

Europe

Charlemagne | Calling Time on Progress



- 1 VIEWED from afar, Europeans are a complacent, ungrateful lot. Nannied from cradle to grave by the world's most generous welfare systems, they squeal like spoiled children when asked to give up just a few of their playthings. As governments in the euro zone trim benefits and raise the retirement age in the wake of the sovereign-debt crisis, a wail of indignation has rung out and a wave of protests set in.
- 2 American commentators seem particularly amused to watch Europeans "dismantle" their welfare systems, just as America embraces European-style universal health care. Only a year ago Europe's leaders were laying into American free-marketry and declaring unbridled capitalism finished.
- 3 Could it be, though, that behind Europe's petty, possessive talk about rights and entitlements there is something more fundamental going on? What is the reason that Europeans struggle to accept the need to work more and get less from the state? Well, an abrupt reversal of the decades-long advance towards

- an ever-more civilised society seems to be what's bothering them.
- 4 The construction of the welfare state is part of a European narrative that conjures civilisation from chaos. Take France, a country that, in welfare matters, more resembles Mediterranean Europe than its more rigorous northern neighbours. The incremental entrenchment of new rights in law, as a mark of progress towards a better society, dates back to just after the first world war. In 1919 the Senate limited the working day to eight hours. Léon Blum introduced the two-week paid holiday for all workers in 1936. François Mitterrand extended this to five weeks in the early 1980s. He also brought in retirement at 60, and the 39-hour working week. Ms Aubry, the French opposition socialist leader, only ten years ago, reduced that to 35. By progressively shrinking the number of hours worked a week, or years worked over a lifetime, society seemed to be rolling towards 5, with *vin rosé* and deckchairs on the beach for all.
- 5 Put simply, if Europe stands for something, it is decent treatment for all. To this way of thinking, to guarantee a comfortable retirement is akin to banning child labour or giving women the vote: not optional perks, but badges of a civilised society. Such social preferences are what Europe is for, and what makes it different from America. Europe may no longer be a global power, or have

much military muscle. Its churches may be empty, its spiritual fibre weak. It may not boast much cutting-edge innovation or economic growth. But it knows how to look after its sick and elderly, take a long lunch break and abandon the office in August. The cold realisation that time is up, and that such progress is over, prompts anger, denial and shock.

6 7, the ideal of progress has perhaps been a myth for longer than Europeans may care to admit. The oil shock in 1973 was Europe's first wake-up call. Since then many countries have been creating an illusion of continual progress by running up hefty debts to finance their welfare states.

7 Dealing with the end of progress is also partly about confronting the myth. Deep down, Europeans probably knew that they could not go on living beyond their means for ever.

8 To accept that progress is an illusion is only one step. To change behaviour is another. Until now, much of Europe has chosen to put its values before growth. In reality, the 35-hour working week in France was not a mark of progress, but a brake on job creation and a spur to deindustrialisation to lower-cost countries; the French may have more time on their hands, but they have little money to do anything with it. Retirement at 60 in an ageing society is not a sign of civilisation, but a cruel joke played on the next generation. The euro-zone crisis has exposed such hypocrisy. It may still take time before Europeans conclude that they must compromise their ideals in order to secure the growth needed to preserve what they can of their lifestyles. But if they did, that would be real progress.

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Tekst 3 Calling time on progress

- 1p 3 Which of the following is in line with the content of paragraphs 1 and 2?
- A America sympathises with European protests against health care reform.
 - B Considering Europe's past attitude towards economy there is some irony in their present struggle.
 - C Despite the financial crisis, Americans invest more in their health care system than Europeans.
 - D Europeans are being punished for throwing tantrums when faced with financial reforms and spending cuts.
- 1p 4 "there is something more fundamental going on" (alinea 3)
In welke zin in alinea 1-3 wordt duidelijk wat "something more fundamental" is?
Noteer de eerste twee woorden van deze zin.
- 1p 5 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 4?
- A a higher unemployment rate
 - B a work-free existence
 - C some sort of ideal
 - D the current financial crisis
- 1p 6 How can paragraph 5 be characterised?
- A It offers an alternative to what is discussed in the previous paragraphs.
 - B It refutes the principles mentioned in the previous paragraphs.
 - C It summarises the content of the previous paragraphs.
 - D It waters down what is stated in the previous paragraphs.
- 1p 7 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 6?
- A However
 - B In short
 - C Moreover
 - D Similarly
 - E Therefore

- 1p 8 Which of the following phrases summarises the “values” referred to in the third sentence of paragraph 8?
- A “work more and get less from the state” (second sentence paragraph 3)
 - B “decent treatment for all” (first sentence paragraph 5)
 - C “boast much cutting-edge innovation” (middle paragraph 5)
 - D “living beyond their means” (last sentence paragraph 7)
- 1p 9 How can the author’s tone in the article be characterised?
- A as bitter
 - B as critical
 - C as neutral
 - D as optimistic

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.