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The European Left in Times of Crises: LESSONS FROM GREECE

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re:think

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[1]
Why SYRIZA?

A RADICAL LEFT PARTY, SYRIZA, found itself at the centre of a maelstrom of social and political developments in the wake of an economic crisis that erupted in a European country. The containment of popular sovereignty, the imposition of stringent austerity measures, and the authoritarian implementation of neoliberal reforms spurred widespread social and political antagonism.

The Greek people resisted the attack by utilising all available means: strikes, demonstrations, and grassroots resistance were deployed against the applied policies; mass movements emerged at the national level as solidarity networks and self-organised social reproduction popped up across the country. The people also instigated a huge political upheaval in back-to-back elections in May and June 2012 as voters disengaged from the dominant parties and turned to SYRIZA, thus

upending the two-party neoliberal consensus between conservatives and social democrats.

Social movement activity from 2012 to 2015 was less intense than in the preceding period but shows a qualitative difference, as it is diffused through neighbourhoods and local communities (with a corresponding strengthening of local solidarity networks, protest actions against privatisations, local initiatives like the anti-mining movement at Skouries, and anti-fascist movements). At the focal point of social and political antagonism—that is, the bailout agreements or *memoranda*—activity shifted to the centre stage of politics now dominated by SYRIZA, which expressed non-compliance with the demands of fiscal straitjacket. Furthermore, 2012-2015 laid the groundwork for the party's rise to government.

What propelled SYRIZA into becoming the bailout period's protagonist and shaped the political force that disrupted the two-party dominance of Greek politics to form an anti-*memoranda* government? SYRIZA was a pioneer political endeavour unifying left organisations and collectives in a country where the political left had managed to survive under the devastating impact of ideological and social shifts triggered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and neoliberalism's strengthening globally. The 'raw material' for this endeavour was drawn from various political traditions in

accordance with the established categorisations of the left's ideological and political tendencies in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The dawn of the new millennium found European societies mired in a deepening impasse, as the elites' strategy focused, effectively undisturbed, on developing an institutional and economic architecture (capped by the Eurozone) that retracted the democratic facets of the postwar social order.

This was the environment in which, in the Greek case, the forces comprising SYRIZA tried to develop new qualities and broaden the horizons of thinking and action for responding, in practice and strategically, to the asphyxiating circumstances. SYRIZA's forces became more sensitive to new and uncategorised forms of social unrest and actively participated, in a spirit of openness, in social movements and other processes which, to an extent, transcended the traditional mobilisation methodology at the local and international levels.

At the local level, we see the party's gradual support of urban movements and claims of free spaces, environmental struggles, anti-racist initiatives, and youth movements, while at the international level the left currents that had come together under SYRIZA were those that actively participated in the anti-globalisation movement.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that the global and European Social Forum is the mould that reinforced bonds and trust relationships among the left groups under SYRIZA. The openness and willingness to broaden political horizons stemmed from, among other factors:

- the need to survive politically within a political stranglehold;
- the party's inclusion of individuals whose backgrounds and experiences differed from those shaped through traditional party life and participation;
- this particular party structure's weak cohesional organisation, a fact that rendered the party open to social processes and prone to grassroots influences beyond the party's leadership intents.

The willingness and ability to adapt to a continuously changing, tight, unstable, and uncharted environment shaped SYRIZA into a singular political space. SYRIZA was a party of the traditional left but it was developing close relationships, at the levels of both political communication and activist methodology, with citizens and social movements, especially youth. It developed the ability to intervene in political events in a way that transcended the size of its small representation in Parliament, which became functional and useful to citizens and movements in stark

contrast to Greeks' feelings of disdain for and alienation from the political establishment. The eruption of the economic crisis thus catapulted SYRIZA to the forefront of an all-encompassing political and social clash. The Greek people used the political force that appeared to be most adaptable to the new field of intense confrontation, the party that was better able to respond to the new conditions and social behaviours but also the political space that had the strength to assume the role of the political embodiment of their needs during a dangerous and precarious period.

This book highlights and assesses a series of actions and phenomena in the party's internal operation, its programmatic work, and its relationship with resistance and solidarity movements during this preparatory period and the first few months of progressive governance, until the bitter end of the negotiations and SYRIZA's acceptance of the austerity framework. It hopes to contribute useful observations, conclusions, and recommendations aimed at learning from the Greek experience to shape a new methodology of emancipatory politics and effective social mobilisation.

[2]

The period of preparation: 2012–2015

THE GREEK EXPERIENCE CAN be understood through the prism of the intersection of two offsetting processes of transformation. On one hand, as noted earlier, segments of what remained of the political left in Greece and individuals participating in the SYRIZA endeavour showed some adaptability to the new conditions that took shape after a great historical cycle came to a close.

This was the element that produced positive political and grassroots results and which highlighted this unique political formation's ability to be a contemporary political force at the side of the popular classes and in the service of fundamental values during a period fraught with danger and

threats. Its subsequent course, however, showed that this potential was not destined to become reality.

SYRIZA's later direction—as cast by the eruption of the economic crisis and accompanying political savagery, the mass grassroots movements, and political upheaval with the party at its centre—showed that the traditional left's adaptability lacked the swiftness needed to keep up with the barrage of change, the intensified antagonism, and the deepening social divide. Thus, from the moment of SYRIZA's rise to main opposition, there has been an accelerated tendency towards reversing the processes of transformation and adaptation to the new conditions and a bolstering of out-dated political mentality and analysis framework.[1]

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1 SYRIZA, was a coalition party until 2013, when it became a single, unified party. It was launched in 2004 by various parties and organisations. The meaning of the Greek syllabic abbreviation is usually translated into English as *Coalition of the Radical Left*. The biggest component was Synaspismos, a party of Euro-Communist roots that had achieved a small parliamentary representation: 5% in 1993, 2,9% in 1996 (failing to pass the threshold of 3% for parliamentary representation), and 3,4% in 2000. Other organizations came from different currents of the left, such as Trotskyism, Maoism, Political Ecology, Orthodox Communism, Autonomy, Euro-communism, and Patriotic Left. As a coalition SYRIZA received 3,2% of the vote in 2004, 5% in 2007 and 4% in 2009. As a unified entity, in the election of January 2015 SYRIZA became the ruling party, receiving 36.3% of the vote.

There is a dynamic tension between:

- the willingness to advance and update methodologies and organisational principles arising from the political forces' evident failings of traditional means in working effectively at the grassroots and social levels (particularly with regards to specific segments of the population); and,

- the adherence to the traditional functioning of a cumbersome, bureaucracy-heavy organisation, and entrenched means of exerting policy (emphasising political confrontation on the central political stage, in the media, and in Parliament).

The dynamic tension was not aligned along demarcations within SYRIZA, but cut horizontally across all factions. Nor was it the focus of official internal discourse. Nonetheless, from the perspective of understanding the Greek experience in relation to operational demands and the appropriate political methodology for the new conditions of socio-political antagonism, this tension was the determining element of SYRIZA's character at that time.

After the June 2012 elections, from which SYRIZA emerged as the official opposition and thus as a potential government-in-waiting, a decisive factor was added that tilted the scales towards entrenched thinking and methodologies:

the tendency to align the party organisation and political personnel with the norms and characteristics of state power. This was a strong 'pull force' that radically changed—and in relatively short time—practices, processes, behaviours, priorities, policies, and organisational structures. It is a case of a party, hitherto remote from power and which had been attempting to explore new methodologies of activism and organisation, now being radically reshaped for compatibility with the state mindset of power and the political strategy inherent to a traditional ruling party.

Below, we examine aspects of party activity which, for the sake of analysis, have been grouped under two categories, organisational and programmatic.

The organisational level

The organisational structure

SYRIZA's organisational structure follows the traditional structure of mass parties. The party convention is the ruling body and its cells are the local and sectoral branch organisations. The convention is comprised of elected delegates who, in turn, elect a central committee and party president, and approve by vote the official party position in the form of the convention resolution. The central committee elects its general-secre-

tary and the political secretariat, which is the supreme guiding organ. The central committee also allocates programmatic work to specific departments which it sets up and which are chaired by members of the political secretariat and central committee. While the parliamentary group does not have an official role in the party's hierarchical structure, it is nonetheless a strong political centre. Local branches also hold smaller conventions to elect central committees and political secretariats in their respective prefectures; these regional organs are guided by the national central committee but are strongly independent, especially with regards to local issues.

Allocation of human and financial resources

SYRIZA's emergence from the June 2012 elections as the main opposition triggered a decisive political moment for the party's future course. This was the allocation of human and financial resources.

At that time, SYRIZA acquired scores of full-time staffers—far more than in the past—thanks to an increased allocation of state funds and a larger parliamentary representation. It is obvious that the deployment of staff and resources is a momentous event against a backdrop of a deepening social and political antagonism, the unravelling of Greece's economy and society, the collapse of traditional rules of parliamentary democracy, a

boost in the neo-Nazis' political influence, and a potential across-the-board clash with the neoliberal bloc in conditions of state bankruptcy and suspension of rudimentary social functions.

Nonetheless, this issue did not receive the requisite attention from SYRIZA's leadership. The allocation of human and financial resources was not a focal issue for the party's leading bodies. It was tasked to a committee that was weakened, and ultimately sidelined in exemplary bureaucratic fashion. Instead of a systematic recording of needs and a radical review of resources' allocation in light of the new circumstances, SYRIZA merely upgraded its traditional operations, even though this could no longer support the political strategy of non-conformity and confrontation with the neoliberal policy framework being implemented. The allocation of financial and human resources is not a secondary issue, but the material basis of a strategy.

As a result, traditional priorities were preserved as if this was a normal period of social and political action. Parliamentary activity retained its primacy in the party's activity, largely because of the influence exerted by parliamentary group members given their nominal authority for hiring their respective staffs. (members of Parliament tend to place priority on their legislative role.) It is worth noting that this is the period when the

bailout agreements had already rendered parliamentary activity effectively token, with no substantive possibility of blocking the policy being implemented. The changes were piecemeal and concerned:

- the reinforcement of the parliamentary group's collective work (staff teams were set up to support groups of legislators) without a reduction in the number of staff.
- the creation of a 'Solidarity For All' initiative supported with staff and resources from the parliamentary group, although it was neither the focus of party activity nor even organically incorporated into party life.[2]
- slight bolstering of personnel in various areas of conventional party operation.

The traditional methodology, established priorities, and the corresponding imaginary prevented SYRIZA from assessing the importance of material conditions for a political strategy to head off austerity and neoliberalism. The party did not focus on this critical issue during the pre-

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[2] The Solidarity for All initiative (S4A) started in the summer of 2012. It is a solidarity movement that was created by the Greek people in the framework of the broader struggle against the austerity memoranda. In this context, grassroots solidarity actions met with SYRIZA's will to support it by creating a solidarity fund based on donations of part of the salaries of its parliamentarians.

paratory period and, on the contrary, replicated outdated organisational forms and habits.

Political organs and selection of cadres
During the preparation period there was an exponential dissolution of internal collective activities. This could be seen primarily in the highest political organs, but later spread throughout the party. The first serious consequences has been the bypassing of democratic processes in making critical decisions and the erosion of accountability. The driving force rapidly reshaping political behaviour, within these organs and the party in general, was the belief that the fundamental issue was promoting specific party members aligned with diverse factions to key positions (parliamentary group, top political organs, future government). This, in turn, led to the marginalisation of collective planning and exacerbated strife between internal party groups and senior cadres. This, in turn, fostered even greater factionalisation and led to the incremental dismantling of the healthy opposition between political wings through which policy was forged.

Collective planning was replaced by rivalry between groups with their own objectives. At the highest political organs, serious deliberation on critical issues gave way to 'power plays' with an eye to sharing existing and future power. This

dismantling of processes deprived the highest political organs of the ability to systematically collect information, evaluate developments, and devise a comprehensive strategy.

The collective organs' inability to become centres for shaping and developing a uniform strategy gradually transformed the party from a pivot of power (which is called upon to act in a hostile environment of domestic and international power dominion) into a field of internal clashes. Decisions resulted largely from rivalry and individual ambitions, and were thus taken according to criteria that did not contribute to strengthening the party as a whole in relation to other centres of power. Indeed, in most cases, these decisions weakened it further.

The implicit premise that made possible this erosion of the quality of collective processes at the highest political organs was that the determining factors for arresting austerity and the neoliberal restructuring would be electoral victories, the formation of a government, and popular support through demonstrations. Each of these factors on their own would have been sufficient, regardless of exactly how the new government would handle the negotiations and issues of governance. In other words, instead of the rise to government being seen as an advanced stage of a clash that requires greater operational abilities for implementation

and more demanding planning, it was seen as the completion of the basic endeavour. From the moment that the main stage of SYRIZA's mission would be completed with the election of the new government, what now appeared to be of interest within the framework of the internal rivalries and power-sharing was which cadres or groups of cadres would have more influence and hold the highest positions in the government and the state.

Additional fallout from underestimating the demands of the head-on confrontation that was just beginning and the insular preoccupation on how the soon-to-be-acquired power would be shared were:

- a squandering of party staff's time and energy on internal competition for positions of authority and future inclusion in the parliamentary group and government; and,
- the undervaluation of the importance of appointing staff capable of fulfilling specific operational demands.

Another miscalculation at the operational level of collective leadership was how party staff and individuals outside the party were evaluated and selected for placement on ballots in national, European, local, and regional elections. The aspect of preparing for a higher-level confrontation was

also underestimated in this area, and what prevailed under the pressures of internal power rivalries were:

- outdated views on broadening the political scope through individuals from other political spaces (at a time when the old political guard faced discredit) or the insistence on SYRIZA officials, regardless of whether they fit the profile of candidates who would inspire citizens to mobilise beyond voting;

- superficial and incumbent popularity assessments, instead of promoting a new mentality of participation in civic affairs, especially at a time when citizens were actively seeking something new at this level;

- alignment with the media's criteria of popularity which often led to frivolous handling of candidacies without the necessary preparation on issues, resulting in miscalculations and public flips that tarnished the party's image.

Furthermore, the regional dimension of Greek society's resilience in the face of the impending clash, the importance of the anti-fascist front, the preparation of elemental aspects for governance, and the negotiations demanded, as noted earlier, out-of-the-box appointments with specific targets and action plans by region and sector, over-

looked at the level of the highest political organs. Rather than seeking a new approach to the duties of governance, the obsolete allocation of authority among members of the highest political organs essentially mimicked the cabinet structure. This reinforced superficial participation in the high political organs and the allocation of portfolios became tools in the internal jostling for a future position in the government and parliamentary group.

For the most part, internal political authority meant issuing statements against the conservative-led coalition in power at the time, and the expression of positions that were not backed by effective action plans.

As seen from the above, there was prevalent ignorance of, or indifference to, the increased demands stemming from SYRIZA rhetoric on:

- the complexities of implementing public policy and engaging with the state after assuming government power;
- the operational demands of the negotiation process (multi-level, multi-personal, high levels of coordination, and so on); and,
- the methodology for the requisite specialisation in mobilising citizens for the development of alternative and autonomous

means of fulfilling rudimentary social functions across the country.

Regarding the latter, it is worth noting that safeguarding degrees of autonomy in performing basic social functions is a cardinal issue for any political strategy seeking to stem the implemented policy. And this is because domestic and European elites have embedded an institutional and fiscal architecture, at the national and European levels, that places primary social functions under their control. In other words, the elites have transformed decisions ensuring a society's smooth operation into their sole prerogative, excluding the majority of citizens from access to decision-making and ultimately weakening related democratic regulation. In such an environment, the elites are well-positioned to threaten as well as implement punitive actions against a society that rebels against these choices.

Obviously, a prerequisite for handling such a situation is a comprehensive operational plan—spanning the local, regional, and national levels—that can secure some measure of autonomy with regards to providing basic social functions in order to avert the danger of collapse. Such planning does not only involve the government, but requires methods of social and political mobilisation at multiple levels and of a different nature than movements of social resistance and actions

for attaining government power. The allocation of material and human resources, the quality of the collective work at the highest political organs, and other aspects of the party's operation did not meet these requirements. Conversely, what we see is the replication of obsolete models of political and party functions typical of establishment forces in periods of generally robust democratic functioning.

Local branches, internal networks, and the grassroots
Naturally, the tendency for aligning the party with the characteristics of state power filtered from the top down. As a result, the influence at the branch organisation level was less pronounced and slower. Thus, while local organisations manifested similar negative phenomena during the preparation period, there also emerged some new, positive aspects from their operation, namely:

- consolidation, which multiplied their potential for intervention;
- the development of local solidarity networks that offered the opportunity to expand social activism (beyond the traditional organisation of resistance movements and advocacy of party positions) and bond organically with their respective communities.

Local solidarity initiatives and their networks allowed community-based organisations a degree of differentiation in members' participation in party life. As solidarity activism involves using individuals' abilities, it became the spark for acknowledging members' skills (formal education, technical expertise, work experience, etc.) and highlighting these abilities and qualifications as an important element for party work as well as facilitating the creative and productive inclusion of people outside its membership.

Nonetheless, SYRIZA, as a collective political body, was unable to utilise this enormous skill pool to expand and support its political strategy, because it did not develop the appropriate organisational receptors and 'extraction' methods for harnessing human potential. This is an issue of equally cardinal significance as the allocation of human and material resources.

Digital technologies facilitate compiling, recording, and cross-referencing party staff and non-members and organising them into multiple working groups, something which could have expanded and enhanced SYRIZA's capabilities at the levels of:

- autonomising rudimentary social operations and establishing local, regional, and sectoral social institutions; and,

- serious and in-depth preparation for governance and the negotiations.

The creation of social mechanisms to devise and implement specific policies at the local, regional, and sectoral levels would place these mechanisms in a position to supplement and support SYRIZA at the levels of governance and state administration, while also acting as the social arm of the negotiation in terms of safeguarding degrees of freedoms in the face of threats and aggressive actions.

Yet, even in this key issue of harnessing grassroots mobilisation, the objective potential for a significant ordering of social forces—and one with the capacity to counter the neoliberal bloc—was forestalled from becoming reality by the two determining factors outlined above: the predominance of a traditional political mindset and the exacerbation of internal rivalries. Specifically, the traditional imaginary exhausted grassroots participation in protest or support demonstrations, rather than in substantive and productive engagement. That is, in a form of participation that was insufficient on its own to respond to the increased demands from the escalation of the social and political confrontation. On the other hand, the exacerbated infighting over power, current and future, activated mechanisms that were either exclusionary (to reduce competition

for posts) or selective (reinforcing specific wings within the party). These mechanisms neutralised the dynamic of grassroots activation either by not using its inherent potential (exclusion) or by deploying it in the internal competition (selection).

We should note that grassroots containment was weaker at the branch organisation level and stronger at the party's upper echelons, while some of this grassroots power was used locally and sporadically.

As for the interface between different levels of the party hierarchy and among sectors, as well as with social forces outside the party structure, it should be noted that this has been a chronic party weakness with a range of consequences that have not received due attention. This interface should provide sufficient and timely information to members and staff, and facilitate democratic decision-making and accountability processes, as well as conveying the necessary signals from the party to its representatives on specific issues. In the framework of this publication, we will focus on two key aspects:

Firstly, we must consider that throughout the preparation period, the leadership centres increasingly used bureaucratic and cumbersome forms of collective operation, which effectively nullified the substantive participation of most members in decision-making on critical issue

and the requisite accountability of appointed representatives.

Secondly, aside from the fundamental issue of internal democracy, the downward spiral in the quality of this interface affected cohesion and effectiveness at a critical point in time. The information flow between party sectors was chaotic and incoherent; as a result, efforts to develop appropriate actions foundered. Committees tasked with important issues and leadership centres acted with little coordination, and gleaned whatever information they could through their own operational abilities without being able to employ the full capacity of the party. At the lowest rungs of the party hierarchy, most local and regional branches formulated their own activity in the solidarity sector without using the structure, network, infrastructure, and technical expertise of the 'Solidarity For All' initiative or the party's central mechanism.

The lack of a strategic plan in which each party department has a specific role and field of action, and the absence of a well-coordinated interface that supports effective methods of communication using new technologies in multiple ways, fostered the breakdown of the party apparatus, leading to more favourable conditions for the spread of internal party rivalries.

Similar weaknesses and miscalculations are also seen at the programmatic level, as we will further explain in the following section.

The programmatic level

Fragmentation of programmatic work
An early consequence of the breakdown in collective functioning was the development of parallel committees and working groups on a range of party issues, albeit without sufficient communication or any functional distribution of work. In the preparation period, SYRIZA had three different bodies tasked with policy development: the corresponding sections of the central committee, the parliamentary delegation's working groups, and the programmatic committee that was set up in view of the prospect of the party being elected to government after 2012. It is indicative that in several sectors, the corresponding central committee group was unaware of the existence of a similar working group under the programmatic committee and did not coordinate—indeed, often competed—with the relevant parliamentary delegation working group.

This resulted in a waste of time and resources as well as an embedding of different centres that developed their own programmatic approach. Here, too, the lack of a clear allocation of authori-

ties and rules for communication and cooperation allowed a mentality to flourish that encouraged multiple overlapping committees as party cadre attempted to consolidate power and then used these committees in their internal rivalries in view of the rise to government power. Setting up a task force or joining the Programmatic Committee became goal in itself as heralding an important future post. The need to establish such a working group did not derive from some collective plan, nor was the quality of the programmatic review the primary criterion for evaluation.

The content of a task force's work was criticised within the sphere of internal party rivalries and thus aimed at (or was assumed to aim at) weakening the influence of the cadres associated with the specific committee rather than aimed at improving the content of the work. Aside from frittering time and energy, subordinating programmatic work to intra-faction competition rendered impossible a true assessment of these policies and impeded any improvement in programmatic processes.

Programmatic proposals vs implementable policies
Another characteristic of programmatic work that was incompatible with the momentousness of the occasion was the prevalent perception regarding its content and the desired outcome.

The traditional political view of a programme was mainly concerned with recording needs and demands in a given field, processing these, and compiling a list of demands to be made from the state and government. But this approach presumes the state's inclusionary capability so that, under electoral and grassroots pressure, it could move in the direction of the demands outlined in the party programme. Additionally, this approach also presupposes that implementing and meeting the demands comes under someone else's authority. But in 2010 it was clear that Greece had already entered a new phase with regards to the state's responsiveness to citizens' needs and demands as well as its leeway to do so.

Thus, the programmatic work needed a radical reorientation and improvement in terms of demands. Emphasis needed to be placed on the ways and means for implementing specific policies in light of a sum of parameters such as the operational condition of the state apparatus and the complications arising from the interlinking of Europe's economies. Rather than outlining what needed to be done, the goal had to be to develop action plans for implementing a policy: what mechanisms were involved and how they had to act in order to achieve something. Most importantly, it had to include the operational structure and grassroots activation outside the state's con-

fines for developing and implementing the de-sired policies. This parameter (aside from being a prerequisite for a political force that seeks to empower citizens and bolster democracy in the exercise of politics) was vital for operational rea-sons, in light of the difficulties and complications of the specific political situation that a left gov-ernment would be called upon to manage.

Nonetheless, the inertia over what constituted programmatic work was exceptionally hard to change. The party was supposed to focus on the collection of information not only about prob-lems and needs, but also about the organisational and operational condition of the state apparatus and the operational complexities at various levels, as well as on the development of plans for inter-acting with social forces and institutions within and outside the state apparatus. These tasks were extremely hard to instil in the committees and working groups. Compiling lists of demands is a completely different type of work from devising plans for policy implementation with the citizens' active involvement.

Furthermore, the focus on listing demands without developing plans to implement them meant that some of the programmatic commit-ments would later be abandoned, given the bail-out's stranglehold on Greek policymaking. Rather than being at the centre of programmatic work,

overcoming obstacles was instead transformed into a potential lever for reneging on programmatic positions that were mere proclamations.

This underestimation of the implementation dimension of a policy, aside from the unwillingness to change the nature of the programmatic process and its subordination to the internal rivalries, was tacitly supported by the assumption that the state has the apparatus to implement any policy. The critical issue, therefore, was an electoral victory and the placement of this apparatus under a new political strategy. In this case, the key question is what type of political decisions the government will make, whether the state is in a position to implement all the choices without any implementation plans from the ruling party. The emphasis on broad political decisions and demotion of their implementation as a 'technical' issue was a decisive factor in the discrepancies between what SYRIZA did to prepare for assuming power and the reality it would be called upon to manage.

The claim that the clash in which SYRIZA became embroiled was solely political, while true from one perspective, nonetheless became an excuse for perpetuating political methods and thinking that could not rise to the demands of the circumstances. The process for implementing a policy is not a 'technical' issue that is not

relevant to the party, which must focus on the 'political' aspect of broader decisions. On the contrary, implementation procedures are the material foundation of a party's political strategy. Decision-making processes at the parliamentary and government level are just the peak of the iceberg of state policy. Implementation procedures are the mass of the iceberg below the water, i.e., the bulk of state policy.

Therefore, there is no possibility that broad political decisions can actually shift state policy, whether through inadvertence or indifference to 'how and who' will implement these decisions. Indicative of this distortion are two patterns that emerged from both the committees and the highest political organs. Once the question of 'how' was disregarded, either because of the inability to offer an answer or because it was seen as irrelevant in the face of internal party rivalry, the dozens of committees that had been formed reproduced vague political confrontations instead of outlining specific implementation plans by sector to overcome obstacles and restructure state functions and institutions with a democratic orientation. Moreover, at the highest political organs, disagreements over the recommended political decision (about the currency, banks, debt, and so on) were tediously repeated as if SYRIZA had the ability to implement them. The central

committee and political secretariat repeatedly discussed the percentage of the debt that the new government should write off, but never touched on the operational terms or the question of 'how'. The ability to implement was taken for granted, provided there was

- a social front with an operational alignment of forces at the regional and local levels and the appropriate mechanisms for supporting rudimentary social operations in the event of hostile actions, and
- a state apparatus aligned with SYRIZA's political strategy, a democratic rationality capable of interfacing with the social front, and high-level operational capabilities able to implement political decisions and ensure rudimentary social operations in the event of hostile actions.

The truth is that the party, as a collective body, was not in a position to implement any of the options discussed by its leadership. Having taken for granted the ability to implement them, it was in no position to focus its energy on formulating the prerequisites (at both the state and social levels) for implementing them so that disagreements over political tactics and strategy would actually be meaningful.

It is worth underscoring a pattern of political behaviour that proved particularly problematic:

- cadres with a more radical orientation showed greater insistence on the lists of demands, which seemed to act as a political shield against the focus on 'how' and thus caused their hesitation to addressing the complexity of implementation;
- more moderate cadres usually cited the complexities of implementation as the main reason for blunting the commitments arising from the lists of demands, but without setting the goal of developing action plans to overcome such complexities.

The end result was that the party did not focus on its basic duty: developing plans of action to address the difficult 'how?' of a different policy in the framework of an asphyxiated political environment. The obsessive adherence to lists of demands that are not attached to plans of action, and the acceptance of difficulties as a reason for adopting a more conventional governance mindset, did not advance the party's operational capability and did not serve its political strategy.

Characteristics of the programmatic discourse
The content of SYRIZA's programme had serious flaws. First, the party was unable to incorporate in its programmatic processes the new data and developments taking place today across most sec-

tors. Most positions were moulded around restoring a range of measures, functions, and rights that had been in place before the neoliberal transformation of recent years. Issues concerning

- digital infrastructures and technologies,
- education in the contemporary setting of information flows,
- the transformation of social relations and work stemming from the spread of information and communications technologies and automation,
- public health and prevention in a challenging living environment,
- consumption models that take into account new approaches and potentials,
- current capabilities of local low-scale production in a connected global environment,
- the possibilities for collective management of resources, knowledge, and other productive and social elements as *commons*,

were not included in the collective programmatic discourse, despite the fact that a number of individuals kept abreast of developments in these areas. While SYRIZA was the party most open to social quests, its pathway to power necessitated a greater ability to exploit the new possibilities rapidly emerging around us with an eye towards strengthening democracy and releasing individuals' inherent skills. These possibilities were

the sole source of strength accessible to SYRIZA ahead of the impending clash.

Secondly, SYRIZA did not alter the traditional articulation of programmatic discourses in relation to the popular classes. In other words, it preserved a methodology of formulating positions directed externally towards parties with the aim of securing electoral support (exchange pattern). The fact that it maintained the geometry of *the party and future government will satisfy the demands and hopes of voters, social groups and movements* reproduced within both government and party—as well as within the Greek society at large—political models that did not respond to the heightened social tension and the dangers inherent in the impending clash.

The structure and nature of the party's programmatic positions had to be characterised by action plans that outlined, in specific ways, the popular classes' position and role in the upcoming confrontation. But instead of instilling the feeling that the government would spearhead the clash and satisfy social demands as long as it had citizens' support, the programme needed to outline the ordering of the social forces against the impending catastrophe and the dangers of hostile actions.

The programme needed to address each segment of the popular classes by proposing roles

and through its contribution to this effort—not, of course, in the guise of 'sacrifices' it would have to make, but as an active social force that undertakes a decisive and active role through participatory planning, decentralisation of authorities and collective decision-making—as the foundation of a specific plan of action. Such a radical change in the nature of the programmatic role would reignite grassroots support, shape new methods of social mobilisation, and enhance the operational capabilities of the popular classes.

Chapter's epilogue

Previous sections focused on the organisational and programmatic levels during the preparation period, in an attempt to highlight key aspects that are not usually the focus of criticism or reviews of comparable experiences. In most instances, such post-mortem discussions revolve around political strategy and tactics, with a tendency to undervalue operational and methodological issues. In the case of SYRIZA, there is already a vast corpus of opinions on its political strategy and policies on major political questions (such as Greece's place in the Eurozone). This is why we chose instead to examine issues that are not related to these big political questions, but look mainly at the operational aspects that secure the required

strength for a substantive confrontation on these questions.

SYRIZA's rise to official opposition in 2012 was a milestone, as the anticipated continuation of the political upheaval presumed innovative elements with regards to mobilisation methods, organisational principles, and political mentality. As we argued above, SYRIZA's hopeful trend towards adapting to the role was outstripped by a tendency to align the party apparatus and cadres with the norms and traits of state power. The consequences of this altered course in SYRIZA's political evolution were many.

The inability to enhance mobilisation methodologies contributed to the collapse of grassroots activity, whose traditional means of expression (mass protests and political change via elections) had been exhausted. An indication of the availability of a qualitatively different, and more effective method for mobilisation was the spontaneous spread and expansion of new forms of social activism and solidarity networks, the anti-fascist front, and various local campaigns.

The party's activities focused on the central and parliamentary political confrontation in rhetorical terms and within parameters set by the country's powerful media. Being trapped in shallow communications and a superficial mode of confrontation, SYRIZA joined the political space

opened by the political elite, regardless of the intensity of the verbal clashes, and thus a larger-scale confrontation was shrunk to fit a more traditional conflict between parties vying for power.

The gradual shift of SYRIZA's political thrust during the period of preparation accelerated considerably during the first period of governance, as we will explain in the following chapter. SYRIZA moved from a position of voiding the bailout regime and ending austerity, as a prerequisite to negotiation and negotiation of a new agreement with different characteristics, to a position of nullifying the bailout regime as the goal of the left government at the end of negotiations, the proclamation of a limited short-term agenda known as the Thessaloniki Programme of September 2014 (whose implementation would be decoupled from the negotiations, something which in the end did not apply), and easing of the Greek debt within the framework of a new 'European New Deal'. This shift partly indicates the inability to confront the neoliberal institutional and economic architecture as the foundations of traditional methodological policy

The intellectual and operational constraints of traditional methodology of politics contributed to the underestimation of the existential depth of the attempted changes set in motion within a neoliberal strategy. Thus, SYRIZA's political rhet-

oric remained 'narrow' (e.g., shaping of social alliances to generate electoral support, government responsiveness to social groups' demands, etc.) and was not imbued with an inspirational aspect that would match emotions or values on a scale equal to the changes or the demands articulated. Consciously or unwittingly, large segments of the population sympathised with the scope of the attempted changes and the associated risks. Nonetheless, SYRIZA did not rise to the role of catalyst for stirring the fighting spirit of the popular classes. It did not elaborate an innovative rhetoric along the above lines, which would be a crucial complement to an operational arraying of forces so that the popular classes would be in a position to influence the course of events.

Concluding this chapter on the preparatory period, it is worth underlining the fact that SYRIZA's negative transformation during this time, and the structural weaknesses in confronting the intensity and complexity of the social and political contest, transcend,to an enormous degree the issue of the traditional contrasts between the 'radical' and 'moderate' or 'centre' left. There is no doubt that SYRIZA shifted politically 'to the right' with regards to its priorities of social representation, yet the issue being examined here is much broader. The weaknesses and shortcomings we identified in the operational and methodologi-

cal dimensions were in those key elements that are required to advance any political strategy that does not comply with neoliberal orthodoxy. In other words, this concerns the necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for the effectiveness of a political force that seeks to change entrenched neoliberal norms and regulations and create space for a different policy, even one of a systemic nature.

In this sense, SYRIZA is not only held in check from the perspective of a radical political orientation capable of confronting a neoliberal restructuring fully underway. In its case, we can also discern weaknesses in noticeably altering the neoliberal restructuring, even in systemic political families attached to the traditional political methodology of social democracy, labour, and progressive parties.

[3]

The first period in government: January–July 2015

THE STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES identified in the preparation period—a product of non-adaptation to the new circumstances of social and political confrontation—largely shaped the framework for a government that showed similar inadequacies, shaping an unfavourable terrain for its effectiveness even in systemic terms. To avoid repetition, we will briefly mention some manifestations of these inadequacies without expanding into the diagnostic observations made in the previous chapter.

Government's formation and operation

The formation of the government and the staffing of the state apparatus displayed the qualities of similar party processes. The group of the highest political cadres who moved into the government and the state emerged from the internal power-jostling as well as from personal strategies. Thus, the 'front line' of the first left government lacked internal cohesion and showed signs of serious problems in coordination, while its operational capabilities generally fell short of even the most basic criteria.

The individuals invited to assume key positions (ministerial and other posts) accepted their assigned roles without having an action plan or a team of associates that was prepared and briefed on the types of challenges they would be called upon to manage. In short, they did not have a road map for reshaping and readying the state apparatus for implementing a different policy under adverse conditions. Conversely, senior government and staff, and in general the 'second line' personnel in the Left administration, were selected according to the rationale of internal rivalry.

Moreover there had not been a systematic legislative preparation or a timeline for those actions that would give the government the advantage in increasing its degrees of freedom during the first

critical period of governance. On the contrary, in some cases there were great delays in staffing key positions, while a significant number of senior decision-makers and staff began acting autonomously, increasingly identifying more closely with the priorities of the state apparatus which they were tasked with managing. The disordered appointments resulting from the internal jockeying for power further reinforced the 'power post' mindset; that is, a mentality that emphasises competition for the position of power versus other contenders (other parties, internal rivals, etc.) Thus the content of governance and the applied politics did not serve a broader political strategy of confrontation with the dominant institutional and economic framework, but was rather integrated piecemeal in an array of competing strategies bolstering micro-powers.

This development seems evident and is usually described as the seductive power' of office that corrupts humans. Nonetheless, this specific pattern describes a task that a political force promising change must manage. The appearance of such recurring dynamics calls for the processing and planning of appropriate offsetting procedures and operations to blunt and transcend them. Conversely, the absence of such planning—for patterns and dynamics that appear every time in similar circumstances—suggests that the preva-

lence of systemic mentalities and functions are not accidental, but rather a negative outcome that burdens each respective party.

It is worth reiterating here the different type of work involved in expressing positions and implementing them. Implementation requires either creating a new state apparatus and procedures or changing those already in place, since state operations are already in progress and performing procedures that move in a different direction. Awareness of the inertia of state mechanisms and targeted interventions to change them as a basis for an action plan that takes their 'velocity' into account involves entirely different work from outlining positions.

Additionally, socialisation is a key element of the desired transformation of state operations—that is;their connection to social forces and social availability outside the state with regards to both planning and implementing the desired policy. We refer here to the need to devise a web of interventions in this direction based on an effective methodology of social and political activism. Such methodology would take into account developments in the last few decades with regards to social and political engagement. The development of innovative approaches to organising and running open participatory procedures for planning and implementation is now critically impor-

tant to the outcome of contemporary political endeavours towards accessing state institutions at the national, municipal and regional levels.

In SYRIZA's case, instead of a specific action plan for each state sector and a road map for the effective change of related mechanisms towards more open, participatory, and democratic operations, the senior party officials appointed to state positions were given an unclear order to do 'the best they could' based on their own abilities, instincts, and experiences. It is obvious today, when autocratic governance in contemporary societies is increasingly rooted in the technocratic integration of various and complex regulations and mechanisms, that political confrontation should aim at garnering the support of diverse forces, multi-level planning, and close coordination. For the most part, the qualities offered by SYRIZA cadres were inadequate in this regard. The traits of political expression and rhetorical confrontation such as those cultivated at the parliamentary level—and which have dominated the political imaginary, thus diminishing other qualities—retain their importance, yet cannot be the only tool for stopping neoliberal restructuring.

The government's relations with the party and the social movements

The relationship between the government and pthe olitical party, as well as the relationship between the the government and the grassroots from which it drew support, largely played out along traditional lines.

The government and the social forces
This is a relationship that played out against the pre-existing pattern of exchanges between party and social forces. The traditional relationship of the party with social organisations and movements was rooted in (a) the shaping of a political programme that adopts demands made by some social forces, and (b) political support—largely rhetorical—in the period before rising to government. SYRIZA moved in this direction based on the organisational and programmatic procedures developed in the preparation period, as noted in the previous chapter.

Consequently, the government—in the framework of the exchange pattern—perceived its relationship with the social forces as one of reciprocity through the implementation of policies in retribution for the support the party had received (and for its replication in the future, in accordance with the exchange pattern's dynamics).

Such an approach cannot conceive the fact that after assuming government power, if it does not transfer resources and decisions to strengthening a competitive economic and social ecosystem (expanding the social power of an operationally organised bloc of social forces), sooner or later the elites will change the equation of power to their benefit. The perception that rising to government is a moment of sharing gains or benefits after a decisive victory, does not take into account the dynamic dimension of power relations.

Moreover, such an approach is not in a position to evaluate the importance of the combination of policies that satisfy just demands with policies that improve access to resources and decisions of specific social forces, thus altering the balance of power.

Even worse, we can claim that the exchange pattern places, from the outset, popular social forces in a relationship that does not include the possibility of substantive empowerment; that is, the transfer of resources and decisions to them. The exchange pattern thus appears to operate as a mechanism for incorporation that guarantees the reproduction of the elites' dominance and does not threaten the status quo, despite political change. It is, therefore, not a relationship that cultivates and promotes a truly emancipatory

policy.[3]

The Greek experience illustrates that the exchange pattern does not work in regimes under bailout oversight. SYRIZA failed miserably and in short order to satisfy even the most basic demands of the social forces that supported it. And this is because the exchange pattern suggests a systemic political methodology for periods where the status quo forces the elites to adopt an inclusive, hegemonic strategy towards the popular classes. Today, emerging institutional and economic architectures (e.g., international markets. the European Union, debt repayment mechanisms, the bailout regime) are harmonising with a more aggressive political strategy—founded on a more advantageous balance of power for the

[3] Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, in the Greek case, we face a unique situation: a governance policy that significantly changes the balance of power between the elites and the popular classes does not serve only a political strategy of emancipation. In Greece, the shift in the balance of power at different institutional levels (national, European) is a condition for averting a deep and extended decline that will downgrade Greek society in several ways, while at the same time shaping a social substrata of a different scale of risks, if we take into account the region's geopolitical 'sensitivities'. In other words, any political strategy that perceives the historical and existential gravitas of political developments in recent years and aims towards greater social stability and cohesiveness, would be obliged to move in a direction of true empowerment of the popular forces by transferring resources and decisions as the necessary condition for altering the broader balance of power that condemns the Greek society to total regression.

elites—that has exclusion rather than inclusion at its centre. In the face of such an aggressive political strategy of multifaceted exclusion, which strikes a heavy blow on social cohesion and harbours grave dangers for the stability of administrative systems, only a political methodology that truly empowers the social forces that are being excluded in manifold ways can hope to halt this course.

The relationship between the government and the social movements followed patterns that could not respond to the deepening social and political competition. The term *movements* is used here to describe two basic expressions of citizen activism: (a) specific moments of social processes, such as protests marches, demonstrations, and rallies, and (b) formations for organised activism, such as labour unions, environmental movements and local organisations, among other forms.

The relationship between the movements and the government was understood by the latter as a relationship of expression of support through protests or rallies. The government was the active factor that made decisions and political choices, while the movements could simply express their support. It is an essentially extrinsic relationship that limits the potential for integrating them into the social and political struggle on terms in which

they can substantively participate and assume responsibility. However, in an undermined institutional and economic framework, where degrees of freedom are negligible, it is obvious that the positive outcome of an intensified clash—as the one set in motion with SYRIZA's rise to power—can only emerge if the popular element is in a position to modify and weaken this framework.

For example, the popular movement needed to be more productively self-organised, locally and by sector, typically in the direction of ameliorating the elites' control over basic social functions—a control that laid the groundwork for intimidation under the fear of a bankruptcy that would also mean the suspension of these functions. This type of activism would have offered the government real support, as the hostile environment would be softened by citizens that produce autonomy and power; that is, through citizens' integration in the confrontation on terms of production rather than mere expression.[4] Consequently, we could claim that the traditional imaginary of people's participation in the political clash exclusively on expressive terms such as protests and rallies is not compatible with the current condi-

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[4] Of course, the transferring of resources and decisions outside the state is necessary condition for this type of activism methodology, as identified earlier.

tions of social and political struggle.[5]

With regards to the government's relationship with the more solidified forms of activism, the government's actions can be ascribed to a bipolar pattern of integration and pressure:

- *Integration*: the government absorbed numerous and important movement cadres into the state apparatus and at the same time contained the policy production within the state. Both these actions impaired the movements' operational abilities, simultaneously placing them on hold rather than promoting productive participation.

- *Pressure*: from the moment that developing and implementing policy is the sole responsibility of government and state, the movements' active role (that is, beyond their being put on hold, as noted above) can only be channelled into expressing external pressure on the government and the state to implement its promises (exchange pattern).

Rather than reinforcing cooperation and coordination, the above choices fostered the weakening and incorporation of the movements, as well

[5] Protests and rallies produce substantial and considerable political power in an inclusive/democratic framework in which the expression of opinion has enhanced importance. But in cases where the modalities of the social and political struggle are organised around the notion of exclusion, the expression of opinion is downgraded in terms of political power.

as the development of tensions and clashes between the government and movements exercising pressure. But the successful outcome of the endeavour of rising to government power is critically dependent on the ability to ensure the cohesion of the struggling ecosystem and its ability to bolster itself and increase its power. The recurring pattern of failure by left governments in this area obliges us to look towards new organisational and methodological choices in this direction

Earlier, we noted that the task of developing policies was undertaken chiefly by the personnel participating in the formation of the government. In the best case, there was a weak and sporadic participation by party sectors and movements through muddled consultation processes. This not only created problems of consensus and a softening of cohesion, but suggests a very problematic allocation of authority in terms of the produced policy outcome. The personnel involved in governance were forced to expend considerable energy and time in facilitating certain bureaucratic procedures and overcoming related problems and obstacles. This continues today, in the context of a complex and technocratic institutional framework with multiple and interlinked levels (regional, national, European). Thus, action plans cannot mature or policies for implementation be devised by government officials and staff

not granted sufficient and appropriate resources and timing.[6]

This is one reason why systemic political forces, when in government, cede a large share of the planning and implementation to extra-state entities that share their rationale. Big business, entrepreneurial organisations, consulting firms and an array of think tanks and institutes, take on the role of maturing and fine-tuning action plans. Afterwards, the personnel inside the state and the government ushers the plans through the implementation process, so that these plans can be brought to fruition either through legislative interventions or through the transfer of resources for their execution.

It is obvious that developing a matching methodology and organisational principles is even more vital for emancipatory forces. This is because an emancipatory force is more effective when it takes into account both the status quo and the hostile environment in which it must operate. Nonetheless, such an approach presupposes a substantive change in the traditional imaginaries and patterns of relations between movements,

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[6] The problematic organisational hierarchies and allocation of authority leads to an overburdening of the personnel inside the state, which, by nature of its position, is susceptible to a gradual affiliation with the dominant strategy through the inability to develop and implement a competitive strategy.

forces in government, and the state. Indicatively, what is required is:

- the emergence of movement entities in a position to develop action plans whose logic goes beyond merely expressing support or exerting pressure, towards a more creative direction that produces implementable policy;
- the ransformation of state processes and operations (see the previous chapter) and new institutional 'spaces' oriented towards developing a more effective allocation of roles and functional coordination;
- the development of a network of open, democratic, participatory, and decentralised decision-making systems and processes, as well as the appropriate mechanisms for coordination, transfer of information, and articulation into effective planning and implementation clusters.

It is worth reiterating that these and other similar elements are not only ideologically, but also operationally, crucial at a time when societies face considerable dangers and challenges. They are vital because only the liberation of existing human potentials and their functional coordination on a mass scale can give birth to:

- the requisite social power to halt the elites' strategy that is deepening the decline, and

- the innovations and solutions needed today to face a series of new challenges.

As evident, political and social struggle today demands that we overcome the incorporation/pressure pattern and develop a new type of relationship and articulation of forces inside and outside the government. Of course, here, too, a vital element is the decentralisation of resources and decision-making power outside the state. We must note that neoliberal politicians have shown a far greater disposition than left governments towards transferring resources and decisions from the capitalist state—and under their authority—to entities of their rationale. It is clear that here we have highlighted a very important point linked to the recurring inability of left governments to rise to their declared role and further enhance the power of the popular classes.

Shifting the political centre of gravity from representing 'opinions' to supporting and cultivating citizens' mobilisation changes the criteria for evaluation and success. A basic criterion for success is the number of people involved in developing a competitive ecosystem for producing social power, the degree and intensity of the 'extraction' of their abilities for bolstering it, as well as the methodical preparation of the interface between state, institutional, and other structures with this ecosystem. Democracy and coopera-

tion are no longer something to be held in 'awe' or something we exercise 'as duty', but acquires key operational significance: the production of the power we need emerges from the liberation of people's embodied capacities. This potential is released and activated only when people cooperate equally towards a shared goal and when the value of their incorporated potential is acknowledged by transferring decisions involving this potential to them.

Developing a new political methodology with these characteristics requires a new leadership model. We do not refer only to the central leadership, but to the leadership functions at every level of a complex organisation. Leadership is a real, structural consequence of complex organisations. It is produced by the need to connect multiple parts of a complex system. Contact between parts does not involve all of each part, and this is where leadership emerges as a function. The political orientation towards developing an ecosystem of productive popular power demands a leadership that does not show a propensity for detaching decision-making from the other members of each network-cell by virtue of its greater access to information and direct link to other network hubs.[7] If the ecosystem's strength is

[7] Digital technologies, and specifically the speed at which information is disseminated in real time and the easy access to data

produced by the 'extraction' of the incorporated potential of as many people as possible, the 'extraction' is only possible when these people have access to the decisions linked to this potential. Then the main feature of the leadership model that corresponds to this rationale is the coordination of others for collective decision-making. A 'good' leadership is one that creates the conditions for making good decisions in collective and distributed ways and not one that makes 'better' decisions. Such leadership's main concern is the continuous enhancement of this function, the integration of new methods and tools, the evaluation of the experience for optimising the processes, and so on. In other words, if we detach decisions from people, we are weakened, because we do not allow the maximum possible utilisation of their potential. And this is tantamount to 'bad' leadership.

The government and the party
In the section above, we pinpointed that the traditional approach of focusing on rhetorical and expressive confrontation constrained the imaginary and practice of movements to forms and

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of the processes occurring simultaneously at different places in the system, may facilitate the development of a different leadership model, thus blunting the tendency for detaching decision-making from communications nodes.

types of social activism that did not produce social power: demonstrations, rallies, and generally support or pressure activism. The cultivation and development of processes and the social regulation of decentralised democratic consultation, planning, and development of action plans at various levels was not only underrated but completely ignored.[8]

The same methodology reduced the party's role from the necessary intersection with the government in developing a network of mass coordination of citizens' productive activity (releasing their potential) towards autonomising basic social functions, to an apparatus of political (rhetorical/expressive) support for the government.

This shrinkage and undervaluation of the party's role had as a consequence the mass transfer of high-ranking cadres from various levels and sectors of the party to the government and the state, creating multiple operational issues and cohesion problems. It also led to a drastic curtailment of party activity.

The party's role remains key after the rise to government, as it is the virtual critical institu-

[8] The fundamental problem is that this did not exist in the range of possible choices, as the cross-party majority of most SYRIZA cadres lacked the proficiency (methodology, political imaginary, organisational principles) to respond to such an endeavour. As a result, from the moment the practical possibility did not exist, it was never raised as a true political possibility.

tional node linking the struggling social and economic ecosystem to a left government. The loss of this node is a severe blow, as it decouples the two basic components for registering the autonomous participation of the popular classes in the social and political struggle. The functions of left parties have evolved to shape the conditions for people lacking economic power to influence critical decision-making and the course of their societies in accordance with an emancipatory system of values. The party is a key tool for an emancipatory social activity to become a valued and regulatory factor, with an autonomous strategy capable of influencing political, economic and social developments.

During the period of assuming government power, the party has a very important organisational role to play in order to ensure the articulation of the struggling social and political ecosystem with the state apparatus and the government.[9]

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[9] We refer here to the party's function in order to isolate it from the historical role shaped by the party's organisational structure and methods. This focus on function rather than form is linked to the following rationale: (a) the party's traditional (post-war) structure and methodology cannot meet the demands of the current social and political struggles and thus it cannot satisfy the respective party function; (b) the party's role is absolutely necessary for all the reasons discussed in this publication; (c) the aim today is for a new *operating system* for a party that fights for emancipation; that is, new organisational principles and methodologies for

If this function is lost, then the government is cut off from the source of its power, facilitating its incorporation; that is, the transformation of the government into available political personnel for managing the implementation of other strategies.[10] On the other hand, the competitive ecosystem is weakened and dismantled, leading to a feebler state of scattered forces of defensive resistance. The SYRIZA case may be considered a typical example of such a regression.

The process of negotiation

According to the narrative offered above, the SYRIZA government gradually but rapidly found itself isolated, or rather bereft of the necessary social regulation and organisational links that would give it the power it needed in national and international negotiations. The excruciating pressure immediately applied by domestic and foreign economic and political centres set in motion a process of adaptation to the existing neoliberal norms and regulations. Without tools for rearranging the framework of the negotiation,

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social and political activism. Thus, we seek those new forms that can fulfill the party's function.

[10] This is repeatedly the case, with left governments creating a pattern that leads us to conclude that the traditional party structure and methodology is unable to fulfill the party's function.

the Greek government and SYRIZA as the ruling party shifted incrementally, from a position of confrontation with the fiscal autocracy to the position of governmental and political teams tasked with the responsibility of reviving the neoliberal plans.

In a time of complex institutional architectures and social and political antagonisms, SYRIZA, as a collective subject, was not in a position to realise even the type of clash in which it had become embroiled. A leadership that cannot perceive the quality of its confrontation can be transformed into available political personnel. This specific transition was typical in the case of the negotiation.

The negotiation process, and especially how it was understood and experienced within SYRIZA, is very illuminating about the political leadership's inability to perceive the type of confrontation, and indicative of the sloppiness and frivolity prevalent in the period of preparation.

Both these elements are linked to the hypothesis that SYRIZA was not in a position to truly perform the party's function. As a result, the SYRIZA government did not negotiate, strictly speaking. It did not develop a coherent negotiation strategy and no action was taken to improve its position during the negotiation. The SYRIZA government effectively postponed a decision that it had to

make.

From the date of the bridge agreement (20 February 2015) to the date when the creditors announced that the only option was to continue with the neoliberal plans (1 June 2015), a pattern emerged with regards to the way in which government staff and senior party officials assessed what was happening. Despite overwhelming signs of negative developments regarding the outcomes of the negotiation, the political leadership focused on positive references, thus distorting reality. In other words, it supplanted reality with what they wished it to be. It is worth noting here that this is not a moral issue of whether some officials were honest or not; even if some were not, their personal stance cannot explain a pattern of collective behaviour.

The 'unreal reality' to which the political leadership had become hitched conformed with the traditional political approach; that is, with how they knew to exercise politics. It is a methodology rooted in the hypothesis of an inclusive strategy from the part of the elites which, in the case of a left government, means accepting the democratic expression of the citizens and their mandate, despite the fact that Europe's entire institutional network has been built around abolishing the ability of people without economic power to influence critical decisions. The hypothesis is that

if the elites do not agree with the policy outlined by the government, they must either accept it to a certain degree or engage in a political confrontation and seek a friendlier government via the democratic route of elections.

This at the core of the 'unreal reality' to which SYRIZA officials remained devoted. Based on this hypothesis, they believed that the negotiation would have a happy ending—despite the fact that reality did not reflect this—solely because of the January 2015 election victory.

In the summer of 2015, the gap between the type of politics that SYRIZA knew how to exercise and the real world grew exponentially, creating ludicrous situations. This peaked in the week leading up to the referendum, as well as in the days after it and until the bailout agreement was signed. The pattern of supplanting reality with a more familiar 'reality' that summer rendered the majority of party and government staff unable to articulate a cogent position or opinion. It is characteristic that most of the positions expressed within SYRIZA at the time were an incoherent jumble that lacked any type of conclusion.

Furthermore, the political leadership experienced the closing of the banks as a cataclysmic event that could not be subject to an analysis that might lead to a political plan for managing it. It is not groundless to claim that this event took on

such otherworldly dimensions because it completely shattered the political imaginary of inclusion on which the entire framework of left traditional political thinking and activity rests. Also, the multitiered political planning for such events had been long removed from any framework of collective processes, in accordance with the organisational and programmatic specifications discussed earlier.

As for the referendum's significance, SYRIZA used all available, traditional, democratic tools of expression to change the field of confrontation. It was evident that the SYRIZA government, under the excruciating pressure of fully endorsing the bailout, tried to respond by escalating the conflict but without any real, practical means at its disposal to make feasible a compromise by the creditors. The traditional democratic means of expression are insufficient for this at a time of rising fiscal autocracy in Europe.[11] On the other hand, the referendum offered the Greek people the possibility of expressing themselves at a critical historic moment and sending the world a very important message that transcended the SYRIZA government and its short-term goals in terms of

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[11] Of course, by integration into a different political methodology for producing real social power, they could be useful and significant. In any case, they cannot be the thrusting point of emancipatory forces.

remaining in power.

With regards to the Greek people's message to the world, a mass bio-political experiment was conducted in the week before the referendum. The banks' closure, the media's intense propaganda, the threats from the sum of the domestic, European, and international establishment, the workplace terrorising, the aggression aimed at the *NO* supporters at the personal level, among other things, created an unprecedented backdrop that we had not been seen before despite the earth-shattering popular uprisings and their brutal suppression in Greece in recent years. Fully aligned, the elites deployed all the means at their disposal and lost: the Greek people refused to endorse the embrace of a life devoid of dignity to avoid a sudden death. It was a highly significant and hope-filled event in the battle against neoliberalism. The Greek people proved that the bio-political control of citizens is not as strong as we often believe. The message to the world was clear and gives courage to all struggling peoples: despite the grim projections for the immediate future, the struggle is not over and human societies do not surrender easily.

As for the processes within SYRIZA, the transformation of the leadership and senior cadres had, to a great extent, already taken place. The leadership shifted its basic-assumption of the

best way to serve the people froma position of firm non-conformity to fiscal autocracy to a position conducive to remaining in power.

What occurred after the signing of the bailout agreement is the natural evolution of this adaptation process.

This leads to the conclusion that from the moment collective organisations are defined not by what they claim but by what they know how to do, it is impossible for the emancipatory forces to influence the course of developments without a radical change in their methodological approach, organisational principles, and political imaginary in a direction that reflects and creatively embodies today's parameters of social and political struggle.

Chapters' epilogue

Political choices have consequences that ripple into the future. Additionally, making one choice means that another—and its sequence events and dynamics—is nullified. Thus, the political significance of SYRIZA's remaining in government after the events of the summer of 2015 is not exhausted in what the government has done since. It must also take into account what the government has not allowed to happen.

Until SYRIZA's rise to government, the Greek

society could look to it as a political factor for normalising and cohesion despite the catastrophe in progress. The democratic political force's refusal to comply with the cynical and multidimensional exclusion and wracking social cohesion at a deeper level acted as break on this process. The social cost of SYRIZA's incorporation into the political system devoid of 'self-delusions'—beyond the continuation of a policy that deepens social decline and economic recession—has deprived society of a political support imbued with rationality and sensitivity. The lack of political representation of non-compliance with the toxic conditions of survival and lack of prospects—a function SYRIZA fulfilled by helping brake the slide into decline—continuously disseminates (self)destructive tendencies in interpersonal relations, reinforcing the underlying social violence and threatening social cohesion in the deepest sense of the term.

As a result, we have now entered uncharted territory. The emancipatory forces face the treacherous period ahead decimated and unravelled, but with one advantage: they can no longer be trapped in outdated operational modes and mentalities. This is not insignificant, as it broadens the gaze and opens the prospect of utilising potential and tools which we tended to underestimate before.

Of course, the situation would be quite different if the majority of SYRIZA's leadership had remained true to non-conformity with a strategy that deepens social decline and harbours grave dangers. The existence of a mass, nationwide body that opted to disengage from a disastrous political strategy and which would direct the sum of its forces to the social field in order to explore jointly with the people everything it failed to achieve in the 2012-2014 period, would have created a different backdrop for Greek society and signalled all left forces in Europe to make a timely change in strategy.

Such a choice would have had a short-term political cost for specific segments of the population, but at the same time would have complicated the implementation of the policy that SYRIZA alone can implement today. At the same time, the party would have embedded its social power in poor and downgraded areas of the country. In this way, it would have eradicated the influence of far-right and nationalist views among sectors of the population hit hardest by the crisis, and it would have created real social spaces for self-organisation and networking that could offer substantive support to its political presence and power in a toxic political environment.

Conversely, SYRIZA today is distancing itself from society by deepening the policies that weak-

en it further. It is a strategy without political viability and huge consequences the Greek people, especially under the prism of the lack of a national, collective bulwark with strong connections to the popular classes that could become a powerful tool in the dangerous phase we have entered.

[4]

General conclusions as guidelines for the future

THE PROSPECT OF GOVERNMENT did not generate or impose novel thinking, practices, or behaviours within the Greek left. It revived and enhanced (and simultaneously shrank and marginalised) elements inherent in political parties, institutions, and organisations that are de facto an extension of the state in the broadest sense of the term. But which of these elements were bolstered and which were diminished?

Indicatively, we could note that in the road towards national government:

- collective processes were dismantled and individual or factional strategies were re-

inforced even within political currents;

- executive-level planning and 'spaces' for consultation collapsed while departmentalisation, superficial political handling, and a media-oriented culture within the party were reinforced;
- communication among sectors of the party apparatus and the dissemination of information were dismantled, thus boosting the emergence of multiple centres that gradually became isolated and developed competitive tendencies;
- the operational alignment of the emancipatory forces underpinning a comprehensive plan was neglected in favour of personal ambitions and the corresponding strategies.

But what was the driving force of this transformation? The above mentioned changes reflect the transformation undergone by the state and the institutions of political power in the current framework of institutionalised neoliberalism. This institutionalisation has resulted in:

- The transformation of the state functions and their alignment with a market-driven rationale with regards to content and modality of decision-making. As a result, inclusive qualities, democratic functions, and operational capabilities for planning

and implementation based on criteria other than profit have decreased, with a parallel increase in the qualities that render state functions compatible with a market rationale.

- The shift of the political power's centre of gravity to European institutions that are designed to be beyond citizens' reach. Thus, many state functions have atrophied and been reduced to regional mechanisms of a far broader system of administration and rule.

These developments have resulted in the decline of the democratic profile of state institutions and functions. It is a decline organically linked to the transition from an inclusive strategy by the elites to a strategy based on exclusion.

Correspondingly, the qualities and characteristics that collapsed within SYRIZA during the period before its rise to government are the same that have collapsed at the level of state power in recent decades. Similarly, the elements reinforced are those which characterise the decline of state functions during this same period.

As an opposition party, SYRIZA, in spite of many difficulties, had explored various ways of reconstructing its political operations, but as the official opposition, it was unable to meet the increased demands of its impending engagement

with political power and the functioning of a state that had been operationally amputated and organisationally weakened in line with neoliberal views of the state.[12] Faced with this anticipated development, SYRIZA, as a collective body, appeared unable to offer a multi-level strategy to reverse the trend. Even worse, this was not even attempted, as the true field of battle had not yet been understood.

SYRIZA was subjected to a counter-transformation because of the lack—or fragility—of offsetting actions that could have internally changed the balance of forces. If we add the fact that the party was comprised largely by left currents that did not reject the rise to government as part of their strategy, then it becomes evident just how obsolete and incompatible some traditional left's perceptions of government are today.

We could extrapolate that SYRIZA's weak but present trend of adapting to the new circumstances before emerging as the main opposition—the

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[12] Beyond the state's neoliberal transformation, what was always at stake was the effective engagement with the bureaucratic mentality and practices that characterise the state. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to disconnect these two fronts, as in spite of its relative autonomy the state bureaucracy is not neutral in its organisational features, goals, and results. SYRIZA, however, did not develop a methodology or operational 'rules of engagement' with the 'traditional bureaucracy' that remains active in many state sectors.

position that offered the opportunity for renewing its political approach and making it more open to social processes and ultimately rendering it the vehicle for a political overthrow—was unable to withstand the increased demands of the 2012-2014 period. Without having sufficiently developed the operational qualities and mentalities that would make it a sturdy political force capable of withstanding the intensified social and political struggles that had put it on a path to government, SYRIZA took a transformational course. From a force for change towards a new direction as a result of its stronger position on the political stage, SYRIZA itself became the object of change.

Furthermore, we live in a time of tectonic shifts taking place on several levels. The economic crisis is a symptom of a deeper decline and is unfolding against the backdrop of a multifactored destabilisation of contemporary societies. Acceleration on several levels (new technologies,[13] environmental instability, depletion of natural resources, reordering of the geopolitical balance of power, etc.) is changing the traditional way of apprehending

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[13] Briefly and indicatively, we mention (a) the new wave of information and communication technologies and the changes they produce in the structure of social relations and regulations; (b) the massive volume of digital data and the changes already triggered across the spectrum of human activity; and, (c) the maturation of automation technologies, which are expected to rupture established norms of social organisation and production.

the type of social and political struggle in which we are engaged. Europe's restructuring and the rise of nationalist and fascist trends, as well as the dissolution and relapse of state structures in the southeastern Mediterranean basin give rise to obligations and demands that transcend everything taken for granted a decade ago. The fast pace of developments has led the elites to adopt a destructive strategy, hoping to close a broader cycle that began two-and-a-half centuries ago with the people's entry onto the social and political stage.

The Greek and European left, if it wishes to be relevant to this period, must rise to the occasion and develop a matching strategy for societies' emancipatory course.

We have entered a transitional phase of grave threats but also immense possibilities. We will not further expand upon the tectonic changes taking place around us, but it is worth underlining that SYRIZA was not in a position to follow the broader changes and utilise the underlying potential during the period it was on the path to power. But a force that hopes to become an agent for social change cannot overlook social changes underway or be indifferent or hostile to the potential emanating from human activity in many fields today.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that:

- Utilising the embodied capacities of the people would have allowed SYRIZA to swiftly change the broader negative framework.
- Adopting a political rhetoric that focuses on the deeper questions regarding what kind of life, community, and set of values we want would have allowed SYRIZA to build stronger bonds with a society that sensed the threats to its existence.

We are living in a period that requires a radical modification and updating of the political imaginary aand the organisational principles and methodologies of social and political mobilisation. To make this possible, we must combine the incredible current output of new ideas, practices, regulations, rationales across the spectrum of human activity—which often are not directly linked to the disputes of the social and political struggle but which, under certain conditions, could shape the ground for producing social power that allows people without economic power to acquire the muscle to influence developments—with the conclusions drawn from the weaknesses and impasses of the traditional political left. Without, however, losing the central idea it bestows upon us, which is none other than the fact that the party function is the condition of possibility for people without economic power to become an autono-

mous emancipatory force capable of influencing political, social and economic developments.

About the Author

Andreas Karitzis is the co-founder of *Komvos* (hub) *for Social Economy, Empowerment and Innovation.* His website is <https://karitzis.wordpress.com>.

He studied Engineering and has a PhD in Philosophy. He has been a member of the Political Secretariat of SYRIZA (responsible for political strategy and planning) and of its Program Committee, until April 2014. He has been a member of the party's Central Committee until August 2015. He was also a member of the Managing Board of the Nicos Poulantzas Institute, and member of Synaspismos (the biggest party that participated in the formation of SYRIZA) since 1997. He is the author of the book *Logic and Method of a Left Government* (in Greek).

A left-wing government found itself at the centre of a maelstrom of social and political developments in the wake of an economic crisis that erupted in a European country. The containment of popular sovereignty, the imposition of stringent austerity measures, and the authoritarian implementation of neoliberal reforms spurred widespread social and political antagonism.

This book highlights and assesses the Greek experience of left governance. It provides an insider's analysis of debates and political developments within the ruling party, SYRIZA. It analyses its programmatic work and its relationship with resistance and solidarity movements during the preparatory period and the first few months in government, until the bitter end of the negotiations and SYRIZA's acceptance of the austerity framework in 2015.

This publication provides useful observations and recommendations aimed at learning from the Greek experience to shape a new methodology of emancipatory politics and effective social mobilisation.