

BASIC INCOME

**Newsletter of the
Basic Income European Network**

N°1 February 1988

Joint Chairmen : Claus Offe, Peter Ashby
International Secretary : Walter Van Trier
Bosduifstraat 21, 2018 ANTWERPEN, BELGIUM TEL. : 32-3-271.16.42

WELCOME

Dear all,

In September 1986, a first International Conference on Basic Incomes was organised by the members of the Collectif Charles Fourier in Louvain-la-Neuve. At the end of the conference, it was decided to set up a more permanent means of keeping contact. The Basic Income European Network was founded and Claus OFFE (Bielefeld, BRD) and Peter ASHBY (London, UK) accepted to share the chairmanship.

The main aim of the network was to provide a focus for research and debate about basic income at the European level and support the various networks that are being developed throughout Europe to explore the feasibility of basic incomes, and promote public discussion. BIEN set itself four limited objectives : organising bi-annual International conferences, stimulating small-scale (technical) seminars, setting up national archives, and producing a regular newsletter.

Our take-off took quite some time. But now, BIEN really goes public, which calls at least for some celebration (as the front page indicates).

This Newsletter features some developments of the basic income idea in a few European countries and points to several recently published interesting books. You will also find some information on the National Archives and the announcement of our second International Conference, to be held in Antwerp.

From now on, we aim at a regular Newsletter. Therefore, we need the necessary information to make it an effective means of communication. We would be very happy if you would send any information on basic incomes you happen to lay your hands on (dates of seminars or conferences, publications or papers, political meetings or statements, etc.). We plan the 2nd Newsletter to go out sometime in the second half of March 1988. Keep this date in mind if you want to get some of your information in it.

Hoping to hear from you,

Walter Van Trier
International secretary

NEWS FROM SOMEWHERE

European Parliament

On 11th and 12th of June 1987, the Green-Alternative European Link in the European Parliament (Brussels) organised a meeting on the idea of a basic income as a new system of structuring society. Twenty green and alternative parties from all over Western Europe took part in the discussion. Papers expressing the point of view of all participating parties, an analysis of the basic income idea by GRAEL and the final report of the meeting can be obtained from Alexander DE ROO, GRAEL in EP, 79- 81 rue Belliard, B-1040 Brussels. (The papers are available in English, French, German, Dutch, Italian and Spanish, and are free of charge.)

UK

On April 4th 1987, the Basic Income Research Group organised a Report-Back Conference. BIRG was formed in 1984 to explore whether basic incomes are practical in the UK. As well as exploring the technical feasibility of basic incomes, BIRG has also considered the kind of society that basic incomes might help promote ; this has been done without BIRG becoming wedded to any one political party. BIRG has become a forum within which those from all parties and with various concerns can debate both the kind of society we want to live in and practically how we may get there. Research on costings (Parker) and on the labour market decisions of low income families (Jordan), reports from working parties on the elderly, disability and youth, seminars on several technical subjects made clear that, whatever its practical difficulties, a wide range of partial basic income schemes are both possible and feasible, and would be considerably better for most citizens than either the present tax/welfare arrangements or other proposed reforms. BIRG has many members from the voluntary organisations, from academia, and from the churches. A priority now is to build a similar interest and debate among trade unionists, employers, the civil service, and the media. Enquiries about this or any other aspect of BIRG should be directed to the coordinator, Tony WALTER, 15 Southcot Place, Lyncombe Hill, Bath BA2 4PE, England.

The papers presented at the Report Back Conference, supplemented with material on basic income and disability, are published in BIRG-Bulletin n° 7, which will appear in April 1988. This Bulletin can be ordered from the coordinator of BIRG (or the International secretary of BIEN) and will cost £ 5 (included postage). Back copies of some of the other BIRG-Bulletins are still available.

The Netherlands

On 29th October 1987, fourteen organisations set up the « Werkplaats Basisinkomen » (Workshop on Basic Income). Amongst them several trade unions, political parties, claimants unions, and voluntary organisations. The aim of this group is to stimulate and coordinate activities concerning the debate about basic incomes. Basically, the « Werkplaats Basisinkomen » would like to make real the saying. « If you have any questions about basic income, call us ». To reach this aim, an ambitious campaign was set up (and on which will be reported further in following BIEN-Newsletters). The workshop's Advisory Board comprises a few former ministers. Membership of the workshop implies the acceptance of some general principles. One of them is the following : a guaranteed basic income needs to sustain a decent human existence. This principle is used to mark a difference with other proposals which do guarantee an income but on a very low level (such as the much debated proposal of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy).

International contact person : Janneke VAN DER PLAAT, Werkplaats Basisinkomen, Herman Heyerrnansstraat 20, AMSTERDAM.

Belgium

On 21st November 1987, a one day conference on basic incomes was organised in Brussels (Stichting Lodewijk De Raet). After the presentation of the idea, a debate took place with amongst others representatives of trade unions and socialist party, who were very hostile and spoke out very vigorously against any form of basic incomes.

The General Committee of the Walloon green party Ecolo discussed, late in 1987, two proposals concerning unemployment policy : the first proposing to introduce a system of voluntary working time reduction (by giving some form of tax-credits to volunteers), the second proposing to go for a partial basic income system. The debate showed a majority in favour of the first proposal.

France

During summer holidays 1987 a first international meeting of organisations of unemployed people was organised. More information can be obtained from M. PAGAT, 17 rue Louis-Henri Barbusse, 92000 Clichy, France.

READINGS

A capitalist road to communism. (Special issue of *Theory and Society*, vol. 15, n° 5, 1986, pp. 631–758). Kluwer Academic Publishers Group. PO Box 322, 3300 AH Dordrecht, Nederland.

This volume contains a thorough discussion of theoretical issues raised by the basic income (or universal grant) strategy from the perspective of the Left. In their short introduction, Rod Aya and Bart Tromp emphasize the originality of the “immodest proposal” made by Robert van der Veen (Amsterdam) and Philippe Van Parijs (Louvain-la-Neuve) in the volume’s core essay, « A capitalist road to communism », already widely discussed throughout Europe long before this first English-language publication. Van der Veen and Van Parijs argue that, as a means for achieving the Marxian ideal of distribution according to needs in a liberated society, the introduction of a basic income in a capitalist context and the gradual increase of its relative level provide an effective and attractive alternative to the conventional socialist strategy. The essay is followed by six critical comments. Johannes Berger (Bielefeld) and Adam Przeworski (Chicago) agree that this is the most promising way forward but question some aspects of its feasibility. Alec Nove (Glasgow) and Erik Olin Wright (Wisconsin) favour a form of market socialism coupled with a universal grant. Joseph Carens (Princeton) and Jon Elster (Chicago), finally, argue that the proposal is both utopian and ethically unappealing. In their comprehensive reply, van der Veen and Van Parijs reexamine, in the light of the six comments and of other recent intellectual and political developments, both the desirability and the (economic and political) feasibility of introducing a basic income scheme and of using it as a means for approaching (free market) communism.

Guy Standing, *Unemployment and labour market flexibility: The United Kingdom*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1986. (ISBN 92–2–105291–5).

This book reviews the arguments and evidence on labour flexibility and examines the Special Measures adopted to check the growth of unemployment until supply-side measures could take effect. It concludes by considering several alternative strategies designed to combine labour flexibility with income security, notably the merits of work reorganisation, profit-sharing and a social dividend approach to social security.

Michael Opielka/Illona Ostner (eds.). *Umbau des Sozialstaats*, Klartext-Verlag, Essen, 1987. ISBN 3–88474–411–9.

This book contains 37 contributions on different aspects of the crisis of the Welfare State. They developed in connection to discussions about alternative social policy measures proposed by the greens. Each contribution tries to highlight the new emphasis these proposals contain.

Bill Jordan. *The State Authority and Autonomy*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1987. (ISBN 0-631-14273-8).

Rethinking Welfare, Basil Blackwell, London, 1987. (ISBN 0-631 -15348-9).

Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale, Rapport présenté au nom du Conseil Economique et Social par M. Joseph Wresinski, *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Avis et rapports du Conseil Economique et Social*, année 1987, N° 6 (28 février 1987).

Du revenu social : au-delà de l'aide, la citoyenneté ? *Bulletin du MAUSS*, N° ~3, septembre 1987.

RESEARCH

The Netherlands

Recently a research project, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment started at the Department of Social Security Sciences of Tilburg University (The Netherlands). The central question is : which views and proposals for a basic income are brought forward in the international and national discourse, what motives are at the roots of this views and proposals which, are the supposed, or located advantages and disadvantages of several options. The project is headed by drs. Joop M. ROEBROEK. (Address : Department of Social Security Sciences, Tilburg University, PO 90153 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands. Tel. 013-66.27.97 / 66.21.40.)

Belgium

At the « Working Group on Labour Economics » (SESO-UFSIA, Prinsstraat 13, 2000 Antwerp) a research project on basic incomes is being conducted since March 1986. Its main focus is on the labour supply effects of basic income schemes and on the institutional form of different basic income strategies (Contact persons : Patrick VAN DURME, tel. 03-220.41.77, Walter VAN TRIER, tel. 03-220.41.76.)

ARCHIVES

Several National Archives try to keep up with the material published on basic incomes in their country. A regularly updated overview of the books or articles available, can be ordered

For the **Netherlands** : R.J. VAN DER VEEN, Economisch-Seminarium FSW
Herengracht 528
1017 CC AMSTERDAM

For **Belgium** : Collectif Charles Fourier, p/a Philippe VAN PARIJS, ECOS
Place Montesquieu 3
B-1348 LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE

Walter VAN TRIER, Working Group on Labour Economics,
SESO, UFSIA,
Prinsstraat 13
B-2000 ANTWERPEN

For **France** : Marie-Louise DUBOIN, 88, Bd. Carnot
78110 LE VÉSINET

People wishing to contribute to the production of a complete bibliography on basic incomes or willing to collect and keep up with the relevant material in other countries are kindly invited to contact the international secretary of BIEN.

IF YOU WANT TO BE KEPT INFORMED **ABOUT BIEN** (or if you know someone else who does), PLEASE FILL IN AND RETURN:

NAME :

INSTITUTE/POSITION :

ADDRESS :

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**CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT
and call for papers**

A second International Conference on Basic Incomes will be held in Antwerp (Belgium) on **22, 23 and 24th of September 1988.**

It will be hosted by the « Working Group on Labour Economics » (SES0 – UFSIA) of the Antwerp University

This conference will focus on problems of implementation of basic income schemes. This focus covers discussions about different strategies and models, ways of financing, institutional settings, supporting social movements and so on. However, room will be left for work on more theoretical or philosophical topics as well as for ad hoc workshops on themes eventually coming up during the conference. Also, the conference will update an overview of the more general state of the debate on basic incomes in each of the European countries.

We want this conference to be lively and full of debate, therefore the number of attendants will be kept relatively small. Papers should be rather short and mainly highlight points for discussion. Since we want to send them to all participants beforehand, **papers should be finalized by the 1st of August 1988.**

People wishing to participate and/or to submit a paper, should give notice as soon as possible to : Walter VAN TRIER, Vakgroep Arbeidseconomie (SES0 – UFSIA) Prinsstraat 13, B-2000 ANTWERPEN Tel. 32-3-220.41.76

Returning the preliminary inscription form, you will get more detailed information on conference proceedings and practical arrangements.

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I want to participate to the 2nd International Conference on Basic Incomes
(22-23-24 th of September 1988 in Antwerp)

NAME :

ADDRESS :

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I would like to contribute to the conference by a paper :

SUBJECT :