

ON SYRIZA AND ITS VICTORY IN THE RECENT GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GREECE

On the 25th of January of 2015, for the first time in Greek history, a left-wing party, SYRIZA, won the general elections with a majority of 36.34%, 8.5 percentage points above Nea Dimokratia (“New Democracy”), the traditional right-wing party and the main force of the departing government coalition. However, SYRIZA didn’t win an absolute majority since it gained 149 seats in the parliament (a minimum of 151 seats is needed to win a vote of confidence). In consequence, they formed a coalition with “Anexartitoi Ellines” (“Independent Greeks”), a right-wing nationalist populist party which gained 4.75% of the votes and 13 seats in the parliament. Such a collaboration became possible due to the firm opposition of “Anexartitoi Ellines” to the memoranda austerity programs in the previous years despite the great differences in issues like immigration and foreign policy between the two parties.

The working class and the petty bourgeoisie vote for SYRIZA was a revenge vote against a right-wing government whose harsh austerity programs had disastrous effects on their lives and had pushed them to depression and suicidal tendencies. It was a vote against the politics of fear that had promoted not only the police repression of struggles but also numerous daily, small and depressing “civil wars” among the workers. It was a vote against the constant and monotonous propaganda of “there-is-no-alternative” dogmas. Nothing illustrates the popularity of SYRIZA’s alternative political program better than this example: inside the Amygdaleza concentration camp, the “illegal” immigrants who had revolted against their incarceration in the summer of 2013 and who are not eligible to vote were rhythmically chanting “Tsipras-Tsipras” in the face of their wardens on the night of January 25.

As we will show in greater detail in the remainder of this text, SYRIZA’s main positions are a) **the write-off of the biggest part of the Greek government debt as well as other debt relief measures** and b) **the abolition of the memoranda austerity** (i.e. capital devaluation) **programs**. It is interesting to note that only recently SYRIZA cadres have expressed optimistic views concerning the acceptance of their positions and proposals by the creditors, i.e. the rest of the EU member-states, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the IMF. It is possible that this optimism is connected with the fact that the ongoing deflation and stagnation within the European Union, in connection with the recent oil price slash, has led to the launching of a very large “quantitative easing” (QE) bond-buying program by the ECB, amounting to 1 trillion euros, to provide demand stimulus to the European economies. This recently announced QE strategy signals a policy of inflationary devaluation of money capital within EU *as a whole*, by means of the euro-currency depreciation that *might* prevent the imposition of new harsh austerity measures to specific EU-member countries or the tightening up of budget deficits, even though this shift does not mean that good ol’ fiscal terrorism will be abandoned as a tool to attack the proletarians in EU.

Further, a few European government officials have expressed support or sympathy to the positions of SYRIZA, such as the finance minister of Ireland who, two weeks

before the Greek general elections, backed the idea for a European debt conference or the chancellor of Austria who criticized the austerity programs and expressed the will to discuss specific debt relief measures. It seems that, because of the lingering economic stagnation, a small but growing fraction of the European capital pushes for the abandonment of the hard austerity policy promoted by Germany. Recently, several prominent economists and financial columnists have not only acknowledged that debt relief is necessary but have actually endorsed SYRIZA's program for the replacement of expenditure cuts by demand stimulus spending.¹ Even if Martin Schulz, the German social-democrat president of the European Parliament, expressed the conviction that SYRIZA will not achieve a haircut on the Greek debt, he nevertheless spoke about proceeding to a "compromise".

At the same time it seems possible that SYRIZA will use other instruments of foreign policy such as the ability to veto decisions in order to press for concessions from the European Union.

How SYRIZA came to be the majority party in Greece

SYRIZA is the acronym for "Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras" which is translated into English as "Coalition of the Radical Left". SYRIZA was created in January 2004 as a coalition of several leftist political parties and groups with the most important ones being Synaspismos (Coalition of Left, of Movements and Ecology), AKOA (Renewing Communist Ecological Left), KEDA (Movement for the United in Action Left), DEA (Internationalist Workers Left) and KOE (Communist Organization of Greece). SYRIZA was transformed into a single-party before the general elections of June 2012 when it seemed possible to win the elections in order to be eligible to receive the bonus parliamentary seats given to the majority party under the current Greek electoral system. Synaspismos was by far the strongest and biggest constituent of SYRIZA and was initially formed in 1989 as a coalition between KKE (the pro-soviet Communist Party) and Greek Left, the successor of KKE Interior (a euro-communist party which split from KKE in 1968). KKE left Synaspismos in 1991 when the hard-liner Stalinist faction purged all the more social-democratic oriented members, including the General Secretary of the party, who resigned and remained in Synaspismos. AKOA split from KKE Interior at the end of the '80s whereas KEDA split from KKE at the beginning of the '90s. DEA was a split from the Trotskyite Socialist Workers' Party (associated with the International Socialist Tendency) and KOE the successor of a splinter group from the maoist party KKE-Marxists/Leninists.

¹ In a letter sent to *Financial Times* on 22/1/2015 entitled "Europe will benefit from Greece being given a fresh start", Stiglitz, Pissarides and other "top" bourgeois economists supported a) the replacement of public expenditure cuts with public investment programs that will increase demand and stimulate growth as well as with "more efficient tax collection"; b) a "further conditional increase in the grace period, so that Greece does not have to service any debt, for example for the next five years and then only if Greece is growing at 3% or more"; c) "debt reduction, especially of bilateral official debt to further increase the fiscal space available" and d) "significant money for efficient investment projects, especially for exports". The same letter reminded the substantial debt relief of the German debt in the 1950s and essentially replicated many proposals originally put forward by SYRIZA.

The creation of SYRIZA is directly connected with the political ferments and developments which took place during the period of the “anti-globalization” movement and the prevalence of the so-called anti-neoliberal discourse within the ranks of the movement. Specifically, all these seemingly heterogeneous political groups united around the opposition to the neoliberal restructuring of the capitalist welfare state and opted for a return to a more social-democratic management of capitalist social relations. The organizational vehicle for this unification was the “Space for Dialogue for the Unity and Common Action of the Left” formation which prepared the Greek leftist participation at the 2001 Genoa “anti-global” demonstration. Without a doubt, there are still different positions within SYRIZA with regard to a series of issues such as the nationalization of banks or the participation in the Eurozone but at this point the more “radical” social democrats, who support the nationalization of banks as well as the so-called Euro-skeptics, who are for the exit from the Eurozone are at the losing side within the party.

Before the outbreak of the “debt crisis” in 2010 -which was a manifestation and aggravation of the protracted capitalist reproduction crisis in Greece- and the imposition of the shock policy of constant and variable capital devaluation through the mechanism of the infamous “memoranda” -i.e. the austerity programs connected with the loans given by the Troika (IMF, ECB, European Union)²- in the years that followed, SYRIZA had never won more than 5% of the vote in both the European and the national elections. SYRIZA emerged as the main opposition party in the repeated general elections of 2012 only after the retreat, recuperation or defeat of the struggles against the imposition of the policy of capital devaluation (16.78% of the vote in May and 26.9% in June 2012).

This development is greatly related to the central role played by SYRIZA within the “movement of the squares” which erupted at the end of May 2011 and lasted in a vigorous manner for more than one year. The main manifestation of the “movement of the squares” in Greece was the occupation of the Syntagma square (the central square of Athens opposite the Parliament), which lasted for two months in the summer of 2011. This movement seemed to give a perspective of overcoming the sectional logic of the trade unions and a perspective of questioning the political parties of the left as alienating forms of representation of working class practices as well as the political system as a whole. However, it remained at the level of political protest and the demand for “real / direct democracy”, although its role in calling strikes against the medium-term agreement and in the organization of the battles against the police forces of capitalist rule in June 2011 was crucial. The party mechanism of SYRIZA and other organizations of the left took part incognito in key organizational groups in the square and thereby succeeded largely in dominating the content and the forms of struggle by

² For an extensive analysis of the capitalist crisis, its management by the Greek state and the Capitalist International (IMF, EU, ECB, etc.) and the class struggles that took place in Greece after 2010, see our texts: “Burdened with debt”, “Preliminary notes towards an account of the «movement of popular assemblies»”, “Down with the Stalinists! Down with the Bureaucrats”, “Burdened with debt reloaded”, “Counting Defeats: Internal devaluation, the failure of working class struggles in Greece & the Sino-Greek «success story»” and the interview of our group by Juraj Katalenac “An Interview” which are available at: http://www.tptg.gr/?page_id=105.

promoting a nationalist leftist ideology of “national independence”, “productive reconstruction of the Greek economy”, “cancellation of the odious part of the debt”, etc. Furthermore, this mechanism did its best to limit the struggle to a purely symbolic level, undermining any practical suggestions that were made for the expansion of the struggle to the workplaces and the unemployment offices, while it promoted provocateurology against those that clashed with the forces of order in mass demonstrations at that time.

The “movement of the squares” was based either on the creation of new “popular assemblies” in the neighbourhoods of Athens and in provincial towns or the temporary reinvigoration of already existing ones (with their genealogy going back to the December 2008 revolt). In the period following the movement of Syntagma square there was a current of mobilizations promoting “refusal of payments from below” organized mainly by the assemblies. The mobilizations mainly focused on the refusal of payment of: a) the electricity bills, which at this point and for the next 3 years included a surcharge for a new property tax, b) the transport tickets, the price of which had been increased, and c) the highway tolls, which have been multiplied and at the same time their fare has been increased. The members of SYRIZA and other leftists, who participated in the “popular assemblies” promoted a shift of the focus of the mobilizations from proletarian antagonistic activities -e.g. the reconnection of electricity in working class houses or the blockade / sabotage of the ticket cancelling machines in the metro stations- to legal actions which often involved the apparatuses of the municipalities administered by left/social democrat mayors.

SYRIZA’s attempts to recuperate the mobilizations were widely successful and a rather easy task due to the latter’s interclass composition and political content: the assemblies, even when they were predominantly composed of proletarians of all sorts, never defined themselves as working class collectivities; they were rather perceived by the majority of their members as assemblies of local citizens/private individuals/private property owners. From there it was a short step to be subsumed to the social-democratic discourse of “citizens’ social rights”, “common goods rights”, etc. which has been promoted by SYRIZA. For example, the neighbourhood assemblies have organized a series of so-called solidarity activities, such as soup kitchens, self-organized health centers, co-operative (simple) commodities exchanges, service exchanges (e.g. foreign language classes) within an interclass anti-government framework. This self-managed austerity strategy was widely adopted by SYRIZA, which, as it will be shown below, has included “social” or “solidarity” economy as one of the “pillars” of its program for the “productive reconstruction of the Greek economy”. Today, SYRIZA controls a plethora of such rank and file “solidarity” organizations including self-organized health centers and pharmacies, commodity exchanges, poverty relief groceries, etc. Our position that the boundaries between such projects and charities led by the Church and NGOs are blurred has been confirmed by the recent declarations of support to the philanthropist mission of the Church, which were expressed by the president of SYRIZA at a meeting with the Archbishop in a church charity institution. Furthermore, SYRIZA utilized the neighbourhood assemblies in order to strengthen its local branches, which often copied the assembly form and recruited members from the neighbourhood assemblies.

The ability of SYRIZA to substitute (to a limited, yet substantial, extent) the functions of the disintegrating welfare state in Greece has been augmented by its recent gains in the local elections. For example, SYRIZA administers the Regional Administration of Attiki (the most-populated Greek region where the city of Athens belongs) since September 2014 and has implemented the reconnection of electricity to a significant number of poor households providing 360 euros per year to each household where electricity has been cut off.

Moreover, after the defeat of the struggles in the public sector (with the exception of the struggle against the new employee and workplace unit evaluation system, which is still pending), a defeat which occurred due to a number of reasons, some of which have been presented in our above-mentioned texts, SYRIZA emerged as the political party which would restore the status quo ante by cancelling the redundancies and the lay-offs at the universities and, more broadly, in the public services and re-opening ERT (the national radio and television broadcasting network which was closed down by the previous government dismissing about 3000 employees). In the case of struggles against factory closures, SYRIZA has actively promoted the self-management of factories by their former employees based on the example of VIOME³ as well as the organization of the distribution of the output through self-organized commodity exchanges without intermediaries. The self-management of bankrupt enterprises and the creation of new cooperative enterprises, the self-organization of the output distribution/consumption networks and the creation of associations of self-managed enterprises that will provide supporting functions such as legal, consulting and accounting services “in order to create economies of scale” or even the creation of cooperative credit institutions constitute the program of SYRIZA for the “social economy” pillar of their “productive reconstruction” plan.

On the same terrain of political representation, SYRIZA's power was augmented by its resolute opposition to the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn. Golden Dawn's impact on the national constituency was highly reinforced after the recession of the “movement of the squares”. This movement had combined a grassroots “revolt from the left” with a “revolt from the right”. After its retreat, the most passive and racist part of the grassroots “revolt from the right” against austerity measures found a political representative in this political party. This representation was encouraged by the governing right-wing party and the mechanisms of the “deep state”. When its members' physical violence against immigrants and leftists run amok in September 2013 and its autonomisation from the state became obvious, their right-wing brothers in government were obliged to put its leadership in jail. However, the real winner of this state antifascist campaign was SYRIZA, which had supported all the antifascist activities of the previous years inside and outside “popular assemblies”.⁴

³ VIOME is a buildings material factory, a subsidiary of Filkeram & Johnson, which has been taken over by its workers after its bankruptcy and abandonment by its owners. For more information cf. <http://www.viome.org/>.

⁴ For more about the issue of fascism/antifascism in Greece, see our forthcoming text “Antifascism vs fascism: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce”.

The dominance within the anti-austerity movement of the nationalist discourse concerning the renegotiation/reduction of the government debt -a statist reduction of payments from above (a concern shared also by Golden Dawn) as opposed to the proletarian refusal of payments from below- and the “productive reconstruction of the Greek economy” combined with the dominance of the social-democratic discourse about “citizens’ social rights”, “common goods rights”, “self-management” and the “social-economy” paved the way for the emergence of SYRIZA as the next ruling party. After actively undermining the potential development of the struggles in the workplaces, the squares and the streets into a proletarian movement that could threaten the rule of capital and its state, SYRIZA managed to transform their defeat into its electoral power. A large section of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie rested their hopes for the reversal of the capital devaluation politics on the polling success of SYRIZA. The new government coalition is the reconnection of the grassroots “revolt from the left” with the more active and non-fascist “revolt from the right” on the capitalist state level. Normally, this will open up a new round of revendicative struggles of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie.

What happens to left political programs when social movements retreat?

It is interesting to draw up a list of the changes of SYRIZA’s political program from 2010 till today. In order to illustrate the changes more clearly we divided them into the following categories.

Government debt management: the main position of SYRIZA’s program concerning the restructuring of government debt has remained the same since 2010, i.e. to renegotiate the government debt with the aim to write-off its biggest part. Recently, they have invoked the historical precedent of the 1953 debt relief treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and creditor nations after the London Debt Conference. On the other hand, the main changes can be summarized as follows: a) in 2010 and 2011 SYRIZA argued for direct borrowing from the European Central Bank (ECB) at very low interest rates, similar to the ones offered to private banks, whereas in their most recent program they argue for “quantitative easing” policies through the purchase of government bonds by the ECB; b) since 2012 SYRIZA proposes a deferred payment of interest until the Greek economy recovers as well as the establishment of an “economic growth clause” regulating its repayment; and c) in 2011 SYRIZA argued for an extensive audit of the government debt in order to cancel its odious part, a position which has since been removed from the program. It is also telling that in 2010 and 2011 SYRIZA asserted the abolition of the European stability pacts whereas in 2015 they just ask for the exclusion of public investment programs from the restrictions of the Stability and Growth Pact. Further, in 2010 SYRIZA advocated the restriction of the free movement of capital e.g. through the imposition of the Tobin tax, a position which has since been purged from the program. Last but not least, in the program of 2015, SYRIZA calls for the establishment of a substantial grace period so that the Greek state will not have to service any debt for a number of years in order to immediately channel funds to investment spending as a lever to “restart the economy”.

Banking system and private debt: there has been a fundamental change of the program of SYRIZA with regard to the banking system. In particular, in 2010 and 2011 SYRIZA advocated the nationalization of banks whereas in 2015 they are only speaking about the establishment of a public investment bank and a number of specialized public credit institutions for small enterprises, self-managed enterprises and farmers. Every reference to the nationalization of banks has been erased. Since 2011 SYRIZA has included in its program a provision for the settlement of non-performing loans of households and enterprises while the 2015 program promises that the auctioning of primary residences will be forbidden. Moreover, the 2015 program advocates the settlement of private debts to the state due to taxation or due to outstanding contributions to the social security funds by setting upper limits to the debt installments, which will be connected to the household income. At the same time, they promise to stop property foreclosures and criminal prosecutions of the individuals, who will voluntarily settle their debts to the state.

Privatizations / nationalizations: SYRIZA has not changed its position to stop the privatization of public utilities, public enterprises and infrastructure. However, its initial position in 2010 to “gradually” re-nationalize “strategic enterprises” such as telecommunications, electricity and infrastructures such as ports, airports and roads has gradually been abandoned. Since 2012, SYRIZA connects the re-nationalization of “strategic enterprises and infrastructure” with the availability of funds in order to buy out stocks and property rights, a condition which practically means that the re-nationalization will not take place. Also, since 2012 SYRIZA advocates the transfer of the ownership of natural and mineral resources to a public treasury in order to use them as collateral for the issuance of government bonds. Their position of 2010 for the re-regulation of the market (utilities, etc.) has been abandoned.

Public investment: SYRIZA programs have not changed since 2010 with regard to the intention to increase public investment as a lever both for growth and for the so-called productive reconstruction of the economy. In this context, they promise to raise the expenditure on scientific research, mainly conducted in the Greek universities, and facilitate certain industries (e.g. medicine production). In 2015, SYRIZA calls for a European “new deal” that will reverse deflation and fuel growth in Europe through an EU-backed public investment program.

Taxation / expenditures: the position of SYRIZA in 2010 and 2011 to impose a tax of 45% on the undistributed profits of big capitalist enterprises has been erased from its program since 2012. Also, their promise of abolishing tax exemptions of the shipping capital in 2010 and 2012 has been watered down since in their most recent program they only talk about the review of all exemptions and the abolition of only those, which are “not related to the shipping activity per se”. As far as the taxation of “natural persons” is concerned, the 2010-11 position of increasing direct taxation of the richer strata has disappeared, whereas in the program of 2015 they are only speaking about the gradual reduction of indirect taxation “after deliberation”, contrary to their position of 2010 for an immediate reduction of indirect taxes and their position of 2012 for the reduction of the value added tax in tourism and dining. However, in the 2015 program SYRIZA promises to increase the tax-free income for all natural persons to 12.000 euros, to abolish the new property tax, the heating oil tax and the poll tax imposed on self-employed

workers. Further, they promise to reduce the tax burden of small enterprises. As far as state expenditures are concerned, during 2010 and 2011 SYRIZA advocated the increase of the social expenditures and the reduction of the defense expenditures whereas after 2012 SYRIZA only talks about freezing the reduction of social expenditures. After 2014 their position is that they will maintain a **balanced government budget**, a position which is usually equivalent to the continuation of austerity despite and in contradiction with their promises.

Wages / labour relations: the program of SYRIZA in 2010 promised an increase of wages, pensions and unemployment benefits. In 2011 their position had changed to the immediate restoration of wages and pensions to the levels of 2009, before the imposition of the memoranda programs. In 2012 they only advocated the freezing of wage and pension reductions and the gradual restoration of wages to the levels of 2009, whatever is meant by that, and only promised the immediate restoration of the minimum wage. In 2015 they are just promising the immediate restoration of the minimum wage to the levels of 2009. As far as the labour (i.e. the exploitation) relations are concerned, in 2010 they advocated the imposition of new restrictions on lay-offs whereas after 2012 they have only promised to abolish the 2010 legislation, which provides for the “liberalization” of the labour market by making lay-offs easier, reducing severance pay and limiting the application of collective agreements. SYRIZA still advocates the reduction of precarious labour through the abolition of indirect employment and the curbing of outsourcing in the public sector. However, they contradictorily admit that they will use subsidized programs of temporary labour in municipalities as well as “training programs” in order to reduce unemployment. Also in the programs of 2012 and 2015 SYRIZA promises the criminalization of employing undeclared (“black”) labour and the reinforcement of the state agency which observes labour legislation. Last, in their most recent program they promise to fully restore Sunday holidays for retail shops.

Benefits: SYRIZA promised in 2010 to increase the unemployment benefits. In their most recent program their position is just to restore unemployment benefits to the 2009 levels (461 euros for 12 months). In 2012 they promised to extend the unemployment benefits to the self-employed while in the 2015 program they are talking about the redesign of unemployment benefits in order to cover a part of the self-employed workers without income. While they advocated the extension of duration of unemployment benefits to 2 years in 2012, in their most recent program they promise such an extension only for long-term unemployed workers. However, they promise to abolish the imposed restriction on the total length of benefits (400 total subsidized day benefits per 4 year period). Also, they have included in their recent program a number of benefits for the alleviation of extreme poverty, i.e. free electricity and food tickets for 300.000 households, free housing for homeless people through the utilization of empty municipality buildings and empty hotels which will be subsidized, free medical care for the unemployed and people with no social security, free transport for unemployed and very low-income workers. SYRIZA had understood that it could gain many votes by promising to provide a pittance to the significant group of pauperized households.

Pensions: back in 2010 SYRIZA promised to abolish all the laws that had attacked social security rights and pensions since 1990 and recognize the debts of the state to the social security funds. In the 2012 program this position had been erased and they only promised to restore employer contributions to their previous higher

levels, fight contribution evasion by the employers, freeze pension reductions, “gradually restore the pensions” to their previous levels and abolish the 2011 exemption of many jobs from the “hazardous occupation” category which is favorable to the workers. As it was mentioned above, the promise of 2010-11 to restore pensions to the 2009 levels has been replaced both in the 2012 and the 2015 programs by a promise to freeze pension reductions. Furthermore, in the 2015 program they claim that they will review the exemption of jobs from the “hazardous occupation” category, contrary to their 2012 promise to immediately abolish this exemption. They also claim that they will reduce the retirement ages by 2 years, i.e. restore retirement age to 65 years for full pension and to 60 years for reduced pension. Moreover, they promise to abolish the new method for the calculation of pensions after 1/1/2015, as well as the restrictions for the award of a reduced pension which exclude many workers from the right to get a pension (i.e. according to these restrictions, a worker should have contributions for 100 workdays per year within the last 5 years).

“Social economy” (self-managed sector): in 2010 the program of SYRIZA did not give much emphasis on the “social economy” apart from a reference to supporting farmer associations. This started to change in 2012 when the program promised to provide incentives and accommodations for the development of the “social economy”. This has completely changed in the 2015 program, where it becomes evident that SYRIZA gives much weight to this sector both for the reduction of unemployment and for the “productive reconstruction of the economy”. This change reflects the growth of the “social economy” sector, as more and more proletarians partially cover their needs or even make both ends meet by engaging either in such projects or in low cost businesses. Specifically, they promise to help the takeover and self-management of bankrupt enterprises by changing the bankruptcy law. Also they promise to support cooperative enterprises and associations through tax exemptions, European subsidies, funding by specialized public credit institutions as well as through the creation of supporting facilities providing consulting, accounting and legal services.

Public sector jobs: The 2012 program promised the abolition of the law for redundancies and lay-offs in the public sector. In the program of 2015, SYRIZA promises that the public sector workers, who have been laid off or made redundant will return to their previous positions. They also promise to abolish the new employee and unit evaluation system and replace it with an evaluation system that will be based on “objective factors and indicators”, whatever is meant by that. Further, they engage for the abolition of the new strict disciplinary law for public sector workers which was imposed in the context of the memoranda legislation. Last but not least, they promise the creation of thousands of permanent stable public sector jobs in education, health care and social protection as a part of their commitment to create 300.000 jobs in total in the public, the private and the self-managed sectors.

The previously presented and rather long-drawn out catalogue of the changes in the program of SYRIZA illustrates convincingly the gradual watering down of its positions to a more timid social democratic direction, as well as their contradictions. The gradual adjustment of SYRIZA to realpolitik shows that, after

pruning out most of the positions, which are considered to be unacceptable from the standpoint of the dominant neoliberal capitalist strategy in the Eurozone, and by keeping and maybe enriching the most harmless ones such as those concerning the so-called social economy, it can transform itself into a “fresh” and rather competent manager of the capitalist state.

TPTG, January 2015

Appendix: On some theoretical debates inside SYRIZA that were quickly put aside

The anti-state communist minority in Europe and elsewhere, who still concern themselves with issues of communization, the capitalist state and value theory might be interested to know that one of the main architects of SYRIZA's program - and a member of the negotiating team of the new government with the rest of the EU member-states- was, until some years ago, the main theoretician of the Althusserian faction of SYRIZA and a leading critic of the neo-gramscian state theory and the left ricardian labour theory of value!

Here are some interesting quotes from his texts:

It's the parliamentary “filtering” of the different class practices (the practices not only of the bourgeoisie and its allies but also of the working class and its allies) that makes their “representation” inside the state feasible; that makes their subsumption to the general capitalist interest practicable... It's not a particular party but the whole parliamentary system that ties the lower classes to the “political class” of capitalist rule. It's not a particular party but the capitalist state as a whole that constitutes the real “party”, the real “representative” of capital, the political condensation of capitalist rule. That's why, since the era of Marx, all the “visions” and the attempts of the reformist political vehicles to “conquer” and socialize the state have ended to the nationalization of the visionaries and a rude awakening.⁵

Classical political economy was an embodied labour theory of value and a theory of the exploitation of wage labourers by propertied classes. The main currents of Marxism adopted this classical theory of value and exploitation by removing Marx's critique of it. This theoretical mutation is closely connected to the ideological and political mutation of the Left from a movement of radical contestation to a power of management and reform of the capitalist system... In its “conservative” version this problematic raises the issues of the “fair” pay of the worker, her “dignified living conditions”, pay rises in accordance to productivity of labour etc. In other words, the immediate demands of the workers in their conflict with capital are raised to the status of a “social ideal”, since the forms of capitalist relations of power are taken as a “necessary fact”. In its “radical” version this classical theory of value and exploitation envisages a “capitalism without private capitalists”: “socialization”, i.e. public property of means of production goes hand in hand with the maintenance of all forms of

⁵ John Milios, *Marxism as conflict of currents*, Athens, 1996.

*capitalist economy and the capitalist state... The transition from capitalism to communism is necessarily related to the abolition of value form, i.e. money and commodity, and the form of enterprise.*⁶

Fair enough, Dr. Milios! Thanks for this excellent critique of reformist politics! But what has this self-understanding got to do with SYRIZA's program? Absolutely nothing! The problem of disconnection of theory and practice is well known in the revolutionary movement ever since the era of German social democracy. Many decades ago, Paul Mattick had criticized Kautsky for his inability to imagine that a Marxist theory should be supplemented by an adequate Marxist practice. So, his understanding "that for Marx, value is a strictly historical category; that neither before nor after capitalism did there exist or could there exist a value production which differed only in form from that of capitalism" was totally useless.⁷

With the academicization and professionalization of Marxist theory in the last decades things have become even worse. In public political meetings, conferences, reading groups, summercamps, demos etc. one constantly comes upon hundreds of leftist PhD students, researchers, journalists etc. Most of the times one finds herself wondering whether it is a genuine interest in anti-capitalist politics that brought them there or if this involvement is just a necessary step towards a profession guaranteed by the capitalist state, a capitalist enterprise or a reformist party.

⁶ John Milios, *The critique of political economy as a critique of the Left*, Theseis #101, 2007. This interpretation of Marx's theory is based on Michael Heinrich's work and the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* school of thought but we can't go into details here.

⁷ The quote is from Paul Mattick, *Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler*, Living Marxism, vol.4, #7, 1939.