The Syriza problem: radical democracy and left governmentality in Greece

opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/stathis-gourgouris/syriza-problem-radical-democracy-and-left-governmentality-in-g

Stathis Gourgouris

Syriza's extraordinary problem – which would not be faced by any other political party in government – was to alter *internal* institutional frameworks under conditions of *external* institutional assault.

Congress of Syriza for the Greek election campaign, January 2015. Demotix/Kostis Ntantamis. All rights reserved.

Although the history of the Left has produced an extraordinary theoretical legacy, which continues to be the nucleus of almost all radical thinking, it has nonetheless left a trail of extraordinary failures in practice.

I understand the dialectical relation between theory and practice, of course, but we have to admit that in real historical terms this dialectic is terribly uneven, to the degree in fact that it may render questionable a great many of these theoretical achievements, which, if we are going to be rigorously leftist about it, cannot really stand entirely on their own.

To this general account, I now add a series of realizations that have arisen from the experience of a government of the left in Greece since Syriza was elected, a complex, circuitous, contradictory, and internally conflictual trajectory that is still unfolding in full force.

Anyone who thinks that Syriza as a left phenomenon has ended, been coopted or defeated, etc., is thinking too much too fast. Too much complexity is being swept carelessly under the rug. For this reason, despite everyone's intense attention to the recent traumatic developments, it's worth conducting an assessment of the full trajectory of Syriza in government.

Radicalising democracy

As a prelude to mapping the details, let me confess that the overall course of events has made me

aware of the weakness of theoretical predeterminations, and especially of the dangerous tendency, common in left thought, of grasping at schematic theoretical straws in the face of the perplexing circuitry of politics in action – all in some fashion remnants of the history of the left, no matter how dressed up with new terminologies and allegedly new significations.

The field of historical action in the last few months has exceeded the theoretical armory that is presumed to be somehow its strongest signifying capacity, so that in all its turns, sometimes even counter-intended manifestations, historical action needs to be considered in itself, from its own standpoint, as it is happening and in the terms that it sets as it is happening, rather than encountered from the safety of our preexisting theories.

I understand how exasperating this is – indeed as exasperating as it has been to experience this phenomenon of the left in government. My hunch is – because it's too early to tell – that this exasperation with experience and this theoretical incapacity arise directly out of the radical democratic process that makes the Syriza phenomenon different (perhaps even unique) in the history of the Left. It is, in other words, the very precarious, disorderly, an-archic, unpredictable, groundless, perilous, open-ended and resistant-to-closure 'nature' of democracy that has radicalized this already uneven dialectical relation between theory and practice in favor of the second.

Left governmentality

My wager here is to investigate a terrain that we can name *left governmentality* which has emerged as a problematic challenge with the worldwide, even if politically and culturally heterogeneous, phenomenon of the assembly movements since the Arab Spring, to which Syriza's rise owes a great deal.

As mass withdrawals of consent to existing political institutions, assembly movements produced an entirely different signifying framework of political action and brought back to the fore the urgency of radical democratic politics outside and even against the established 'democratic' modes of power. This certainly includes the presumed stability of the party formation, with dire consequences for the political history of the left, and, in the case of Syriza's electoral victory in a parliamentary terrain, a grave challenge to the most unassailable categories of what government, governance, and governmentality might mean.

To anticipate what I will try to retrace from the events of the last 6 months in Greece, let us remember from the outset that Syriza is an unusual political formation. It is a loose, self-contradictory, and internally antagonistic coalition of leftist thought and practice, very much dependent on the capacity of social movements of all kinds, thoroughly decentralized and driven by the activism of solidarity networks in a broad sphere of action across class lines of conflict, gender and sexuality activism, immigration issues, anti-globalization movements, civil and human rights advocacy, etc., and not entirely determined by the crisis although obviously at the front lines of what the crisis has created.

In this sense, Syriza is not a party per se, even though it had to be legally codified as one in order to qualify for the established parliamentary bonus as victor in the elections. This has key implications in our analysis of what has taken place so far and what is to follow, to the degree that we can even remotely predict.

Syriza is a problem – not a problem to be solved, for nothing in politics can be mathematized, but a problem in the sense of an open framework of trouble in the terrain of politics. It is a problem in the midst of the political – in terms of Greek history, if nothing else, certainly unprecedented and way beyond even the history of the Greek left from which it has obviously emerged. To use a phrase by Edward Said in a different signifying framework, Syriza enacts "a technique of trouble". It means trouble; it gets into trouble and creates trouble for all presumed-to-be-stable categories, including, of course, the category of the Left. And the fact that it is now politically *in* trouble is also part of the same rubric.

Syriza is a troublemaker entity in politics, and this is something that we should not lament or wish to extinguish, but rather engage with with an open mind, if we are ever going to get out of the categorical sludge of much leftist thinking, especially since the enormous geopolitical shift of 1989.

From electoral victory to the Greek referendum

Electoral victories that result from popular movements always precipitate a climate of euphoria, even bliss. It's standard. What is also standard is how short-lived this is. A basic psychological reason is that popular movements always look beyond the temporal frame of governance because their desire manifests itself in the present tense. It does not wait and will not be deferred – all the more, after a victory against the grain of previous history and established power.

Popular movements want the future now, and in looking beyond their place in the present they overlook the shift that takes place from the politics of opposition to the politics of government. Winning power under these conditions always produces enormous expectations; it is the self-propelling force of a dream that must become reality.

Syriza's victory in the elections of January 25 created unprecedented waves of expectation and hope in a population brutalized by extreme austerity conditions imposed by external financial interests with the full cooperation of the Greek political elite. This blissful wave of expectation was magnified even more if we consider the unprecedented event of an electoral victory of the left, whose symbolic magnitude exceeds Greek boundaries. While from this standpoint such exuberant response was unavoidable, it nonetheless unleashed, from the very beginning of the encounter with the new governmental reality, an internal danger that the left should have been smarter in anticipating: the danger of self-subversion in the name of political oppositional purity.

Less than a month after Syriza assumed government, without really having a chance to govern, precisely because of the political and financial liability against the EU's great powers inherited from the previous government, we heard voices ranging from prominent Syriza members to key intellectual figures at home and abroad, as well as forces in the movement, manifesting grumbling disapproval, which began to aggravate and wear out the edges of the movement, thus overshadowing both the magnitude of problems faced by the new Syriza government and a cool-headed assessment of its early actions.

This attitude strains beyond the guise of traditional leftist critique from within. Its almost immediate occurrence, even before the dire conditions of the recent events, suggests that it is an endemic issue, not driven by circumstances. The fact that even in the early weeks and months of the new government the elite media interests in Greece had a field day with these presumed critiques seems to have escaped the attention of these critics.

While I would be the first to argue positively that this is the mark of Syriza not being a properly ordered party but a loose coalition of voices, there was – and is, because it continues ever louder – a self-satisfied attitude of pronouncement here that clashes with the hard realities of what it means for the left to govern in the world of global capital. Part of it stems from the great difficulty the left has always had historically – outside the Leninist legacy that still haunts it – with assuming the responsibility of power, even as a mere idea (not to mention the rare occasion of reality).

Part of it, however, also has to do with not understanding the essential non-coincidence between a leftist movement and a leftist government that this movement has brought to power, or a relation of relative autonomy between the two that is the starting point of configuring what 'left governmentality' might mean.

With its electoral victory, Syriza ceased being a mere opposition party. It became the government of a country, whose sovereignty and survival are more important short term than even its prosperity long term. As the government of a country, a party of the left is no longer beholden simply to its ranks: to the

activist nucleus that forms the movement, and certainly not to its party members. It is beholden first to the voters who have elected it to power (in Syriza's case some 38%, most of whom are not on the left ideologically), but even more so to the entire national polity, for Syriza now is a government of all the Greeks and bears responsibility for Greece as such, not just some part of it.

When the Greek Finance Minister is engaged in a Eurogroup battle, his primary responsibility is to his country's viability. This certainly includes his responsibility to the popular will – for this is essential to any democratic government – but ultimately the cherished objective is society's overall viability. In a bankrupt country, shackled to a regime of creditors who also hold the power tools of fiscal living being, this is a formidable task that requires a sort of acrobatic handling and, let's face it, a risk that some decisions may be deemed to be deviations from the original vision or even the electoral platform.

"Deviations" is already a compromised word, for it assumes that political criteria remain unchanged, even while political situations are always changing – in this case at extraordinary speed and scale. Let us rather speak of repositionings or reconfigurations of priorities or reconsiderations of conditions, all terms that indicate the need to remain flexible relative to one's adversarial forces externally and sustainable relative to the internal sphere of consent or contention.

From this standpoint, Etienne Balibar and Sandro Mezzadra's early diagnosis that what Syriza needs most of all is to gain time (for which ground would be provisionally ceded) still remains correct and has been irresponsibly vilified.

Even after the most recent developments, which I address below, the conditional requirement of Syriza's's predicament was the need to gain time, against all odds and at great cost, in order to gain control of the dire situation it had inherited, to organize and apportion its forces to maximum capacity and effectiveness, to gain broader public support to shore up its slim parliamentary control, etc., so as to set in motion the governance of its essential task, which is not so much the settling of accounts with the EU but, above all, the radical reorganization of Greece's long term corrupt social and political institutions.

In other words, Syriza's extraordinary problem – which would not be faced by any other political party in government – was to alter *internal* institutional frameworks under conditions of *external* institutional assault.

Of course, always but especially in today's hard political reality, these two aspects – external confrontation and internal reorganization – are linked and, moreover, the link is asymmetrical in all respects: work on the internal front is of much greater magnitude and therefore requires a greater duration of time, while the external confrontation is under extraordinary temporal duress – the EU elites are still doing everything they can to deprive Syriza of time in order to drive it to its death. Therefore, the response to the situation is not a theoretical matter, a matter of what is properly 'Leftist' politics, but more than ever a matter of Realpolitik, which here I would reiterate not simply as a politics of reality but as a *real politics*.

It was in that spirit – of *real politics* – that the Syriza government went into the arena of negotiations with EU elite powers immediately after it took office, without even a few days of assessing how profoundly shackled its arms were by agreements it had inherited from the previous regime. The EU elites were counting on this duress, with full anticipation of how to counter the new government's initial drive to change the previous terms of relation between EU and Greece, which Syriza derived from the democratic electoral mandate.

Their wager had been all along to wear down Syriza's capacities by stonewalling all its proposals, until it would cave under forced capitulation and the democratic mandate would be withdrawn via popular disaffection. Their plan was, as Costas Douzinas called it early on, to enact a "velvet coup" (which since then has been revealed instead to be made of hard steel): to undermine the democratic will by eroding trust in the government's electoral platform. For this reason alone, critical voices from the self-ascribed left flanks in the coalition are especially open to charges of political irresponsibility, since they

never realized how much they were drawn into the trapping logic of the enemy and, even worse, that they were counted on to be so drawn.

The hapless politics of Grexit

Greek PM Alexis Tsipras speaks at Syriza group meeting, Athens,Feb.,2015. Demotix/Panayiotis Tzamaros.All rights reserved.

From the outset – certainly since the point in the negotiations on February 25 where the Syriza team was outmanoeuvered out of inexperience – the loudest accusation from these quarters has been that the Syriza government adopted a strategy of 'staying in the Euro at all costs'. Strictly speaking, and as we have discovered by the conflicting plurality of voices and accounts since then (on both sides of the negotiations), this was inaccurate because 'all costs' of staying in the Euro were constantly evaluated and reassessed – an essential component in the required manoeuvering of any prolonged and multilateral negotiation. But let us assume that the charge is accurate, at the very least because, whatever the definite mistakes in the negotiation strategy, in the end this tendency prevailed and alternate plans, despite assessments, were never fully realized.

The first thing to say about the charge of 'staying in the Euro at all costs' is that what has always been proposed as an alternative follows the same logic – the logic of 'at all costs'. When possible costs of abandoning the Euro are to this day brought up in protest to those who claim that Grexit is the only option, cost estimates are often dismissed as panic-driven, or at the very least, temporary in effect. Rarely are these costs really measured against current costs, and partly this is an obvious methodological issue: the fact that the current costs are known, while the Grexit costs are positively unknown. Their calculation is a matter of speculation at best, or as Costas Lapavitsas (the leading voice of this strategy) admitted in his GCAS lecture and the heated discussion that followed, it is a projection based on economic models worked out in a laboratory of numbers. Therefore, in terms of real knowledge, whichever position one takes on Grexit, for or against, one is inevitably engaged in some phantasmatic projection. Whether utopian or catastrophic, it doesn't matter in essence – the two are equivalent, as fantasies go.

Lapavitsas is a recognizably accomplished economist and he can never be accused of jumping on the bandwagon or opportunistically taking advantage of circumstances. He developed his position that battling within the Euro is impossible because the Eurozone is institutionally predisposed to a very specific structure of capitalist forces years before he was elected MP in the Syriza government. His critique of all the deadlocks of the Eurozone cannot be disputed on its own terms; I am sure that even his enemies would secretly acknowledge it. The problem arises with the articulation of an exit from this

deadlock as an alternative. The speculative nature of this alternative is outmanoeuverable. This is not wrong in and of itself, since we can hardly fault the work of the imagination in radical thinking. But the fact that it is presented in terms of scientific certainty betrays rather a lack of imagination. Lapavitsas may be right to critique the overprivileging of the political in the left: "not everything is possible through politics," he says, but I wonder how he could disavow the fact that not everything is possible through economics.

The economics of Grexit, especially in conditions that Greece finds itself after five years of austerity, have been questioned by people who know far better than I. But some of this questioning is common sense. Assurances that the social and infrastructural crisis precipitated by switching to the new currency would last for just a few months are really ungrounded for an economy whose productive forces have nearly stalled and banks are depleted of capital – current deposits in the Bank of Greece would barely last three months.

And however many months this would entail, not much thought has been given to the fact that the greatest burden would be borne precisely by those people who have suffered most and whose daily existence already constitutes a humanitarian crisis. This would include not only Greeks but large numbers of undocumented immigrants, who are *de facto* off the social security grid. Moreover, Lapavitsas' proposal that in order to stave off rapidly sliding devaluation we would need to peg the new currency to the Euro is at the very least perplexing, given the whole point of abandoning the Euro framework. How would this be squared with unilateral default on Euro loans, which would be necessary in Grexit (without this there really is no point), and which would mean *de facto* economic war with the EU (not to mention the international financial community), is not addressed. In the end, the new national currency would be totally unprotected – assaulted by the ruthless global market and unsupported by ruined capacities for national production of wealth. Finally, equally speculative, it seems to me, is the assumption that somehow the Greek people will rise to the occasion and by sheer will and labor would not only endure the impending catastrophe, but reverse it – this specifically is a strange amalgam of nationalist and Maoist fantasies.

Beyond the Lapavitsas position, which in any case is the most consistent and articulate, the staunch (and rather old fashioned) economism of 'abandoning the Euro no matter the cost' is never acknowledged as a monetary ideologeme by its proponents who are otherwise proud to point to the (neoliberal) monetary ideology of their opponents.

In the end, the ardent purveyors of Grexit as an imaginary of salvation are unwittingly engaged in an analogous – but negatively laden – fetishism of the Euro as the so-called Europhiles. They are indeed anti-Europhiles – not adversaries of those who presumably 'love the Euro' but proponents of 'loving to be anti-Euro'. Whatever may be the political repercussions of the Euro/anti-Euro battle, as a purely economic terrain of contesting opinions, the two sides of the Euro battle are two sides of the same coin.

Syriza's primary goal

What escapes discussion in this deadlock is that the Euro as hero or devil is not Syriza's concern. Syriza's primary goal and responsibility to history is to alter clientelist Greek institutions and practices that have gone on unchecked for decades, and as a left governmental coalition that understands its place in a globalized economy, the majority of Syriza correctly determines its avenue of struggle to be within the European terrain, not outside it. Partly because it does not see itself to be alone as a radical democratic movement of change, partly because it understands the severity of being thrust to the forefront of this new international movement, Syriza must persist in the idea that its struggle cannot be restricted to the national terrain alone.

This is the only mature way to think politically as far as the history of the left in governmental power goes – a small and not particularly successful history after all. It means that Syriza will have come to terms with the reality that the 'national economy' as primary determinant of national sovereignty no longer holds sway in a regime of globalized capital. We may lament this fact but it is a fact – for all

countries without exception, including the United States – and aspiring to retreat to such a position of nostalgic national fantasy, especially for a totally bankrupt nation with nearly nonexistent primary productivity and de-developed infrastructure, is just mind-boggling.

As a proposed alternative, Grexit is thus absurd – doubly absurd, since it also turned out to be precisely the enemy's plan. Its entire logic is monetary; it expresses a formalist economics worked out in simulation model terms, since exiting a monetary union has never occurred before.

But more to the point, it was always falsely presented as economics, since its impetus is entirely political. Grexit is a name for none other than a politics of national independence, the impetus of which no sane person can possibly disavow. But whether such independence would be achieved in these terms, at least for Greece at this point in time, is doubtful even to the most well-intentioned minds. As national sovereignty is no longer safeguarded by a national economy – which is, as I said, compromised by globalization regardless of sovereign currency – the whole political impetus collapses.

As national sovereignty is no longer safeguarded by a national economy – which is, as I said, compromised by globalization regardless of sovereign currency – the whole political impetus collapses

Worse than that, Grexit ends up feeding the fantasy of alternatives to neoliberal globalization without giving to social movements themselves a chance to really work at imagining such actual alternatives. In this sense, paradoxically it strengthens the real effect of TINA – the famous Thatcherite injunction "There Is No Alternative" – because what determines it, what gives it existence as thought and project, is none other than the very entity it seeks to evade, the European Monetary Union itself.

Surely, to battle against the definite problem of the European Monetary Union as a whole and reconceptualize one's fate in relation to it can just as easily happen from within it:

Surely, to battle against the definite problem of the European Monetary Union as a whole and reconceptualize one's fate in relation to it can just as easily happen from within it: from the standpoint of democratic movements across borders that emerge from and against its excesses, movements that challenge and disrupt its operations.

Syriza is one such movement – it remains a movement – and it is now also a political event, a *governmental event*. The international significance of this event and the vehemence with which it has been opposed is due precisely to Greece's existence within the Eurozone. Who would really care, now that there is no Cold War, if a government of the left had come to power in a little country with drachma as its currency?

There is surely no theoretical necessity that battling the EU must take place on the basis of one's removal from its political-economic terrain. One can certainly take this position, but to do so would be as much a construct of one's political imagination as any other, no matter how rigorous the analysis in economic terms.

An assessment of the referendum

No-voter in Greek referendum. Demotix/Giuseppe Cicci.All rights reserved.

The referendum of July 5 was indicative of Syriza as a troublemaker organism: mobilizing radical democratic desire against, but also in the service of, an institutional battle.

Faced with an ultimatum from Eurocrat institutions that went beyond its electoral mandate to negotiate on the basis of sovereign decision, the government turned the decision over to the people. The conditions of externally and internally driven war that marked this extraordinary event are well known – I won't rehearse them here. I will only make a few schematic assessments of what the referendum unleashed into the historical terrain, especially in light of the government's action subsequent to the result which since July 12 has been an almost violent point of contention in the ranks of the left, in Greece and otherwise.

First of all, let us settle the fact that the historical significance of the referendum has not yet been completed – it is still being made. It cannot be reduced to its event. Like all events, the referendum is liminal and its significance may easily be effaced by the conjuncture that it generated. Its present significance is obscuring its future. What we still feel, is its continuously pulsing radioactivity. The subsequent developments which are perceived as a reversal extend this presently active incompleteness. Indeed, in this case, the wholeness presumed to be inherent in every event has brought into our field of vision – the historical field – the fact that what now seems to have been something else (a reversal, an erasure) was always in place in the course of the event's happening.

Second: contrary to the propaganda in Greece and abroad, the question fielded by the referendum was crystal clear: "Do you want this situation to continue or not?" But the strange thing is that this indisputable clarity produced an enormous range of interpretations. That the dilemma posed by the referendum was meant to be Yes/No to the Euro was above all the interpretation of the enemy. With unprecedented intervention and propagandist onslaught, the Eurocrats made it clear that for them this was the referendum's sole significance, no matter what the Greek government argued. Thus, when the result was announced, the Eurocrats' singular interpretation contradicted the evidence that 75% of Greeks expressly preferred to stay in the Euro. Assuming a simple deduction in what is no doubt a complicated and ambiguous intersection of desires, this could easily mean that of the 62% "No" to the Eurozone ultimatum, 37% was "Yes" to the Euro. One thing is for sure: the majority of Greeks drove a wedge in the Eurozone logic that entwines the politics of imposed austerity with the people's sovereign existence within the Euro.

One thing is for sure: the majority of Greeks drove a wedge in the Eurozone logic that entwines the politics of imposed austerity with the people's sovereign existence within the Euro.

Third: mining a whole inventory of civil strife images and affects going back to the 1920s, the internal oligarchy's media propaganda went wild with charges that the referendum was divisive, that it pitted Greeks against each other. I would argue the exact opposite. The referendum was unifying, for it brought Greeks out into the public for the most rare and precious occasion of making a decision together about their present and future. Indeed, nothing is more divisive than party politics, the great legacy of liberalism that splits the body politic in multiple conflictual fragments which rarely come to understand that together they are acting in a common decision-making framework in which antagonism is inherently shared.

Fourth: the referendum shattered party lines. Despite the extraordinary efforts of the Syriza movement and solidarity networks to do foot-soldiering on behalf of No, which ultimately decided the outcome, not all the No votes came from the Syriza electorate, and even more, some Yes votes (few I imagine, but definitely so) were from Syriza voters. The bilateral structure of the referendum was characterized, if nothing else, by extraordinary heterogeneity, not only ideological but otherwise. The political/ideological range of the No vote was particularly wide-ranging (from extreme nationalist to some communist votes), while even the Yes camp, though more ideologically solid, did not exhaust itself in some unabashed liberal Europhilia.

The political/ideological range of the No vote was particularly wide-ranging (from extreme nationalist to some communist votes), while even the Yes camp, though more ideologically solid, did not exhaust itself in some unabashed liberal Europhilia.

Moreover, I know much has been made of the fact that the bilateral structure was split across class lines. This is too simplistic, as demonstrated from quick demographic studies already made. Surely, the split was based on wage-earning differences and along employment-unemployment lines (which are not reducible simply to class divisions); along generational lines (which are linked to the unemployment factor but also convey a certain sentiment of rage against the established political order *tout court*); and was also determined by geographical factors (the islands and border areas, for example – although this too is linked to the finances of taxation), etc.

This plurality of the electoral split and the heteromorphism of the voting blocks make very difficult the political assessment of the referendum along strict party lines. In addition, more than ideological, a key factor involved in the outcome was what we call the logic of sentiment, a certain insurrectionary affect against the onslaught of media manipulation and in opposition to the blatant coup d'état elements of foreign interference. The same sentimental logic operates when, in the aftermath of Syriza's compromise, people speak of the "No" victory in the referendum as a victory of Syriza which was then sold out by the government. Even if the feeling is genuine and, thus, cannot be criticized as such, the politics derived from it are unfair to the complexity of the event and its aftermath, which is still being played out.

The only obvious victory for Syriza as a result of the referendum was the neutralization of parliamentary party opposition, which now gives the government a buffer zone of non-interference on the social battlefront against oligarchic clientelist networks. Apart from this, the only thing we can safely acknowledge about this momentous event is that it mobilized forces that transformed the political landscape, whose consequences we'll have yet to see, including how these forces will realign on the parliamentary front, or whether they will disavow established political institutions altogether. In either case, by calling for a referendum Syriza unleashed a whole new set of forces in the body politic and will have to find ways to adjust to this shake-up.

But the key political significance of the referendum was international – which is a bit of a contradiction, given that referenda are quintessentially national events and affairs.

But the key political significance of the referendum was international – which is a bit of a contradiction, given that referenda are quintessentially national events and affairs.The event took place under conditions of international war (financial strangulation, media terrorism, sovereign intervention) and it

mobilized an international wave of support for the sovereign democratic action of the Greeks against all odds.

This specific bilateral block of contention between neoliberal bureaucratic order and popular solidarity mobilization is now fully active in most countries in Europe. This marks a great victory on behalf of both the Syriza government and the movement, which should not be underestimated and which needs to be mined further in the time ahead, as the political antagonisms in the European landscape are certain to shift radically.

All in all, the referendum has enabled Syriza finally to govern: to pursue the making of a different governmentality. The no doubt odious terms of the post-referendum agreement were meant to deprive Syriza of governmental capacity, and there are people, including within Syriza, who think this is very much the case.

But for Syriza to be deprived of governmental capacity in a real sense would mean to lose popular consent, to split its ranks, and indeed to fall, to return to the political margins. This has always been, after all, the Eurocrats' ultimately desired outcome. But this has not happened and, given the overwhelming discrediting of the opposition during the referendum and the consistently wide electoral margin in the polls, it is unlikely to happen any time soon.

The disruption of Syriza's ideological cohesion (as tentative and internally antagonistic as it has always been) does not weaken Syriza's governmentability but, on the contrary, it places it at the forefront as its most urgent task. In this sense, the enemies of Syriza in the EU did indeed lose the battle, not to mention their imposition of an agreement that after all, even by their own account, cannot really be implemented.

Government and movement

The biggest wound in this process of tactical retreat – which was experienced as defeat, indeed self-defeat – was surely suffered in the ranks of the movement. The experience has been traumatic, and the condition of response to this trauma is at this point an aporia. It is understandable as to why, if we return to what I pointed out at the outset. The movement lives in the now. It is not made for, nor concerned with, tactical manoeuvers of retreat. The immediacy of its social base, relative to the mediation of the exigencies of governance, keeps the movement free of responsibility to sovereignty, to the entirety of the polity within which after all the movement fights agonistically, where time is in constant flux and parameters can change at any minute and in directions that may run counter to plans and wishes, even principles.

Here, democracy is severely tested. The perception – but even more dramatically, the sentiment, the profound affect – that the referendum unleashed the power of the demos-in-action, which was then revoked by the government's agreement with the enemy, has precipitated explosive expressions of disaffection, depression, and rage, as well as charges of cowardice, capitulation, selling out and indeed treason to the principles of the movement.

The referendum was decided by the government and was won, for the government, by the movement in order for the government to act on its basis. Nothing in this equation is assumed to be linear or self-evident, or even simply causal. The components are irreducibly linked but cannot be collapsed into each other.

Neither the government nor the movement is subservient to each other and yet both the government and the movement are responsible for each other. They can exist just as easily in coincidence as in contestation, and indeed they must, if the radical democratic impetus is to be sustained. But this can only happen if Syriza retains its heterogeneity, and does not forget its internal ideological antagonism as well as its historic burden: to have been entrusted by the majority of the Greek people to change things as they are

But this can only happen if Syriza retains its heterogeneity, and does not forget its internal ideological antagonism as well as its historic burden: to have been entrusted by the majority of the Greek people to change things as they are– not just the present conditions of austerity, but the long term oligarchic stranglehold on Greek society by institutional structures of corruption, illegality, and injustice.

The power that the government drew from the referendum was thrown into the arena of international conflict, and indeed I would argue that it helped the government safeguard the disastrous effect of disorderly default, which would have heaped untold damage on the Greek people, on top of their already tortuous conditions of devastation, and rendered Greek sovereignty (financial but also political) prey to the vultures of elite power externally and internally.

The idea that the movement could have been counted on to help fight this disaster of default were it to occur is a non-starter, whatever the great capacities of the movement, because the government that sustains this movement would have fallen (as all governments in history that have presided over national bankruptcy have fallen), and the enemies would have achieved total annihilation – not just Grexit, which, we must remember, was also a plan in the enemy's mind, but, in our terms, the annihilation of Syriza itself and thereby the infliction of unfathomable damage to the movement internationally.

Of course, people say – and rightfully so – that the compromise of the Syriza government has inflicted precisely such damage by discrediting the whole experiment. Frankly, only time will tell. And time remains the most precious thing gained by the agreement – time to put left governmentality to work. On the (politically) reasonable basis that all agreements under unequal power are terrible but no agreement under unequal power is catastrophic – Thucydides' description of the Athenian-Melian dialogue here is singularly instructive – the Syriza government still holds open the task of the radical reorganization of society's institutions and the defeat of corrupt elite interests.

It will be judged on that ground, and it will be judged most intensely and mercilessly by the movement. But at this point, where people in the movement are terribly disaffected, indeed enraged, it is important to consider what lies ahead and what has not had the chance to be implemented – for the struggle to sustain liquidity in a bankrupt country against all odds has kept any real governance from happening. And governance here includes the movement, whose transformative projects have not had a chance to really take off. The solidarity networks are now needed more than ever, for the humanitarian crisis continues and, indeed, intensifies, beyond the political differences between government and movement that have emerged as a result of the compromise.

The solidarity networks are now needed more than ever, for the humanitarian crisis continues and, indeed, intensifies, beyond the political differences between government and movement that have emerged as a result of the compromise.As relatively autonomous from the government, the movement has its own task ahead – an essential task that no government can handle.

Developing a left governmentality entails precisely that internal dissent would register its critical force as part of the governmental capacity. I repeat: Syriza is a heterogeneous coalition, not a party, strictly speaking. Hence, the notion that 'voting No in Parliament against the measures is a vote of support to the government,' as was voiced by various dissenting Syriza MPs, utterly bamboozled the media technocrats and the liberal parties, who can only understand a hierarchical, monovocal, and ideologically sutured party politics.

This notion is not some crazy sophism, but utterly genuine and consistent with Syriza's troubling and troublemaking character. The fact that the oligarchic media is obsessed with Syriza dissenters and is conducting a frenzy of ad hominem cannibalization of certain persons proves the point. Critical dissent within the coalition is indeed support; that's what radical democracy demands and left governmentality requires, and Syriza needs to protect its own, especially against savage media manipulation.

In this light, I would definitely fault Alexis Tsipras' decision not to have immediately convened Syriza's Central Committee to air collectively the full force of internal dissent. Strangely enough, Tsipras'

greatest strength is the dissent in his ranks. Even if distant from reality as some of the internal opposition is – dissent is by no means cohesive and on the same terms for everyone – its unreality serves to keep Syriza's *governmental* position from succumbing to some transcendent righteousness of its truth, as instrumental as this truth might be. Syriza's trouble in the ranks must remain, so that its trouble-making 'nature' can continue to confound stable categories of governmentality in both Greece and in the EU.

Syriza's trouble in the ranks must remain, so that its trouble-making 'nature' can continue to confound stable categories of governmentality in both Greece and in the EU.

Nothing is more radical, more troubling, and more trouble-making than a government that proclaims that it disagrees with the policies it has agreed to implement, a government that refuses to identify with these policies because it recognizes them as abhorrent and unfeasible.

It thus exposes these policies for what they are: absurd demands of reckless power. But even more, it exposes what is always hidden in the liberal understanding of politics: that in the end politics is a performative domain, whose most dangerous aspect is that it is believed to be genuinely true, utilitarian, and transcendent. Syriza's overt *disbelief* in the policies of the agreement actually exposes the profoundly *political* nature of the force-field of action in which it exists, provisionally and agonistically, in which and against which it struggles.

Syriza's overt *disbelief* in the policies of the agreement actually exposes the profoundly *political* nature of the force-field of action in which it exists, provisionally and agonistically, in which and against which it struggles. It exposes the fact that its existence is precisely struggle – not only against the enemy, but against itself.

The reality of defeat

Of course, there are *realities* that are affected by this extraordinarily intense and even violent political show of forces. And there is indeed *a reality of defeat* in the agreement that the Syriza government was forced to sign. But this reality has been addressed by the internal opposition in the most conventional liberal terms of politics – to the degree of arguing that Tsipras is enacting an anti-politics. A worthy and indeed sumptuous exception has been Slavoj Žižek's call to assume the responsibility of fighting with defeat and from within defeat. Žižek also brilliantly dismantles the obsession with the TINA argument: "The true courage is not to imagine an alternative, but to accept the consequences of the fact that there is no clearly discernible alternative: the dream of an alternative is a sign of theoretical cowardice, it functions as a fetish which prevents us thinking to the end the deadlock of our predicament."

TINA has been used in the last two weeks as the grand bogeyman of leftist incapacity. But the greatest mark of leftist incapacity has really been to think and fight from the very standpoint of *the reality of being deprived of alternatives* – precisely what the Eurocrats have done to the Greek left government they so obsessively desire to destroy.

Radical democracy and left governmentality are not about the politics of unreality – so-called alternatives that belong to fantasies of the past, like the nationalist self-enclosure of Grexit scenarios. They are about crashing with realities head on, from the precarious position of groundlessness on matters of principle and the sheer incalculability of decision in the midst of struggle exactly at the point where all options have been removed from the table.

This manifests democracy's greatest challenge to the status quo, keeping in mind that democracy is a politics of high risk. It is not easy politics, it is not even necessarily good politics or wise politics, but it is free politics, the only autonomous politics there is.