

Alexis Tsipras became a vic

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The prime minister who came to power on a promise of change was booted out in the election because he was simply more of the same

Within hours of the polls closing on Sunday night, Greece's ex-prime minister Alexis Tsipras had called his rival and successor Kyriakos Mitsotakis to concede defeat. The man who swept to power on a tide of hope and a pledge to end austerity four years earlier was knocked from it by resounding losses at the ballot box, after the centre-right party New Democracy trounced him with an outright majority.

Over the course of his four-year term in office, Mr Tsipras went from being leader of the scrappy, left-wing, anti-establishment party Syriza, or Coalition of the Radical Left, promising a radical overhaul of tired, elitist systems, to becoming indistinguishable from the very hierarchy he promised to challenge. After four years of being governed by a prime minister who over-promised but under-delivered, Greeks have returned to the centre by voting in New Democracy – many of them young voters, nearly double the number that voted for the party in the 2015 election. What Greeks wanted from Syriza was

something different. What they ended up with was more of the same.

The writing was on the wall in May, when Syriza trailed behind New Democracy in the European parliamentary elections, prompting Mr Tsipras to call an early election. There are still plenty of believers in the party's founding principles. But faced with four years of disappointments, Syriza only managed to secure 31.5 per cent of the vote, considerably less than the 35.5 per cent it won in 2015.

The arguments will soon start over whether Syriza would have won had it stuck to its left-wing politics, instead of becoming managers for EU-imposed austerity. But the past few years have been so extraordinary for the country, it was always unlikely that Syriza would be able to deliver what it promised.

When the history of Greece's long path out of financial crisis is written, the legacies of both Syriza and Mr Tsipras will be tangled, complex ones.

After coming to power in January 2015 as a relative unknown, there was already a cloud hanging over his leadership by that summer when, despite the out-

come of a referendum rejecting bailout conditions, Mr Tsipras negotiated loan terms with the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. There was enough of a backlash to trigger his resignation in August 2015. Although he was reinstated as prime minister in September 2015 in the second election that year, and Greece finally emerged from years of austerity measures last year after the end of its third bailout in a decade, for many, the damage had already been done.

Having steered a course for Greece through painfully deep cuts to public spending, Syriza is leaving office just a year after the last of the international bailouts ended.

Syriza and Mr Tsipras's political project were undone by a mixture of factors. Greek voters appeared to be exhausted by austerity. The radicalism that Syriza promised did not materialise or, more charitably, was at least unequal to the challenge of austerity.

But Mr Tsipras, too, bears some responsibility. He became too cosy with Brussels and Berlin, too enamoured of the trappings of the political circuit. His supporters will say he was mere-



Mr Tsipras comes out of the Greek parliament.

ly being realistic; to his critics, he was elected on a message that things could be different but as it turns out, they weren't.

If austerity pushed Syriza to the edge, two other political challenges tipped the party over it. The first was far bigger than

How the idea of 'India' developed on the

SURESH MENON

In 1911, the first 'All-India' team toured England for a series of matches, 14 of them First Class. It was led by a 19-year-old prince, and comprised six Parsis, five Hindus, three Muslims and two Dalits.

At least two earlier attempts had failed because the communal balance was deemed unsatisfactory.

How the idea of 'India' developed on the cricket field, and what the Kohlis and Bumrahs owe that pioneering effort is described superbly by Prashant Kidambi in *Cricket Country: The Untold History of the First All India Team*. The nation on the cricket field, Kidambi clarifies, was originally constituted by, and not against, the forces of empire.

When scholars (Kidambi is associate professor of colonial urban history at Leicester University) write on sport, they expand our understanding of ourselves, and the place of sport. After all, what do they know of history who only history know?

Kidambi has deliberately used the title of a book written during the world war. Edmund Blunden's *Cricket Country* is both a lament on the passing of an age and a celebration of the timelessness of the game. While Blunden's book is about Englishness, Kidambi's is a tribute to the game's Indianness. "By a curious historical twist," he says, "a sport that defined the identity of the former colonisers is now the ruling passion of the country that they conquered." If Blunden was saying



Cricket is the most popular sport in India.

that cricket was authentic only when it was English, Kidambi is saying, clearing his throat gently, that the 'country' in the title is actually India.

Blunden however anticipated Kidambi when he wrote: "The game is not terminated at the boundary, but is reflected beyond...and belongs to some wider field."

Kidambi's field is wide, wider than most. Politics and sport and their intersection might be a key, but the role of sport in establishing identity, the approach to it for both personal and 'nationalistic' purposes ring true today; only the names have changed. For the Maharajahs and Princes, read corporates and politicians. The Indian rush to England for the

World Cup had its origins in a plan by some merchants to charter a steamer to take them to Britain to watch the Indians play there in 1911. The idea was to take a party of 400 high caste Hindus, with food "prepared by Brahmins" and "all arrangements on orthodox principles." That plan fell apart, but says Kidambi, "the summer of 1911 saw a spike in the number of

travellers from the subcontinent to Britain."

India couldn't persuade Ranji, the greatest Indian cricketer of his time to lead the country. Ranji tried to undermine plans for All-India teams because that might have jeopardised his status as an English icon.

Kidambi's research is deep and extensive. There are wonder-

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