Europe's Radical Left

From Marginality to the Mainstream?

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PART I

THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT

Chapter 2

Radical Left 'Success' before and after the Great Recession

Still Waiting for the Great Leap Forward?

Luke March

In recent years, several analysts have argued that the radical Left has stabilised and even been growing in European party systems.[1] However, such prognoses often appeared confounded, with initial dividends from the Great Recession meagre, and many successes counteracted by debacles. However, 2015 marked an apparent step-change. Syriza's stunning victory in the January Greek legislative elections elected the first anti-austerity radical left government within the European Union, at a time when the austerity consensus appeared under renewed assault. This led to a profusion of sympathetic articles proclaiming that Syriza would start a wave of hope and solidarity that would radically transform Europe and finally undermine TINA (Thatcher's adage that 'There Is No Alternative' to neoliberal transformation).[2] Such hopes took a battering with Syriza's submission to the August 2015 Third Memorandum. Nevertheless, impressive results for RLPs in Spain and Portugal in late 2015 reinforced the sense of an upward trajectory. Was this really the case?

The main question of this chapter is whether the Great Recession has indeed marked change rather than continuity in RLPs' performance. It identifies long-term trends to provide a comparative overview examining RLP 'success' both before and after the crisis. Although 'success' here mainly addresses the electoral and policy realms, I recognise that most RLPs judge their own performance reflecting extra-parliamentary linkages.[3] Therefore, such elements as links with social movements will also be mentioned, prior to being fleshed out more fully in the case-study chapters.

The chapter shows how by the mid-2000s, the European radical Left was indeed emerging as a more electorally consolidated party family that was, in certain circumstances, able to challenge mainstream (particularly social democratic) parties. Nevertheless, this was a relative gain: the party family was unable to become more than the sum of its parts. Even prior to 2008, external

socio-economic conditions in many European countries were propitious for RLPs. However, internal factors within such parties (particularly the absence of a sufficiently electorally attractive vision and still-persistent ideological and strategic conflicts) and divisions between them often prevented RLPs benefitting. To this degree, the party family had not fully overcome its own communist-era crisis. Initially, the post-2008 environment showed more continuity than change, as few parties exploited deteriorating economic conditions. Nevertheless, as the crisis has developed, opportunities have demonstrably increased. Such opportunities include not only changes to the external environment (the intensification of economic distress and the breakdown of established party systems), but also new strategic possibilities within RLPs themselves. The Syriza and Podemos 'magic equations' demonstrate the effectiveness of combining new forms of populist electoral appeal with programmatic flexibility and enhanced party-movement linkages.[4] Nevertheless, most other parties lack this combination of external opportunities and internal resources, meaning that similar success is unlikely to be repeated *imminently* elsewhere. Similarly, dramatic ruptures in European politics remain, as yet, remote possibilities.

THE PATCHWORK OF ELECTORAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

A longer-term historical perspective confirms several pertinent facts (Figure 2.1). Even at its post-World War II zenith, when boosted by its role

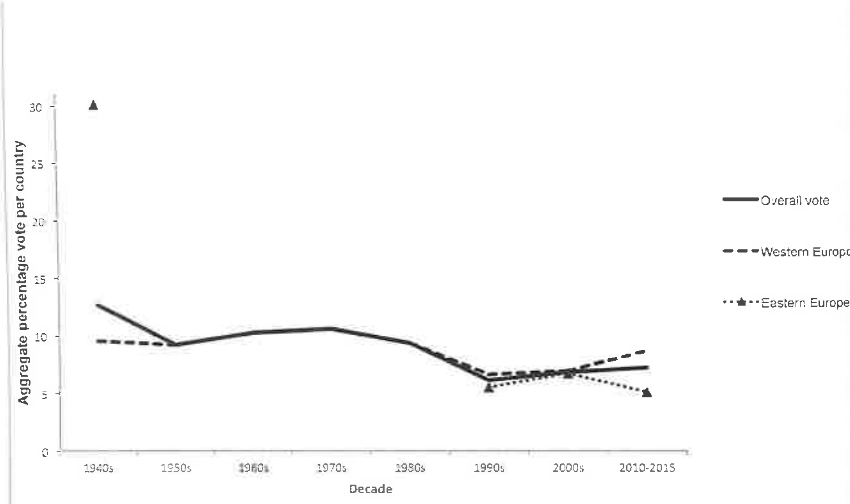

Figure 2.1 The Electoral Performance of the Radical Left in Europe, 1945–2015.
Source: Authors' calculations from www.parties-and-elections.eu and www.parlgov.org.

in the resistance and the relatively benign image of the Soviet Union, the European radical Left was only ever a 'small party family', seldom polling over 15 per cent of the vote.[5]

Table 2.1 (showing the aggregate national percentage vote across all European countries) confirms a sharp decline from the 1940s until the 1950s in overall performance (12.6 to 9.2 per cent), followed by upwards stabilisation in the 1960s and 1970s (10.2 and 10.5 per cent, respectively).[6] A collapse started in the 1980s and especially 1990s (9.3 then 6.1 per cent, respectively), followed by a marginal uptick in the 2000s (6.8 per cent), enhancing in the 2010s (7.2 per cent). Despite this recovery, today's radical Left remains way below its historical high, and is weaker in former Eastern Europe (just 5.1 per cent in the 2010s). Moreover, the radical left vote has become increasingly fragmented domestically. The vote *per party* decreased from 14.9 per cent in the 1940s to 5.2 per cent in the 1980s and merely 3.7 in the 1990s, before recovering to reach 4.5 per cent in 2010–2015. This data reflects that, even at the peak of Western European Communist Party (WECP) strength, few parties (in Cyprus, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Portugal and San Marino) ever hit the 15-per cent mark. Many WECPs were nationally insignificant after the 1950s and by the 1970s, 90 per cent of West European communists belonged to the CPs of Italy and France.[7] Various 'new left' parties helped sustain aggregate strength, but were often relatively tiny and/or ephemeral themselves.

The contemporary situation confirms that RLP support has become geographically broader, but electorally shallower and more nationally variable still than in the communist era. Whereas France, Italy and other historical heartlands no longer make up its core, it is infinitesimal across much of the continent (in 21 of 42 European countries, RLPs poll less than 3 per cent *on aggregate*!) Focusing on the pre-crisis electoral performance of the most relevant European parliamentary (EP) RLPs makes the diversity very apparent (Table 2.1). Despite a marginal recovery (to 9.7 per cent) by 2008, aggregate growth cannot conceal that the fortunes of individual parties much differed. In some countries, party support drastically improved after 1990 (notably the Netherlands); in others it markedly declined (e.g. former WECP heartlands such as France and [especially] Italy); in most the position was stable over time, but volatile from one election to the next. Some general trends are evident. Only six of the 25 most relevant parties polled double digits in the 2000s. Moreover, the pockets of above-average strength were generally in poorer and/or smaller countries (e.g. Greece, Cyprus and Moldova), (only some) post-Soviet countries and outside the European Union. Crucially, RLPs had below-average strength in several core EU countries (e.g. France, Italy and Germany). In some (e.g. the United Kingdom and Austria) there was *no* relevant party whatsoever.

Table 2.1 The Electoral Performance of the Most Relevant RLPs, 1980–August 2008[§]

Country/Party	*Average Vote 1980–9*	*Average Vote 1990–9*	*Average Vote 2000–2008*	*Vote Change 1989–2008*	*Vote Change 1999–2008*	*Post-1989 High*	*Post-1989 Low*
EU-28							
Cyprus (AKEL)	30.1	31.7	32.9	2.8	1.2	34.7 (2001)	30.6 (1991)
Czech Republic (KSČM)	CP	12.1	15.7	n/a	3.6	18.5 (2002)	10.3 (1996)
Denmark (EL)	8.7 **(a)**	2.5	2.7	–6.0	0.2	3.4 (2005)	1.7 (1990)
Denmark (SF)	12.6	7.7	8.5	–4.1	0.8	13.0 (2007)	6.0 (2005)
Finland (VAS)	13.5 **(b)**	10.7	9.4	–4.1	–1.3	11.2 (1995)	8.8 (2007)
France (PCF)	12.4	9.6	4.6	–7.8	–5.0	9.9 (1997)	4.3 (2007)
Germany (LP)	CP	4.0	6.4	n/a	2.4	8.7 (2005)	2.4 (1990)
Greece (KKE)	10.4	5.1	6.5	–3.9	1.4	8.2 (2007)	4.5 (1993)
Greece (Syriza) **(c)**	6.8	6.1	3.8	–3	–2.3	10.3 (1990)	2.9 (1993)
Greece (DIKKI) **(d)**	n/a	4.4	2.2	n/a	–2.2	4.4 (1996)	1.8 (2004)
Ireland (Sinn Féin)	1.0	2.1	6.7	5.7	4.6	6.9 (2007)	1.6 (1992)
Italy (PRC)	28.2 **(e)**	6.7	3.6	–24.6	–3.1	8.6 (1996)	3.1* (2008)
Latvia (LSP)	CP	5.6	(coalition)	n/a	n/a	5.6 (1995)	5.6 (1995)
Luxembourg (LÉNK)	5.3 **(f)**	3.3	2.6	–2.7	–0.6	3.3 (1999)	1.6 (1994)
Netherlands (SP)	0.4	2.4	9.6	9.4	7.2	16.6 (2006)	1.3 (1994)
Portugal (PCP)	15.6*	8.8*	7.3*	–8.3	–1.4	9.0* (1999)	7.0* (2002)
Portugal (BE)	n/a	2.4	4.6	n/a	2.2	6.4 (2005)	2.4 (1999)
Slovakia (KSS)	CP	2.1	5.1	n/a	3.0	6.3 (2002)	0.8 (1992)
Spain (PCE)	5.9*	9.2*	4.8*	–1.1	–4.4	9.2* (1993/6)	3.8* (2008)
Sweden (V)	5.6	7.6	7.2	1.6	–0.4	12.0 (1998)	4.5 (1991)
Average EU-28	*11.2*	*7.2*	*7.6*	*–3.6*	*0.4*		
Non-EU countries							
Iceland (VG)	15.4 **(g)**	12.6	11.6	–3.8	–1.0	14.3 (2007)	8.8 (2003)
Moldova (PCRM)	CP	30.1	48.1	n/a	18.1	50.1 (2001)	30.1 (1998)
Norway (SV)	6.8	7.0	10.7	3.9	3.7	12.5 (2001)	6.0 (1997)
Russia (KPRF)	CP	19.7	12.1	n/a	–7.6	24.3 (1999)	11.6 (2007)
San Marino (RCS)	26.6 **(h)**	3.4	6.1	–20.5	2.7	8.7* (2006)	3.3 (1998)
Ukraine (KPU)	CP	18.7	9.7	n/a	–9	24.7 (1998)	3.7 (2006)
Average non-EU	*16.3*	*15.3*	*16.4*	*0.1*	*1.1*		
Overall average	**12.1**	**9.1**	**9.7**	**–2.4**	**0.6**		

Key: [§] For simplicity and clarity, the relevance threshold is defined as obtaining at least 3 per cent of the vote and gaining parliamentary seats in at least one national election; only parties still extant at end of this period are included; * signifies in coalition. Coalitions not led by RLP are excluded; CP signifies ruling Communist Party; (a) Four constituent parties later forming EL; (b) Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL; in 1987 SKDL + Democratic Alternative); (c) until 2004 as Synaspismós; (d) Democratic Social Movement. Joined Syriza in 2007; (e) Italian Communist Party (PCI); (f) Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL) until 1999; (g) People's Alliance (AB) until 1995; (h) Sammarinese Communist Party (PCS).

Source: www.parties-and-elections.eu.

What therefore explains common trends and variations in RLP success before 2008? The ensuing analysis summarises the main reasons, focusing first on *demand-side factors* (long-term socio-economic and electoral variables), then the *external supply side* (party-system and institutional factors) and finally the *internal supply side* (factors internal to RLPs themselves). Recent scholarship argues that the demand side provides a necessary, albeit differential and not sufficient 'breeding ground' for RLPs across Europe and therefore the supply side explains much of the divergence in their trajectories.[8] For instance, the ideological support for the radical Left averages approximately 11 per cent across European electorates.[9] Particularly when protest voting is considered, this means that the potential RLP vote is usually *much* greater than achieved success. Even in the Soviet era, explanations were similar. Whereas countries with traditions of strong (particularly) class cleavages and economic impoverishment provided helpful milieux for WECPs, they did not determine party success, and parties needed 'clever exploitation' of the demand side to perform well.[10] Therefore, as for the radical Right, widespread demand should be 'a given, rather than the main puzzle' and the most pertinent research questions focus on 'why have so few parties been successful given the generally fertile breeding ground?'[11] Although the following sections outline general answers to this question, a significant degree of national variation is to be expected. After all, despite the imposed conformity of Leninism, WECPs were increasingly nationally specific by the 1980s. Therefore, in the absence of Moscow's guiding hand, identical post-Soviet trajectories would be more surprising still.

The Modernisation Crisis

The general context for the rise of anti-establishment parties since the 1980s (whether of right, left or green orientation) has been a 'modernisation crisis'.[12] This term encapsulates many things: the transition from industrial economies to post-industrialism; a declining role for class identities and the traditional proletariat; the end of the post-war 'social democratic consensus', whereby mainstream parties pursued Keynesian economics and protected the national welfare state and the flourishing of neoliberal globalisation since the 1970s. Most pertinent for the Left has been the structural disaggregation of social democrats' links to traditional electorates and affiliated organisations like trade unions. This has left social democrats' traditional Keynesian solutions at the mercy of financial markets, central banks and ratings agencies, leading to the neoliberalisation of social democracy itself.[13] Together, these factors have produced strata of the population who perceive themselves as 'modernisation losers', materially and psychologically threatened by the contemporary capitalist state's apparent inability to control borders, the

economy and welfare. New forms of protest have emerged to reflect this trend.

The Populist Zeitgeist

One prevalent new form of protest is populism. Many European political actors have become increasingly prone to using elements of populism that is presenting themselves as 'ordinary' representatives of the 'common people', and depicting their opponents as the mainstream, elitist, 'Establishment'.[14] An accelerator of this process has been EU integration, which, as an elite-led project that impinges on national sovereignty with a pronounced market-making bias, has become the favoured target for new populists as the phantom of unaccountable and anti-popular policies imposed by a faceless bureaucratic elite.[15]

RLPs have certainly benefited directly from such sentiments. Their vote potential increases where an electorate's anti-globalisation and anti-EU sentiments are high.[16] Most contemporary RLPs can be regarded as 'Eurosceptic', although, as Michael Holmes and Simon Lightfoot argue in this volume, this term conceals varied and contradictory stances towards the European Union. Nevertheless, a core part of RLPs' appeal has long been critiquing the European Union for acting as globalisation's vanguard in favouring free-market integration over state-led regulation. Their common cause with the global justice movement (GJM) is based on defending 'globalisation losers' against new forms of economic insecurity ('precarity').[17]

Historical Legacy

The past matters, most obviously because RLPs are rarely newcomers: they either have a long historical pedigree (e.g. the Greek Communist Party [KKE], founded in 1924) or are recompositions of older organisations (e.g. Syriza, often seen as a 'new' party, has distant origins in the KKE-Interior of 1968–1987). The past is most evident in post-communist countries, where most RLPs (including Die Linke) are 'successor parties' – that is, they have partially inherited the former ruling parties' organisational and ideological legacy.[18] Yet in Western Europe too, an (albeit slowly diminishing) appeal to revolutionary traditions dating back to the early 1920s underpins sub-cultural support for parties such as the Cypriot Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). Overall, the most successful RLPs today generally exist where their predecessors were successful. Weak legacies also mean weak RLPs today. With very few exceptions (e.g. Germany and the Netherlands), where there was no successful RLP in the 1980s (e.g. Britain, Austria and Belgium), there is none now.

However, although heritage usually underpins contemporary success, it is certainly not sufficient, and is sometimes an obstacle. In most post-communist countries outside the former Soviet Union, there has been no consistently successful RLP since 1989. This reflects how many ruling communist regimes lacked domestic legitimacy, particularly where communism was seen as an imported imposition. Generally, outside the Soviet Union communism simply lacked sufficient domestic legitimacy to sustain a post-communist RLP. In most cases (e.g. in Hungary and Poland), the former communists became social democrats and RLPs were marginalised. Throughout the 1990s until declining fortunes thereafter, such ex-communist social democratic parties monopolised links with trade unions and significant numbers of activists who might otherwise have formed independent RLPs.[19]

The Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), which remains one of Europe's stronger RLPs, represents an exception to this general trend. As Vladimír Handl and Andreas Goffin argue in this volume, at root is a strong interwar domestic socialist culture that continued during communist rule and underpins a strong traditionalism. Ammon Cheskin and Luke March's chapter also shows how the 'success' of the Latvian Socialist Party (LSP) results from coalition with other Russophone parties, with an appeal more focused on ethnic sentiments than left-wing policies. The LSP never exceeded 6 per cent of the vote when running independently. Overall, the communist past is a very mixed blessing, particularly for unabashed communist parties. With the exception of AKEL, no European CP (either in East and West) has avoided secular decline. Even when they have apparently stable ratings (e.g. 6–8 per cent in Greece and Portugal), this is far below their historical zenith.

Economic Distress

One of the factors most helping RLPs is a poor economic environment (especially high unemployment and low growth). This is unsurprising, given RLPs' emphasis on economic and job-security issues, particularly affecting lower-status constituencies.[20] Nevertheless, there has been no *direct* relationship between economic distress and RLP success (principally because the mainstream opposition and other protest parties may also benefit). Certainly, there were cases where the economy did directly matter prior to the Great Recession. For example, the Portuguese Left Bloc grew as Portugal's economy faltered in the mid-late 2000s (although it suffered a reverse in 2011 in the midst of Portugal's crisis). However, there are more counter-examples: RLP support *grew* alongside rising GDP and declining unemployment in several countries until 2007 (Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands), and fell despite rising unemployment in others (e.g. Spain in 2008 and the Czech Republic

in 2005). Despite an average unemployment rate of 13.47 per cent between 1990 and 2016, there is no successful RLP in Poland. Clearly then, economic factors play an important background role, but are far from all-determining.

Political Institutions

Turning to the external supply side, it is evident that, as a small party family, RLPs are very susceptible to the influence of political institutions and other party competitors. For example, when electoral systems are not very proportional, or there are high parliamentary thresholds, these generally weaken small parties' prospects, and RLPs are no exception.[21] Generally, higher electoral thresholds in East-Central Europe have contributed to RLP marginalisation there. For example, the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Munkáspárt*) polled 3–4 per cent in the 1990s (enough for parliamentary representation in countries like the Netherlands), but it never crossed Hungary's 5-per cent parliamentary threshold. In addition, many Eastern European RLPs have suffered from restrictive legislation. In 1991–1993, new anti-communist authorities often banned communist parties and expropriated their resources. Although in much of the former Soviet Union the bans were eventually rescinded, in several states (e.g. the Baltic states), communists remain illegal or face continuing legal difficulties. This is one reason why the LSP has been unable to replicate the success of the Russian communists.

The Social Democratic Vacuum

One of the biggest factors affecting RLP performance is whether there is an open electoral field. In particular, the 'vacuum thesis' argues that social democrats' rightwards drift since the late 1990s has created a vacuum, meaning that former social democratic core constituencies are now available for capture by new actors.[22] Similarly, social democrats' uncritical adaptation to the European Union's market-integration policies has allowed RLPs to adopt 'Euroscepticism' as an identity marker vis-à-vis the Centre-Left.[23] Certainly, RLPs have often presented themselves as the real Left, appealing to former social democrats who feel deserted by their erstwhile parties. Such a strategy is potentially lucrative, because whenever RLPs attract protest votes, a significant proportion (often upwards of 25 per cent of their vote gained) comes from disaffected social democrats.

A potent symbol of the neoliberalisation of social democracy has been 'grand coalitions' between the Centre-Left and the Centre-Right. In several countries (e.g. Germany and especially Austria), these have a long tradition. Nevertheless, when the mainstream parties regularly collaborate in this way, such 'establishment party convergence' can boost 'outsider' parties

(particularly populists) who claim that the 'Establishment' are all the same.[24] Certainly, such a populist critique of the social democrats as an integral component of the neoliberal establishment gave the Dutch Socialist Party and Die Linke much traction in the 2000s. In the post-crisis environment, this trend has intensified. Syriza's dramatic breakthrough in 2012–2015 is intimately related to 'Pasokification' – the collapse of the social democratic party (PASOK) following its implementation (in left-right coalitions) of austerity.[25] Consequently, Syriza successfully persuaded many former PASOK supporters that it was the only credible left party remaining.

However, over-fishing social democrats' electorates can backfire, weaken the RLP vote and increase social democratic support. RLP support proves particularly vulnerable if the main social democratic party can demonstrate it is a better 'useful vote' to defeat the Right. As Dan Keith argues in this volume, this dynamic helps explain why the SP vote first ballooned then returned to Labour in the September 2012 Netherlands elections. Moreover, opportunities to exploit social democrats do not always transpire. Not all social democrats have 'neoliberalised' – for example, the Socialist Party in Wallonia never fully embraced Blairism. As Fabien Escalona and Mathieu Vieira show (this volume), the French Socialist Party's avoidance of full austerity has weakened the RLPs' traction.

Moreover, competition from other non-establishment parties, including the Greens and the radical Right, constrains RLPs' ability to exploit the social democratic vacuum. Although most European green parties are no longer radical, in some countries (e.g. Finland and Western Germany), their espousal of non-mainstream concerns means that they can rival RLP support among the white-collar electorate.[26] In southern and (particularly) Eastern Europe, the Greens remain less viable as competitors because of the relative weakness of post-materialist politics.

That radical right parties (RRPs) compete with RLPs is no paradox. Historically, this phenomenon was most noted in the decline of the French Communist Party (PCF) in the 1980s, when working-class PCF voters defected to the French Front National en masse.[27] Contemporary competition between RLPs and RRPs is rarely so direct – each has very ideologically distinct core supporters that do not intersect.[28] However, competition for protest voters disaffected by the 'modernisation crisis' is more salient. As Escalona and Vieira note (this volume), it is the radical Right's 'agenda-setting' among the 'popular classes' with issues such as anti-immigration and defence of sovereignty that may limit RLPs' potential to exploit anti-EU, anti-globalisation and anti-establishment sentiments. In addition, many contemporary RRPs (such as the British National Party) and nationalist-populist parties (such as the Finns Party) combine identity issues with a Left-sounding 'welfare chauvinist' economic platform that defends indigenous workers' rights against 'outsiders'.[29]

Overall, even prior to the Great Recession, there were sufficiently advantageous external conditions for RLPs to succeed in many European countries. However, far from all European countries developed strong RLPs. Therefore, such external factors should be regarded as contextual, not causative, and we must focus more on factors internal to the RLPs themselves. The chief of these are now summarised.

Party Origins

Parties that took the initiative in reforming communism prior to communism's collapse (especially in Scandinavia, where transitions from orthodox Marxism-Leninism began in the early 1960s) were best placed to survive it. Overall, the evolution of many RLPs since their re(founding) in the late 1980s/early 1990s corroborates arguments that the ability of a party to use its Soviet-era legacy positively depends much on how elite struggles in the transition from communism were resolved in the early 1990s.[30] This lastingly affected whether a party was able to adopt a clear post-communist policy direction. For example, the Dutch SP's consistent ideological moderation was predicated on its rapid centralisation and de-Leninisation after 1991.[31] Where internal conflicts were not decisively resolved (e.g. the Italian *Rifondazione Comunista* never developed a party programme), RLPs potentially remain hampered by internal strategic disputes deriving from the Soviet era.

The Intra-Party Balance

Party organisation is also an important factor in shaping RLP success. Traditionally, over-dependence on Leninist democratic centralism was a critical weakness of CPs, and those that interpreted it most flexibly were also the most adaptable. In the post-Soviet era, this pattern has recurred: some parties have combined democratic centralism with ideological and strategic flexibility (e.g. the Cypriot AKEL), while many (e.g. the KKE, LSP, Portuguese Communist Party [PCP]) have demonstrated the strategic ossification common to parties upholding democratic centralism. In general, however, many RLPs have replaced democratic centralism with *Basisdemokratie* (grassroots democracy), which enhances linkages with the GJM.[32] This has improved pluralism and democracy, but the flip side can be more open internal tension (for instance, Die Linke has numerous internal platforms, making consensus over programmatic issues a 'tortuous process').[33]

Many RLPs experience conflict between policy purist *Fundis* and more pragmatic *Realos*. Nevertheless (as with the Greens of the 1980s), the Realos are increasingly dominant: many more successful parties (e.g. the Dutch SP and Portuguese Left Bloc) are led by pragmatists who focus less on abstract Marxist theory and more on practical campaigns that try to implement

concrete policies and to build support broader than the party. Even (ex-) Trotskyist parties such as People Before Profit (Ireland) have grounded their increased popularity in becoming campaigning organisations (e.g. by being central to the anti-water charges movement in Ireland in 2014–2015). Similarly, most parties, even the more pragmatic, have become more 'populist' in terms of addressing the *vox populi* more than the proletariat.[34] Leadership Realism can often conflict with parties' orientation towards *Basisdemokratie*. Certainly, inveterate strategic/doctrinal disputes (e.g. over parliamentarism vs. movementism) have not entirely dissipated, and many CPs in particular retain conservative and sectarian practices. Even ostensibly ex-communist parties (such as the Finnish Left Alliance) have often been troubled by disputes predating 1991.[35]

Party Leadership

This related factor has great influence. For example, where conservatives retained control in the early 1990s (e.g. in the LSP or the KSČM), these parties continue 'introverted' doctrinaire strategies, focused on keeping party activists happy rather than broadening their electorate or making policy compromises. This has preserved stability but not dynamism. Where pragmatic leaders have been able to centralise, professionalise and de-ideologise their parties (as in the Dutch SP), they have often been largely able to respond flexibly to their environments with minimal risks of party splits.

In the most effective parties, the role of leadership has also changed. Rather than the dour 'democratically centralised' bureaucrats such as former PCF leader Georges Marchais (replicated today in the PCP's Jerónimo de Sousa or LSP's Alfrēds Rubiks, who have minimal appeal beyond the party base), many modern RLP leaders are non-dogmatic, media-savvy performers who are considered effective, if not 'charismatic' even by political opponents. For instance, interlocutors have recognised Alexis Tsipras' solidity, statesmanship and charm: 'He comes across neither as a fervent ideologue nor as an aggressive *enfant terrible*.'[36] Of course, poor leadership is often evident. The PCF's long electoral slide since the 1970s results from continually reforming 'too little, too late'. Generally, leadership change is one of the most significant factors impacting on party success: many parties have suffered electorally after leadership changes (e.g. the Dutch SP after Jan Marijnissen in 2008); in other cases a new leader has soon brought electoral gain (e.g. Syriza after Tsipras's entry into parliament in 2009).

Party Goal

Introverted strategies that prioritised policy purity over electoral success were once traditional to most RLPs, who, after all, were highly ideological actors.

Certainly, this remains partially true: several communist parties (e.g. the KSČM, KKE and PCP), have appeared relatively content with niche positions concentrating on programmatic purism. For others (e.g. the Italian Rifondazione or French PCF) the prospects of broader coalition or government have caused serious internal ructions. However, as outlined below, most RLPs now find the notion of governing in so-called left-left coalitions (between the Centre-Left and radical Left) at national-level uncontentious, at least under favourable conditions. Even where governing possibilities remain remote, many RLPs have sought new constituencies and allies. Several now exist in semi-permanent coalitions (such as the Portuguese Democratic Unity Coalition [CDU], Spanish United Left [IU] and [less stably] the French Left Front).

Overall, some advantageous party strategies can be observed. Many of the more electorally dynamic parties have relied decreasingly on abstract ideological slogans and doctrine; they try to encapsulate all radical left trends under an umbrella of opposition to neoliberalism (or austerity) that makes little *electoral* reference to Marxism or socialism (this is most noticeable in the Portuguese Left Bloc and the Dutch SP). Symptomatic was the 2009 refounding of the French Communist Revolutionary League as the New Anti-Capitalist Party, whose spokesperson (Olivier Besancenot) claimed no longer to be a Trotskyist. Parties that have espoused specific campaigns or practical actions have often received electoral dividends (e.g. both the French and Dutch Left got boosts from their 2005 opposition to the European Union's Constitutional Treaty). It is now unproblematic for most parties to adopt non-Marxist ideological accents, such as environmentalism, feminism and regionalism. One of the most noticeable new accents is the left-wing populism that focuses more on identity than on theory. For all that Syriza and Podemos are presented as the harbingers of a new left-populist spectre haunting the continent, the fact is that many other successful RLPs have attempted elements of similar strategies over the last decade, albeit less successfully.[37] Even Syriza's dogmatic opponent, the conservative communist KKE, has dallied with populism and nationalism.[38]

THE CRISIS AND RLPS: PLUS ÇA CHANGE?

Given the above, there was every reason to expect that RLPs might be chief beneficiaries of the post-2008 crisis, providing they could exploit the favourable milieu. Falling output, rising unemployment and Euroscepticism, as well as ideological support for RLPs even where such parties were absent, appear a potent growth formula. However, this section will show that RLPs' electoral gains were meagre prior to the rise of Syriza. It is still unclear whether the tide has substantially or lastingly turned.

The EP elections make a comparative benchmark. In June 2009, the European United Left-Nordic Green Left parliamentary group (GUE/NGL) actually dropped from 42 MEPs to 35, with its seat share declining from 5.2 to 4.8 per cent. However, the GUE/NGL won big in May 2014, increasing its seat share to 6.9 per cent (52 seats) to become the biggest radical left EP group since 1986. This total was, however, disproportionately boosted by stellar results in Greece and Spain (providing 13 of the new MEPs), while as Holmes and Lightfoot show in this volume, the radical left transnational Party of the European Left barely gained.

In national elections since the crisis began, the picture is similarly mixed. Table 2.2, focusing on the parliamentary RLPs, shows that these *have* certainly benefited electorally from the crisis. On average, RLP results have increased by nearly 60 per cent of their previous vote since September 2008. Simultaneously, it is unsurprising that this increase has barely registered in political consciousness – many parties are still so small that even significant vote improvement (2.7 percentage points on average) hardly increases their political weight. Moreover, Syriza and Podemos are rather exceptional and skew the results upwards: nowhere else apart from Moldova and Cyprus are RLPs polling over 20 per cent. There are some countries (e.g. Belgium and Slovenia), where RLPs have made parliamentary breakthroughs. Elsewhere, increases are much more incremental.

Indeed, the trajectory for the majority of parties in major European states (e.g. France, Germany and Italy) is one of relative stability, whereas in some (e.g. the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Finland), RLPs appear to be doing *worse* during the crisis. Certainly, the major growth appears to be in some countries hardest hit by the crisis (e.g. Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask whether RLPs should not have done better, sooner and more often. The previous discussion indicated that there is rarely a direct relationship between economic woes and RLP success. Several factors (some related to those already indicated) have played a particular role in the crisis, and help explain how RLPs have been as yet unable fully to capture the moment.

Lack of Policy Impact

RLPs often struggle to demonstrate clear policy achievements, because they lack national governing experience and are often perceived, even if no longer as pariahs, then as lacking competence. This is partially a product of the Soviet era, when Leninist parties often put policy purity before effectiveness and used parliaments as 'tribunes' simply to disown bourgeois politics. Before 1988, RLP participation in government was very exceptional: only the Finnish Communist Party (12 years total), Icelandic People's Alliance/

Table 2.2 European RLPs' National Electoral Performance (September 2008–February 2016)

Country/Party	*Post-Crisis Performance*	*Post-Crisis Vote Change*	*Percentage Vote Retained Post-Crisis*
EU Countries			
Belgium (Workers' Party of Belgium)	2.8 (average 2010–2014)	+2.0	350
Cyprus (Progressive Party of Working People)	32.7 (2011)	+1.6	105.1
Czech Republic (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia)	13.1 (average 2010–13)	+0.3	102.3
Denmark (Red-Green Alliance)	7.3 (average 2011–15)	+5.1	331.8
Finland (Left Alliance)	7.6 (average 2011–15)	–1.2	86.4
France (Left Front)	6.9 (2012)	+2.6	160.5
Germany (Left Party)	10.3 (average 2009–13)	+1.6	117.8
Greece (Communist Party of Greece)	6.3 (average 2009–15)	–1.9	76.9
Greece (Syriza)	24.0 (average 2009–15)	+19.0	480.4
Ireland (Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit)*	3.1 (average 2011–16)	+2.0	281.8
Ireland (Sinn Féin)	11.9 (average 2011–16)	+5.0	172.4
Italy (Left Ecology Freedom)	3.2 (2013)	+0.1	103.2
Luxembourg (The Left)	4.1 (average 2009–13)	+2.2	215.8
Netherlands (Socialist Party)	9.8 (average 2010–12)	–6.8	59.0
Portugal (Portuguese Communist Party)	8.0* (average 2009–15)	+0.4	105.7
Portugal (Left Bloc)	8.4 (average 2009–15)	+2.0	131.3
Slovenia (United Left)*	6.0* (2014)	+6.0	n/a
Spain (PCE/United Left)*	5.3* (average 2011–15)	+1.5	139.5
Spain (Podemos)	20.7 (2015)	+20.7	n/a
Sweden (Left Party)	5.7 (average 2010–14)	–0.2	95.8
UK (Respect)	0.1 (average 2010–15)	–0.3	16.7
Average EU Countries	*9.4*	*+2.9*	*164.9*
Non-EU Countries			
Iceland (Left-Green Movement)	16.3 (average 2009–13)	+2.0	114.0
Moldova (Party of Communists of Republic of Moldova)	37.8 (average 2009–14)	–8.2	82.2
Moldova (Party of Socialists of Republic of Moldova)	20.5 (2014)	+15.5	410
Norway (Socialist Left Party)	5.2 (average 2009–13)	–3.6	59.1
Russia (Communist Party of the Russian Federation)	19.2 (2011)	+7.6	165.5
San Marino (United Left)*	8.9* (average 2008–12)	+0.2	101.7
Switzerland (Labour Party of Switzerland)	0.6 (average 2011–15)	–0.1	78.6
Ukraine (Communist Party of Ukraine)	8.6 (average 2012–15)	+3.2	159.3
Average Non-EU Countries	*14.6*	*+2.1*	*146.3*
Average (excluding Syriza and Podemos)	*10.0*	*+1.4*	*147.0*
Overall average	**10.8**	**+2.7**	**159.4**

Key: *Coalition. Calculations from www.parties-and-elections.eu. Parliamentary parties only. Correct at 1 April 2016.

United Socialist Party (10 years total) and FCP (three years total), joined governmental coalitions during this period.[39] The situation has ameliorated as RLPs (although seldom the extreme Left) have become increasingly open to 'left-left' coalitions with social democrats (and Greens). At the very least, they will consider parliamentary support for social democrat minority governments.[40]

In general, as Table 2.3 shows, RLP participation in government has not been a particularly happy experience. In most cases, RLPs have lost support after governmental participation (the average loss is 1.3 percentage points; after government they retain only 84 per cent of their previous vote). Generally, this results from the dilemma of small coalition partners everywhere – sharing policy responsibility with larger parties without significant ministers, power or visibility to demonstrate an independent profile.

RLPs join such coalitions in order to mitigate governmental neoliberalism, advance their own agenda and provide a 'left-wing conscience' for social democrats. Yet to date, even such minimalistic aims have been hard to corroborate. At best, RLPs can demonstrate limited *reforms* in office (e.g. incremental increases in benefits, halting privatisation and pioneering socially liberal legislation), but this is hardly a 'radical' reconfiguration of capitalism. Certainly, RLPs have been involved in key campaigns both internationally (e.g. opposing the EU Constitutional/Lisbon treaties) and nationally (e.g. Portuguese legalisation of abortion and gay marriage) that have had wider resonance, and indeed, one of their key aspirations (the Tobin financial transactions tax) is now widely supported in continental Europe (but unimplemented). However, many such campaigns also had considerable support in other parties (including social democrats), and RLP contributions have hardly been pivotal.

There are only three European countries where RLPs have been the dominant government partner since 1990: Cyprus (2003–2013), Moldova (2001–2009) and Greece (2015–). Despite significant differences, these are all small, peripheral states. In the former two cases, RLP governmental policies were little different from those of a social democratic government, greater emphasis on economic dirigisme and scepticism towards Euro-Atlantic institutions notwithstanding (e.g. in 2011, the AKEL government adopted [without significant protest] the EU fiscal treaty imposing penalties if countries' budget deficits exceeded 3 per cent). Not only did these parties not fundamentally challenge neoliberalism domestically or abroad, but their governments failed to survive post-crisis elections. Such travails explain why RLPs have put such hopes on the Syriza government. It remains a work in progress but its acceptance of austerity measures after the Third Memorandum indicates it may not fundamentally buck the odds.

Table 2.3 RLP Government Participation 1990–2015

Country	*Party*	*Date*	*Type of Participation (a)*	*Party Vote Change At Election Following Participation*	*Percentage of Vote Retained*
Cyprus	AKEL	1988–1991	Coalition	+3.2	111.7
	AKEL	1991–1993	Coalition	+2.4	107.8
		2003–2006	Coalition	-3.6	89.6
		2006–2011	Coalition	+1.6	105.1
		2011–2013	Coalition	Not yet known	n/a
Denmark	SF **(b)**	1994–1998	Support	+0.2	102.7
		1998–2001	Support	-1.1	85.3
		2011–2014	Coalition	-0.5	45.7
	EL	1994–1998	Support	-0.4	87.1
		1998–2001	Support	-0.3	88.9
		2014–2015	Support	+1.1	116.4
Finland	VAS	1995–1999	Coalition	-0.3	97.3
		1999–2003	Coalition	-1.0	90.8
		2011–2014	Coalition	-1.0	87.7
France	PCF	1989–1993	Support	-1.9	81.4
		1997–2002	Coalition	-5.1	48.5
Greece	SYN/KKE	1989–1990	Coalition	-0.7	93.6
	Syriza	2015 (Jan–Sept)	Coalition	-0.8	97.8
	Syriza	Sept 2015–	Coalition	Not yet known	n/a
Iceland	VG	2009–2013	Coalition	-10.8	49.3
Ireland	Democratic Left	1994–7	Coalition	-0.3	89.3
Italy	PRC	1996–8	Support	-1.9 (total PRC and PdCI)	77.9
	PdCI	1998–2001	Support		
Italy	PRC/PdCI	2006–8	Coalition	-7.1 (total PRC, PdCI and Greens)	38.3
Moldova	PCRM	2001–5	Government	-4.1	91.8
		2005–Feb 2009	Government	+3.5	107.6
		2009 (April–July)	Government	-4.8	90.3
		2015 (Feb–July)	Support	Not yet known	n/a
Norway	SV	1993–7	Support	-1.9	75.9
		2005–9	Coalition	-2.6	70.5
		2009–2013	Coalition	-2.1	66.1
Portugal	Left Bloc	2015–	Support	Not yet known	n/a
Portugal	PCP	2015–	Support	Not yet known	n/a
Russia	KPRF	1998–9	Support	+2.0	109
Spain	IU	2004–2008	Support	-1.2	76
Sweden	V	1998–2002	Support	-3.6	70
Sweden		2002–2006	Support	-2.5	70
Ukraine	KPU	2006–7	Coalition	+1.7	145.9
		2010–12	Support	+7.8	244.4
		2012–14	Support	-9.3	29.5
Average				*-1.26*	*84.43*

Key: (a) 'Coalition' is where a party is formally included in government portfolio allocation, 'support' is where a party is not formally included in government, but lends legislative support to (at least some of) its main initiatives to guarantee its position in the legislature; (b) SF is counted as an RLP until 2014.
Source: T. Bale and R. Dunphy, "In from the cold? Left parties and government involvement since 1989", *Comparative European Politics*, 9(3), 2011 pp. 269–291; author's calculations from www.parties-and-elections.eu. Data correct at 1 March 2016.

RLPs increasingly consider governmental participation even where they have not governed to date (e.g. in Sweden and the Netherlands). As detailed elsewhere in this volume, the post-crisis scenario has brought RLPs ever more into coalition contention (e.g. in Portugal and Spain). Parties increasingly develop a sober calculation of risks and rewards, and try to enter formal coalitions where possible, regarding the risks as no worse than electoral losses when in opposition.[41] This perception is not entirely borne out by the facts: when they join left-left coalitions, the principal beneficiaries are often the larger social democrats (as in Norway in 2005). Increasingly, RLPs have to weigh up unpredictable gains when in opposition against similarly unpredictable losses when in government. Such is the lot of a small party family.

Lack of Extra-Parliamentary Mobilisation

Until the 1980s, communist parties had links to whole 'counter-societies' of affiliated trade unions and social movements that multiplied their social weight.[42] In most cases, these are history: the Cypriot AKEL is the only European RLP to retain affiliated organisations in every 'nook and cranny' of society.[43] Although RLPs of all stripes have reinvigorated their pursuit of extra-parliamentary linkages, these have rarely been able to approach their historic influence.

For instance, RLPs were becoming attractive to trade unionists disaffected with social democratic parties even prior to the crisis. After all, trade unionists defecting from the German Social Democratic Party were instrumental in the founding of Die Linke in 2005; sections of the Communication Workers' and Rail, Maritime and Transport Unions left UK Labour to support the Scottish Socialist and Respect parties in 2004–2007. Often (as in Scandinavia) the trade unions have been the major advocates of left-left coalitions. Austerity has brought trade unions and RLPs closer, as evidenced by the European Trade Union Confederation's address to the European Left Party's 2013 Madrid congress. Nevertheless, more intensive rapprochement between RLPs and trade unions is unlikely as long as social democrats remain governing parties that represent the best lobbying points for NGO interests.

Usually, RLPs have long-standing links with diverse social movements, including peace, environmental and solidarity groups deriving from the 1970s. RLP ties with the GJM accelerated during the European Social Forums in the 2000s, with RLP activists, networks and logistical support becoming critical to these bi-annual festivals of workshops, seminars and rallies for NGOs, civil society and trade unions. However, RLP links with the GJM remain problematic, and is questionable whether there is really a left-wing 'movement' as such. This is the core of Alex Callinicos' (exaggerated) claim that RLPs are still in deep crisis, as 'left reformist' parties with

weak social bases incapable of exploiting class discontent.[44] Indeed, while left-wing activists comprise much of the movement, many of them (particularly in Northern Europe) orientate themselves to moderate NGOs and social democratic parties; whereas the GJM has also had a strong autonomist and anarchistic tradition, which regard all parties' politics with suspicion.

Nevertheless, after initially indicating continuity, the Great Recession has expanded opportunities for renewed RLP-movement ties. On the one hand, the crisis arguably accelerated the demise of the European Social Forums (last held in 2010). The earliest anti-austerity manifestations (e.g. Occupy and the Indignants) initially appeared to replicate the anti-party sentiment of the GJM – as one *Indignado* claimed: 'In Syntagma square the people didn't want to hear about political parties, even left ones.'[45] On the other hand, as illustrated further in this volume, RLPs, trade unions and social movements have played integral roles in anti-austerity actions (e.g. the general strikes in Portugal in 2012–2013). Moreover, other trends within the GJM have shown a renewed acceptance of internal organisation and engagement with state power.[46] The recent success of parties such as Syriza, Podemos and the Slovenian United Left Coalition is intimately connected with strong links to anti-austerity movements and to this degree appears to represent 'the rejection of the rejection of the parliamentary process'.[47]

Overall, most RLPs' extra-parliamentary possibilities barely match those the biggest CPs used to have. Moreover, the lack of obvious, direct policy repercussions ensuing from often transient movements (Occupy, most recently), remind us that these are often capable at most of influencing the political climate rather than fundamentally changing any state's policy direction. Nevertheless, the crisis has (gradually) increased RLPs' extra-parliamentary mobilisation potential.

Ideological/Strategic Divisions

Although RLPs have made major efforts to surmount them, divisions often linger from Marxism-Leninism's obsession with correct doctrine and exegesis: most obviously many countries still have several 'dwarf' extra-parliamentary RLPs that 'salami-slice' an already-small electorate. Some of the divisions mirror profound ideological-cultural cleavages. For example, old left-new left divisions are still very salient.[48] Certainly, there are many parties, principally the conservative communists, who remain more socially authoritarian, not supporting libertarian issues such as LBGT rights, drugs decriminalisation and opposition to nuclear power.

Moreover, parties are often internally fissiparous. Indeed, internal divisions have been behind some of the radical Left's most spectacular failures, for example, the auto-combustion of the Italian Left, which cost both communist parties their national and EP representation in 2008–2009. Other examples of party divisions hindering crisis responses abound: most recently, tensions between Podemos and the United Left, and divisions between Europeanist and pro-'rupture' tendencies within Syriza. Indeed, the starkest divisions are over the European Union. As the chapter by Holmes and Lightfoot shows, the inability to find common understandings over how to interpret the European Union prevents RLPs from developing a shared strategic vision of Europe. Therefore, RLPs cannot move from a defensive position towards actively shaping European politics.

The Eastern Deficit

Another legacy-influenced weakness is in former communist countries, where relevant RLPs are generally absent outside former Soviet countries, which are not likely to become EU members anytime soon. This weakness matters, because the more that former Eastern Europe joins the European Union, the potentially weaker the radical Left becomes. The 2004–2013 enlargements incorporated countries where RLP's 2014 votes totalled just 1.5 per cent.[49] Moreover, because of the vastly different significance of 1968 in both West and East, Eastern parties have often been less engaged with new left traditions, adding to the existing ideological heterogeneity of the party family. The situation does show signs of changing. For instance, Die Linke's Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung has 'built a major infrastructure for the left in Eastern Europe'.[50] Younger radical left groups are playing increasingly important roles in protests in Eastern Europe (e.g. Bosnia, Croatia and above all Slovenia). The 2014 parliamentary breakthrough of the Slovenian United Left shows that new actors can emerge. Nevertheless, this success has yet to be replicated more widely, and it remains critical to building the Left in the East.

Lack of the Vision Thing

Undoubtedly most debilitating for contemporary RLPs is the failure to develop a distinct popular vision for contemporary Europe. Hopes of activists notwithstanding, TINA was emphatically reinforced by Syriza's capitulation to the Third Memorandum. Despite the evident crisis of neoliberalism, most European political, economic and media elites regard fundamental challenges to the consensus as impossible and RLPs as dangerous and irresponsible populists/extremists. There is exceedingly narrow scope for publicly articulated alternatives. For instance, many media stories described the Dutch Socialists in 2012 as a 'far left' party, whereas (as Dan Keith shows in this volume), the SP's moderated policies are little different from a Eurosceptic social democratic party!

Moreover, the nature of the Great Recession itself has challenged the Left's economic credibility. Although its origins are rooted in private sector irresponsibility, the result is unprecedented state indebtedness. RLPs' main alternative economic solutions are essentially Keynesian. Their chief weakness has always been doubt over their viability in the contemporary world of globalised financial flows (and, as the Syriza example revealed, creditors and ratings agencies). Recognising this, many RLPs have insisted on reforming the international financial architecture, principally the IMF and European Central Bank. However, the dominant narrative of a bloated state sector makes it much harder for the Left to advocate higher state spending and interventionism. In the initial crisis years, when neo-Keynesian solutions were more in vogue, it did not help that centre-left governments were in office in some of the most crisis-hit nations (Greece, Portugal and Spain), and anti-incumbent sentiment therefore brought the Right back to power.

It is not that (as often proclaimed), RLPs lack practical solutions. They have plenty, including models of participatory budgeting and local democracy developed in Latin America, Iceland and elsewhere. However, local solutions do not compensate for their lack of governing experience in major European countries. Overall, the radical Left lacks a distinct metanarrative now that this is no longer (for most parties) communism. Additionally, RLPs often fail to communicate their core messages in ways that resonate as much as anti-immigration or environmentalism, and so cede intellectual and electoral ground to the Right and the Greens. Often, rightly or wrongly, electorates still perceive RLPs as too nostalgic and 'old left'. As illustrated elsewhere in this volume, many RLPs argue that the crisis has vindicated their economic programmes. But rather than necessarily bringing electoral benefit, this often results in a Cassandra complex: as former European Left Party chair Lothar Bisky argued: 'Nobody votes for you just because you've known things from the start.'[51] The diminution of RLPs' message is reinforced by *red-washing* (the appropriation of their slogans and ideas by other parties), something inconceivable in the Soviet era. Greens and social democrats have increased their (rhetorical) criticism of neoliberalism, while newer formations like the Italian Five Star movement, with their anti-elite rhetoric, 'neither left nor right' image, and emphasis on new social media, can often better appeal to younger voters for whom parties in general and left parties in particular appear antiquated. It is only the more populist formations, such as Podemos and Syriza, that have fully engaged with more general anti-establishment sentiment beyond RLPs' traditional ideological comfort zones.

CONCLUSION

In the post-Soviet era, the European radical Left's impact has been mixed at best. There is demonstrably an increase in electoral performance. RLPs are more organisationally and ideologically consolidated (and confident) than they have been for several decades. Many have become stable actors in their party systems, and increasingly in government, and as such need to be reckoned with by political elites and social democratic parties alike. They have been able to affect the political climate, and some of their long-articulated policies have entered the political mainstream.

The weaknesses of RLPs are equally apparent and difficult to surmount. Historical legacy still looms large, evident in the absence of relevant parties in many European countries, above all in the East. Several parties still face internal ideological and strategic divisions, particularly over the balance between national and EU-level policies. Though far less doctrinaire than hitherto, they still remain among the most ideological of party families, making the absence of a cohesive vision still more problematic. Overall, RLPs remain on the defensive, the central strategic problem being first to successfully mount a rear-guard defence of the Keynesian welfare state before even considering a more proactive transformation of capitalism, for which there still remains no credible blueprint.

The Great Recession has undoubtedly offered great growth potential: after all, core ideological support, buttressed by socio-economic stress, Euroscepticism and anti-establishment sentiment demonstrably aided RLPs even *before* the crisis, although far from all benefited. Even if Europe returns to stable growth, lasting socio-economic side effects will likely provide excellent mobilisation potential for the radical Left (although they face a crowded field with a resurgent radical Right, Greens and newer actors).

However, the principal caveat is that most RLPs remain small actors that are barely the masters of their own environments. Developments in 2015 appeared to indicate this situation was changing, with Syriza and Podemos showing that RLPs could become both major domestic actors and examples to the rest of Europe. Yet, these two parties remain largely exceptional: products of particularly intense socio-economic crisis, the discrediting of the political establishment and (in Syriza's case) 'Pasokification', all of which has helped parties with a populist image and strong ties to social movements. Rarely are all these components in place for RLPs elsewhere, at least yet. Accordingly, only precipitate declines in economic and party-system stability will give other RLPs similarly dramatic opportunities for growth. Most likely, where RLPs are established they may well get bigger, but where they are small they are likely to remain small(ish), and where they are microscopic, they are unlikely to make major breakthroughs. Therefore, the most likely medium-term scenario is no 'great leap forward', but a succession of baby steps. But perhaps European elites should beware: babies eventually learn to run!

NOTES

1. For example, Luke March, 'Problems and Perspectives of Contemporary European Radical Left Parties: Chasing a Lost World or Still a World to Win?,' *International Critical Thought* 2, no. 3 (2012): 314–39. See also Fabien Escalona and Mathieu Vieira, 'The Radical Left in Europe: Thoughts about the Emergence of a Family,' Fondation Jean-Jaurès/Observatoire de La Vie Politique (Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 19 November 2013).
2. For example, Peter Bratsis, 'The End of TINA,' *Jacobin*, 13 January 2015, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/01/syriza-greece-election-tina/.
3. Myrto Tsakatika and Marco Lisi, '"Zippin" up My Boots, Goin' Back to My Roots': Radical Left Parties in Southern Europe,' *South European Society and Politics* 18, no. 1 (2013): 1–19.
4. The term (albeit used for Syriza only) is from Stathis Kouvelakis, 'Syriza's Magic Equation,' *Jacobin*, 9 February 2015, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/tsipras-parliament-speech-austerity/.
5. Peter Mair, 'The Electoral Universe of Small Parties,' in *Small Parties in Western Europe*, ed. Ferdinand Müller-Rommel and Geoffrey Pridham (London: Sage, 1991), 41–70.
6. Data in this figure includes all European countries and all RLPs included in the databases, parliamentary and non-parliamentary.
7. Neil McInnes, *The Communist Parties of Western Europe* (London; New York: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs by Oxford University Press, 1975), 2.
8. For example, Luke March, *Radical Left Parties in Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
9. Mark Visser et al., 'Support for Radical Left Ideologies in Europe,' *European Journal of Political Research* 53, no. 3 (2014): 541–58.
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11. Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy,' *West European Politics* 33, no. 6 (2010): 12.
12. Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
13. For example, Ashley Lavelle, *The Death of Social Democracy: Political Consequences in the 21st Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008). See also chapter 3 in this book, authored by David Bailey.
14. Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542–63.
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Chapter 3

Capitalist Crisis or Crisis of Capitalism?

How the Radical Left Conceptualises the Crisis[1]

David J. Bailey

The way in which radical left actors have perceived and conceptualised the international economic crisis and its consequences has the potential to shape the way in which they have sought to engage with it. Therefore, this chapter asks questions such as: what causal processes are considered by the radical Left to have brought the crisis about? What social structures are considered to have generated those processes? In particular, it asks whether RLPs conceptualised the crisis as a capitalist crisis or a crisis of capitalism. Whereas a 'capitalist crisis' enables capitalism to be reconstituted and restructured in a more profitable form, in a 'crisis of capitalism' the very existence of capitalism itself is threatened.[2] This distinction highlights the importance of understanding how crises are conceptualised and how they are produced in the present.[3]

How radical left actors conceptualise the crisis may also affect the type of crisis that it becomes, especially in contexts where they have significant influence over public policy, public opinion or mass social movements. For instance, if radical left actors perceive a capitalist crisis as taking place, then we might expect them to seek to intervene in or resist any process of 'restructuring' capitalism. If a crisis of capitalism is perceived to be occurring, however, then this is likely to inform a more militant response as left actors anticipate and seek to accelerate the transcendence of capitalism. This echoes debates within the socialist movement of the early twentieth century, between those pursuing reform of a near-permanent capitalism and those seeking social revolution.[4] It also draws our attention to questions of ontology and epistemology, in that it requires us to consider the degree to which RLPs see social structures as fixed or immutable, the role of ideas regarding those structures, and the actions that are required to transform or disturb those structures.[5]