

**SYRIZA as a Symptom
of the Euro-Crisis.
De te fabula narratur**

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A brief history of SYRIZA

- SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) was formed in 2004 as a Coalition of the left party “Synaspismos” (SYN) and political groups of the so-called “renewing Left” and “revolutionary extra-parliamentary Left”
- All political groups co-existed in the Greek and European alter-globalization movement since 2000, later participated in the “Greek Social Forum” and the “European Social Forum”. “People before profits! Another Europe is Possible!”
- February 10, 2008, A. Tsipras elected new President of SYN (5th Congress). Also President of SYRIZA
- June 6, 2010 split from SYN of the “Rejuvenating Wing” under F. Kouvelis (6th Congress), formation of the “Democratic Left” (DIMAR)

A brief history of SYRIZA

- July 2013, 1st founding Congress of SYRIZA. Transformed into a unitary party. SYN tradition remains, Party of “Political Unity”, different ideological streams
- January 25, 2015: Electoral victory, 149/300 MPs, Coalition Government with ANEL (anti-austerity conservatives, 13 MPs)
- July 13, 2015: Agreement on a 3rd “Stabilization Program”
- September 20, 2015: New elections after split of 25 MPs forming the “Popular Unity” (LAE) and new electoral victory (SYRIZA 145 MPs + ANEL 10 MPs)

SYRIZA, Electoral Performance

- National Elections 2004: **3.26%** (ND: 45.36%, PASOK: 40.55%, KKE: 5.90%)
- National Elections 2007: **5.04%** (ND: 41.84%, PASOK: 38.10%, KKE: 8.15%)
- National Elections 2009: **4.60%** (PASOK: 43.92%, ND: 33.47%, KKE: 7.54%, LAOS: 5.63%). A PASOK formed government (George Papandreou)

SYRIZA's Electoral Performance

- National Elections, May 6, 2012: **16.76%** (ND: 18.85%, PASOK: 13.18%, ANEL: 10.60%, KKE: 8.48%, Golden Dawn (XA): 6.97%, DIMAR: 6.11%, Parties below 3% threshold: 19.05%)
- National Elections, June 18, 2012: **26.89%** (ND: 29.66%, PASOK: 12.28%, ANEL: 7.51%, XA: 6.92%, DIMAR: 6.26%, KKE: 4.51%). A ND-PASOK-DIMAR coalition government
- European Elections, May 2014: **26.60%** (ND: 22.71%, XA: 9.38%, PASOK+: 8.02%, To Potami: 6.61%, KKE: 6.07%, ANEL: 3.47%)

The Terror of the European Elites for a SYRIZA victory

- „Die Griechen treffen am Sonntag eine historische Wahlentscheidung – und sowohl Ergebnis als auch Folgen sind unklar. Die FTD sagt in ihrer Wahlempfehlung, wen die Griechen wählen sollen, in deutscher und griechischer Sprache. [...] Liebe Griechinnen und Griechen, sorgen Sie für klare politische Verhältnisse. Stimmen Sie mutig für den Reformkurs. [...] Ihr Land braucht endlich einen funktionierenden Staat. Damit es geordnet regiert wird, empfehlen wir die Nea Dimokratia. Das fällt uns nicht leicht. Die Nea Dimokratia hat über Jahrzehnte eine falsche Politik betrieben [...] Trotzdem wird Ihr Land mit einer Koalition unter Antonis Samaras besser fahren als unter Tsipras, der das Rad zurückdrehen will und eine Welt vorgaukelt, die es so nicht gibt“.

(Financial Times Deutschland, June 15, 2012)

SYRIZA's Electoral Victories

- National Elections, January 25, 2015: **36.34%**
(ND: 27.81%, XA: 6.28%, To Potami: 6.05%,
KKE: 5.47%, ANEL: 4.75%, PASOK: 4.68%)
- National Elections, Sept. 20, 2015: **35.46%**
(ND: 28,10%, XA: 6.99%, PASOK+: 6.28%, KKE:
5.55%, To Potami: 4.09, ANEL: 3.69%, Union of
the center: 3.43%) [LAE: 2.87%]

From SYRIZA's Program (2013)

- “We will cancel the memoranda and the implementation laws. We will implement a program of social and economic recovery, of productive and environmental reconstruction, which will heal the wounds inflicted on the working class and gradually restore the conditions of secure employment and decent living, with the appropriate wages and pensions, creating new jobs. *The first step will be the restoration of employment relations, collective bargaining, minimum wages, minimum pension, unemployment benefit, and family allowances to pre-memoranda levels [...]*”
- “We will restore and strengthen the welfare state and promote the democratization of all its activities and functions: protection of employment, the jobless, healthcare, social welfare, education, and social insurance ”.

From SYRIZA's Program (2013)

- “We will raise a protective shield against humanitarian crisis. There will be no citizen without the necessary minimum income for his survival, without healthcare or social protection, without access to the basic goods of food and decent housing. We commit ourselves that we will allow no confiscation of any main residence due to debt”.
- “We will cope with deficits in an effective and socially just way, giving priority to redistribution and environmentally safe growth, aiming at gradual increase in wages and social expenditure. We will create a national land registry and an analytical registry of assets in order to restore economic democracy. State revenue will come from the taxation on wealth, net profits, high incomes, large property, and the property of the Church; from cancelling the privileges of the oligarchy and multinational corporations; from halting recession”.

From SYRIZA's Program (2013)

- “In contrast to capitalist competition, continuous enlargement and accumulation, we support another organizational model which is based on the balance between human activities and natural resources and which ensures sustainable growth. The ecological transformation of the economy can become a key element in a more just socio-political vision of productive reconstruction that can mobilize large masses of citizens for its specification and implementation”.
- “We will set the banking system under public ownership and control, through the radical conversion of its functioning and the aims it is serving today, through the upgrade of the workers and the customers' role. We will found special purpose public banks focusing on agricultural credit, small and medium-sized businesses, and public housing”.

From SYRIZA's Program (2013)

- “We need and we will do everything we can to reorganize an autonomous mass class labor union movement, inspired by the values and principles of the Left: liberty, equality, solidarity, transparency, and democracy. It is our nonnegotiable aim to promote democracy in the workplace, establish institutions of labor and social control independent from the labor movement, but which will include representatives of the workers, elected and recalled by them ”.

From SYRIZA's Program (2013)

- “We will radically change the way public services and local authorities operate, establishing democracy, decentralization, transparency, and meritocracy, regardless of ideology or political opinion; relentlessly cracking down on corruption, vested interests, partisanship and bribery. We will introduce the concept and practice of democratic planning and social control on all levels of central and local government”.

Facets of the Crisis

- 1. One shall distinguish between the effects of the crisis per se, and the effects of the policies followed (supposedly to tame the crisis)
- Wage cuts and the dismantling of the welfare state in Greece followed what has been previously described as the “shock doctrine”
- 3. Unemployment rate rose from 7.3% in 2008 to 26.6% in 2014. Employment reduced from 4.64 m (2008) to 3.54 m (2014)
- 4. Employment categories mostly hit: Wage labour; working class + petty bourgeoisie (: “officers and sub-officers of production” and state employees)

Question 1: May 2012. What caused the Political Reshuffling?

- First Wave of Mass Demonstrations, March-May 2010. On May 6, 2010 three employees die after bank set on fire.
- Second Wave of Mass Mobilizations, May 2011 - February 2012. “Movement of the Squares”. 1/4 to 1/3 of the population in big cities participates. Since June 28 2011 regular police attacks against the gathered crowds
- Mostly “new-comers”. They demand and impose “absence of parties and trade-unions” and “direct democracy” in discussions and decision making.
- On Nov. 11, 2011 Papandreou resigns. PASOK-ND-LAOS coalition government. PM the banker L. Papademos. On April 10, 2012 feels obliged to proclaim early national elections.

Question 2: Why SYRIZA?

- Connection to youth, environmental, civil rights and labor movements, at least since 2006.
- “There is an alternative: Government of the Left!”
- Analysis of the (global) systemic crisis. Emphasis on the the Euro-Area architecture, as one of the causes of Euro-crisis. Emphasis on the interconnection between bank crisis and sovereign debt crisis
- The political aura of Alexis Tsipras

Question 3: Is austerity a false policy?

- Neither a “false” nor a “correct policy”. A class policy!
- Reduces labour costs, so increases profit per (labour) unit cost and thereon boosts the profit rate.
- However, what is cost for the capitalist class is the living standard of the working majority of society. Austerity cannot be left undisputed. Social conflict necessarily exacerbates.
- Austerity’s recessionary effects function as “constructive destruction”; precondition for a new upward economic cycle.
- Austerity’s strategic target: a model of labour with fewer rights and less social protection, with low and flexible wages and absence of any substantial bargaining power for wage earners

SYRIZA's Mutation (2012-15): Shift towards Centre-Left

- “Old SYRIZA of 4%” as against the “new SYRIZA of 27%” (after the 2012 elections)
- “Government of Social Salvation” as against “Government of the Left”
- “Austerity is a false policy imposed to our country from abroad, by the dogmatic neoliberal European elites”
- The strategic target of the Left is “productive reconstruction” of the country’s economy. This target uniting all Greeks, except a few speculators
- Suppression of the Party’s Program of Redistribution of Wealth and Income (Taxation Program and plans to develop “Social Economy”)

SYRIZA's Mutation (2012-15): Shift towards Centre-Left

- SYRIZA's "Thessaloniki Program" (Sept. 2014): "In place of any anti-capitalist (let alone, socialist) measures was a National Reconstruction Plan which focused upon restarting the Greek economy through public investment and tax reduction for the middle class. Recovery and growth (along with a negotiated moratorium on debt servicing) would rescue the Greek economy and allow it to 'gradually' reverse all the memorandum injustices [...] Economically, the Thessaloniki Programme was based upon Keynesian (not even post-Keynesian) theory, and it supplemented its focus upon aggregate demand stimulation by proposed measures to deal with the humanitarian crisis (e.g., subsidies for [...] the poor and unemployed)" (Michael Lebowitz, August 2, 2015)

SYRIZA's Mutation (2012-15): Shift towards Centre-Left

- *70% of Memorandum is good:*

“We will implement deep reforms in coordination with the OECD [...] To these reforms we will add about 70% of the reforms or commitments that have already been laid out in the current memorandum. As wise people, we don't object to these reforms as long as the other 30% of reforms, which we deem unacceptable, are either suspended or removed.” (Varoufakis, Feb. 9, 2015)

SYRIZA's Mutation (2012-15): Shift towards Centre-Left

- *No social conflict. Growth is the target that unites all Greeks:*

“In the year 2015, after five years of catastrophic recession, where ultimately everybody is a victim, there are only a few cunning people who have profited from this crisis. The era in which a government of the Left was by definition contrary to the milieu of entrepreneurship has passed. If we get to a point when there is growth, we can start talking again about conflicting labour and capital interests. Today we are together” (Varoufakis, April 22, 2015)

SYRIZA's Mutation (2012-15): Shift towards Centre-Left

- *The Memorandum of the ND-PASOK government was a success story: “Greece has proceeded to an unprecedented economic adjustment aimed at improving budgetary consolidation on the one hand, and on the other to enhance the competitiveness of the economy [...] The shift to a development model with export orientation seems to have been achieved in the years 2013 and 2014, when the current account recorded a surplus of 0.6% and 0.9% of GDP respectively.” National Programme of Reforms (Greek Ministry of Finance, April 2015)*

The Greek Government's Negotiations: Looking for a “fig leaf”

- The February 20, 2015 Agreement: A four-month extension of the existing Memorandum (signed by the previous government).
- The “red lines”: Maintenance of the existing neoliberal austerity framework without further wage or pension cuts, or raising restrictions on mass lay-offs. Low VAT on Greek islands
- The “Junker Plan”: No “red lines” accepted!

An alternative Strategy that was never put forward

- A “memorandum for the rich”, i.e. implementation of SYRIZA’s program for redistribution of income, wealth and power to the favor of the working class and the welfare state: Progressive tax system, “open books” in both the public and the private sectors, institutional reforms to enable people’s participation, cooperative and “social economy” schemes to combat unemployment and to transform social relations.

An alternative Strategy that was never put forward

- This internal dynamic would strengthen the effectiveness of negotiations with lenders. The neoliberal trap could be broken if the Greek government made it clear that if forced, would dare to delay reimbursement payments, until an agreement with the “Institutions” had been reached.
- No “disaster” would take place: on May 1, 2015, 3 major rating agencies, S&P's, Fitch and DBRS, announced that they would not consider as default a delay of payments by the Greek government to the IMF or the ECB. Frank Gill, of S&P's, declared: “If Greece were, for whatever reason, not to make a payment to the IMF or ECB that would not constitute a default under our criteria as it is ‘official’ sector debt”

The July 5 Referendum

- On June 26, Greek PM Alexis Tsipras proclaimed a referendum on the “Juncker plan” and on June 28 the government decided to impose restrictions on withdrawal of deposits from the Greek banks (“bank holiday” and “capital controls”), as the ECB refused any increase in the Emergency Liquidity Assistance provided to the Greek Banks
- Two “Greeces” fought each other. On one side, the poor, wage-earners, the unemployed and “survival self-employment” fought for “No”; on the other the capitalists, the managerial class, the higher ranks of the state and so on agitated for “Yes”
- The Greek electorate voted with the banks closed and in an atmosphere of fear that declared voting “No” would lead to disaster. Intense mouth-to-mouth blackmail from employers pressuring workers to vote Yes
- 61.3% voted “No”

The New Stabilization Program

- In collaboration with the opposition parties, the Government transformed the 61.3% “No” vote, into a 83.7% “Yes” (in Parliament) and signed the 3rd Memorandum (the July 13 Agreement)
- Instead of putting the interests and the power of the working people above the bourgeoisie “common-interest” rhetoric, SYRIZA finally complied with the European neoliberal economic and social agenda
- SYRIZA’s Program had been abandoned before the 2015 elections. As it has never been implemented, it is wrong to state that “it couldn’t be successful”

SYRIZA's Electoral Victory of September 2015

- Political “inertia” of the “lesser evil”: a majority of the working classes still believes that SYRIZA clearly differentiates itself in a positive manner from the “old political system”
- Absence of a clear political alternative: The political narrative of LAE based itself on a similar argument to that of governing SYRIZA: “We have *the* plan for the ‘productive reconstruction’ of our country”

Lessons form SYRIZA

- 1. Extreme neoliberal austerity policies exacerbate social conflict and polarize the society between the “labor camp” and the “camp of entrepreneurship”. Protection of Labor’s rights and income and of the welfare state, vs. curtailing “labor cost” and “freeing entrepreneurship” from labor market regulations (“rigidities”).

This social polarization has become apparent beyond Greece: Podemos in Spain, Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, the recent electoral results in Portugal, giving the lead to the left alliance under Antonio Costa, etc.

Lessons form SYRIZA

- 2. In this economic and social framework, a reshuffling of the political landscape and a government of the Left is absolutely possible
- 3. However, the political and social agenda of a left government can be feasible only if it clearly understands social conflict in the conjuncture of the Euro-Crisis, and attains a clear stance favoring the interests of Labor

Thank you!