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RADICAL LEFT PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

The Cases of
SYRIZA and AKEL

Yiannos Katsourides



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PREFACE

Debates about participating in state institutions and the government had been a matter of fiery contests among various Marxist and neo-Marxist movements, parties, and organizations not only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also in the 1960s and 1970s. The resurface of the debate in the latter period was at the centre of western Marxism not without reason. During this period, several important events took place (see Chap. 2). The fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, however, put these discussions and quests into the background for many years.

As often quoted although, history tends to repeat itself. Twenty years after capitalism and liberal democracy were thought to have won the battle in a definitive manner (Fukuyama 1992), this was again questioned. The reason for this was the new Great Recession that brought the issue of government participation onto the agenda of radical Left parties (RLPs). Many parties of this family emerged as serious or at least considerable government contenders and/or coalition partners all over Europe, including among others:

- In Greece the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) rose to power within a time frame of three years
- In Cyprus the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) had governed from 2008–2013
- In Portugal the Portugese Communist Party (PCP) and the Left Bloc (BE) were offering support to the Socialist government

- In Spain the Podemos' share of votes had risen to 20 % by the 2015 elections and proposed a coalition government with the socialists
- In France J.-L. Melenchon scored 11 % in the 2012 presidential elections
- In Germany the German Left Party (Die Linke) polled 8.6 % in the 2013 national elections coming in third

After years of political marginalization the radical Left seemed to have acquired political visibility once again.

The Greek anti-austerity, left-wing party, SYRIZA's recent electoral victory and rise to power in particular electrified the Left all over Europe. SYRIZA stormed to power after years of harsh austerity in the country and provided a model that was acceptable even for moderate social democrats who had struggled in search of ideas and inspiration since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008. Other parties of the (radical) Left took inspiration from this achievement. In discussions of SYRIZA's surprising victory, however, it is often forgotten that theirs was not the first victory of a RLP; in 2008 the Cypriot AKEL was elected to power in the Republic of Cyprus, holding the presidency until 2013.

Although these two parties come from very similar cultural settings (i.e., Greece and Cyprus share many common features) notwithstanding their significant differences, they have never been studied in comparison, only in isolation. This book's aim is to bring the experiences of the two parties together and place them in the context of RLPs' politics mostly with regard to the issue of government participation. Thus, the chapters illustrate and analyze how the two parties came to power and compare their governing styles, focusing especially on their ability to fulfil—with regard to their radical identity—their electoral promises once in office. Furthermore, the book addresses the circumstances of radical Left politics in two small countries on the European periphery, which some commentators view as exemplars of a much (needed) wider European change.

The book analyzes the trajectory of the two parties from opposition to governing, focusing on 'how' they came to power and how they behaved while in office. By examining these parties' trajectories, it is possible to put forward larger and more substantive questions that can go beyond their isolated experience in government. That is, questions that are related not

only to the history and current trajectory of the RLP family but also with regard to the path of the European Union (EU) in contemporary times, amid a multifaceted crisis (i.e., economic, trust, legitimacy, etc.).

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Portions of certain chapters draw on ideas originally presented in my articles 'Travelling against the Tide: The Cypriot Communist Left in the Post-1990 Era' and 'Organizational Continuity and Party Strength: The Communist Party of Cyprus' (co-authored with Antonis Ellinas); these were published, respectively, in *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* and *West European Politics*. The book makes use of a significant number

of Greek sources intentionally in order to convey to a wider (English-speaking) audience the many analyses and opinions from within the two countries.

None of this would have been possible without the encouragement and patience of my family, and especially my wife Yiota, who has supported me throughout this endeavor. Still, there is one person who has my eternal gratitude and to whom I will always owe much more than I ever told her while she was alive. This is my late mother, Androula, to whom I dedicate this book.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

17N	17 November (Greek Terrorist Group)
ADISOK	Renewed Democratic Socialist Movement (Cyprus)
AEKA	Renewing Modernizing Movement of the Left
AKEL	Progressive Party of the Working People (Cyprus)
ANEL	Independent Greeks Party
ANTARSYA	Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow (Greece)
ATTAC	Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen's Action
BE	Left Bloc (Portugal)
CPC	Communist Party of Cyprus
CTP	Republican Turkish Party (Cyprus)
Die Linke	The Left (Germany)
DIKO	Democratic Party (Cyprus)
DIMAR	Democratic Left (Greece)
DISY	Democratic Rally (Cyprus)
EAR	Greek Left
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Central Bank
EDA	United Democratic Left (Greece)
EDEK	United Democratic Union of the Centre (Cyprus)
EDH	United Democrats (Cyprus)
EDON	United Democratic Youth Organization (Cyprus)
EEC	European Economic Community
EKA	Union of Cypriot Farmers
EL	Party of the European Left
EL	Red-Green Alliance (Denmark)
EOKA	National Organization of Cypriot Fighters

EP	European Parliament
EPALXI	Front for the Restoration of the Center
EU	European Union
EEC	European Economic Community
FG	Left Front (France)
GAL	Green-Alternative-Libertarian
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KKE	Communist Party of Greece
KKE- <i>Es</i>	Communist Party of Greece (Interior)
KOE	(Maoist) Communist Organization of Greece
META	Militant Workers/Employees Class Overturning
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ND	New Democracy (Greece)
NLL	Non Leftist Left
LAE	Popular Unity (Greece)
PASOK	Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Greece)
PCE	Communist Party of Spain
PCF	Communist Party of France
PCI	Communist Party of Italy
PCP	Communist Party of Portugal
PEO	Pancyprian Federation of Labour
POGO	Pancyprian Federation of Women's Organization (Cyprus)
PSF	French Socialist Party
PSOE	Spanish Socialist Workers Party
RLPs	Radical Left parties
SP	Socialist Party (the Netherlands)
SYRIZA	Coalition of the Radical Left (Greece)
Synaspismos	Coalition of Left and Progress
TAN	Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist
TINA	There Is No Alternative
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	World War II

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Introduction

Abstract This book focuses on radical Left parties in government and the impact of governing on their radical character. The introductory section considers, first, issues related to the conceptualization and definition of radical Left parties, one of the most important being the European integration project. Second, this chapter examines the contemporary social, economic, and political conditions that have led to the most recent Left governance in some countries. Two issues are highlighted: coercive Europeanization and austeritarianism. The third section presents this book's frame of analysis, which revolves around the vote-office-policy trichotomy of party goals. The final section explains the selection of case studies and the book's methodology.

Keywords Radical Left parties • European Union (EU) • Europeanization • Economic crisis • Austerity • Vote-office-policy • AKEL • SYRIZA • Greece • Cyprus

Substantial research on the status of the radical and communist Left parties was undertaken during the first years after the collapse of the Soviet bloc; however, interest in these parties soon faded, likely because of their minimal impact on national political systems. This earlier research—as well as even quite recent research—tended to focus on the Left's issues such as ideological identity, forms of organization, relationship to their past, and the organizational and ideological adaptation and/or transformation

required to cope with the new environment, and so on (e.g., see March 2011; March and Mudde 2005; Dunphy 2004; Botella and Ramiro 2003; Bosco 2001; Boggs 1995; Bull and Heywood 1994; Bell 1993). There has been relatively little investigation into Left strategies targeting governance and how these might affect its radical identity (e.g., Dunphy and Bale 2011; Olsen et al. 2010; Dunphy 2007).

There are obvious reasons for the lack of research in this area: the radical/communist Left parties are most often very small and usually relatively insignificant, and most of them are unable, unwilling, or not sought after to form part of governing coalitions. That there is renewed interest, however, is not surprising given that the radical Left is increasingly a stabilized, consolidated, and permanent actor on the European political scene; as such it has become a principal challenger to mainstream social democratic parties (March 2012: 314) that seem to have run out of ideas (Moschonas 2010).

Nevertheless, the attitude of radical Left parties (hereafter RLPs) towards government participation is acknowledged as the biggest change in the radical Left's strategy since the Cold War (March 2008: 13). Between 1947 and 1989, in no country other than Finland, was the Communist party a regular participant in government; since 1989 there have been a number of coalition governments with Left party representation. By mid-2016 most RLPs (although not extreme Left parties) in fact no longer viewed bourgeois parliaments and social democratic parties as designed to deceive the working class. Radical Left parties have increasingly become open to forming coalition governments with social democrats and Greens, or at least willing to offer ad hoc cooperation in parliaments and support for social democrat minority governments (Daiber and Kulke 2010). This signals their transition from outsider to insider parties (Olsen et al. 2010: 2).

The previous debate over whether communist parties should pursue power in the national or the pan-European context is once again resurfacing, especially because of the convergence and interdependence of globalization and Europeanization and, most importantly, the recent economic crisis. Although many RLPs' goal is for government participation on a national level, they do so as part of a European Left strategy that aims for leftist parties to take the reins of their own governments so that they can effect or facilitate changes in the European Union (EU). However, today's radical Left milieu is complex and diverse, thus necessitating a minimum operationalization of this party family.

DEFINING THE RADICAL LEFT

Although the concept of party families has been a useful tool for the comparison and analysis of party systems in European democracies (Mair and Mudde 1998), it is not without problems, especially in the so-called post-ideological era (Elff 2013). This applies to all manner of party families, and the radical Left is no exception.

Historical legacies and diverse ideological outlooks add to the problems and particularly within the Left. In this regard, the Russian Revolution marked not only the longest lasting division among the Left (Gomez et al. 2016: 352) but also within the Communist party family (von Beyme 1985). The communist movement formerly were differentiated as “reformist” and “revolutionary” parties (Eley 2010: 229–318; Foster 1990: 307–576). *Reformism* was seen to be both supportive of liberal democracy and reconciled to the capitalist system, whereas *revolutionary* implied a party committed to the overthrow (possibly violent) of both multiparty democracy and capitalism. Still, Bale and Dunphy (2011) argued that this distinction is less helpful at the present time because most western European RLPs and communist parties are thoroughly committed to liberal democracy, even if they criticize it.

In the post-World War II (WWII) period, New Left and Left Socialist parties were created in the western part of Europe around the revolts during the 1960s. They departed ideologically from the more orthodox versions of both social democrat reformism and communist socialism, proposing an alternative democratic socialism and assuming the “new politics” agenda (Gallagher et al. 1995; Lane and Ersson 1987). Even if they were not the only divisions experienced by the western Left (as the Trotskyite and Maoist ruptures attest), the communist and new Left/Left socialist waves of party formation generated RLPs that have been present in many West Europe polities for a long time.

Moreover, the Eurocommunist strategies proposed during the 1970s by a number of western communist parties also blurred the distinction between socialist and communist families (Bale and Dunphy 2011: 271). The ideological evolution of the communist and radical Left post-communist parties further complicated the boundaries between the old communist and Left socialist families and led to the formation of a new and distinct RLP family (Gomez et al. 2016: 352). Overall, says March (2012: 317), the radical Left now is markedly less ideological and more pragmatic than during the Soviet era. Compared with the international