

# The death throes of the “Confederation of Europe”?

By [Jacques Le Cacheux](#)

Will the institutions that the European Union has developed – from the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, which created it and defined the roadmap that led to the launch of the euro in 1999, to the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, which took up the main articles of the constitutional treaty that the French and Dutch had refused to ratify in referendums in 2005 – be sufficient to resolve the crisis facing the EU today? After five years of economic stagnation and nearly four years of persistent pressure on national debts, it had seemed that fears about the sustainability of the European Monetary Union had been appeased by the determination shown in early autumn 2012 by Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, to ensure the future of Europe’s single currency at any cost. But the results of the recent general elections in Italy have once again unsettled the European sovereign debt markets and revived speculation, while the euro zone has plunged back into a recession even as the wounds of the previous one lay still unhealed.

How much longer will we be content with mere expedients? Would it not be better to make a real institutional revolution, like the one undertaken between 1788 and 1790 by the framers of the Constitution of the United States of America, as they faced an acute crisis in the public debt of the Confederation and the confederated states? In his Nobel Lecture, which the OFCE has just published in [French](#), Thomas Sargent invites us to consider this through an economic and financial reading of this critical episode in the institutional history of the United States, and through a parallel with the current situation of the euro zone that some may find audacious, but which is certainly enlightening.

There are of course many differences between the situation of the former British colonies ten years after independence and the Member States of the European Monetary Union. But how is it possible not to see certain similarities, such as the inability to find a collective solution to the national public debt crises or the inanity of the agreement in February 2012 on the future EU budget? *Mutatis mutandis*, it is a question of fiscal federalism, as well as political, in one case as in the other.

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## In honour of Robert Castel

[Hélène Périvier](#), Bruno Palier, Bernard Gazier

It is with great sadness that we have learned of the death of Robert Castel. He left his mark on French sociology and on the social sciences more generally with his analysis of wage society and the way it's changing. In his work *les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, he highlighted the emancipatory power of "wage society", which has endowed workers with "social property". This concept facilitates an understanding of the challenges related to the acquisition of social rights in certain market economies. He preferred the term *Etat social*, the welfare state, to the commonly used term *Etat providence*, the provident state, as he saw in the latter the notion of □□a welfare state that had just dropped out of the sky, whereas it is the fruit of battles and negotiations and has been built over a long period of time. The flexibilisation of the labour market, the weakening of social rights and the casualisation of labour have, in his opinion, all been leading to the phenomenon of disaffiliation, as some

individuals are simply beyond the reach of the welfare state's protections.

We had the good fortune of collaborating with him on a project to redesign a new generation of social rights. Always ready to share and to learn from many-sided discussions, we also discovered a man of great humility, someone who listened to the contributions of others, but also to their criticisms – including to the feminists who pointed out his silence on the sexual division of labour. He accepted and recognized the relevance of their observations. During our discussions, he showed his concern about developments in our economic and social organization, which are shunting aside those who are most vulnerable: young people, especially those living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, who are starting life with little educational preparation. He proclaimed equality as a founding principle of our social contract, but he also thought of equality as equality of opportunity. He argued for “solidarism”, as did Léon Bourgeois in his time.

In a world scarred by crisis and increasingly violent inequalities, Robert Castel was present in the public debate, and brought a long-term perspective to the failings of our social systems, as well as to the principles that could guide reform. His absence will affect the quality of this debate. While we can still benefit from the great contributions of his work, we will miss his always relevant interventions, his intellectual honesty, and his kindness to all. More than a researcher, we have lost a thinker, and a friend.