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As ECB tells Greeks they voted wrong — will Syriza pull the temple down?

Andrew Flood

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Do we live in an economy or in a society? Last night Europe's central bankers sent the clear message they expect us to be the well behaved slaves of an economy rather than equals in a society. Less than two weeks after the Greeks had elected an anti-austerity government the ECB in effect told them they intended to block the promises of change that government was elected on.

Last night the ECB stopped the use of Greek sovereign bonds as collateral in borrowing from the ECB. In doing so they were sending a clear message that they expect the new Syriza/ANEL government in Greece to completely abandon the anti-austerity promises they were elected on. If they fail to obey the unelected central bankers then this policy change was intended to indicate a willingness to allow the collapse of the Greek banking system, something that would have disastrous effects in Greece but also across the rest of the EU.

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In effect the people of Greece and indeed Europe have been turned into spectators on a West Wing or House of Cards style confrontation. Syriza have been internally referring to this sort of confrontation as the 'Samson Strategy'. That's a biblical reference to the myth of Samson who collapsed the temple on himself rather than continuing to endure slavery. The temple in this case being the European economy.

The logic of Syriza is simple and also correct. Austerity has already pushed their economy far into depression, there is no way that can pay the 319bn euro debt assigned to Greece by the capitalist crisis. Maintaining or deepening austerity will make that even more impossible.

They were elected on scrapping that debt but in the hope of saving the temple they are according to Paul Mason offering instead to "swap 60 per cent of its debt owed to the EU, for bonds that are paid back very long-term, and which pay no interest unless the economy is growing"

This mess illustrates not only the hostility to democracy at the heart of the EU project but also the lack of meaningful democracy in the lives of everyone in Europe. We are not equals in a society whose shape we determine together, we are slaves to market forces, forces that are fully determined to punish any section that seeks to escape its command.

Ironically the election of Syriza merely serves to illustrate the scale of the problem and reduce us once more to spectators in a 'will they or won't they' drama. Whether or not the temple is collapsed it illustrates that the road to a living in a society where we all have an equal say can not lie through a parliamentary road which always reduces to watching our self selected leaders performing on a far away stage. While some of the left are content to act as cheer leaders for their side we want to sweep the stage away.