIZA to water down its social/class rhetoric and practice.
- (e) Formalism, electoralism and an instrumentalist perception of power. SYRIZA runs the danger of leading people to make the naïve assumption that a simple electoral victory that granted power to the left would be a pleasant picnic in the countryside. As SYRIZA has no presence in the hard-core of Greek state power (secret and diplomatic services, police, army), an instrumentalist perception of power could be a disaster, especially when we consider that the political culture of the country is not participatory but entrusting, i.e., a culture that has made citizens passive receivers of governmental policies. After the recent local and Euro-elections, SYRIZA has entered into political alliances to broaden and consolidate its political influence, which could replicate the petit faults of electoralism of the traditional left.
- (f) Economism. The severe austerity policies imposed by the Memorandum could endanger SYRIZA's strategy as it might be forced to rally mainly around the social and economic issues created by the Memoranda. The danger here is that: (1) SYRIZA might limit itself to an anti-Memorandum discourse and not transform it into an anti-capitalist one; and (2) it might reproduce the naïve idea that social immiseration leads to political radicalism.
- (g) Weakness of the other left. Although SYRIZA dominates the left end of the political spectrum, the growing weakness of the rest of the left (KKE and The Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow [*Αντικαπιταλιστική Αριστερή Συνεργασία για την Ανατροπή*, ANTARSYA]) and the subsequent lessening of its overall mobilizing capacity certainly does not help the maintenance of a radical perspective.
- (h) Solidarity versus philanthropy. This is an open challenge to SYRIZA's multilevel solidarity initiatives and networks. The party runs these mobilizations on a class basis as well as a participatory and democratic basis, since it considers them instruments to overcome the crisis. But, when in power, these mobilizations should be seen as a projection of the society that SYRIZA is striving to create. Institutions with a purely philanthropic orientation (especially the Greek Church, and non-governmental organizations) might undermine the party's strategy in this field.

The first major test, as to the direction in which these challenges are to be taken, were the May 2014 municipal, regional and especially Euro-elections. SYRIZA managed to maintain its radical orientation and yet be electorally effective in these elections. Can it, however, continue to find a golden mean between its internationalist commitments, as expressed through its "Europeanism," which has been underlined since A. Tsipras led the ticket of the Party of the European Left as the party's candidate for the EU presidency and its position "no sacrifices for the Euro, no illusions for

⁷This for example was the case of SYRIZA's trade unionists in June 2012 when they did not back up a vote for a wild cat strike of the high school teachers, a move that was heavily criticized by the radicals within and outside the party.

the drachma,” which somehow allows space for the party’s various Eurosceptics? The party organization, though still disproportionately weak relative to its popular support, appears to be more ideologically and politically united, as the official survey among the Congress delegates has shown (Bistis and Filippou 2013).

However, although one can remain optimistic as to the radical orientation of SYRIZA, we cannot but see three possible scenarios regarding its future: (a) SYRIZA’s support will remain stagnant and although it will be large relative to any other radical left party, it will develop like the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) in the 1970s; (b) SYRIZA will slowly transform itself from a radical to a conformist left-wing party, closer to the old social democracy; however, given that in the current conjuncture, reformism is not on the agenda as an alternative way of managing capitalism, this is a scenario which would lead to its demise; or (c) SYRIZA will soon come to power in such a manner that would enable it to change the social, political and institutional balance of power and open the path to prove practically that “another world is possible.” This, however, will depend on its capacity to mobilize on its class base within the country and to receive solidarity internationally.

Notes on Contributor

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