

Endgame For Syriza? The Unbearable Lightness Of The Greek Left



C.J. Polychroniou

Perhaps those who voted for Kasselakis are unfamiliar with U.S. politics and the true color of the Democratic Party, but it is a vision that undoubtedly sends shivers down the spine of the members of the old guard.

The Third Way is a political term that gained currency in the late 1970s and early 1980s and is associated with the New Labour administration of Tony Blair, who served as UK's prime minister from 1997 to 2007, but also with those of Bill Clinton in the US (1993-2001) and Gerhard Schroder in Germany (1998-2005), respectively. The term itself was developed by British sociologist [Anthony Giddens](#) and denotes a distinct political ideology that argues in favor of so-called "centrist" politics.

Essentially, Third Way proposals seek to reconcile right-wing and left-wing policies. More specifically, the "Third Way" aims to integrate center-right economic policies and center-left social policies. As such, the "Third Way" is really nothing short of a political stratagem whose underlying goal is to maintain the hegemony of capitalism by making the system sensitive to cultural and social sensibilities. Disregarding the left flank, embracing the "catch-all" thesis, and loosening the influence of labor in the economy and society at large while promoting at the same time the politics of multiculturalism define the politics and

strategy of social-democratic parties that became part of the “Third Way” movement.

Indeed, by the late 1990s, virtually all the social-democratic parties in advanced capitalist societies had fallen prey to the fatal attraction of the Third Way mentality while the traditional values and beliefs of the old Left joined the dustbin of history. The only country in the western world with a radical leftwing party that did not fight for power on the ground laid by the Third Way was Greece.

Until very recently, that is.

Part of the explanation for the “delay” of Greek leftwing parties in adopting the approach of the “Third Way” is that social democracy was never established in Greece. Throughout the 20th century, the bulk of the country’s left had aligned with a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, named KKE, but a major split occurred in 1968 following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. A big group broke from the KKE, forming KKE Interior, which eventually came to identify itself with Eurocommunism, a political movement that flourished in the late 1970s in several western European communist parties and sought to introduce socialism beyond the political and ideological orbit of Soviet communism.

The Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) traces its roots to the KKE Interior, although Eurocommunism disappeared as an international current shortly after its birth and, for all practical intents and purposes, the Syriza party that rose to power in Greece in 2015 was a political organization that had no discernible ideological traits whatsoever other than an expressed aversion to the fiscal austerity measures that had been imposed on the country by its international creditors — namely, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund - as a condition to the bailout deals that had been crafted in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

However, while in power, Syriza experienced a huge metamorphosis. The dilemma of choosing between resistance and capitulation was resolved in favor of the latter. Syriza had promised voters it would ditch austerity and in fact rip to pieces the bailout memorandum. In turn, it not only continued to enforce the same austerity program that had been implemented by the previous Greek governments but ended up [signing a third bailout memorandum](#).

Moreover, even before coming to power, Syriza had initiated a series of moves

that aimed to reshape the party's political profile in congruence with the trends observed in those western social democratic parties that had adopted the "Third Way" proposals. The process of Syriza's transformation into a mainstream party continued unabated both when the "left" was in power (from 2015-2019) and back in opposition (2019-2023). Yet, while it was abundantly clear that the party, under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras and his inner team, was bent on abandoning its tradition of radical politics and that a prominent left faction inside Syriza was too weak to halt that process, it wasn't at all clear where the party's base stood.

The answer to that mystery was revealed during the leadership election that was held just this past Sunday when party members elected a gay, liberal, former [Goldman Sachs](#) trader, shipping investor, and political neophyte Stefanos Kasselakis to head the once radical left-wing Syriza party.

Tsipras had stepped down as Syriza chief following his party's humiliating defeat in the June 2023 general elections. Given the party's dwindling public support, Tsipras' resignation was inevitable, but the question why Syriza members (though it should be said that some 40,000 were registered as members on the spot) decided to place the future of the party into the hands of someone who was light on policy and heavy on social media marketing during his campaign speaks volumes about the political processes that had been unleashed by Tsipras and his inner circle over the past 9 years or so.

Kasselakis, with no experience in politics and no leftist credentials, but with the blessing of Tsipras himself and his closest associates, beat former Minister of Labor Effi Achtsioglou in a runoff election, sending shockwaves throughout the Greek left.

The ideal scenario for Syriza's future that its new leader has envisioned is that it becomes the mirror image of the Democratic Party in the United States. Perhaps those who voted for Kasselakis are unfamiliar with U.S. politics and the true color of the Democratic Party, but it is a vision that undoubtedly sends shivers down the spine of the members of the old guard inside Syriza for they surely know that this is a recipe for the complete disappearance of the Left from the Greek political scene.

Most likely, then, what lies ahead for the party are divisions and conflict, rather than unity and peace. Eventually, an actual, formal split of the Syriza party also cannot be ruled out. Indeed, senior Syriza cadre and former education minister

Nikos Filis said in a TV interview the other day that Kasselakis is “a cross between Beppe Grillo [an Italian comedian and co-founder of Italy’s Five Star Movement political party] and Trump.” In the same interview, Filis also blamed Tsipras for Syriza’s demise. And Effie Achtsioglou has already turned down every party post offered to her by Syriza’s new leader.

Make no mistake, Syriza is entering a new era with Kasselakis in charge of the party. Under Tsipras, Syriza abandoned any pretext of being a radical leftwing party. Under Kasselakis, Syriza will cease having affinity to leftist politics in any form or shape, which means that Greece will now be left with a Leninist-Stalinist Communist Party as the only large-scale organized political force fighting for the interest of the working class.

Oh, the unbearable lightness of the Greek left.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/stefanos-kasselakis-syriza>

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (A collection of interviews with Noam Chomsky; Haymarket Books, 2021), and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (Verso, 2021).