

Greece's Deepening Economic and Social Crisis: What Prospects for the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)?

Taking Power In and Beyond the State

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The near election victory of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) in [June 2012](#) has made the debate over the conditions for a left to take power of burning contemporary significance.

With nearly 27 per cent of the popular vote, the formation of a government clearly to the left of social democracy has moved from being a far-off wish for the future to a real, tangible possibility of the present in Greece. This is not the logical result of an evolutionary process of decay of crisis-ridden capitalism, but rather the result of plural class struggles as well as the specific intervention of the radical left in Greece within them.

The representation crisis of parliamentary democracy that is observable across Europe, has been increasingly palpable in Greece since 2004. Since the end of the social democratic government of [Konstantinos Simitis](#) and the delegitimation of his proposed modernization and europeanization discourse, a political representation crisis began to loom, and was deepened in the years of the conservative government of [Kostas Karamanlis](#) (2004-2009). This is mostly due to the ongoing corruption within the state apparatuses and lack of perspective amongst the younger generation that already predated the crisis, and which made the construction of a new, stable hegemonic project impossible. Under the impact of the Memorandum, the vanishing charisma of neoliberalism began since 2010 to develop ultimately into a crisis of hegemony.

From the Crisis of Representation to the Crisis of Hegemony

For a sufficient understanding of the current situation, it must be remembered here, that the crises of hegemony in no way results in the automatic strengthening of the political left. Instead, it is the strategies and tactics chosen by the left that are critical in determining the character of the efforts to overcome the crisis, and the developments which will come out of the political shifts and transformations.

The deep economic crisis, the maintenance of politics which accentuate the sharpening recession, the nearly exclusive burden on wage-dependent and traditional petty bourgeoisie, have produced such a situation, from which it is nearly impossible for the established bourgeois parties to escape unscathed. It is the struggles of the last three years

however, which ultimately brought about a situation in which the chances for a radical emancipatory transformation has become closer than at any other point in time in the European post-war period. There are above all two moments that are responsible for SYRIZA going from being a marginal player to becoming a central actor on the political stage: First, its participation as an *organic part* of the social movements in the protests of the past three years, which were fundamental for the politicization of spontaneous, collective outbreaks of anger, like the Syntagma movement was. Through SYRIZA's relationship to the existing struggles, it was possible for the party *to transport the protest and social struggles into the bourgeois state, to sharpen existing political conflicts*, and to deepen the crisis of bourgeois hegemony.

Under these conditions, an incredibly heterogeneous resistance and protest movement began to identify itself toward the left, and under SYRIZA's project for the development of a left government for the uncompromising overturning of the politics of the Memorandum, *toward the formation of a new political camp*. SYRIZA's goal of building a left government coalition beyond a neoliberalized social democracy, and of giving concrete and especially prompt expression to the preceding mass mobilizations, through the assumption of governing responsibilities, represents the second determining moment for the direction which the developments in Greece have taken.

All those within this process, who find themselves together in this political project, constitute an amalgam of thoroughly contradictory political orientations, in which there is the co-existence of left nationalism, anti-capitalism, internationalism, and conceptions of a controlled and therefore "more just" organization of capitalism, amongst others. This heterogeneous mass, which feels sometimes more and sometimes less strongly represented by the party's aims, nevertheless is *set in motion through its common relationship to SYRIZA*. This way it constantly extends the left discourse and creates the conditions for a deeper change in power relations.

The Moment of State Power

The radical transformation of power relations to the benefit of the subaltern can in no way occur by first engaging in civil society and to aim for state power only in a last step, after ideas and political goals of the left had become hegemonic. The analysis of the concrete conditions of the concrete situation, which we are experiencing in the Greek societal formation, shows that social movements, solidarity initiatives, cooperative production under the direction of workers and other moments of a solidarity economy are able to advance and further develop themselves, when they rely on higher levels, that is, on a *government*, which acts toward their advantage. Social struggles in civil society and social struggles inside the state have to strengthen one another. Seeking government power is not the goal but an indispensable intermediate step. We all know, that winning government does not mean winning state power and even less it means winning back structural economic and social power. But it can help to change power relations.

A government, whose central actors are the Coalition of the Radical Left, would be in the position to immediately revoke the politics of the Memorandum and to concretely ameliorate the living conditions of broad sections of the population. The current state uses the crisis for the radical readjustment of the relationship between capital and labour. With the means of a reactionary law-and-order discourse, a no tolerance politic and massive physical repression, it aims to reestablish bourgeois hegemony. A victorious moment in the

mobilization process against this strategy would be an important step for the further orientation toward the left. The left government project seeks thereby not only the end of neoliberal politics and the re-establishment of the old status quo.

It is much more about a *fundamentally different conception of the formation and exercise of political power*, in which, the establishment of directly democratic control and structures play a central role in the path to socialism in the twenty-first century. This implies the reconfiguration of the state, its constraint through the establishment of structures, which embed the popular classes into the new formation of life and work. This would *ensure, that a left government in Greece, is grounded in the societal roots*, which makes it possible for society to withstand the attacks of capital. The struggles of the last three years and their results show that in this authoritarian, neoliberal Europe it is not possible, to change the world without taking power in and beyond the state. •

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