# NOT FOR PUBLICATION.

# REFLECTIONS ON “THE CRISIS” IN GREECE.

# Mike Miller. 10/14/17.

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# Preface

# In late September and early October I visited Greece with my partner Kathy Lipscomb, mostly on a vacation, but also to inquire into the impact on the Greek people of “The Crisis,” as the economic austerity is commonly described there, and to further learn about what was happening to the Syriza government.

# Two years earlier, based on intense but brief attention to Syriza’s dealings with “The Troika” (International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank), I wrote “Syriza Prompted Musings,” which—in a slightly different version from what’s below—was published by *The Stansbury Forum* on August 30, 2015.

# Printed here are my additional thoughts and reflections based on this recent trip, readings associated with it, and notes from meetings with people who are introduced below. For background and further discussion, the reader will also find articles and speeches by intellectuals, politicians and journalists who know far more about Greece than I, or from friends who raise questions from a perspective different from mine.

# This is primarily a document for, first, my own thinking, and, second, friends who might be interested in Greek politics and society, and the broader issues raised by The Crisis there. In the starkness of its poverty and powerlessness, Greece makes clear just how far the nominal democracies of the western world are now really governed by corporate and financial institutions that are unaccountable to the popular will. As will become clear to those reading this who don’t know me, I consider myself a small “d” democrat. I have a blurred vision of what a better society might look like. But the focus of my energy has been on creating the “partisan-nonpartisan” (I explain this term below) people power organizations whose success and power are, in my judgment, preconditions to getting the world out of the mess it now is in.

# You might conclude after reading this that I’ve fallen in love with the country. You would be right. It is physically beautiful, with a great deal of variety squeezed into a little space; culturally as rich as anyplace I’ve ever been; I love Greek music and dancing; the place is manageable in size so you can see a lot of it in a relatively short period of time. And its people are extraordinarily hospitable. At 9:50 p.m. one night Kathy and I were looking for a newspaper office on a small street in Athens, so small that my aging eyes couldn’t find the street on our hotel give-away map. And we were getting desperate because we had a 10:00 p.m. appointment. As I struggled looking at the fine print, a woman stopped and asked if she could help. We told her what we were looking for; she didn’t know where it was either. She asked, got directions, and proceeded to take 10 minutes of her time to walk us there. We had numerous experiences like that.

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**1. “Syriza Prompted Musings”. Excerpts with minor revisions from a piece I wrote in August, 2015 that was published in *Stansbury Forum.***

**Preface**

[Syriza](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/07/what-syriza-answers-more-complicated-you-think)’s defeat in its recent non-negotiations with the [Troika](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31098367) was disturbing, though not unexpected. From day one, I was the “pessimist”, according to my friends, arguing that major concessions would strengthen other left formations like [Podemos](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/06/spain-politicians-euro-crisis-greece-podemos) and encourage new ones, and for that reason would not be forthcoming from The Troika. My heart was hoping to be proved wrong; my head told me not to get my hopes up.

Nevertheless, this experience is an opportunity to raise some fundamental questions about the nature of the world in which we live and the people power that will be necessary to change it. Specifically, a democratically elected government with a firm mandate from its electorate to reject austerity was essentially ignored. Those who represent financial power, and/or are ideologically committed to austerity and “neoliberalism” imposed their will upon Greece.

**Questions**

**Question #1:** Was a “[Grexit](http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=Grexit)” possible? While several writers on the left argued that it was, I initially saw nothing that convinced me that Greece could go it alone. While I hoped someone would draw a persuasive parallel to what Iceland and Argentina had done, with a handful of suggestive exceptions I did not find it in my searches of the abundant Internet discussions on the subject. The Syriza parliamentarians who voted against [Tsipris](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33243579) didn’t seem to have a case, other than righteous anger, either.

**Question #2:** I initially asked, “Why didn’t Syriza have a contingency plan?” If public statements more-or-less reflected private thinking, there was no Syriza anticipation that there wouldn’t be a deal. In an early statement, [Yanis Varoufakis](http://www.theguardian.com/world/yanis-varoufakis) suggested that the negotiators were reasonable people, equally committed to a fair Europe, and that serious Keynesian proposals accompanied by necessary domestic reforms (tax collection, retirement and others) that wouldn’t further punish the poor and working class would provide the basis for an agreement.

(It now appears there was a “Plan B,” that never got further than a five-page memorandum from Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipris. Varoufakis now says that he was not “authorized” to take steps to implement the plan. (More on this below.) At the same time, he and others indicate that in order to implement Plan B secrecy would have been required in order to prevent intervention by the Troika.)

**Question #3:** Why didn’t Syriza use the little leverage available to it in the EU when there was a vote to continue economic sanctions against Russia? As I understand it, such a vote has to be unanimous. Since it passed, I assume Greece’s representative voted for it, giving up the leverage his vote might have offered the Syriza negotiators. And wasn’t there an opportunity to float a new possibility: Greece joining with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries giving them a presence in Europe?

**Question #4:** How could a Plan B be given legs without secrecy? In the subsequent Internet buzz around Plan B, critics say that Syriza/Varoufakis should not keep secrets from the Greek people. That’s more easily said than done. Let me tell a story from a different time and place to illustrate the problem.

In a major 1930s strike at a General Motors Fisher Body plant in Michigan, union leaders told their members a lie about where the sit-down (occupation of the plant) was going to take place. They knew company agents had infiltrated the union. The strike organizer used the infiltrators to send the company’s security guards and police to the wrong place so that the planned occupation could take place unimpeded. Should the organizer have told the members the truth, thus alerting General Motors to the tactic? I think not. But it is a difficult question: under what circumstances should a democratically elected leadership (or an organizer) lie to its people? And if there is a very good reason for secrecy, for how long can declining to tell the truth be justified? (Obviously in the auto plant case it was for a very short time.)

**Question #5:** Were Syriza negotiators’ hands tied by the contradictory [Greek polling results](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/jul/05/greek-referendum-no-vote-signals-huge-challenge-to-eurozone-leaders) that showed strong majorities for an end to austerity, and similarly strong majorities for not leaving the Euro? And, if so, why wasn’t there any campaign to diminish the latter in order to strengthen the negotiators’ position? Only at the last was there a referendum that clearly represented rejection of austerity—but it didn’t cross the bridge of abandoning the Euro.

**Here are the referendum results.** Voters were asked: 'whether to accept the outline of the agreement submitted by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund at the Eurogroup of 25/06/15’ – i.e. the demands of Greece’s creditors which the government campaigned against.

National results, with 100% of the 3,558,450 (62.5%) votes counted: Yes: 38.69%; No: 61.31%. It looked like a mandate!

**Question #6:** Why wasn’t there much, if any, international solidarity action? Why, for example, weren’t international longshore unions, which have a strong tradition of acting in solidarity with struggles that have no relationship to their “bread and butter” issues, asked to call a one-day refusal to unload German goods in the ports of the world? Within Germany, why wasn’t there a strong demonstration of support for the Greeks? (In fact, it appears quite the opposite was the case: polls suggest that a large majority of the German people supported [Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/germanys-finance-minister-believes-in-united-europe/article25570879/) — shades of the disintegration of international solidarity at the commencement of World War I.)

**Question #7:** Why wasn’t there massive non-violent disruptive direct action by the social movements within Greece that would both have strengthened the negotiators’ hands and precipitated similar action in other European, if not further, countries? Here let me quote at some length from [Leo Panitch](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/leo-panitch) who penned these words from Athens for the July 15, 2015 issue of *The Bullet.* (Panitch is no crazy sectarian—he is editor of the [Socialist Register](http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/index#.VeNp6c6cxvU), a research professor at York University, Canada, and a long-time commentator on Canadian Broadcast Corporation radio and TV.)

***Not only the party but also the social movements were in a state of suspended animation from February to June as everyone waited for the outcome of the negotiations. This was not something engineered from the top. One very senior minister privately expressed to me his disappointment that the social movements he had expected to light a fire behind him had become largely immobilized. Indeed, the 20 page political resolution passed at Syriza’s refounding conference in the summer 2013 had concluded by saying that the party was not a slingshot that would impel its leaders into the state and leave them there but rather the enabler of a “diverse, multidimensional movement of subversion” without which those in the state would not be able to accomplish much by way of political, economic and social transformation. That there was little spontaneous evidence of this was no doubt a relief to some in the government; but to others it was troubling. There were especially some highly capable Syriza leaders who deliberately remained in the party apparatus in order to facilitate this. But the difficulty of doing this was not just a matter of the rest of the leadership’s preoccupation with the negotiations but also the lack of capacity among Syriza activists for animating the creative plans from below to which the state would need to respond.***

**Question #8:** Panitch says, “…some highly capable Syriza leaders [deliberately remained] in the party apparatus to facilitate” independent mass action. Why didn’t that action take place? The Devil is in the details: these leaders should have been outside the party apparatus, in leading positions in mass organizations funded by their members and the Greek people, accountable to these movements. When John L. Lewis, leader of the 1930s emerging industrial union movement, confronted General Motors, Lewis-ally Frank Murphy, then governor of Michigan, told Lewis he would have to use the National Guard to remove the workers from their sit-down strike. Lewis responded that the sit-down would continue, and that he, Lewis, would stand in the GM plant window so that his body would be among the first to fall from bullets aimed at the strikers. Murphy backed off; the strike was won. Who was there to hold Tsipris and Syriza’s feet to the fire? (By the way, I’m well aware of Lewis’ undemocratic practices in his own union.)

**Question #9:** Is neoliberalism so dominant internationally that even Keynesianism is fringe radicalism? To read the press in the United States, with the exception of Paul Krugman’s regular op-ed column in the *New York Times* and a few others, one would think so. It did not matter that Syriza was not proposing a “socialist” solution. They were “radical”, “immature”, and “unreasonable” anyway. Ironically, Germany has abundant government interventions in its domestic “free market”; evidently the Greeks don’t deserve the same. Are we in a truly hegemonic world context totally controlled in the essentials by multi-national financial and corporate institutions rather than the tenuous, and in flux, world suggested by [Immanuel Wallerstein](http://iwallerstein.com/), a highly regarded scholar?

**Question #10:** This one is of a different nature, and has to do with Greece’s complicity in its mess. Who is responsible for the failure to collect taxes, especially the taxes on the wealthy? Are there pension abuses that are indefensible? The question of complicity is the one usually raised by conservatives and thus, and also usually, dismissed by liberals and radicals. But that’s not good enough. This is a much broader question, and applies in depth, for example, to the question of corruption in Africa, Mexico and other emerging nations around the globe.

**A Note on Electoral, Legislative and Regulatory Agency Politics**

The role of electoral politics, in particular, in building mass organization and movement raises thorny and unresolved questions. I’ve been around long enough to remember being told that the Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, Jesse Jackson and other Democratic Party campaigns, as well as third party efforts like those of California’s Peace and Freedom Party and the Green Party would help “build a movement”. To the best of my knowledge, none of them did, for two reasons. First the logic of running major electoral efforts is one of “mobilization”, not “organization”. Second, in every case of which I’m familiar, the candidate has called the shots in how the campaign should be run, not those who think they can build a movement out of it.

In the case of Syriza, Varoufakis says he presented a five-page contingency plan to Tsipris and failed to get his authorization to put legs on what was at that point simply a memorandum. So I don’t think any of us is in a position to know whether the Greek economy could have survived the process of dropping out of the Euro and returning to the Drachma. Everything now written on that question is mere speculation reflecting the initial bias of its author.

But we can know something about the politics of the conflict between Syriza and a majority of the Greek people, and The Troika. Everything was controlled by the “parliamentary party”, rather than in partnership with the independent mass-organizations/mass movement. The leadership of the outside forces evidently completely deferred to Tsipris and the parliamentary leadership on the question of organizing mass domestic and international support for debt relief that coordinated with what was going on at the negotiating table, but was separate and independent of it (what I call an “outside/inside strategy”).

Syriza claimed that it understood the necessity of the mass movements remaining autonomous; there seems to be no evidence of that. In the absence of a mass non-violent disruptive direct action campaign aimed at German banks and other appropriate targets, with the addition of support from longshore unions that might have refused to unload German products, with the addition of some kind of international boycott aimed at carefully targeted products, we have no way of knowing what might have been won at the negotiating table. Further, the contradictory ideas of getting substantial relief and remaining in the Euro community might have been reconciled in the course of such a campaign. Campaigns move people; polls are only static pictures of where they are at a specific moment in time. A campaign might have changed the Greek people’s collective mind about remaining in the euro.

It appears that Syriza thought “reason” was going to prevail–the occupational hazard of having academics and intellectuals at the center of your policy-making who are accountable only to themselves. (As earlier noted, I told friends from day one that the Troika was not going to budge because if it did it would strengthen Podemos and all the other left forces now emerging in Europe.)

All we got was an ad hoc mobilization called at relatively the last minute by Tsipris and the Syriza central committee, as distinct from a mobilization by the mass organizations that was part of a six month campaign to defeat neoliberalism. When leadership is centered in the parliamentary party rather than parallel and with the mass organizations, that’s the result you get. (In California a number of years ago, in the Electricity & Gas for People Campaign, all our Sacramento [the state capitol] allies–both legislators and public interest advocates–told us not to have a mass action to support lifeline legislation. We did it anyway. Afterward the very same allies told us the action dislodged the bill from being stuck in committee, and moved it forward. It’s not international, but it’s a parallel experience.)

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*A group of former UC Berkeley student movement friends of mine read this article by former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, and had a discussion of it in our monthly SLATE (the name of our campus organization) meeting; we’ve known each other since the late 1950s!), and have been meeting monthly for more than 10 years.*

**2. “How I became an erratic Marxist.” Yanis Varoufakis. *The guardian.* 2/15.**

*Before he entered politics, Yanis Varoufakis, the iconoclastic Greek finance minister at the centre of the latest eurozone standoff, wrote this searing account of European capitalism and how the left can learn from Marx’s mistakes.*

In 2008, capitalism had its second global spasm. The financial crisis set off a chain reaction that pushed [Europe](http://www.theguardian.com/world/europe-news) into a downward spiral that continues to this day. Europe’s present situation is not merely a threat for workers, for the dispossessed, for the bankers, for social classes or, indeed, nations. No, Europe’s current posture poses a threat to civilisation as we know it.

If my prognosis is correct, and we are not facing just another cyclical slump soon to be overcome, the question that arises for radicals is this: should we welcome this crisis of European capitalism as an opportunity to replace it with a better system? Or should we be so worried about it as to embark upon a campaign for stabilising European capitalism?

To me, the answer is clear. Europe’s crisis is far less likely to give birth to a better alternative to capitalism than it is to unleash dangerously regressive forces that have the capacity to cause a humanitarian bloodbath, while extinguishing the hope for any progressive moves for generations to come.

For this view I have been accused, by well-meaning radical voices, of being “defeatist” and of trying to save an indefensible European socioeconomic system. This criticism, I confess, hurts. And it hurts because it contains more than a kernel of truth.

I share the view that this European Union is typified by a large democratic deficit that, in combination with the denial of the faulty architecture of its monetary union, has put Europe’s peoples on a path to permanent recession. And I also bow to the criticism that I have campaigned on an agenda founded on the assumption that the left was, and remains, squarely defeated. I confess I would much rather be promoting a radical agenda, the raison d’être of which is to replace European capitalism with a different system.

Yet my aim here is to offer a window into my view of a repugnant European capitalism whose implosion, despite its many ills, should be avoided at all costs. It is a confession intended to convince radicals that we have a contradictory mission: to arrest the freefall of European capitalism in order to buy the time we need to formulate its alternative.

## ****Why a Marxist?****

When I chose the subject of my doctoral thesis, back in 1982, I deliberately focused on a highly mathematical topic within which Marx’s thought was irrelevant. When, later on, I embarked on an academic career, as a lecturer in mainstream economics departments, the implicit contract between myself and the departments that offered me lectureships was that I would be teaching the type of economic theory that left no room for Marx. In the late 1980s, I was hired by the University of Sydney’s school of economics in order to keep out a leftwing candidate (although I did not know this at the time).

After I returned to Greece in 2000, I threw my lot in with the future prime minister George Papandreou, hoping to help stem the return to power of a resurgent right wing that wanted to push Greece towards xenophobia both domestically and in its foreign policy. As the whole world now knows, Papandreou’s party not only failed to stem xenophobia but, in the end, presided over the most virulent neoliberal macroeconomic policies that spearheaded the eurozone’s so-called bailouts thus, unwittingly, causing the return of Nazis to the streets of Athens. Even though I resigned as Papandreou’s adviser early in 2006, and turned into his government’s staunchest critic during his mishandling of the post-2009 Greek implosion, my public interventions in the debate on [Greece](http://www.theguardian.com/world/greece) and Europe have carried no whiff of Marxism.

Given all this, you may be puzzled to hear me call myself a Marxist. But, in truth, Karl Marx was responsible for framing my perspective of the world we live in, from my childhood to this day. This is not something that I often volunteer to talk about in “polite society” because the very mention of the M-word switches audiences off. But I never deny it either. After a few years of addressing audiences with whom I do not share an ideology, a need has crept up on me to talk about Marx’s imprint on my thinking. To explain why, while an unapologetic Marxist, I think it is important to resist him passionately in a variety of ways. To be, in other words, erratic in one’s Marxism.

If my whole academic career largely ignored Marx, and my current policy recommendations are impossible to describe as Marxist, why bring up my Marxism now? The answer is simple: Even my non-Marxist economics was guided by a mindset influenced by Marx.

A radical social theorist can challenge the economic mainstream in two different ways, I always thought. One way is by means of immanent criticism. To accept the mainstream’s axioms and then expose its internal contradictions. To say: “I shall not contest your assumptions but here is why your own conclusions do not logically flow on from them.” This was, indeed, Marx’s method of undermining British political economics. He accepted every axiom by Adam Smith and David Ricardo in order to demonstrate that, in the context of their assumptions, capitalism was a contradictory system. The second avenue that a radical theorist can pursue is, of course, the construction of alternative theories to those of the establishment, hoping that they will be taken seriously.

My view on this dilemma has always been that the powers that be are never perturbed by theories that embark from assumptions different to their own. The only thing that can destabilise and genuinely challenge mainstream, neoclassical economists is the demonstration of the internal inconsistency of their own models. It was for this reason that, from the very beginning, I chose to delve into the guts of neoclassical theory and to spend next to no energy trying to develop alternative, Marxist models of capitalism. My reasons, I submit, were quite Marxist.

When called upon to comment on the world we live in, I had no alternative but to fall back on the Marxist tradition which had shaped my thinking ever since my metallurgist father impressed upon me, when I was still a child, the effect of technological innovation on the historical process. How, for instance, the passage from the bronze age to the iron age sped up history; how the discovery of steel greatly accelerated historical time; and how silicon-based IT technologies are fast-tracking socioeconomic and historical discontinuities.

My first encounter with Marx’s writings came very early in life, as a result of the strange times I grew up in, with Greece exiting the nightmare of the neofascist dictatorship of 1967-74. What caught my eye was Marx’s mesmerising gift for writing a dramatic script for human history, indeed for human damnation, that was also laced with the possibility of salvation and authentic spirituality.

Marx created a narrative populated by workers, capitalists, officials and scientists who were history’s dramatis personae. They struggled to harness reason and science in the context of empowering humanity while, contrary to their intentions, unleashing demonic forces that usurped and subverted their own freedom and humanity.

This dialectical perspective, where everything is pregnant with its opposite, and the eager eye with which Marx discerned the potential for change in what seemed to be the most unchanging of social structures, helped me to grasp the great contradictions of the capitalist era. It dissolved the paradox of an age that generated the most remarkable wealth and, in the same breath, the most conspicuous poverty. Today, turning to the [European crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2015/feb/17/greece-bailout-talks-europe-deal-live-updates), the crisis in the United States and the long-term stagnation of Japanese capitalism, most commentators fail to appreciate the dialectical process under their nose. They recognise the mountain of debts and banking losses but neglect the opposite side of the same coin: the mountain of idle savings that are “frozen” by fear and thus fail to convert into productive investments. A Marxist alertness to binary oppositions might have opened their eyes.

A major reason why established opinion fails to come to terms with contemporary reality is that it never understood the dialectically tense “joint production” of debts and surpluses, of growth and unemployment, of wealth and poverty, indeed of good and evil. Marx’s script alerted us these binary oppositions as the sources of history’s cunning.

From my first steps of thinking like an economist, to this very day, it occurred to me that Marx had made a discovery that must remain at the heart of any useful analysis of capitalism. It was the discovery of another binary opposition deep within human labour. Between labour’s two quite different natures: i) labour as a value-creating activity that can never be quantified in advance (and is therefore impossible to commodify), and ii) labour as a quantity (eg, numbers of hours worked) that is for sale and comes at a price. That is what distinguishes labour from other productive inputs such as electricity: its twin, contradictory, nature. A differentiation-cum-contradiction that political economics neglected to make before Marx came along and that mainstream economics is steadfastly refusing to acknowledge today.

Both electricity and labour can be thought of as commodities. Indeed, both employers and workers struggle to commodify labour. Employers use all their ingenuity, and that of their HR management minions, to quantify, measure and homogenise labour. Meanwhile, prospective employees go through the wringer in an anxious attempt to commodify their labour power, to write and rewrite their CVs in order to portray themselves as purveyors of quantifiable labour units. And there’s the rub. If workers and employers ever succeed in commodifying labour fully, capitalism will perish. This is an insight without which capitalism’s tendency to generate crises can never be fully grasped and, also, an insight that no one has access to without some exposure to Marx’s thought.

## ****Science fiction becomes documentary****

In the classic 1953 film [Invasion of the Body Snatchers](http://www.theguardian.com/film/video/2014/oct/30/why-invasion-of-the-bodysnatchers-is-the-film-to-watch-this-week-video-review), the alien force does not attack us head on, unlike in, say, HG Wells’s [The War of the Worlds](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/19/war-worlds-hg-wells-review). Instead, people are taken over from within, until nothing is left of their human spirit and emotions. Their bodies are shells that used to contain a free will and which now labour, go through the motions of everyday “life”, and function as human simulacra “liberated” from the unquantifiable essence of human nature. This is something like what would have transpired if human labour had become perfectly reducible to human capital and thus fit for insertion into the vulgar economists’ models.

Every non-Marxist economic theory that treats human and non-human productive inputs as interchangeable assumes that the dehumanisation of human labour is complete. But if it could ever be completed, the result would be the end of capitalism as a system capable of creating and distributing value. For a start, a society of dehumanised automata would resemble a mechanical watch full of cogs and springs, each with its own unique function, together producing a “good”: timekeeping. Yet if that society contained nothing but other automata, timekeeping would not be a “good”. It would certainly be an “output” but why a “good”? Without real humans to experience the clock’s function, there can be no such thing as “good” or “bad”.

If capital ever succeeds in quantifying, and subsequently fully commodifying, labour, as it is constantly trying to, it will also squeeze that indeterminate, recalcitrant human freedom from within labour that allows for the generation of value. Marx’s brilliant insight into the essence of capitalist crises was precisely this: the greater capitalism’s success in turning labour into a commodity the less the value of each unit of output it generates, the lower the profit rate and, ultimately, the nearer the next recession of the economy as a system. The portrayal of human freedom as an economic category is unique in Marx, making possible a distinctively dramatic and analytically astute interpretation of capitalism’s propensity to snatch recession, even depression, from the jaws of growth.

When Marx was writing that labour is the living, form-giving fire; the transitoriness of things; their temporality; he was making the greatest contribution any economist has ever made to our understanding of the acute contradiction buried inside capitalism’s DNA. When he portrayed capital as a “… force we must submit to … it develops a cosmopolitan, universal energy which breaks through every limit and every bond and posts itself as the only policy, the only universality the only limit and the only bond”, he was highlighting the reality that labour can be purchased by liquid capital (ie money), in its commodity form, but that it will always carry with it a will hostile to the capitalist buyer. But Marx was not just making a psychological, philosophical or political statement. He was, rather, supplying a remarkable analysis of why the moment that labour (as an unquantifiable activity) sheds this hostility, it becomes sterile, incapable of producing value.

At a time when neoliberals have ensnared the majority in their theoretical tentacles, incessantly regurgitating the ideology of enhancing labour productivity in an effort to enhance competitiveness with a view to creating growth etc, Marx’s analysis offers a powerful antidote. Capital can never win in its struggle to turn labour into an infinitely elastic, mechanised input, without destroying itself. That is what neither the neoliberals nor the Keynesians will ever grasp. “If the whole class of the wage-labourer were to be annihilated by machinery”, wrote Marx “how terrible that would be for capital, which, without wage-labour, ceases to be capital!”

## ****What has Marx done for us?****

Almost all schools of thought, including those of some progressive economists, like to pretend that, though Marx was a powerful figure, very little of his contribution remains relevant today. I beg to differ. Besides having captured the basic drama of capitalist dynamics, Marx has given me the tools with which to become immune to the toxic propaganda of neoliberalism. For example, the idea that wealth is privately produced and then appropriated by a quasi-illegitimate state, through taxation, is easy to succumb to if one has not been exposed first to Marx’s poignant argument that precisely the opposite applies: wealth is collectively produced and then privately appropriated through social relations of production and property rights that rely, for their reproduction, almost exclusively on false consciousness.

In his recent book [Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste](http://bookshop.theguardian.com/never-let-a-serious-crisis-go-to-waste.html), the historian of economic thought, Philip Mirowski, has highlighted the neoliberals’ success in convincing a large array of people that markets are not just a useful means to an end but also an end in themselves. According to this view, while collective action and public institutions are never able to “get it right”, the unfettered operations of decentralised private interest are guaranteed to produce not only the right outcomes but also the right desires, character, ethos even. The best example of this form of neoliberal crassness is, of course, the debate on how to deal with climate change. Neoliberals have rushed in to argue that, if anything is to be done, it must take the form of creating a quasi-market for “bads” (eg an emissions trading scheme), since only markets “know” how to price goods and bads appropriately. To understand why such a quasi-market solution is bound to fail and, more importantly, where the motivation comes from for such “solutions”, one can do much worse than to become acquainted with the logic of capital accumulation that Marx outlined and the [Polish economist Michal Kalecki](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/14/deepening-mess-words-polish-economist)adapted to a world ruled by networked oligopolies.

In the 20th century, the two political movements that sought their roots in Marx’s thought were the communist and social democratic parties. Both of them, in addition to their other errors (and, indeed, crimes) failed, to their detriment, to follow Marx’s lead in a crucial regard: instead of embracing liberty and rationality as their rallying cries and organising concepts, they opted for equality and justice, bequeathing the concept of freedom to the neoliberals. Marx was adamant: The problem with capitalism is not that it is unfair but that it is irrational, as it habitually condemns whole generations to deprivation and unemployment and even turns capitalists into angst-ridden automata, living in permanent fear that unless they commodify their fellow humans fully so as to serve capital accumulation more efficiently, they will cease to be capitalists. So, if capitalism appears unjust this is because it enslaves everyone; it wastes human and natural resources; the same production line that pumps out remarkable gizmos and untold wealth, also produces deep unhappiness and crises.

Having failed to couch a critique of capitalism in terms of freedom and rationality, as Marx thought essential, social democracy and the left in general allowed the neoliberals to usurp the mantle of freedom and to win a spectacular triumph in the contest of ideologies.

Perhaps the most significant dimension of the neoliberal triumph is what has come to be known as the “democratic deficit”. Rivers of crocodile tears have flowed over the decline of our great democracies during the past three decades of financialisation and globalisation. Marx would have laughed long and hard at those who seem surprised, or upset, by the “democratic deficit”. What was the great objective behind 19th-century liberalism? It was, as Marx never tired of pointing out, to separate the economic sphere from the political sphere and to confine politics to the latter while leaving the economic sphere to capital. It is liberalism’s splendid success in achieving this long-held goal that we are now observing. Take a look at South Africa today, more than two decades after Nelson Mandela was freed and the political sphere, at long last, embraced the whole population. The ANC’s predicament was that, in order to be allowed to dominate the political sphere, it had to give up power over the economic one. And if you think otherwise, I suggest that you talk to the dozens of miners gunned down by armed guards paid by their employers after they dared demand a wage rise.

## ****Why erratic?****

Having explained why I owe whatever understanding of our social world I may possess largely to Karl Marx, I now want to explain why I remain terribly angry with him. In other words, I shall outline why I am by choice an erratic, inconsistent Marxist. Marx committed two spectacular mistakes, one of them an error of omission, the other one of commission. Even today, these mistakes still hamper the left’s effectiveness, especially in Europe.

Marx’s first error – the error of omission was that he failed to give sufficient thought to the impact of his own theorising on the world that he was theorising about. His theory is discursively exceptionally powerful, and Marx had a sense of its power. So how come he showed no concern that his disciples, people with a better grasp of these powerful ideas than the average worker, might use the power bestowed upon them, via Marx’s own ideas, in order to abuse other comrades, to build their own power base, to gain positions of influence?

Marx’s second error, the one I ascribe to commission, was worse. It was his assumption that truth about capitalism could be discovered in the mathematics of his models. This was the worst disservice he could have delivered to his own theoretical system. The man who equipped us with human freedom as a first-order economic concept; the scholar who elevated radical indeterminacy to its rightful place within political economics; he was the same person who ended up toying around with simplistic algebraic models, in which labour units were, naturally, fully quantified, hoping against hope to evince from these equations some additional insights about capitalism. After his death, Marxist economists wasted long careers indulging a similar type of scholastic mechanism. Fully immersed in irrelevant debates on “the transformation problem” and what to do about it, they eventually became an almost extinct species, as the neoliberal juggernaut crushed all dissent in its path.

How could Marx be so deluded? Why did he not recognise that no truth about capitalism can ever spring out of any mathematical model, however brilliant the modeller may be? Did he not have the intellectual tools to realise that capitalist dynamics spring from the unquantifiable part of human labour; ie from a variable that can never be well-defined mathematically? Of course he did, since he forged these tools! No, the reason for his error is a little more sinister: just like the vulgar economists that he so brilliantly admonished (and who continue to dominate the departments of economics today), he coveted the power that mathematical “proof” afforded him.

If I am right, Marx knew what he was doing. He understood, or had the capacity to know, that a comprehensive theory of value cannot be accommodated within a mathematical model of a dynamic capitalist economy. He was, I have no doubt, aware that a proper economic theory must respect the idea that the rules of the undetermined are themselves undetermined. In economic terms this meant a recognition that the market power, and thus the profitability, of capitalists was not necessarily reducible to their capacity to extract labour from employees; that some capitalists can extract more from a given pool of labour or from a given community of consumers for reasons that are external to Marx’s own theory.

Alas, that recognition would be tantamount to accepting that his “laws” were not immutable. He would have to concede to competing voices in the trades union movement that his theory was indeterminate and, therefore, that his pronouncements could not be uniquely and unambiguously correct. That they were permanently provisional. This determination to have the complete, closed story, or model, the final word, is something I cannot forgive Marx for. It proved, after all, responsible for a great deal of error and, more significantly, authoritarianism. Errors and authoritarianism that are largely responsible for the left’s current impotence as a force of good and as a check on the abuses of reason and liberty that the neoliberal crew are overseeing today.

## ****Mrs Thatcher’s lesson****

I moved to England to attend university in September 1978, six months or so before Margaret Thatcher’s victory changed Britain forever. Watching the Labour government disintegrate, under the weight of its degenerate social democratic programme, led me to a serious error: to the thought that Thatcher’s victory could be a good thing, delivering to Britain’s working and middle classes the short, sharp shock necessary to reinvigorate progressive politics; to give the left a chance to create a fresh, radical agenda for a new type of effective, progressive politics.

Even as unemployment doubled and then trebled, under Thatcher’s radical neoliberal interventions, I continued to harbour hope that Lenin was right: “Things have to get worse before they get better.” As life became nastier, more brutish and, for many, shorter, it occurred to me that I was tragically in error: things could get worse in perpetuity, without ever getting better. The hope that the deterioration of public goods, the diminution of the lives of the majority, the spread of deprivation to every corner of the land would, automatically, lead to a renaissance of the left was just that: hope.

The reality was, however, painfully different. With every turn of the recession’s screw, the left became more introverted, less capable of producing a convincing progressive agenda and, meanwhile, the working class was being divided between those who dropped out of society and those co-opted into the neoliberal mindset. My hope that Thatcher would inadvertently bring about a new political revolution was well and truly bogus. All that sprang out of Thatcherism were extreme financialisation, the triumph of the shopping mall over the corner store, the fetishisation of housing and Tony Blair.

Instead of radicalising British society, the recession that Thatcher’s government so carefully engineered, as part of its class war against organised labour and against the public institutions of social security and redistribution that had been established after the war, permanently destroyed the very possibility of radical, progressive politics in Britain. Indeed, it rendered impossible the very notion of values that transcended what the market determined as the “right” price.

The lesson Thatcher taught me about the capacity of a long‑lasting recession to undermine progressive politics, is one that I carry with me into today’s European crisis. It is, indeed, the most important determinant of my stance in relation to the crisis. It is the reason I am happy to confess to the sin I am accused of by some of my critics on the left: the sin of choosing not to propose radical political programs that seek to exploit the crisis as an opportunity to overthrow European capitalism, to dismantle the awful eurozone, and to undermine the European Union of the cartels and the bankrupt bankers.

Yes, I would love to put forward such a radical agenda. But, no, I am not prepared to commit the same error twice. What good did we achieve in Britain in the early 1980s by promoting an agenda of socialist change that British society scorned while falling headlong into Thatcher’s neoliberal trap? Precisely none. What good will it do today to call for a dismantling of the eurozone, of the European Union itself, when European capitalism is doing its utmost to undermine the eurozone, the European Union, indeed itself?

A Greek or a Portuguese or an Italian exit from the eurozone would soon lead to a fragmentation of European capitalism, yielding a seriously recessionary surplus region east of the Rhine and north of the Alps, while the rest of Europe is would be in the grip of vicious stagflation. Who do you think would benefit from this development? A progressive left, that will rise Phoenix-like from the ashes of Europe’s public institutions? Or the Golden Dawn Nazis, the assorted neofascists, the xenophobes and the spivs? I have absolutely no doubt as to which of the two will do best from a disintegration of the eurozone.

I, for one, am not prepared to blow fresh wind into the sails of this postmodern version of the 1930s. If this means that it is we, the suitably erratic Marxists, who must try to save European capitalism from itself, so be it. Not out of love for European capitalism, for the eurozone, for Brussels, or for the European Central Bank, but just because we want to minimise the unnecessary human toll from this crisis.

## ****What should Marxists do?****

Europe’s elites are behaving today as if they understand neither the nature of the crisis that they are presiding over, nor its implications for the future of European civilisation. Atavistically, they are choosing to plunder the diminishing stocks of the weak and the dispossessed in order to plug the gaping holes of the financial sector, refusing to come to terms with the unsustainability of the task.

Yet with Europe’s elites deep in denial and disarray, the left must admit that we are just not ready to plug the chasm that a collapse of European capitalism would open up with a functioning socialist system. Our task should then be twofold. First, to put forward an analysis of the current state of play that non-Marxist, well meaning Europeans who have been lured by the sirens of neoliberalism, find insightful. Second, to follow this sound analysis up with proposals for stabilising Europe – for ending the downward spiral that, in the end, reinforces only the bigots.

Let me now conclude with two confessions. First, while I am happy to defend as genuinely radical the pursuit of a modest agenda for stabilising a system that I criticise, I shall not pretend to be enthusiastic about it. This may be what we must do, under the present circumstances, but I am sad that I shall probably not be around to see a more radical agenda being adopted.

My final confession is of a highly personal nature: I know that I run the risk of, surreptitiously, lessening the sadness from ditching any hope of replacing capitalism in my lifetime by indulging a feeling of having become agreeable to the circles of polite society. The sense of self-satisfaction from being feted by the high and mighty did begin, on occasion, to creep up on me. And what a non-radical, ugly, corruptive and corrosive sense it was.

My personal nadir came at an airport. Some moneyed outfit had invited me to give a keynote speech on the European crisis and had forked out the ludicrous sum necessary to buy me a first-class ticket. On my way back home, tired and with several flights under my belt, I was making my way past the long queue of economy passengers, to get to my gate. Suddenly I noticed, with horror, how easy it was for my mind to be infected with the sense that I was entitled to bypass the hoi polloi. I realised how readily I could forget that which my leftwing mind had always known: that nothing succeeds in reproducing itself better than a false sense of entitlement. Forging alliances with reactionary forces, as I think we should do to stabilise Europe today, brings us up against the risk of becoming co-opted, of shedding our radicalism through the warm glow of having “arrived” in the corridors of power.

Radical confessions, like the one I have attempted here, are perhaps the only programmatic antidote to ideological slippage that threatens to turn us into cogs of the machine. If we are to forge alliances with our political adversaries we must avoid becoming like the socialists who failed to change the world but succeeded in improving their private circumstances. The trick is to avoid the revolutionary maximalism that, in the end, helps the neoliberals bypass all opposition to their self-defeating policies and to retain in our sights capitalism’s inherent failures while trying to save it, for strategic purposes, from itself.

This article is adaptedfrom a lecture originally delivered at the 6th Subversive Festival in Zagreb in 2013

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*A member of the SLATE alumni group, also then a member of the American Communist Party (he subsequently left because the U.S. CP is too reformist for him), wrote these comments on Varoufakis’ article.*

**3. “Erratic Marxism.” Unpublished commentary on Varioufakis by a student movement-days friend of mine.**

Syriza was formed originally in 2004 as coalition of leftist sects. It was re-formed as an electoral party only in 2012, now including many former members of the old socialist party, PASOK and unaffiliated leftists. Thus it does not have a high degree of ideological unity or I suspect organizational discipline. It does not have deep roots in the masses. So far as I can tell it does not lead non-parliamentary struggles such as trade unions or neighborhood organizations. Its electoral success was based on slogans and demagoguery that spoke to the anger and frustration of Greek masses. Like the Democratic Party under Obama it is led by an attractive young man with a gift of the gab. It is therefore extremely unlikely that such an organization would consider, much less lead, a break with the European Union, the European Central Bank, NATO, the US and their Greek allies. It does not have the organizational capacity or confidence in the masses to lead the mass resistance to those forces. This is no May 26 Movement (of Cuba).

Varoufakis embodies Syriza's political weakness to an even higher degree. He comes from a high bourgeois family, is an academic and has spent much of his adult life in England and the United States, two countries where the working class is in a very weak position. He could not as a native of the country be more isolated from the real political and economic life of the Greek people. He readily admits in his article that the defining event in the development of his political consciousness was the coming to power of the Thatcher regime and its regressive policies, which was somehow enabled by Varoufakis' own radical fantasies. The British workers resistance, particularly the striking Scottish miners - their organization, their humanity and fighting spirit, their sense of solidarity, and capacity for sacrifice, does not figure in his narrative. There is only defeat. The same goes for the anti-apartheid struggle. The ANC was 'allowed [by the white capitalist class] to dominate the political sphere, it had to accept impotence over the economic one'. Notice the oppressed have no agency in this formulation and the whole exercise has ended in tragedy. In fact defeat and regression is the hallmark of every act of resistance or revolution in the last century, starting with Russia. Needless to say he cannot conceive of a confrontation between Greece and the massed forces of Euro-Atlantic capital ending in success. He says that the best that can be hoped for is that the European economy can be temporarily stabilized, if the leaders of European capital would follow his sincerely proffered advice. Maybe his program would work and maybe the leaders will adopt it, but I would not bet very much on either.

There is quite a bit of discussion of Marxist theory and of Varoufakis personal journey, which might in another article be food for further thought, although I have my doubts. But in this article it is just syrup to help get the basic defeatist line down the reader's throat.

In all fairness Varoufakis is not the political leader of Syrizia. It is likely that a long time political operative like Tsipras is in closer contact with the masses and has a less defeatist and more militant attitude than Varoufakis. Still I suspect that given the responsibility he has been entrusted in the Syriza government his views are not very different from the rest of the leadership. I am not very optimistic of the outcome. Let’s assume a best case scenario in which the European economy is stabilized, with or without V's program. I believe there is no realistic way that the suffering of the Greek workers will significantly be ameliorated or that the stabilization will be any more than temporary. The support for Syriza will sooner or later evaporate. The masses may again be demoralized and pacified. Alternatively, it is remotely possible that mass support will shift to those organized political forces such as the Communist Party that are willing to confront big capital. How the confrontation would work out is impossible to predict or to use Varoufakis' language - radical indeterminacy prevails. Nevertheless it is the only 'realistic' way out of the crisis.

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*Another voice from the left is that of James Petras, an old UC Berkeley student movement days (late 1950s!) friend of mine. Jim was an advisor to and earlier Prime Minister of Greece, Andreas Papandreou.*

**4. “Greek Elections:  January and September 2015 - From Hope to Fear and Despair.” James Petras.** **8/26/15.**

**Introduction**

Eight months will have passed since the election of Syriza on January 25 up to the snap elections in September.  During that time Syriza’s leaders play-acted their ‘*opposition to austerity’* and then knelt down in submission to the ‘Troika’.

The contrast between January and now is dramatic: Syriza’s leader, Prime Minister Alexi Tsipras, aroused joy and great hope among the Greek voters with his promises to end Greece’s subjugation to the European oligarchs (the “*Troika*”) but now convokes snap elections exploiting the pervasive fear and misery among the population.  Greeks confront a future of even greater impoverishment and despair with an entire generation bound up and delivered to forty years of debt slavery and colonial subjugation by their elected Syriza leaders.

In January, Syriza swept into office on its promise of ‘*change*’ without specifics.  ‘*Change’* turned out to be an empty slogan. Changes did take place: Changes for the worse! Since his election, Tsipras emptied the Greek Treasury to pay the EU bankers; stripped pension and municipal funds to meet IMF obligations and, worse yet, he allowed the flight of over 40 billion Euros to be transferred from Greek banks to overseas accounts - essentially de-capitalizing the financial system.

The linguistic perversion of “*change*” was not the worst of Syriza’s contribution to the corruption and discredit of the European left.  Its slavish pillage of the economy shocked and confused the impoverished Greek majority.  The voters had expected Syriza and its radical phrasemongers to do the opposite – to save the national economy and lead the country!

For a while Tsipras’s submission and betrayal was disguised by his theatrical poses of the ‘*tough negotiator’*  with the German bankers.   His perpetual boyish grin, frozen on his face, as if to reassure his followers: “*You can trust me.  I will make sure Madame Merkel and company do not shove another bristly cucumber up your backsides!”*  Tsipras feigned resistance before the bankers, setting a stylistic template for other Syriza legislators, who likewise ‘*protested and submitted’*.  They too came to believe that ‘their efforts’ (and not their results) deserved public approval!

Between February and April, Tsipras endured stern lectures from his overlords in the EU, returning to Greece with his silly grin and empty pockets.

Tsipras did everything possible to distract, to entertain, to bluster and deceive Syriza’s befuddled supporters.

Tsipras resorted to radical rhetoric, empty gestures and verbal defiance.

His emotional outburst were just ‘*hollow farts’* *(kfes pourdes* in demotic Greek) in the poetic language of an insightful, indignant grandmother whose pension had been cut by 40%!

Syriza bent and broke before the predictable intransigence of their German overlords and their 28 rubber-stamping, vassal states.  Syriza got nothing and worse.  The more they talked, the less they achieved…

Tsipras broke the Greek financial system and then declared defeat, but not before mounting one more grand electoral fraud.  Syriza announced a popular ‘*referendum’* on the EU dictates and 61% of the Greek voters said ‘no’ to the EU demands.  But Tsipras immediately said yes!

Tsipras accepted the complete sell-off –-‘privatization’-- of all the strategic, lucrative, major and minor public enterprises, properties and sources of Greek national wealth.

There were no popular uprisings in the street on Tsipras’ capitulation:  just a little ‘*tempest in the teapot’* in the Greek Parliament when the “*Left Platform*” voted no, showed their backsides to their now ex-leader, defected and formed a new party - *Popular Unity*.  With no mass organization and not supporting mass action, the ‘Left Platform’ just rose up on their hind legs . . . to bray out a manifesto calling for ‘*popular unity’*….within the confines of the Parliamentary cesspool of knaves and scoundrels.  Meanwhile, Syntagma (Constitution) Square was full of pigeons and homeless vagabonds...  Is this another *hollow fart*?

These armchair rebels, who sat in the Cabinet and slavishly followed Tsipras for seven months, engaging in sterile internal *party debates* and giving interviews to the dwindling bands of *leftist academic tourists*, while ignoring the street fighting youth, will face a new election in one month.  They have the insurmountable task of convincing a cowed, confused and fearful electorate that *they* should unite, organize and reject Tsipras, Syriza and  infinite regression.

Tsipras, for his part, will take the EU ‘*bailout funds’*, pay the banks and finance his own campaign.  He will get free publicity from the domestic and foreign press (the  Financial Times editorializes in praise of ‘*his courage and good sense’*) and employ an army of campaign workers with bail-out funds to obliterate the ‘*Left Platform’*.  He will thus gain support from the Greek oligarchs and having adopted the platform of the right opposition, he has little to fear electorally from the boring old kleptocrats of Pasok and New Democracy, who cannot match his giveaways, theatrics and demagogy at the ballot box.

Disillusion and direct action—strikes, marches and fiery barricades-- will set in after the September elections  when Tsipras has further slashed pensions and shredded labor rights, when privatizations lead to massive layoffs at the docks, airports, power companies and oil refineries.  Tsipras’ call for rapid elections was designed to secure votes from a shocked electorate before the pain of his massive sell-out is fully felt.

With time, there will be tempestuous protests, but the EU will have pillaged Greece of its present and future wealth.  Tsipras’ electoral support will dwindle and tear gas will once again perfume the streets of Athens.  Then, the old political whores and kleptocrats from the Right will trot out to center stage once more.  And who knows, Tsipras may even form a new ‘*inclusive’* coalition regime with the sluts of the right.  Bankers, oligarchs and kleptocrats are not fussy about their bed-partners, even played-out traitors with boyish grins are worth a ‘romp in the sack’ if it gets them back in power...

**Conclusion**

The financial press and the mass media *concocted*an image of Syriza as “far left” or “hard left”.  In fact, Syriza did everything possible to destroy the hopes of the majority of downwardly mobile Greeks desperate for a reversal of the shock austerity policies imposed by the EU.

From the very first day in office, Syriza leaders embraced the oligarchical structure of the EU, retaining the Euro currency and recognizing the illicit foreign debt.

Caged from the outset, Syriza just made a big racket, rattling the bars and pleading for a long leash and more time.

The trained eyes of the EU autocrats recognized Syriza leaders as captives, given to inconsequential political ejaculations and ‘outraged protestations’.  They made no concessions: Indeed bankers decided to really punish the Greek voters for electing the clowns…

The Germans immediately sized Tsipras up as a *marshmallow leftist -*organically incapable of breaking out of the EU cage, of renouncing the Euro and the debt.  With their long historical experience, Euro-imperialists know how to treat ‘socialist’ and ‘nationalist’ subjects, who negotiate on bended knee:  “*The more you kick them, the less they ask*”

Tsipras begged for money to pay the European and US banks!  He agreed to sell twenty-nine Greek airports to German capitalists in order to pay the German bankers.

In other words, Syriza and Tsipras have  impoverished millions of Greeks and sold off all of Greece’s lucrative enterprises so that German, French and English holders of Greek bonds will not miss a single interest payment!  Was Tsipras just posing as a Prime Minister while serving as a pimp for gang rape?

According to the latest polls, the Greek people will re-elect him!  The victims have gone mad!…God bless Greece --the cradle of democracy has become a roiling nest of vipers!

**5. Notes written to me by Petras in October, 2017 in which he comments on what I’ve written in these pages.**

1/MICHALIS SPOURDALAKIS DRAWS A SALARY FROM SYRIZA/TSIPRAS

2/ THE ENTIRE SYRIZA PROGRAM WAS DUMPED ONCE TSIPRAS WAS ELECTED.

3/ THE SEPTEMBER REFERENDUM –60+% VOTED TO REJECT DEEP CUTS AND AUSTERITY – WAS REFUTED/REVERSED BY TSIPRAS A FEW DAYS LATER.

4/ NEW HARSHER CUTS WERE PASSED BY TSIPRAS.

5/ THE FOREIGN DEBT WAS BASED ON ILLEGAL AGREEMENTS INVESTIGATED BY THE HEAD OF PARLIAMENT—A SYRIZA LEADER WHO LATER RESIGNED IN DISGUST WITH TSIPRAS’ CAPITULATION.

6/ UNDER TSIPRAS WAGES WERE SLASHED BY 30%. PENSIONS CUT BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. UNEMPLOYMENT DEEPENED TO 30% FOR ALL WORKERS. BANKRUPTCY AND FORECLOSURES HIT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS.

7/ THE JEWELS OF THE ECONOMY WERE PRIVATIZED--UTILITIES, TRANSPORT, PORTS ETC AS TSIPRAS FOLLOWED THE TROIKA.

8/ THE FUTURE IS MORE OF THE SAME. THOUSANDS OF PROFESSIONALS, ENGINEERS, SKILLED EMPLOYEES AND WORKERS WHO VOTED FOR SYRIZA WERE FORCED TO LEAVE IN FRUSTRATION AT LIES AND BETRAYAL. MICHALIS SPOURDALAKIS AND HIS MENTOR LEO PANITCH [see my below quotes from Panitch; MM] IGNORED AND COVERED UP TSIPRAS’ PROGRAMATIC COMMITMENTS AND ASSUMED DICTATORIAL POWERS—CALLING REFERENDUM AND REVERSING IT.

AS ADORNO DESCRIBED AUTHORITARIANS, THEY ARE AT THE THROAT OF THE PEOPLE AND AT THE FEET OF THE BOSSES.

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*In 2015, internationally known and respected economist Joseph Stiglitz, who was part of the Bill Clinton Administration, wrote this:*

**6. “Europe’s Last Act?” Joseph Stiglitz.  *Social Europe.*6/8/15.**

European Union leaders continue to play a game of brinkmanship with the Greek government. Greece has met its creditors’ demands far more than halfway. Yet Germany and Greece’s other creditors continue to demand that the country sign on to a program that has proven to be a failure, and that few economists ever thought could, would, or should be implemented.

The swing in Greece’s fiscal position from a large primary deficit to a surplus was almost unprecedented, but the demand that the country achieve a primary surplus of 4.5% of GDP was unconscionable. Unfortunately, at the time that the “troika” – the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund – first included this irresponsible demand in the international financial program for Greece, the country’s authorities had no choice but to accede to it.

The folly of continuing to pursue this program is particularly acute now, given the 25% decline in GDP that Greece has endured since the beginning of the crisis. The troika badly misjudged the macroeconomic effects of the program that they imposed. [According to their published forecasts](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2015/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2013&ey=2020&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=174&s=NGDP_RPCH&grp=0&a=&pr.x=79&pr.y=11" \t "_blank), they believed that, by cutting wages and accepting other austerity measures, Greek exports would increase and the economy would quickly return to growth. They also believed that the first debt restructuring would lead to debt sustainability.

The troika’s forecasts have been wrong, and repeatedly so. And not by a little, but by an enormous amount. Greece’s voters were right to demand a change in course, and their government is right to refuse to sign on to a deeply flawed program.

Having said that, there *is*room for a deal: Greece has [made clear its willingness](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/greece-government-reforms-by-yanis-varoufakis-2015-05" \t "_blank) to engage in continued reforms, and has welcomed Europe’s help in implementing some of them. A dose of reality on the part of Greece’s creditors – about what is achievable, and about the macroeconomic consequences of different fiscal and structural reforms – could provide the basis of an agreement that would be good not only for Greece, but for all of Europe.

Some in Europe, especially in Germany, seem nonchalant about a Greek exit from the eurozone. The market has, they claim, already “priced in” such a rupture. Some even suggest that it would be good for the monetary union.

I believe that such views significantly underestimate both the current and future risks involved. A similar degree of complacency was evident in the United States before the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. The fragility of America’s banks had been known for a long time – at least since the bankruptcy of Bear Stearns the previous March. Yet, given the lack of transparency (owing in part to weak regulation), both markets and policymakers did not fully appreciate the linkages among financial institutions.

Indeed, the world’s financial system is *still* feeling the aftershocks of the Lehman collapse. And banks remain non-transparent, and thus at risk. We still don’t know the full extent of linkages among financial institutions, including those arising from non-transparent derivatives and credit default swaps.

In Europe, we can already see some of the consequences of inadequate regulation and the flawed design of the eurozone itself. We know that the structure of the eurozone encourages *divergence,*not convergence: as capital and talented people leave crisis-hit economies, these countries become less able to repay their debts. As markets grasp that a vicious downward spiral is structurally embedded in the euro, the consequences for the *next*crisis become profound. And another crisis in inevitable: it is in the very nature of capitalism.

ECB President Mario Draghi’s confidence trick, in the form of his [declaration in 2012](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/key/date/2012/html/sp120726.en.html" \t "_blank) that the monetary authorities would do “whatever it takes” to preserve the euro, has worked so far. But the knowledge that the euro is *not*a binding commitment among its members will make it far less likely to work the next time. Bond yields could spike, and no amount of reassurance by the ECB and Europe’s leaders would suffice to bring them down from stratospheric levels, because the world now knows that they will *not* do “whatever it takes.” As the example of Greece has shown, they will do only what short-sighted electoral politics demands.

The most important consequence, I fear, is the weakening of European solidarity. The euro was supposed to strengthen it. Instead, it has had the opposite effect.

It is not in the interest of Europe – or the world – to have a country on Europe’s periphery alienated from its neighbors, especially now, when geopolitical instability is already so evident. The neighboring Middle East is in turmoil; the West is attempting to contain a newly aggressive Russia; and China, already the world’s largest source of savings, the largest trading country, and the largest overall economy (in terms of purchasing power parity), is confronting the West with new economic and strategic realities. This is no time for European disunion.

Europe’s leaders viewed themselves as visionaries when they created the euro. They thought they were looking beyond the short-term demands that usually preoccupy political leaders.

Unfortunately, their understanding of economics fell short of their ambition; and the politics of the moment did not permit the creation of the institutional framework that might have enabled the euro to work as intended. Although the single currency was supposed to bring unprecedented prosperity, it is difficult to detect a significant positive effect for the eurozone as a whole in the period before the crisis. In the period since, the adverse effects have been enormous.

The future of Europe and the euro now depends on whether the eurozone’s political leaders can combine a modicum of economic understanding with a visionary sense of, and concern for, European solidarity. We are likely to begin finding out the answer to that existential question in the next few weeks.

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*Writing before it became apparent The Troika was not going to negotiate, and before the capitulation to its demands, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipris penned these words.*

# 7. “Europe at a crossroads.” Alexis Tsipras. Prime Minister’s article in *Le Monde.* 5/24/15.

On 25th of last January, the Greek people made a courageous decision. They dared to challenge the one-way street of the Memorandum’s tough austerity, and to seek a new agreement. A new agreement that will keep the country in the euro, with a viable economic program, without the mistakes of the past.

The Greek people paid a high price for these mistakes; over the past five years the unemployment rate climbed to 28% (60% for young people), average income decreased by 40%, while according to Eurostat’s data Greece became the EU country with the highest index of social inequality.

And the worst result: despite badly damaging the social fabric, this program failed to invigorate the competitiveness of the Greek economy. Public debt soared from 124% to 180% of GDP, and despite the heavy sacrifices of the people, the Greek economy remains trapped in continuous uncertainty caused by unattainable fiscal balance targets that further the vicious cycle of austerity and recession.

The new Greek government’s main goal during these last four months has been to put an end to this vicious cycle, an end to this uncertainty.

Doing so requires a mutually beneficial agreement that will set realistic goals regarding surpluses, while also reinstating an agenda of growth and investment. A final solution to the Greek problem is now more mature and more necessary than ever.

Such an agreement will also spell the end of the European economic crisis that began seven years ago, by putting an end to the cycle of uncertainty in the Eurozone.

Today, Europe has the opportunity to make decisions that will trigger a rapid recovery of the Greek and European economy by ending Grexit scenarios, scenarios that prevent the long-term stabilisation of the European economy and may, at any given time, weaken the confidence of both citizens and investors in our common currency.

Many, however, claim that the Greek side is not cooperating to reach an agreement because it comes to the negotiations intransigent and without proposals.

**Is this really the case?**

Because these times are critical, perhaps historic – not only for the future of Greece but also for the future of Europe – I would like to take this opportunity to present the truth, and to responsibly inform the world’s public opinion about the real intentions and positions of Greece.

The Greek government, on the basis of the Eurogroup’s decision on February 20, has submitted a broad package of reform proposals, with the intent to reach an agreement that will combine respect for the mandate of the Greek people with respect for the rules and decisions governing the Eurozone.

One of the key aspects of our proposals is the commitment to lower – and hence make feasible – primary surpluses for 2015 and 2016, and to allow for higher primary surpluses for the following years, as we expect a proportional increase in the growth rates of the Greek economy.

Another equally fundamental aspect of our proposals is the commitment to increase public revenues through a redistribution of the burden from lower and middle classes to the higher ones that have effectively avoided paying their fair share to help tackle the crisis, since they were for all accounts protected by both the political elite and the Troika who turned “a blind eye”.

From the very start, our government has clearly demonstrated its intention and determination to address these matters by legislating a specific bill to deal with fraud caused by triangular transactions, and by intensifying customs and tax controls to reduce smuggling and tax evasion.

While, for the first time in years, we charged media owners for their outstanding debts owed to the Greek public sector.

**Oligarchs losing sleep**

These actions are changing things in Greece, as evidenced the speeding up of work in the courts to administer justice in cases of substantial tax evasion. In other words, the oligarchs who were used to being protected by the political system now have many reasons to lose sleep.

In addition to these overarching goals that define our proposals, we have also offered highly detailed and specific plans during the course of our discussions with the institutions that have bridged the distance between our respective positions that separated us a few months ago.

Specifically, the Greek side has accepted to implement a series of institutional reforms, such as strengthening the independence of the General Secretariat for Public Revenues and of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), interventions to accelerate the administration of justice, as well as interventions in the product markets to eliminate distortions and privileges.

Also, despite our clear opposition to the privatisation model promoted by the institutions that neither creates growth perspectives nor transfers funds to the real economy and the unsustainable debt, we accepted to move forward, with some minor modifications, on privatisations to prove our intention of taking steps towards approaching the other side.

We also agreed to implement a major VAT reform by simplifying the system and reinforcing the redistributive dimension of the tax in order to achieve an increase in both collection and revenues.

We have submitted specific proposals concerning measures that will result in a further increase in revenues. These include a special contribution tax on very high profits, a tax on e-betting, the intensification of checks of bank account holders with large sums – tax evaders, measures for the collection of public sector arrears, a special luxury tax and a tendering process for broadcasting and other licenses, which the Troika coincidentally forgot about for the past five years.

These measures will increase revenues, and will do so without having recessionary effects since they do not further reduce active demand or place more burdens on the low and middle social strata.

Furthermore, we agreed to implement a major reform of the social security system that entails integrating pension funds and repealing provisions that wrongly allow for early retirement, which increases the real retirement age.

These reforms will be put into place despite the fact that the losses endured by the pension funds, which have created the medium-term problem of their sustainability, are mainly due to political choices of both the previous Greek governments and especially the Troika, who share the responsibility for these losses: the pension funds’ reserves have been reduced by 25 billion through the PSI and from very high unemployment, which is almost exclusively due to the extreme austerity program that has been implemented in Greece since 2010.

Finally – and despite our commitment to the workforce to immediately restore European legitimacy to the labour market that has been fully dismantled during the last five years under the pretext of competitiveness – we have accepted to implement labour reforms after our consultation with the ILO, which has already expressed a positive opinion about the Greek government’s proposals.

**Institutional intransigence**

Given the above, it is only reasonable to wonder why there is such insistence by Institutional officials that Greece is not submitting proposals.

What end is served by this prolonged liquidity moratorium towards the Greek economy? Especially in light of the fact that Greece has shown that it wants to meet its external obligations, having paid more than 17 billion in interest and amortisations (about 10% of its GDP) since August 2014 without any external funding.

And finally, what is the purpose of the coordinated leaks that claim that we are not close to an agreement that will put an end to the European and global economic and political uncertainty fueled by the Greek issue?

The informal response that some are making is that we are not close to an agreement because the Greek side insists on its positions to restore collective bargaining and refuses to implement a further reduction of pensions.

Here, too, I must make some clarifications:

Regarding the issue of collective bargaining, the position of the Greek side is that it is impossible for the legislation protecting employees in Greece to not meet European standards or, even worse, to flagrantly violate European labour legislation. What we are asking for is nothing more than what is common practice in all Eurozone countries. This is the reason why I recently made a joint declaration on the issue with President Juncker.

Concerning the issue on pensions, the position of the Greek government is completely substantiated and reasonable. In Greece, pensions have cumulatively declined from 20% to 48% during the Memorandum years; currently 44.5% of pensioners receive a pension under the fixed threshold of relative poverty while approximately 23.1% of pensioners, according to data from Eurostat, live in danger of poverty and social exclusion.

It is therefore obvious that these numbers, which are the result of Memorandum policy, cannot be tolerated – not simply in Greece but in any civilised country.

**So, let’s be clear**

The lack of an agreement so far is not due to the supposed intransigent, uncompromising and incomprehensible Greek stance.

It is due to the insistence of certain institutional actors on submitting absurd proposals and displaying a total indifference to the recent democratic choice of the Greek people, despite the public admission of the three institutions that necessary flexibility will be provided in order to respect the popular verdict.

What is driving this insistence?

An initial thought would be that this insistence is due to the desire of some to not admit their mistakes and instead, to reaffirm their choices by ignoring their failures.

Moreover, we must not forget the public admission made a few years ago by the International Monetary Fund that they erred in calculating the depth of the recession that would be caused by the Memorandum.

I consider this, however, to be a shallow approach. I simply cannot believe that the future of Europe depends on the stubbornness or the insistence of some individuals.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the issue of Greece does not only concern Greece; rather, it is the very epicentre of conflict between two diametrically opposing strategies concerning the future of European unification.

The first strategy aims to deepen European unification in the context of equality and solidarity between its people and citizens.

The proponents of this strategy begin with the assumption that it is not possible to demand that the new Greek government follows the course of the previous one – which, we must not forget, failed miserably. This assumption is the starting point, because otherwise, elections would need to be abolished in those countries that are in a program. Namely, we would have to accept that the institutions should appoint the ministers and prime ministers, and that citizens should be deprived of the right to vote until the completion of the Program.

In other words, this means the complete abolition of democracy in Europe, the end of every pretext of democracy, and the beginning of disintegration and of an unacceptable division of United Europe.

This means the beginning of the creation of a technocratic monstrosity that will lead to a Europe entirely alien to its founding principles.

The second strategy seeks precisely this: The split and the division of the Eurozone, and consequently of the EU.

The first step to accomplishing this is to create a two-speed Eurozone where the “core” will set tough rules regarding austerity and adaptation and will appoint a “super” finance minister of the Eurozone with unlimited power, and with the ability to even reject budgets of sovereign states that are not aligned with the doctrines of extreme neoliberalism.

For those countries that refuse to bow to the new authority, the solution will be simple: Harsh punishment. Mandatory austerity. And even worse, more restrictions on the movement of capital, disciplinary sanctions, fines and even a parallel currency.

Judging from the present circumstances, it appears that this new European power is being constructed, with Greece being the first victim. To some, this represents a golden opportunity to make an example out of Greece for other countries that might be thinking of not following this new line of discipline.

What is not being taken into account is the high amount of risk and the enormous dangers involved in this second strategy. This strategy not only risks the beginning of the end for the European unification project by shifting the Eurozone from a monetary union to an exchange rate zone, but it also triggers economic and political uncertainty, which is likely to entirely transform the economic and political balances throughout the West.

Europe, therefore, is at a crossroads. Following the serious concessions made by the Greek government, the decision is now not in the hands of the institutions, which in any case – with the exception of the European Commission – are not elected and are not accountable to the people, but rather in the hands of Europe’s leaders.

Which strategy will prevail? The one that calls for a Europe of solidarity, equality and democracy, or the one that calls for rupture and division?

If some, however, think or want to believe that this decision concerns only Greece, they are making a grave mistake. I would suggest that they re-read Hemingway’s masterpiece, “For Whom the Bell Tolls”.

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*Shortly after returning home, and before I decided to create this document, I wrote a brief report on the trip that was published in* Stansbury Forum*:*

**8. “Report from Greece: Preliminary Thoughts.” October 9, 2017. Mike Miller. *Stansbury Forum.***

**Preface**

What I know about Greece and Greek politics can be put in a thimble, and probably a small one at that. So these observations and questions need that preface. As further preface, it is very difficult to apply lessons learned in the United States to anyplace else without contextualizing them in the new setting. That requires intimate knowledge of what is happening on the ground—so what follows are friendly speculations.

All the political Greek people we’ve met have been warm and hospitable in their welcome to us, Americans whose political and economic structures (government, financial and corporate), along with the European Union, European Bank and International Monetary Fund are largely responsible for the mess in which their country now finds itself. To be sure, there is complicity in past behavior and decisions made in Greece. But it’s not these macro questions that I want to consider here.

**Local People**

We (my partner Kathy Lipscomb\* and I) have now met with a public school teacher, taxi driver, waiter (who is also a university graduate in political science), tour guide, night shift security guard and a well known Greek actress ALL of whom blame Syriza ([“Who we are” – Syriza](http://www.syriza.gr/page/who-we-are.html#.WdpRxIZrzOY)) for the current mess, are fed up with politics and politicians (“they are all alike”), and think Syriza (has done nothing for the Greek people or, even worse, point to things Syriza ([Here](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/25/one-year-on-syriza-radicalism-power-euro-alexis-tsipras)) did (ignore the referendum results), or is doing (see below), that are making things worse.

We have also met with an internationally known political scientist who is active in Syriza, and who is interviewed regularly in various English language left journals, and a Syriza political appointee who is the national coordinator of municipal mayors. The two of them have elaborate explanations for everything Syriza has done or not done. The bad things, in their views, are for the most part the result of constraints imposed upon them by [The Troika](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/greece-crisis-who-is-the-troika-bailing-out-greece-10358047.html). They note good things that are done quietly, with no fanfare, under the radar. However, these seem to be so under the radar that none of the other people with whom we spoke mentioned them; indeed they said things that contradicted the claims. Our pro-Syriza informants also indicate that mistakes were made, but they believe these had more to do with Syriza strategy than with decisions that hurt the Greek people.

The clearest example of a bad thing is the story we were told about home foreclosures. There is a high percent of homeownership in Greece. Until recently, we were told, there was an ‘umbrella” that protected a home owner in his/her residence, though it didn’t protect additional property from foreclosure. Syriza, we were told, is responsible for removing the umbrella. Not only that, when the protection was first removed demonstrators appeared at the foreclosure proceedings making it impossible for judgment to be rendered. In response, Syriza made the procedure an electronic one. You now receive an e-mail informing you of the foreclosure as a “done deal”.

Another example we were given, Syriza is further eroding the pensions for which people paid during their work lives. That is a disaster for Greek retirees: there is only a public retirement system. Workers paid 18% of their wage into this system; employers paid 28%. The government has now more than once cut retiree payments.

What is the truth? We are in absolutely no position to tell. I can say with some confidence that not one of these informants was disingenuous; they firmly believe what they told us; none had a pre-disposition against Syriza and, in fact, most of them had been Syriza supporters, and voted for Syriza in the last election. Now, they told us, they either will not, or do not know if they will, vote. And, if they decide to vote, they have no idea for whom that will be.

Is there a way to understand these apparently opposing views of the same facts? There is clearly a participation and perception gap between people we met who were Syriza supporters and those now actively engaged in Syriza. In what follows, I use a framework that I apply in my understanding of what’s going on in the United States. Does the application work? Is it appropriate? I’ll leave that for the reader to decide.

**What’s Up?**

In a democratic and participatory union, workers may decide to strike because the offer being placed on the table by their employer is inadequate. They might conduct an effective strike, and still be stonewalled as far as any improvement in the employer’s offer. At some point, the workers might decide they’ve put up as good a fight as can be waged, and their own economic circumstances are such, or the increasing presence of scabs is such, that they have to end the strike, return to work, build their strike fund again (if they have one), and wait until the next round of contract negotiations to return to the negotiating table from a position of strength. These workers are not likely to blame their leadership for the failure of the strike. [The 1948 Packinghouse Workers Union strike](http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10104&context=annals-of-iowa) is probably a good example of what I’m talking about.

As every American trade unionist who cares about the future of the labor movement knows, what I just described is, for the most part, a memory of the past. It has been replaced by what people call “insurance policy unions”. You buy your insurance policy (pay your dues) and expect your benefits (advocacy—contract negotiations, and services—grievance representation). Thus the common phrase, “What’s the union going to do about ‘x’?” as if the union is a third party—separate from the member asking the question.

What’s all that got to do with Greece, Syriza, and electoral politics in general? It seems to me in the nature of politicians and political parties in formally democratic systems that the party adopts a program, selects its candidates, and then determines a strategy by which to convince citizens to vote for it and them. But “convince” in the modern era is a tricky word because what it really means is to sell buyers (voters) a product (candidates and their program—which might have little to do with what they actually do if elected). At best, during an election a door-to-door mobilization takes place in which the candidate’s volunteers ask voters to support their candidate. Reasoning is not what takes place at the door because the canvassers are instructed not to waste time with opposition and, at best, to spend limited time with the undecided. Campaign imperatives demand this kind of behavior: there is an election that will take place on an already specified date and a majority of voters is required if the candidate is going to win. This imperative makes mobilization necessary and organization unlikely once campaign season has begun.

It is not by accident that this kind of campaigning takes place. The gap between the political parties and their candidates, on the one hand, and the voters, on the other, is huge. More likely than canvassing, it is direct mail, social media and television advertising that are used to reach the voters (the market). In national campaigns this approach is built into campaign structures: campaign consultants, who are the principal operators of campaigns, are paid by a percentage commission on the cost of the medium used for reaching to voters. Door-to-door work gets almost no money because most of the workers are volunteers!

Even in a campaign that is heavily dependent upon volunteer effort, the contact with the citizen is a fleeting one, and the follow-up is typically electronic, not personal except for election-day when the favorable voter is contacted to insure his or her turnout.

Potential voters do not say about the candidates they support, “What are we going to do about ‘x’ (unemployment, student debt, immigration, etc)?” They want to know what the candidate is going to do about ‘x’. The very nature of the campaign process tends toward the separation of “the campaign”—candidates and their inner-circle, donors, leaders of key interest groups (whose members already think of their organizations as third parties), and activists.

The question then becomes, “How deeply rooted are these activists in the day-to-day lives of the various constituencies addressed by the candidate?”

My friend Herb Mills was chairman of a “stewards’ council” in the International Longshoremen’s & Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU). There developed under his leadership a widespread system of elected stewards at worksites. The stewards worked alongside other workers. There was little-to-no gap between them. They were the point of connection between a worker or a “gang” (a working group that unloaded cargo) and “the union”. There was no gap, no “what’s the union going to do about ‘x’?” question.

In my experience as an organizer, “the activists” typically lack the rootedness in constituencies in whose behalf they believe their candidate will, if elected, act. Frequently they are sociologically very different: young, instead of spread across the age spectrum; “Anglo”, rather then reflecting the racial/ethnic diversity of the constituency; college educated, etc. They are people with whom I might agree on a very high percentage of things they believe. But they aren’t people upon whom I would rely to engage in a continuing conversation with the voters after the election, especially if the person elected had to make a compromise that appeared to violate the platform on which s/he had run as a candidate. Thus the activist isn’t likely to be able, over the long haul, to “deliver” at the base.

**Greece Application**

Is any of this applicable in Greece? People who know that situation far better than I will have to draw those conclusions. I hope the questions and observations are useful.

I suspect that Syriza and its activists lack the kind of rootedness that is required for everyday voters to say about their plight, “What are we going to do to solve the mess we are now in?” Both our Syriza informants told us nuanced examples of how the organization is now supporting things like soup kitchens, community gardens, homeless shelters and other programs and activities to solve the problems of poverty. They also claimed that Syriza had expanded funding for education, and stopped some bad things from happening to pensions. They see Syriza as having an organic connection with the “social movements”. Yet the school teacher and her security guard husband made no connection between their volunteer time spent in a soup kitchen and Syriza. Similarly, other activities we heard about from our other Syriza-critics (retiree organizations and mobilizations, campaigns to save peoples’ homes, worker strikes, etc) do not seem to be viewed as an aspect of a larger movement of which Syriza is a part. Quite the contrary, Syriza is seen as part of the problem, not the solution.

In the U.S. I think there needs to be a vehicle for “we”, and it is not a political party because the dynamics of parties don’t lend themselves to the effective creation of “us”. Is that idea relevant in Greece?

One of our informants said that when her son arrived at the university to begin his studies there, nine different political parties had registration desks where he could join one of them. But there was no registration desk for a student union that enlisted the vast majority of students around a lowest significant common denominator program that represented their values and interests—for example their indebtedness and the almost 50% unemployment rate their age group faces. Similarly, there is no organization in the community that includes mothers’ clubs, soccer teams, retiree organizations, unions, interest groups of various types and others, and new groups that could be formed among the marginalized. Various interest groups engage in protest demonstrations, but only political parties seek to bring them together. Thus there is nothing outside the electoral politics process capable of defending and advancing a program, and effectively demanding of politicians that they implement it.

Is something like that possible and/or desirable in Greece? I’ll wait to hear from them on that question.

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\*Disclaimer: My partner Kathy doesn’t agree with all that’s said above. These are my views alone.

Readers of *Stansbury Forum* might want to look at my earlier post, [“Syriza Prompted Musings”](http://stansburyforum.com/syriza-prompted-musings/).

For readers who would like to dive further into Mike’s thinking about Greece, write him @ mikeotcmiller@gmail.com and ask for “Reflections on Greece”.

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*In my work as a community organizer in the United States, support from Mainline Protestant, historically African-American Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Unitarian religious traditions has been very important. Earlier, when I was a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Council of Churches was at times the only mainstream voice in American public life that supported SNCC. With the decline of organized labor as a progressive and militant voice on a wide range of social and economic justice issues, the religious community in the U.S. became the central support for the work of Saul Alinsky, the dean of American community organizing.*

**9. Excerpts from and Notes On “The Orthodox Church of Greece and the Economic Crisis” Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias and Almyros. November 12, 2014.” And quotations from The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I.**

I begin with,

Matthew 19:23-24:

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

One institution that would be central to the possibility to the possibility of “people power organizing” in Greece is the Greek Orthodox Church. I looked to see if there was a Gustavo Gutierrez or Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns (Peruvian liberation theologian; prelate of the Archdiocese of Sao Paulo Brazil), a Jacques Maritain (French Catholic theologian who introduced Saul Alinsky to the Italian church), a Reinhold Niebuhr or George Todd (American Protestant theologian of political realism; American Presbyterian at the core of a group responsible for funding Saul Alinsky’s work in the U.S.; later he did the same thing at the World Council of Churches Office for Urban and Rural Advance), or a Walter Rauschenbusch (Baptist theologian of the social gospel whose thinking inspired many in the Deep South civil rights movement) in the Greek Orthodox Church who could provide the theological base, or bishops and priests who could provide both the theological and institutional base for this kind of organizing?

Also looking to the Greek Orthodox Church is Pope Francis. In a 2014 Istanbul visit with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, Francis identified the biblical bases for a “social gospel” as a basis of unity. The search was reported November 30, 2014 in *Crux, Taking the Catholic Pulse*, “an independent Catholic news site, operated in partnership with the Knights of Columbus,” and edited by the widely respected former *National Catholic Reporter* Vatican correspondent John L. Allen, Jr. Allen reports that Francis choose not to use the usual conservative cultural issues—“a common stand against secularism, especially permissive sexual morality.”

Instead, writes Allen,

[Francis] then ticked off three reasons why Orthodox and Catholics should come together: to defend the poor, to end war and heal conflicts, and to help young people to see past materialism and to embrace a “true humanism…

“There are too many women and men who suffer from severe malnutrition, growing unemployment, the rising numbers of unemployed youth, and from increasing social exclusion.”

And, “We cannot remain indifferent before the cries of our brothers and sisters,” he said. “They ask us to fight, in the light of the Gospel, the structural causes of poverty: inequality, the shortage of dignified work and housing, and the denial of their rights as members of society and as workers.”

This approach, Allen writes, is “congenial to Bartholomew, who among other things has been dubbed the ‘Green Patriarch’ for his strong environmental concern.” But Allen cautions, “How well it will play in more traditional centers of Orthodox opinion, such as the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, remains to be seen.” In contrast, Allen notes that the Russian Orthodox Patriarch had a clearly more theologically conservative approach to unity.

Allen’s (and Francis’) questions led me to find this document that is likely to be unfamiliar to most American readers. Reported November 19 in *Pemptousia*, at a public London School of Economics lecture “The Orthodox Church of Greece and the Economic Crisis,” on November 12, 2014, Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias elaborated the basis for Greek Orthodox involvement in economic and social justice issues, and here I quote at some length.

The speech is editorially introduced with this observation, “…Historically a central pole of national identity, the way in which the Orthodox Church of Greece is impacted by Greece’s economic crisis and how it responds to it, is of major importance to the nation’s public and social affairs.”

For several years now, the economic crisis has remained at the center of international interest, affecting in a particularly negative way the daily lives of thousands of people, even in the very heart of the industrialized Western world. As we all know, one of the European countries most affected by the crisis has been Greece, which has experienced it from its beginning, and continues to experience the tragic consequences of this unprecedented global situation, which has sorely tried the Greek people’s social cohesion and unity, and led to hopelessness and despair for many. Thus, according to many experts, we are dealing not only with an economic crisis but also a humanitarian one, with serious consequences for people’s lives and for social cohesion. Official surveys conducted by different government institutions and economic institutes paint a bleak picture: about 1.5 million unemployed (out of a total population of 11 million), i.e., approximately 27% of the total active workforce. Among young people, the news is even worse, with the unemployment rate for people under 30 at an astronomical 60%, a figure unprecedented in the Eurozone. According to the same surveys, since the beginning of the crisis, Greeks have lost 30-40% of their income. And a recent report from Eurostat for the year 2013 lays out the tragic figures of the crisis in a particularly vivid way: 35.7% of the population (i.e., 3.9 million people!) lives close to the poverty line, 23.1% survives on a meager income in spite of the various social benefits that are provided, and 20.3% is unable to cover the expenses for the most important material goods (i.e., heating, debt repayment, a diet with meat, fish every two days, etc.). At the same time, another recent report, this time by UNICEF, reveals that “about 750,000 children in Greece are living in poverty and many of them are malnourished,” highlighting another aspect of the various problems brought about by the economic crisis, with the victims this time being children of school age.

The Metropolitan’s report of the church’s response then focuses on “philanthropic work” and wonders “whether the Church can or should be involved in political and economic issues, such as the financial and debt crisis plaguing Europe…” He then answers the question:

Such an objection, however, while legitimate, faces two problems: first, it ignores the fact that the current economic crisis has serious consequences for all Greek citizens and therefore for the Church’s flock; secondly, it seems to forget the very identity and mission of the Church which is best encapsulated in the biblical “in the world, but not of the world,” i.e., the dialectic between history and eschatology.

…

[W]ith a humble sense of responsibility as a bishop of the Church of Christ, an attempt will be made to lay out some parameters for a different approach to the economy, which places at its center the human being made in the image of God, and not the homo economicus who is ruled by finances and consumerism. In the remainder of this talk, some basic aspects of this different theo-political understanding will be briefly outlined, (e.g. the selection made by the early Christians of the political term “ecclesia” to identify themselves, a term borrowed from the political practice of ancient Athenian democracy, in order to emphasize their awareness of belonging to a body, a community and a society, the social and political dimension of the mystery of the Eucharist, the necessity the Church, if it wishes to be faithful to His example, not just preach to the poor, the hungry, the foreigner, and the marginalized, but must become incarnate and identified with Him and His cross, as heavy as it may be, the new meaning of life etc.) and some specific actions that the Church has implemented from the beginning of the crisis in response to the urgent needs and challenges of our people will be described (e.g. the Church has set up soup kitchens and food distribution, given out clothing and shelter, and provided financial aid, medicine, and free medical care, its contribution through its parishes, that constitute the oldest, largest, and most active volunteer network and social welfare system, which extends even to the furthest reaches of Greek territory, the most isolated village or island, where the state itself is often absent, unable to fulfill even its basic medical obligations, the program to equip and operate soup kitchens and food banks, the free Medical Clinics and Medicine, the Citizens Advice Centers, Psychological support for victims of the crisis, etc.).

…In the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, ‘The Church can never be reconciled with injustice, with all those anti-personal forces that erode social cohesion. *It always resists, proposing the social content of the Gospel, exercising its ministry of service and charity*.’ [emphasis added]

…

The parish can serve as the counterpoint to the situation that has been created b y the globalized capitalism of late modernity, with its abstract and idealized universality pitted against the life of actual people living in local communities.

…

“The Church has set up food kitchens and food distribution centers, given out clothing and shelter, and provided financial aid, medicine, and free medical care. The Church has also provided psychological treatment and, more broadly, pastoral and spiritual support for the ever-increasing number of needy. It has established help centers for legal, judicial, social, economic, and tax issues that affect the victims of the crisis and the poor, as well as prisoners and immigrants.”

[The paper quotes at length from “The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Prevalence of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Fraternity and Love Among People, as well as the Elimination of Racial and Other Discrimination,” in *Episkepsis*, #360, December 15, 1896, pp24-25 (in Greek). English translation taken from the book by Fr. John Chryssavgis-Konstantnos Delikostantis, *The Partriarch of Solidarity,* Istanbul: Istos Publications, 2013, pp. 133-135.), including this:

“Being Christian means imitating Christ and being prepared to serve Christ in the person of the vulnerable, hungry, *oppressed* [emphasis added] and generally underprivileged. Any other effort to behold Christ as a real presence, without any existential relationship with the needy, is nothing but mere theory.”

[The paper outlines the church’s activities in the current crisis: free meals and food banks; free medical clinics and medicine; shelters to house the homeless; financial and other aid to charitable institutions (nursing homes, orphanages, homes for the terminally ill, etc; specialized legal and tax services for individuals and businesses; psychological, emotional and spiritual support for victims of the crisis.

It also notes “social welfare programs the Church has operated long before the crisis…including” nursing homes, boarding houses, houses for people with developmental disabilities and Down syndrome, pre-schools and kindergartens, shelters for unaccompanied minors, courses in English, tutoring programs for children, Greek lessons for immigrants and refugees, sendng books and stationery to remote areas, etc.”]

[T]he Church has tried from the beginning to function as a source of *unity* for the people, ensuring social cohesion and further strengthening those ties that held the Greek people united in other difficult circumstances throughout its history.

…

Having said all this, I do not wish to give the impression that everything has gone smoothly, or that there are not any problems, and I certainly do not want to shy away from self-criticism. We, the leaders of the Church, have not always risen to the occasion.

While certainly to be commended, none of these are in the Roman Catholic sense “social action” since charity, however appropriate and necessary in a given circumstance, cannot be a substitute for justice. The Metropolitan then identifies a structural problem that arises from the fact that clergy in Greece are employees of the state:

It should be admitted that some clergy and officers of the Church have enjoyed luxurious living and cozy relationships with state power, and that this has resulted in their bureaucratization and professionalization. At the same time this proximity to power did not allow us to sufficiently distance ourselves from the patron/client mindset, from populism, and from the corruption of the Greek political system, so that we could warn the people about where we were heading with the deeply parasitic nature of the Greek economy and our consumeristic absurdity, which was funded by over-borrowing and the long-term mortgaging (and consequent destruction) of our country’s future, a lack of a more critical attitude toward the problem, an attitude which, faithful to the example of the Fathers, would examine the problem at its root and not just superficially, looking at the structures that produce poverty and social injustice and not just the symptoms, etc.).

Moreover, the Church’s response to the economic crisis has mainly taken merely the form of emergency charity. It seems that the Church’s preaching is lacking a more critical attitude toward the problem, an attitude which…would examine the problem at its root and not just superficially, looking at the structures that produce poverty and social injustice and not just the symptoms…[T]he Church… neglects, however, to red on where the Fathers criticize the structures themselves and warn against transactions with the rich and powerful, condemn loans with interest, and denounce withholding workers’ wages.”

[The paper notes the Church’s opposition to Golden Dawn as a “neo-Nazi” movement, and its support for “the antiracist bill recently brought to a vote by the Greek government in order to address such phenomena.”]

The Metropolitan’s ideas go right to the edge of supporting what I call “people power organizing” with this: “It would be a fatal mistake to passively monitor this process of forming the new landscape. Inasmuch as we all had a part, to a greater or lesser degree, in bringing about the crisis, we should also all have a part in bringing about change. We have both the ability and the duty to contribute to the formation of the healthier society that we all want and envision…The question is: will we seize this opportunity?”

The Bishop notes the rise of neo-Nazism and fascism

constitutes a broader threat and challenge for the Orthodox Church itself, to the extent that the reception and acceptance of the ‘other’ especially the poor and the foreigner, is a fundamental element of its own tradition and identity…[T]he Christian faith is, by definition, diametrically opposed to every racist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic ideology that divides people according to race or other physical traits…

Moreover, the crisis and the Church’s extensive social work…has led to a better relationship and understanding with the secular and leftist intelligentsia… Orthodoxy’s image has been tarnished by the fact that some representatives off the Church…have aligned themselves with the military dictatorship or other extreme ideologies which emphasized nationalist and anti-European rhetoric…It is hoped that this new rapprochement will help to further mutual understanding and to overcome mutual ignorance and suspicion.

[The diminishing financial support from the state for the church] is preparing us for the possibility of the separation of Church and state, and for the role our Church will be called to play in the future as an integral part of society and as a coequal participant in public space.

…

The Church is asked to “examine [its] own mistakes,” and “become creative, proposing realistic steps for exiting the crisis and for a spiritual restoration of the human person.” *From the point of view of introducing people power organizing into a conversation with the church, what a wonderful invitation!*

At the end of this talk, the new challenges brought about by the current crisis will be addressed in a spirit of dialogue, including among others, the issue of the Church’s role in the Greek public sphere (e.g. the rise across Europe of neo-Nazism and fascism constitutes a broader threat and challenge for the Orthodox Church itself, to the extent that the reception and acceptance of the Other, especially the poor and the foreigner, is a fundamental element of its own tradition and identity, the crisis and the Church’s extensive social work—rendered without regard to religion or ethnicity—has led to a better relationship and understanding with the secular and leftist intelligentsia, who now see the Church’s contribution to society in a better light…

The economic crisis is a reality that, it seems, will haunt us for some time to come. Despite our shortcomings, the Church has nevertheless played an important role in stemming the effects of this crisis, using every means at its disposal to provide an enormous amount of charitable and social work. What the Church needs to do now is further highlight, within the public sphere, the primacy of freedom and human dignity, as a universal and fundamental fact of human existence, in direct opposition to the logic of market domination and profit that transforms the human person into a disposable economic unit.

“***5. By Way of Conclusion***

…What the Church needs to do now is further highlight, within the public sphere, the primacy of freedom and human dignity, as a universal and fundamental fact of human existence, in direct opposition to the logic of market domination and profit that transforms the human person into a disposable economic unit. As aptly noted in the Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in 2008: ‘The gap between rich and poor is growing dramatically due to the financial crisis, usually the result of manic profiteering by economic factors and corrupt financial activity, which, by lacking an anthropological dimension and sensitivity, does not ultimately serve the real needs of mankind. A viable economy is that which combines efficacy with justice and social solidarity.’

As one contemporary theologian has noted, ‘the unprecedented economic and financial crisis that we all face today could perhaps give us Greeks, as well as the other peoples of southern Europe, an opportunity to repent and work on our spiritual, moral, and political maturation…[and] be an opportunity for European leaders to reconsider their attitude and ponder the tragic and devastating effects that their imposed, doctrinal neo-liberal economic and financial policies are having on human beings and social cohesion.” [From “Gospel Values and debt Politicies [sic] in Post-Christian Europe,” *Synaxi*, pp.50-51 *in Greek*.]

In the midst of such a situation, the Church, whose primary goal is the salvation of the human person and the whole creation, is called to fight with all its might in the struggle for the righting of injustice and a new balance between the human person and society, the individual and the collective, while also recalling the irreplaceable value and importance of asceticism and perseverance, solidarity and love.

*[Note: there were two translations of this speech. I have quoted from both. MM]*

Clearly the Greek Orthodox Church wants to provide services to those who are hurting. Also clearly, judging from this bishop’s statements, there is a desire and willingness to “speak truth to power”. My reading, and I immediately acknowledge its limits, is that there is at the present time no experience of speaking truth to power with church supported people power. That’s the contribution Saul Alinsky made, first in the United States then internationally—both with Mainline American Protestantism, the historically African-American churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

In Chicago’s infamous “Back of the Yards,” during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Alinsky developed an organizational form that made it possible for the conservative pastors of Catholic parishes and the Communist-led Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) to work together on a basis of equality. That work earned the respect of Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain which, in turn, led to meetings in Italy of Alinsky and the Bishop of Milan and the head of the local Communist-led union. Alinsky concluded in a letter to his wife Jean that the church was too deeply intertwined with the Christian Democrats for a similar organizational development to take place there.

The first economic justice encyclical, Alinsky wryly told me, was the result of the socialists of the mid-to-late 19th century making deep inroads into the Catholic Church’s working class membership. Pope Leo responded with *Rerum Novarum.* Once asserted, the Church began to take the ideas seriously. Indeed it had to if in the 20th century the Italian Communist Party wasn’t going to more deeply penetrate the Italian working class.

Judging from the Pope’s visit with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, and from the statement by Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias, and recognizing the institutional constraint of the clergy being paid by the state, there is basis in the Greek Orthodox Church for contextually appropriate action in Greece that parallels the role of the church in community organizing in the United States. What that might look like would require extensive discussion and reflection. I’m hopeful that a discussion toward this end takes place in Greece.

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*We met professor of political science Michalis Spourdalakis. He teaches at the University of Athens, is a founding member of Syriza, and is well known internationally for his thoughts on the situation in Greece. These are my notes of that meeting with him. MM:*

**10. “Notes from a conversation with Michalis Spourdalakis, Professor of Political Science, University of Athens.” Visited on September 21, 2017 with Kathy Lipscomb.**

We met Michalis at the old law school building, which now houses the departments of economics and politics of the University of Athens. Our introduction to him came from Gene Bruskin and Peter Olney, both U.S. labor movement organizers.

Syriza operates within the constraints of the global economy; 70% of its goods are imported. As far as food is concerned, only cereal is produced here in sufficient amount for the population. Withdrawal from the Euro was not a viable option. “The Troika” is the designation of the European Union body that deals with Greece on its debt. It is the Troika that was unwilling to negotiate when Greece was represented in these negotiations by Alexis Tsipras and Yanis Varoufakis. Varoufakis was an outsider, never really a member of Syriza.

The mass media of Greece support neoliberalism and austerity. In the PASOK period, public TV and radio was defunded; we re-established it. There are three channels. It is the only source of news that presents our point of view other than some newspapers.

The Troika actually punished Greece for its attempt to negotiate more favorable terms on its debt. It comprises the European Union (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and thee International Monetary Fund (IMF). It should be understood that these are not democratic bodies; they are run by technocrats, whose commitment is to neo-liberalism and the imposition of austerity on countries that are now have international debt.

The Syriza government is doing what is possible within the constraints imposed by the Troika, and its supervision of the implementation of austerity in Greece. Syriza operates within the narrow limitations imposed upon it; it is creative and finds ways to do things that are not part of neoliberalism/austerity. It would be irresponsible to ignore the state, and not contest for political power even if achieving it means living within Troika constraints. But the constraints on are severe.

Given these, here are some things to be noted:

* There is slow growth in the economy that shrunk by one-fourth before we were elected.
* Unemployment is less than the 27% it was at its maximum. It’s now down to 21.2%. However, youth unemployment is 40%.
* Pensions have been saved and extended to many who lost them. There was a small increase in pensions last year.
* An anti-corruption and efficiency campaign is cleaning up the operation of government, making it more effective, and making it more responsive.
* Health care has been extended to another two million people; it is not an adequate health care system, but it is better than nothing. Two thousand new people were hired in the health care system, from doctors on down.
* Schools are funded to now have all programs that were once eliminated restored. There’s been an increase in funding.
* In the university, 500 new positions were funded.
* Now, 300,000 more people have food on the table.

The Greek people have been able to survive the catastrophe primarily because of these things:

* Extended families reach out to members who are most hurting.
* An estimated 70% of Greeks, the highest in Europe, own property of some kind. If they’re tenants and evicted, they can live in what they own. Many live in one home and own another small piece of property from which they can generate some income.
* A large exodus, particularly of people with advanced degrees; there is a brain drain in Greece. People are moving to Australia, the US and Canada, and European countries whose economies are in better shape.

Politically:

* Syriza’s vote in the coming election (in two years) is uncertain. A sizeable percent of its former supporters describe themselves to pollsters as “undecided” on how they will vote, with a likely shift to the left by some number of them.
* On the other hand, “New Democracy,” the centrist/neoliberal bloc vote is more committed; only 20% of it is “undecided” in contrast to 35% of Syriza’s former supporters.
* Golden Dawn, the Nazi group is stable; it’s not growing. It is now being prosecuted for killing a popular rap singer, a group of refugee fishermen and another person.
* A left group left Syriza, and has a presence in parliament; they are Popular Unity. Michalis thinks they do not have a program other than to object. This group, plus the Communists who never entered in the government, pose a threat to Syriza’s electoral future.
* Public ownership transfers to the private sector have been slowed. In some cases, new government programs have been implemented.
* A voluntary sector is encouraged by the government. There are, for example, community gardens, soup kitchens and cooperatives, civil rights groups, networks of solidarity movements for clothing, housing and food that are formed locally and make use of the political space that exists for them because of government encouragement.
* Syriza is cracking down on tax evasion.
* We were forced to privatize the airports; there’s continuing pressure for privatization.

There are now 50,000 refugees registered in various camps. Some of these camps are adequate; others are below standard. We need better care in the camps. We accept people who are fleeing political persecution. However, people who have left their country solely for economic reasons are not assured a place here in Greece.

Michalis believes that social democracy is now a dead ideology; it capitulated to capitalism, and in most countries when it was in power simply followed the neoliberal line and implemented privatization and austerity. There is now something operating that is just beginning to surface around the world, and is expressed in: Corbyn, Sanders, Syriza, Podemos, etc. These are neither reform nor revolution; those two words are inadequate to describe what is happening. In the case of Syriza, while it is limited in what it can “deliver” to/for people, it is able to involve people more in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and to make some contribution to the betterment of their lives.

On the state: liberalism and communism share an assumption on the nature of the state with which we disagree. They think you can just take over the state and make it work for your purposes. We do not think that.

We are seeing in the bureaucracies that the holdovers from the PASOK era seek to undermine Syriza-adopted policies. You can think of them as our “internal Troika”. We deal with that by sometimes eliminating refusenik positions, and creating new ones—or even new agencies. When faced with that, formerly recalcitrant people become more amenable to implementing policies that are adopted by the Syriza government. However, the government has been limited in implementing this; I think it could do more.

The Troika would like to eliminate government agencies and turn their functions over to “the market” or to NGOs. We cannot do all that we’d like to stop The Troika, but we must fight to stop the bleeding it seeks to impose upon the Greek people.

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**11. “The Syriza Called ‘Snap Election’”. By Akis Georgakellos and Harris Mylonas. *Washington Post.* August 20, 2015.**

**Greece just called new elections. Here’s the background you need to understand them.**

Greece is headed for snap elections in September, less than eight months since its last parliamentary elections. For the past five years, Greece’s internal political competition has [centered](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1537592714000942) around its financial crisis — and more specifically, around whether the nation should accept the austere bailout terms offered by the European Union “troika” of the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Union. This has become known as the “memorandum” vs. “anti-memorandum” policy cleavage.

That debate appeared to be decisively answered in a July 5 referendum, when  [61.3 percent](http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/jul/05/live-results-greek-referendum) of the nation voted to reject the troika’s “memorandum” terms. And yet within a week, Greece’s parliament — led by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his party—[capitulated](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11735609/Greece-news-live-Crucified-Tsipras-capitulates-to-draconian-measures-after-17-hours-of-late-night-talks.html) and signed the memorandum of understanding. What operated as a sharp division between the pro- and anti-memorandum camps disappeared, when most of Tsipras’s Syriza party and all of the ANEL party voted in favor of the [third memorandum](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-5503_en.htm)— yet [one-third](http://www.ekathimerini.com/200565/article/ekathimerini/news/greek-parliament-approves-third-bailout-but-syriza-rebellion-growshttp:/www.ekathimerini.com/200565/article/ekathimerini/news/greek-parliament-approves-third-bailout-but-syriza-rebellion-grows) of Syriza refused to go along. [The populist, rightwing Independent Greeks (ANEL) would at first sight make for a strange bedfellow for the radical leftists Syriza and the deal makes an unusual alliance, but they are brought together by a mutual hatred for the bailout programme keeping [Greece](https://www.theguardian.com/world/greece) afloat. *The Guardian.*]

Of the nine parties that have entered the Greek Parliament in the past five years, only two remain opposed to the terms of the European bailouts: the [Communist Party of Greece](http://inter.kke.gr/en/firstpage/) (KKE) and the far-right [Golden Dawn](http://www.xryshaygh.com/en).

**Why is Tsipras still popular, after capitulating to Europe despite the referendum?**

It may seem rather paradoxical that Alexis Tsipras remains the dominant political figure in Greek politics, despite his major turnaround. To be sure, plenty of followers have been [disappointed by his change of heart](http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/17/us-eurozone-greece-panos-idUSKCN0QM0EO20150817). He is still mistrusted by many of his opponents, who fear that he can jeopardize Greece’s place in the European Union. But according to all polls at the moment, [Tsipras is still the most popular Greek politician, and his party has a wide lead over the second-place New Democracy party](http://www.wsj.com/articles/greek-prime-minister-alexis-tsipras-remains-popular-despite-tough-bailout-deal-1437563249). Why?

To begin with, Tsipras has convinced a large part of Greek public opinion that he [did his best to negotiate](http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/english/2015/07/23/extracts-from-prime-minister-alexis-tsipras-speech-in-the-greek-parliament/) with the country’s creditors these past six months. Regardless of whether this is true, his supporters believed he was more willing to negotiate. Next, his followers balance his support for a third bailout plan for Greece with expectations that he will oppose corruption and tax evasion or stand up on issues of human rights.

To defend his transformation, Tsipras suggested that the choice was between a [“a memorandum with the euro or a memorandum with the drachma.”](https://euobserver.com/economic/129884) In other words, there was no way to avoid a new bailout.

Of course, it helps that most Greeks still see Tsipras’s main political competitors as discredited by their recent record. Meanwhile, both of those competing parties — [New Democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Democracy_(Greece)) and [PASOK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panhellenic_Socialist_Movement) — are undergoing leadership changes. In contrast, Tsipras is still perceived as representing something new, unspoiled and somewhat hopeful. After all, he was elected for the first time six months ago. This image may have been tarnished in the past months, but it has not been entirely overturned.

Tsipras’s pragmatic turn cost him votes on the left, but it is compensated by new voters from Syriza’s right. In fact, it seems that the more he fights against his internal opposition, the greater his appeal among the wider public. This has led many, even among his toughest critics, to suggest that he is a social democrat in the making, not a leader of the radical left. A solid bloc of voters still considers him to be an irresponsible politician whose communist ideological background will prevent this transformation.

Finally, his support may still be strong, but there is no doubt that when the Greeks begin paying their annual tax obligations and the measures stipulated in the third memorandum get implemented, Tsipras will have to pay the political cost from this deal.

**How does all this fit in the larger Greek political scene?**

Here’s the larger political context. Syriza is [internally divided](http://www.globalpost.com/article/6631106/2015/08/14/three-key-figures-greek-ruling-partys-internal-war). The main actors in the internal opposition include [Panagiotis Lafazanis](http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Vouleftes/Viografika-Stoicheia/?MPId=bfe6610b-940d-4a8e-95dc-a90ef8de3495), head of the most organized internal faction, known as the [Left Platform](http://www.tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=729441); former finance minister [Yanis Varoufakis](http://yanisvaroufakis.eu/); and [Zoe Konstantopoulou](http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Organosi-kai-Leitourgia/Proedreio/Proedros/), the president of the Parliament. The latter two have little power within the party but do have some appeal to the electorate at large. What complicates things is that these main actors may not be able to collaborate to form a party and oppose Tsipras.

The minor coalition partner, [Independent Greeks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Greeks) (ANEL), is facing the fate that all such partners faced when they [changed sides on the memorandum-antimemorandum cleavage](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/2047-8852.12050/abstract): electoral demise. ANEL has only 13 members of parliament now. If any of those are to make it into the next one, the party will have to either produce a convincing new message or be absorbed by Syriza.

In the main opposition party, New Democracy, former prime minister [Antonis Samaras](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonis_Samaras) resigned, passing the baton to [Vangelis Meimarakis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vangelis_Meimarakis) — the former party secretary and president of the Parliament — as interim party president. Meimarakis is considered a hardened party cadre. Despite his classical liberal past, he has good relations with all tendencies within the party — and most important, with both former prime ministers, [Karamanlis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostas_Karamanlis)and Samaras. Meimarakis has already initiated a realignment of the party to the center. Nothing is more permanent than the temporary, goes a Greek saying. Nevertheless, when things quiet down, there will be an intensely contested succession struggle within the party.

PASOK’s president, [Evangelos Venizelos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelos_Venizelos), also resigned and was replaced by [Fofi Gennimata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fofi_Gennimata) — a former minister and governor of Attica, daughter of a historic PASOK figure and the first woman to hold this position. Gennimata is attempting to regain the support of former PASOK voters, but so far, to no avail. Ironically, Venizelos, who was not popular as the leader of PASOK, has increased his popularity across the “yes” camp since he stepped down.

The River, a new political party, is still trying to find its niche, balancing between safe political choices and new political personalities.

PASOK, ND and The River supported the “yes” in the referendum and voted “yes” for the third bailout plan, interpreting both as a vote for remaining within the European Union and the euro zone. The question remains whether they could form an electoral alliance in the next election — possibly involving nonpartisan players such as Athens Mayor Giorgos [Kaminis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giorgos_Kaminis), or Yiannis [Boutaris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiannis_Boutaris), the mayor of Thessaloniki, who spearheaded the “yes” campaign in the recent referendum. Winning only 38.7 percent of the referendum vote may have been disappointing, but this percentage could win an election. The comparative advantage of this camp is that its voters have more homogeneous political views relative to the “no” camp.

Things will be complicated by the fact that existing electoral law does not allow for coalitions of parties to receive the 50-seat bonus (out of 300) received by the political party that gets the largest number of votes. Thus, such a coalition seems rather unlikely.

On the left, KKE is trying to regain disappointed Syriza voters. Tsipras’s turnaround may strengthen the [Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anticapitalist_Left_Cooperation_for_the_Overthrow) (ANTARSYA), which currently has no seats in Parliament.

On the far right, Golden Dawn is trying to capitalize on Syriza’s troubles, which are coincidentally taking place during a new [immigration crisis in the Aegean](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33861290).

Finally, previously electorally marginal political parties have been approaching the 3 percent threshold — necessary to enter the Parliament — in recent opinion polls.

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**12. Who Is Responsible?**

**-- Professor Konstantine Gatsios. Selections from his articles;**

**-- Rev. Robert C. Linthicum on systems;**

**-- Some of my thoughts.**

The Crisis, from one point of view, is due to the irresponsibility and greed of the Greek people: unions negotiated pensions and retirement ages that were untenable for the Greek economy to bear. Members of these unions elected those leaders who made the pension and retirement age promises when they campaigned for those members’ votes. People bought homes when they couldn’t afford them because there were loans available that made it possible; they should have known that they couldn’t afford the payments. Voters elected candidates who made unsustainable promises; they should have taken greater responsibility for their roles as citizens, and been more discerning in their selection of politicians to represent them.

The Crisis, from another point of view, is the result of institutional and individual irresponsibility and exploitation on the part of those in high places. Bankers should not have made loans to customers they knew on the basis of past experience would not be able to make the payments if there was the slightest change in their economic circumstances, or if there was the slightest dip in the value of their homes. Elected politicians should have been honest with the electorate, and told them the truth about what Greece could and could not afford. Prosecutors should have vigorously pursued jail terms for elected officials who lied—by commission or omission—about the facts.

Blame the system? Blame the person? That’s the way the debate is usually conducted. There is no thornier moral, theological, philosophical, ideological or political question than that of complicity. Even if one places emphasis on institutions and dominant values, it seems to me you cannot deny the role of individual responsibility. To do so is to render people complete victims, and to deny them the possibility of agency.

What are we to make of these diametrically opposed views? Every organizer must deal with them when she tries to move people from inaction to action. I cannot tell you how many times in my life as an organizer that I have heard complaints about how the system “screwed me”. And the complainers are often right: they were taken advantage of, typically by people who knew what they were doing: an unscrupulous merchant who sold them shoddy goods; a politician who promised one thing during the election campaign, then voted the opposite way once in office, a banker who made a loan knowing the likelihood of its payment was low if any but the most optimistic economic forecast was to be the future reality.

In the Deep South, “field secretaries” (organizers) for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were often told by local African-Americans they were trying to register to vote that “politics is white folks business.” But there was no denying the fact that police brutality, denial of equal rights, economic opportunity and a host of other things desired by local people could not be achieved in the Apartheid states of the American south. SNCC people persisted. They built a movement and organizations that contributed to overcoming some of the worst of the racism in the south. (Much remains to be done.)

Organizers seek to move people from inaction to inaction. The process is a delicate one, and requires a great deal of listening and empathy. But it doesn’t stop there. In effect, the organizer says to people: “this is your mess; no one’s going to get you out of it other than yourselves”. That’s called agitation. Accompanying the agitation there has to be a believable scenario that persuades people of the efficacy of collective action. Thus the most visionary organizer who imagines the most transformative change must begin with immediate, specific and winnable issues in which people can experience for themselves the power of people power.

Are the Greeks responsible for their own crisis? That is the argument of Konstantine Gatsios, Professor of Economics, and former Rector, at Athens University of Economics and Business.

Reading his articles, excerpts of which are below, I was reminded of the biblical understanding of complicity I learned from Rev. Robert C. Linthicum, an evangelical Presbyterian with whom I worked closely over a period of almost ten years. He was also active in a number of Saul Alinsky-tradition community organizations, and headed a small “Urban Advance”—community organizing—office in the otherwise traditionalist relief agency, World Vision.

Linthicum’s theology is radical—in the original sense of the word:  going to the root. The world that God intends, he says, is one in which the political system is just and the religious (values-sustaining) system guides people to act justly. Here is how he describes the economic system as intended by God in an article I commissioned when I was editor of *Social Policy* (“Systems As God Intends and Humanity Corrupts”; Autumn, 2001):

Deuteronomy is reminding Israel that all that it possesses is a gift from God. Therefore, do not insult God by saying, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth" (8:17). Because this wealth is a gift from God, Deuteronomy teaches that it is *not a private wealth to be owned but a common wealth that God has invested in the Israelites so that they can be good trustees or stewards of that wealth*.

Since wealth is to be only temporarily invested in the people, for what purpose are they to manage it? It is at this point that Deuteronomy presents its most radical insight – as radical for its time as it is for our own. Wealth is to be used for one purpose alone – *"There will, however, be no poor among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment."* (Deut. 15:4-51)Wealth is to be used to rid the nation of poverty (which was considered a national disgrace)! If wealth is accumulated, this should be as savings for investment that will create more abundance to be shared with all – not for conspicuous consumption (certainly chief executive officer salary/benefit packages that reach into the millions would not be tolerated).

Deuteronomy is replete with instructions as to how the nation can guarantee that the economy is managed in such a way that poverty will be eliminated from the nation. No interest is to be charged on loans. Wealth cannot be passed from one generation to another. All debts are to be forgiven every seven years and wealth is to be evenly redistributed. All wealth is to be tithed for the purpose of eliminating poverty in the community in which the tithe-giver lives. Even the institution of slavery was profoundly different than that of the slavery practiced by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome – or the United States. The Israelite slave was more of an "indentured servant" than "chattel", who agreed temporarily to service of a "master" as a way of paying off debts or other obligations. Therefore, Deuteronomy commands that all slaves are to be set free every seven years and fairly compensated for their period of enslavement. The "bottom line" of each of these regulations is simply to use Israel’s wealth to eradicate poverty from the nation.

But, Linthicum’s biblical reading tells us, systems go astray:

The political system, instead of guaranteeing justice, has been practicing a *politics of oppression*.

The business leaders of Israel had moved from seeing the purpose of business to provide a service or of quality goods, to embracing its purpose as making the biggest profit possible (22:27). They took bribes. They charged interest in their loans (explicitly disobeying Israel’s Law). They extorted (22:12). And such action in regards to their money had resulted in a significant shift of economic leaders from perceiving themselves as *stewards* of a "common wealth" to *owners* of a private wealth. The result of that perspective was a profound change in the way Israel’s economic leaders used the nation’s wealth – for they used it for their own purposes and profit, intentionally exploiting the poor, marginalized and powerless of that society to increase their wealth. They were practicing an *economics of exploitation*.

What Ezekiel tells us (22:26) is that the religious leaders are withholding from the people what they need to know in order to follow the Law and therefore be right with God. But one must ask, "Why would religious leaders refuse to give to the people the information they need in order to be in a right relationship with God?" The answer is obvious. It gives them control over the people. And they can use that control to rationalize what is being done by the other two systems and thus to "bless" the oppression and exploitation of the people.

This, of course, is the essential weakness of any system that helps to set and maintain the values and beliefs of a society. That system can use its authority to create and maintain those values that are most self-serving, as well as those that serve the political and economic powers of the society. This is what the professional religionists of Ezekiel’s world were doing – they were creating a *religion of control*!

…

There are potentially three reformist forces in society, Ezekiel teaches – the prophet, the people and God. And God help your nation if it has to be God!

The first reformist force is the prophet. Deuteronomy calls the prophet to hold the systems accountable. But Ezekiel tells us "the prophets have smeared whitewash on (the systems’) behalf" (22:28). They are "covering up" the actual practices of the systems so that the people won’t discern how they are being betrayed. The prophets have been seduced! And those who haven’t been seduced are slandered, shunned, persecuted or killed!

The second reformist force is the people. Deuteronomy calls them to practice in their private lives and business associations the justice, stewardship and relationality to which the systems are to be committed, to hold systems accountable, and to pass on this way of life to future generations. But what have the people done with this heritage, according to Ezekiel?

Ezekiel writes, "The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress" (22:29). Ezekiel presents one of the saddest results of corrupt systems. It is that the people are infected with the systems’ greed. Seeing the systems "grabbing for all they can get," the people follow suit and embrace those values for their own. Toward each other and especially toward those who are more vulnerable or marginalized then they are, the people become dominating, oppressive and exploitive. ***So they become complicit in the systemic evil around them*.** [emphasis added]

Thus, Ezekiel declares, God seeks for any person "who would . . . stand in the breach before me on behalf of the (people), so that I would not destroy (the nation) – *but I found no one!"* (22:30b)

So it is that God remains the only reformist force in such a decayed society. So what will God do? Ezekiel writes, "I have poured out my indignation upon them; *I have returned their conduct upon their heads*, says the Lord God." (22:31)

How will the end come to such a society? God will simply let it experience the consequences of its own action. God will simply allow the systems…to destroy themselves, the people and that society.

Konstantine Gatsios is now writing as Deuteronony’s prophets spoke—demanding that Greek politicians be held accountable, AND that everyday people end their complicity with evil. His focus is there, not on the international banks or Euro zone institutions. Is he correct in his analysis and prescription of what has gone, and is going, wrong in Greece? I do not know. Is he blaming the victim by focusing almost exclusively on the Greek people and their politicians? I think there is blaming the victim, but he is saying things the left traditionally ignores that often need to be said. Is he a voice in the wilderness? That appears to be the case. If he is right, the future for Greece is, indeed, a bleak one.

These are excerpts from Gatsios’ writing; you can find his articles in English at [www.gatsiosblog.gr](http://www.gatsiosblog.gr)

[Greece’s] complete loss of its autonomy and independence …are not the result of some foreign treacherous conspiracy. To a large extent, they are the result of our collective attachment to pre-modern forms of understanding the world, which lead us to submit ourselves to established interests, obsessions and absurdities, to collective inertia and historical delay.

…

When a country cannot distinguish the Syrian refugee families from the Pakistani illegal immigrants, when it cannot release a Public Enterprise from the ties of the abusive guild that controls it and put it into operation for the benefit of society as a whole, when it cannot realize that pensions cannot exceed a certain percentage of GDP without there being an impact for the economy, when it considers that prosperity can come only from the end of “austerity”, i.e., from a new limitless borrowing, when it perceives development as something that results from “others’” money, then this society is doomed to lose control of the conditions of its own existence. Being unable to solve and handle any of its problems, small or large, it is fatal, slowly but steadily, to watch the relative tasks and responsibilities being passed down to the hands of those who can and who are more capable or more determined than itself is—that is to the foreigners.

For seven years now we have been living in a deep crisis. Yet! We have not been able to draw up a national plan to get out of it. We prove incapable of reaching an understanding among ourselves, even of the basics. We are limiting ourselves, or–more accurately–our institutional and technocratic representatives are limiting themselves to launching malicious, for the most part, criticisms against the foreign managers of our problems…

So far, that is, the most our country can achieve is to make comments on the actions of those that define its destiny while it collapses! We have become spectators of our own tragedy. For which, of course, we are to blame. We progressively but firmly lose our national freedom, independence and autonomy, not for any other reason, but because we prove to be incapable of handling our own issues, to answer our own problems—which we have created ourselves! And the only way to reverse that path, and to start re-taking the country in our hands, is a revolution of the new against the old, an educational, cultural, social and national revolution against our collective bad self. This is something that cannot be limited to the narrow scope of a simple political change. Greece will belong to the Greeks only when we collectively succeed in replacing slogans with logical analysis, superstition with rationality, ignorance with knowledge, selfishness with collective and individual ethics, and despair with determination. When, that is, we will begin to recognize ourselves, and only ourselves, as responsible for our destiny.

…

Those who are concerned and worried about the probability that in 2017 our country will be taken over by the movement of “post truth” politics, which spreads in the western world like the midsummer fire spreads in the grain fields, can settle down. There is no danger of this happening, for a very simple reason: because the “post truth” politics, namely the politics of illusion and absurdity, of madness and chicanery, of blindness and self-destruction, have been endemic for years in our dominant national way of thinking and acting, which our society externalizes through every pore it has and with every breath it takes, at every moment and with every opportunity. It is present in the political “narratives” of all dominant (and even marginal) political parties…

It is present in our collective consciousness that considers that a people and a society who have been self-governed for four decades, may not have the slightest responsibility for the consequences of their actions and inter-temporal choices but rather that the ones responsible for any adverse turn in their fate are some foreigners who covet, envy and hate us. It is present in the thought of “intellectuals” and “professionals” of speech and pen alike—or in a strong majority of them, anyway—who, violating any logic, any morality and any ethical commitment and intellectual honesty, twist things only to be liked by the public.

In the dawn of 2017, has the threat of destruction hovering the country for seven years, somewhat receded? Unfortunately, the answer is negative. Our society appears to be culturally unsynchronized with the economic necessities and requirements of the second globalization-the (consumption) benefits of which, however, it fervently seeks. This phenomenon has two aspects. On the one hand, there is a leading political class, which is, in general, either incapable or illiterate or corrupt. And on the other hand, there is a dominant pre-modern ideology in the social fabric, which fully obscures the prevailing reality either because it is related to anti-Enlightenment religious-type doctrines or because it totally belongs to the logic of conspiracy theories and scaremongering. So, seven years after the onset of the crisis, the society has not even realized what has really happened and is still happening, and the political leadership throughout the political spectrum, demagogic as it is, keeps on mythologizing in order to deceive and to reassure—as they have done before and they keep on doing after the crisis until today—with the purpose of reaping the ephemeral benefits of power, without caring what will happen next in a country that is in structural failure, geopolitical encirclement and demographic collapse.

Within this context, anyone who really cares about their country and is interested in the historical continuity and survival of the nation has a single duty. Especially, in the extremely difficult and dangerous year that 2017 is believed to be. To speak and promote the truth with simple, logical and sincere arguments and with the correct use of the necessary substantiation (especially if one is an economist), neglecting and ignoring the intimidations of those who only know how to threaten, and the slanders of those who only know how to smear and who will not hesitate to call him Stalinist or fascist, neoliberalist or statist, submissive to the Germans or Syriza-troll. Ignoring all that, the honest and judicious Greek patriot must defend those truths that will be necessary and relevant in 2017.

For example, that things regarding the “primary surplus” are not exactly as the incurable demagogy of the government and the opposition presents them to be, and that building confidence and attracting investment, namely the interest of the country, require that the payment of the interest of its loans is made through the primary surpluses, preferably through the reduction of spending rather than the increase of taxes and, definitely, not through new borrowing, as it constantly happens up to today. Also that in 2017, the public sector will have to cut clearly and openly (and not silently and in disguise) the percentage of public spending directed to pensions, in [order for it to be] possible for the youth to earn a living. (Especially if, at first, these cuts concern the pensions of the evil-pensioners, the ones that are “first in pursuing ‘their’ rights, first in pursuing ‘their’ fights”). That the promise of the uninterrupted and continuous recourse of the Greek government to the “markets” for all the years after 2018 in order to cover its financial needs is but a fairy tale—and fortunately so, because otherwise if it were to take place, it may have been a nightmare, a constant death rattling. That the “escape from the Memorandum” means nothing to a bankrupt state, and that an economic policy “outside the Memorandum” may be, by necessity, stricter and more disappointing for all those who hope to prosper not through their work and their efforts but through the “generosity” of the patronage Greek state.

Regarding the political parties and their promises, the honest patriot commits himself, especially now, in 2017, when a full experience cycle is complete, to put forward to all of them the following simple demand: instead of programs with promises and twaddles, which they all know have no value, to focus on two simple things. First, to explain to the Greek people the criminal and nation-destructive errors they have committed in the previous years to date, with particular emphasis of course on the critical years before the event of bankruptcy in 2010. Second, which happens to be the most important, to state exactly the way they are thinking to rectify and reverse their “mistakes”, that is the near-complete destruction of the Greek nation. (This demand applies to all political parties that existed before 2010, but also to all the new ones that have, however, their origin to the parties existing before 2010).

Let 2017 be a turning point in the course of the Greek nation, during which the Greeks will give up the hallucinations and the ostrich-like attitude, and will lead the country into a new phase of growth, prosperity and decency.

…

If there’s something we learned, which we did not know, from the recent “VIP” visit, it is that the government and the opposition, (together with the head of state), agree on this: the key problem of our country, of our economy and society, is “austerity”! As a result, it was logical just after we learned that, a reasonable question to emerge, at least to some of us: since it is so, and the two major parties agree upon something so fundamental, why the hatred and strife? Instead of blaming each other for many minor issues, why don’t they form (together with the smaller parties that agree on this issue) a coalition government in order to address together what they regard as the major problem? To fight, that is, all together, this villain, “austerity”? To abolish, with one law and one article if possible, this terrible scourge, which lies behind every disaster that has been hitting us for the last decade? Given that, if we remember correctly, “austerity” existed also back in 2008 and 2009, before we entered the crisis. Because it was “austerity” that the “unwavering fighters” were then denouncing and the “sound needy” were grieving for!

Unfortunately, we live in a country where the public debate is “divorced” from logic and the collective consciousness from reality. For today in Greece no “austerity” policy is being applied. Greece consumes 90% of the GDP it creates when, in order for it to have macroeconomic balance and any hope for growth, it should only consume 75%, in order to save and invest the rest (as almost all other eurozone countries do). Also this year, after six years of Memoranda, Greece will borrow an amount greater than 2.5% of its GDP, for no other reason but to pay the interest on its loans!

That means, we have a bankrupt country whose oversized public sector continues to consume beyond the capabilities of its economy. A bankrupt country that fails to serve on its own the interest payments of its debt and, as a result, it continues to borrow and, therefore, to further increase its debt! Despite, even, the fact that because of the greatest debt reduction that has ever happened globally and of various other accompanying arrangements, today it needs to pay annual interest of almost EUR 10 billion less than it would have paid if these arrangements had not taken place. (For which, however, it curses and blames its creditors claiming that they set a trap and destroyed it! This does not prevent it, of course, to ask, afterwards, for another reduction of its debt!) An additional characteristic of this bankrupt country is that it has the smallest percentage of economically active population in the developed world and it has allowed to retire nearly 10% of its inhabitants while still in productive age—and now is mourning because it is unable to pay the kind of pensions that it would have “wished”!

Unfortunately, Greece is also a country where its people instead of turning everything upside-down in order to create jobs for the more than a million unemployed people and the five hundred thousand young people who have fled to foreign lands, sit around and watch with pride their leaders mourn and beg their foreign counterparts that happen to meet for things that have nothing to do with reality. Because in Greece today not only is there no “austerity” policy being pursued, but also the public debt is not our main problem. Especially for the public debt, after the arrangements that have been made, we pay as a percentage of GDP less than other countries that have never borrowed as much. And in any case, we are burdened for servicing our debt with an amount (3.5% of GDP), which can be considered normal for an economy at our level of development. But because the debt and its reduction are a convenient topic, we continue to chatter about it while the actual cancer called “non-performing loans”, i.e. the private debt, is becoming gigantic day by day threatening to lead the economy to a complete collapse. That was a cancer that was left for years to develop, because addressing it required unpopular and, therefore, despised solutions to the prevailing demagoguery. And thus the opportunity to cure this cancer, when the banks still belonged to the Greek state and a satisfactory solution was still possible, was lost. Now, unfortunately, it will either be left to drown the Greek economy or it will be eradicated with extensive side effects.

The Greek economy does not suffer from “austerity”. It suffers from multiple asymmetries and malformations, all products of wrong and misguided perpetual choices of the Greek citizens themselves and their political representatives. Therefore, bursting into sobbing and begging when faced with any foreign official, relevant or irrelevant to our debt and the alleged “austerity”, does not constitute a productive practice. Not only because it cannot have any result, but mainly because a people is not worth living employing the art of revolutionary lamentation and militant begging, with the whole world as an observer.

Be that as it may, the foreigners gave what they had to give, and they will give whatever more they must. Even by necessity. But the solution to the country’s problems is only in the hands of its own citizens. And this solution will be applied only if they decide–soon hopefully—first to hunt those demagogues and then to reform and purge their life with moral courage and intellectual audacity. To restore their country as “Greece” and themselves as “Greeks”.

**…**

In the history of “applied socialism” in the 20th century in the Soviet Union and China, there are two remarkably black pages: it is the famine and the death of millions of people from starvation. In the case of the Soviet Union it happened during 1928-1933 with the so-called “collectivization”, and in the case of China during 1958-1962 with the “Great Leap Forward”. The main feature of both cases in economic terms, which explains the loss of tens of millions of lives, was the attempt to reduce, in an authoritarian and abrupt manner, private consumption (which consisted–due to poverty– mainly of food) in order to channel the savings into investment for the creation of heavy industry. In terms of National Accounts, what happened was a sudden decrease of consumption as a percentage of GDP, and a corresponding increase in savings, which was then turned to investment.

One might wonder: how do all these relate with the Greek economy today?

…

Unfortunately, they do… The famine in the Soviet Union, which caused millions of deaths from starvation, was called Holodomor. Unfortunately, our country today is facing in the years to come a kind of its own Holodomor. There are, of course, two big differences compared to the case of the Soviet Union, but also to that of China: in those cases the conversion of consumption to investment came violently and extremely fast, due to the existence of an authoritarian dictator. The Greek Holodomor, by contrast, can be long and protracted, with a slow and painful process of dissolution of our social structures, not due to a reduction of GDP consumption but, instead, due to its continued primacy. Which was not imposed by any dictator but, which was given prominence, over time, by the citizens themselves and of course by their political representations, with their decisions and their ostrich-like, but also self-destructive, behavior.

…

I do not think that the SYRIZA government has been elected by pensioners and civil servants, and no survey or poll points to something like that. The government was promoted to power by the entire old political establishment, that is, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the New Democracy (ND) parties, with their irresponsibility and inability to tell the truth to the Greek people about what is really happening. The people had learned a few things completely wrongly from these two parties, such as that you can live in perpetuity according to your wishes and not according to your abilities and your production. Seeing, then, that the two major political parties could no longer fulfill their promises, the Greek people thought, motivated by the sheer demagoguery which dominated the Greek society from 2010 onwards, that this failure is because these parties “were sold” to the foreigners. And therefore the people elected SYRIZA, wrongly considering that it was not part of the system, to bring back the good old days where one would get a pay rise regardless of the course of the economy, would easily get hired in the public sector, would start a business selling imported goods and would amortize the investment within the first year, the days that one would retire before churning out a single white hair and so on. The tragedy is that this belief that the “old world is possible”, continues to dominate the Greek people, who only now believe that SYRIZA was also sold to “foreign imposers”.

It constitutes not only a dead-end politicking, but also an act of treason to the nation that the two political parties that were dominant during the post-1974 period still do not tell the truth to the people, do not admit that they were practicing demagogy and that they were lying, and at the same time do not explain to the citizens that they have to change their perception on things. Instead, they invest for their “return to power” in the irreversible deterioration of SYRIZA, due to the mismatch between the demagogic promises that were profusely given by SYRIZA and to the cruel reality.

…

This is something I have said many times before, again and again. The interventions [now required in the economy] are simple but very difficult for the prevailing mentality. There is a need for structural adjustment of overdue loans with decisive moves, which even if they were not accepted by the prevailing demagoguery, would enhance the competitiveness of the economy. Also, I would suggest a radical pension reform by streamlining and adjusting the pensions to the actual prior working contributions of every pensioner, a sweeping reform of the public sector with elimination of any misspending or and lowering of taxes to a level that we would be competitive not only in comparison with the Balkan countries but also with countries like Ireland. But the main policy target is one: to set unemployment as the number one problem of the Greek economy and to utilize all other issues as economic policy tools in an effort to combat it.

I like a lot of what Gatsios has to say. At the same time, and perhaps because he wants to counter contrary escape-from-blame tendencies, I think he lets The Troika and all it represents off the hook.

We live in cultures that define dominant values: you are what you buy/own/consume is a pretty big one in the U.S. The dominant values offer the parameters of choice*.*

Society’s institutions structure choices further. We have to pay for things we want. We have to work in order to obtain the money to pay for those things. The more money we earn, the wider the range of purchases available to us. The pecking order is organized to recognize who earns how much. Conspicuous consumption was the term invented a half century ago to describe it. And nothing is more American than wanting to own your own home, which requires down payments, mortgages, insurance, taxes, and a repair and maintenance fund. When Johnnie or Susie comes home from school and wants mom to buy whatever is the latest fad, that’s the pressure of the dominant culture reaches into the family.

While specifically different, I think these principles hold in Greece.

But hold on. It is not a hegemonic culture, nor are the institutions that enforce the dominant culture ubiquitous. A strong counter-dominant culture exists both in the religious and political traditions of the United States. “We the people” are supposed to be equal before the law; our voices are supposed to be equal in “one person one vote”.

We are supposed to be our sister’s and brother’s keeper. Catholic encyclicals, Protestant exegeses, Torah readings, and the Muslim Qur’an and Sunnah tell the faithful to avoid excess and protect the poor, and talk about economic justice. The Greek Orthodox Church leaders quoted above say the same things.

The Ancient Athenians were cognizant of the fact that both participation and effectiveness in the Assembly were related to economic status and took steps to equalize status and power. Ancient Athenian democracy was the result of hundreds of years of struggle against aristocracy, monarchy and tyranny. I believe it created a foundation on which the Greek people today can build the vehicles to struggle against the present Troika tyranny.

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**13. Taking Power vs Making Power: Special Report from Greece. *The Laura Flanders Show.***

*Unfortunately, I’m unable to download this report. It is at the website for Grassroots Economic Organizing:*  *<http://www.geo.coop/story/taking-power-vs-making-power> If you go there, you can then watch a YouTube presentation by Laura Flanders on the rise of cooperatives. She asks the question, “Before people can take power for a new way, do they have to make a new way?” Here’s a brief preview of the presentation.*

From taking power to making power. This week on [The Laura Flanders Show](http://www.lauraflanders.com/" \t "_blank), a special report from Athens, Greece where many are asking if progressives in government can change much at all if people don’t first change society. In 2015, anti-austerity Greeks were disappointed by the progressive left Syriza government, which they'd voted into office after the financial crisis, but the other things they did to meet society’s needs just might be sowing the seeds for transformation.

One interviewee says that by December, 2012 there were more than 200 cooperatives (“self-organization”) meeting needs for food, health care, child care and other necessities. “Consumers, producers and volunteers come together and create a community.” “We imagine a small network of many distribution places rather than a few supermarkets.” “People”, says one spokesperson, “have to find their own strength so they can regain hope.”

The people are creating the power to change the world by creating non-hierarchical institutions, by working together in new ways. People feel betrayed by the politicians. It highlights the fact that transformational power can be realized only by claiming power, not only by taking state power. People become active agents for social change.

This is one form of response to the challenge made by Konstantine Gatsios. While important, I believe it is not sufficient. Government must be made accountable. Mutual aid activities are not enough to make that happen. Beyond Greece’s government, some handle down the road has to create accountability from European-wide institutions. While there is monetary integration in the Euro, there is no democratically constituted governing institution to determine monetary and other macro-economic policy to make the Euro accountability to the demos. Who better than the Greeks to begin that conversation? The demos was the invention of the Ancient Athenians!

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**14. Capitalism, Social Democracy, Socialism, Cooperatives (“Third Way”) and Democracy. Mike Miller.**

Of course being in Greece led me to exploration of Athenian democracy, which ran a course—including ups and downs—from 508 to 322 BCE. To diminish what the Athenians accomplished because slaves and women, and only some citizens, were full participants in it, and go no further, is a mistake. It can be called “incomplete democracy” and, at the same time, there are important things to be learned from it. Among others, these ideas: citizens are sovereign, not a king, oligarchy, divinity or tyrant; freedom of speech; equality before the law; independent judiciary; rotation of leadership; freedom from arbitrary and capricious behavior by public authority; the capacity of citizens to govern themselves; responsibility and right of citizens to participate in civic life, and; checks and balances have their origins in ancient Greece. In their popular assembly, Athens’ citizens debated and decided issues from the greatest—declaration of war—to the mundane—qualifications for ferry boat captains.

Apart from those who couldn’t vote or participate, there are questions such as these: would an oarsman dare debate his captain, or a field worker the farm’s owner? I do not know enough about ancient Athens to know the answer to questions such as these, but I sure know what the answer is in the United States. If the former don’t have a union, they’re likely not to. And it better be an effective union. Which brings me to the present.

In both Greece and the United States, the reality of “one person-one vote” does not stand up under scrutiny. In reality decisions made (the decision to evict or relocate a factory), or not made (the refusal to invest or lend or lower interest rates), by those in possession of great amounts of income and wealth, or in positions of power unaccountable to the popular will, define the character and quality of life for the vast majority of citizens who are nominally sovereign. In contemporary Greece, people of wealth invest abroad, or hide their riches in Swiss bank accounts. Tax avoidance by the rich is widespread. The absence of job opportunities leads people who would like to stay home to move elsewhere. International financial and European Union institutions impose severe austerity requirements as conditions for further loans without which the country would be bankrupt—most of which are used to pay off previous debt rather than directly benefit the Greek people.

In our present financialized global economy, debt contributes to xenophobia and suspicion, if not hatred, of The Other. The manipulation of the economy is now a matter of clicks on a computer keyboard that move vast amounts of capital from one place to another. The availability of cheap labor in the other place, and container ships to take what is produced there to anyplace else, creates competition of all against all—with capital going to the place where labor is cheapest, union organizing most difficult, and governments most pliant. There is, then, little reason to be surprised by the rise of the racist right throughout Europe, and of Donald Trump in the United States.

The present reality—in Greece, the U.S. or elsewhere in the world—has few defenders. How this reality came to be, and the way(s) to escape it are subject to endless debate that is sometimes interesting and enlightening, and other times deliberately designed to obfuscate. Most partisans in the debate have favored plans and programs, and strategies for their implementation. The vehicles to advance these are political parties and their candidates.

Standing on the rock of Acropolis in the shadow of the Parthenon, in the midst of the crowds there and being careful so I didn’t slip on the marble, I was struck yet again by the power of those ancient Athenian ideas of democracy. Whatever path—reformed capitalism, social democracy or the welfare state, a deeper democratic socialism or a cooperative economy (my personal choice is the last; I’ve written about it in a report I wrote on a visit to the Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain)—might be the way out of the present morass, none of them will be realized in the absence of vital people power organizations, deeply rooted in civil society, in which “we the people” can discuss, deliberate, debate, discern and decide upon alternatives we want turned into public policy, and use our collective power to insure that these decisions are implemented by those in public office and not sabotaged by those who hold private power.

My public life has been about the creation of those “we the people” organizations. Their development, sustenance, expansion and interconnection at regional, state, national and international levels is far more important to me than my personal preferences in matters of public policy. In their absence, many of the public policy arguments and the despair about current politicians that now engage the attention of people seeking a way out of the present morass have an air of unreality.

In workshops I lead on community organizing, I like to tell this story:

Four couples, all old friends, are sitting around the dining room table of one of them discussing a planned vacation. One wants to go to the Arctic, and presents its mysteries and the opportunity to see global warming up close as reasons to go. Another favors a cruise down the Danube to visit its many fascinating medieval castles and the rich histories associated with the cities along its banks. Still another alternative—basking in the sun of Maui’s beaches, and snorkeling or SCUBA diving in its waters—is offered by the third.

Throughout the discussion, the fourth couple has remained quiet. Then, during a pause in the lively exchange about possibilities, the wife of the until-then silent couple asks, “How much money do we have to spend on this trip?” There is silence at the table. Then the other three couples each huddle, husband and wife discussing their respective budgets. When figures are put on the table, each can spend about $2,000. The painful fact is that they’ll be lucky if they spend a week in one of their favorite American national parks.

Many of the discussions going on among my friends about how to re-organize American society have that utopian quality—they bear little relationship to the resources available to turn their content into policy that is not only adopted (we do have a full employment act on the books in the United States!), but implemented in the way the policy is or was intended. That is not simply a problem of ideas, though good ideas are important. It is mostly a problem of power: the people power required to get recalcitrant decision-makers to adopt changes, or to replace them if they won’t; the power to renew and re-shape existing institutions, and to create new ones if the existing ones do not serve the values of justice, equality, freedom, community, interdependence and solidarity.

Speaking truth to power, I’ve learned over the years, is not enough. Better to speak truth with people power. The status quo is more likely to change with kicks in their rears than with good ideas in their ears—though the good ideas are surely needed. The civil rights movement, both the mobilizing done by Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the organizing work done by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) provided that kick to President Lyndon Johnson and the Congress in the 1955-1965 period. In his day, Saul Alinsky called the vehicles on which to put the boot “mass-based organizations”. (Aaron Schutz and I discuss these at length in *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*). They are desperately needed today in the United States. I believe they are needed in Greece and, for that matter, throughout the world. In what follows, I outline their character.

**15. Concluding Thoughts**

I hope I’m not being dogmatic, but there is that risk. My major concluding observation about Greece isn’t all that different from my observation of the current enthusiasm among many on the left for the post-Bernie Sanders developments in the Democratic Party, namely: electoral politics has to be one strategic expression of mass-based organizations, but it cannot be the only or principal one, and before entering into the electoral arena, these organizations have to have a depth of relationship with their members and constituencies that allows them to resist the forces of cooptation that inevitably arise when entering the game of electoral politics (forces analogous to those that arise when entering into collective bargaining agreements with capital). Lou Goldblatt, for many years the Secretary-Treasurer of the International Longshoremen’s & Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) captured the problem when he said to me, “We are in a continuous struggle with the employer over prerogatives.”

This conclusion applies to Greece, and to Podemos in Spain,. It offers an explanatory framework for what went wrong in Lula’s Brazil, Chavez’ Venezuela, Mitterrand’s France and elsewhere in the world where popular forces were captured by an electoral strategy and, as a result, were unable to implement the promising programs they initially voiced.

Let me then summarize the characteristics of my understanding of a people power mass-based organization.

Mass-based, multi-issue/multi-constituency organizations have the capacity to engage in sustained struggle with corporate/financial and political power and win. With some relatively timid exceptions, we have little experience in the last 50-or-more years with mass-based organization. Rather, our experience is with mobilizations that momentarily capture attention and may temporarily paralyze the status quo with disruptive direct action. Think here about Occupy. Contrast it to the industrial unions of the 1930s that both could call upon members to engage in militant action with little fear of major defection, AND that had broad support among the people in the rest of the country, AND that remained in existence after the mobilizations were over. Mobilizations that are unconnected to mass organization may win particular battles, often important ones. They have not changed the relations of power that is a pre-condition for major economic victories over poverty and deprivation, let alone restructuring of the economy as a whole or creating a truly democratic society.

Mass based organizations have a number of strategic expressions which are central to their ability to act with power:

**1)** Economic action: strikes, boycotts and corporate campaigns that have specific targets and are supported with deep commitment by workers at a specific workplace or a community constituency that is directly affected by a targeted corporate actor.

**2)** Mass, nonviolent, disruptive direct action, the purpose of which is to demonstrate that “business as usual” will not continue so long as a particular wrong isn’t righted, and to bring an adversary to the negotiating table where concessions can be won *and a negotiating relationship established*. The latter alters the relations of power.

**3)** Public shaming that is designed to isolate a target from his or her social and cultural environment; these are tricky but can be highly successful. A CEO of a corporate exploiter can be publicly shamed at a place of worship. But it’s important that this be done in a way that doesn’t lead peers to rally behind the target. Instead, the tactic’s aim is to isolate the target from his/her community.

**4)** Alternative institutions that can be as small as a neighborhood buying club or as major as the [Mondragon system](http://www.mondragon-corporation.com/eng/co-operative-experience/our-principles/) of cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. They include bartering, pooling resources, credit unions, burial societies and a host of other mutual aid approaches that deepen interdependence and a sense of community among people.

**5)** Member Benefits are the result of having the economic power to negotiate as a group. Some unions have taken this so far that they seem to be dictated to by their benefits. But that is not a necessary result of using your numbers to get lower prices on everything from the stores on a neighborhood street to an insurance company or a health maintenance organization.

**6)** Advocacy for members. This, like member benefits, is a service that is provided for members—but with this twist: the advocacy is done by groups of members, not by a lawyer or some other professional. Thus advocacy becomes another tool to build the self-confidence and civic competency of members and leaders. This approach can be applied every time an individual is getting screwed by an institution, ranging from an auto or health insurance company to a public agency.

**7)** Creation of a small “d” democratic counter-culture. Through internal processes of education, reflection and celebration a new story of everyday people as makers of history is created. Without this, the likelihood of the internal life of a mass organization replicating the patterns of deference of the larger society are impossible to overcome.

**8)** Electoral, legislative, regulatory agency and judiciary politics. These are but one of five strategic approaches available to a mass organization. Their use should also engage large numbers of people in the process, whether that be door-to-door canvassing and house meetings in an election, mass lobbying at a legislative or regulatory body hearing, or even the quiet display of many people showing up in a courtroom.

It is important to use the tools of mass action rather than “insider” lobbying or closed door negotiations that are isolated from the very people most directly affected by the outcome of these negotiations.

My own view is that engaging in the electoral arena is the last act in the drama of creating and sustaining social change that benefits “the 99%”, and significantly dismantles the power of the now-reigning oligarchy that seems otherwise impregnable EVEN WHEN it grants concessions.

All politics is local. All politics is global. The recently closed library in your neighborhood or town reflects the failure to have an equitable and just tax system at local, state and national levels. The passage of [NAFTA](http://www.epi.org/blog/naftas-impact-workers/) reflects the inability of progressive forces in hundreds of districts to hold accountable their members of Congress; ditto for the [Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-p-hoffa/chinas-currency-manipulat_b_7998236.html).

The specific issues that engage people in a mass-based organization must be immediate and specific. Proposed solutions must be believable and winnable in a relatively short period of time. These issues are what shift people from non-participation to engagement. These campaigns are essential if we are to reach beyond the choir, the activists who now can be counted upon to show up for a demonstration.

Once engaged in a lively organization that builds community around values of human dignity, justice, equality, security, democracy and freedom everyday people will be willing to undertake action on issues that require lengthier campaigns because these campaigns more deeply challenge entrenched power. A relative handful of people can shut down a neighborhood store that carries shoddy merchandise and refuses to accept returns. A large number of people are required to make Wells Fargo Bank and the other big banks stop the foreclosures that resulted from their bad loans.

Action on global issues has to be translated to local targets. If a successful mass movement, comprising mass-based organizations around the world or at least around the country, is to be built its targets have to have local actionable handles so that local people can win agreements without waiting for some national or international victory. For example, even a block-club can get a boycotted product off the shelves of the neighborhood corner grocery. Or a local city government can decide to move its funds from a bank or disinvest from a polluter.

I call the strategic approach of these organizations “partisan non-partisanship”. They are deeply partisan on the freedom, justice, equality, solidarity, community, mutual respect and related values that are their bases for action. And they are deeply partisan on the specific issue campaigns, ranging from a stop sign at a dangerous intersection or reforming the practices of a cheating merchant or negotiating an agreement between tenants and their landlord to national health care, a living wage or full employment. However, they are not joined with or dependent upon any given political party. They seek to create a situation in which politicians adopt their platforms rather than the usual circumstance in which politicians adopt platforms and then seek to convince voters to endorse them.

In the absence of such formations, I fear that we will continue on the downward course the world has embarked upon. Whether it is climate change, diminishing potable water, the hubris of empire, growing concentration of wealth and power in an ever-smaller financial and corporate elite that is targeted for change, the result will be defeat.

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If you, the reader, have something to say about what’s going on in Greece, or an article that you think sheds further light on the situation there, please send it to me. I’ll add it to this collection. Maybe it will be useful to people thinking or doing things about the present, I hope loosening, grip of “neo-liberalism” on the world.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Miller’s **organizing background** includes the early student movement at UC Berkeley, field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1962-end of 1966), directorship of a Saul Alinsky community organizing project (1967-68), and a number of subsequent organizing projects. His **articles on organizing** have appeared in *Christianity & Crisis, National Council of Churches Report, New Conversations, Boston Review, Social Policy, Generations, CounterPunch, Dissent, the liberal democrat, Socialist Review, International Journal of Urban Planning and Research, Shelterforce, Poverty & Race Research and Action Reports, Race, Poverty and the Environment, The Ark, The Movement, Organizing*, *The Organizer, New Labor Forum, Working USA and the newspapers San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Examiner and Sun Reporter*.

**His books include**: *Community Organizing: A Brief Introduction, A Community Organizer’s Tale: People and Power in San Francisco*, co-author of *The People Fight Back*, and co-editor of *People Power: The Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*.

He **taught community organizing, political science or urban studies** at University of California (Berkeley), Stanford, Notre Dame, University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee, San Francisco State University, Hayward State University and Lone Mountain College. He lectures and leads intensive workshops on community organizing.

He **led a twice-yearly five-day** **intensive workshop on community organization** attended by labor, religious, and interest and identity group leaders from across the United States, and around the world, including Australia, Canada and countries in Europe, Asia and Africa.

His **consultations include**:

**Religious organizations**: United Church Board for Homeland Ministries; United Methodist Board for Global Ministries, World Council of Churches, Office on Urban and Rural Mission; United Presbyterian Church, National Division; Catholic Diocese of Tucson, Arizona; Catholic Charities, and; many local churches and congregations.

**Unions:** American Federation of Teachers, California State Employees Association, California School Employees Association, and numerous public and private sector union locals, including Firefighters, Food & Commercial Workers and Office & Professional Employees.

**Community organizations:** Metropolitan Organizations for People (Denver), Portland (OR) Organizing Project, Omaha Together Organizing Project, Great Plains Organizing Project (rural Nebraska), San Francisco Organizing Project, Citizens Action League (CA), and Tenderloin Senior Organizing Project (San Francisco).

**And:** numerous interest (tenant, homeowner, small business, block club) and identity (senior, ethnic, racial, youth)

He directs ORGANIZE Training Center, [www.organizetrainingcenter.org](http://www.organizetrainingcenter.org)