

BASIC INCOME EARTH NETWORK GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

CAPE TOWN, 4 NOVEMBER 2006

MINUTES

Financial Report

The Secretary & Treasurer, David Casassas, gives the financial report. The main figures are provided below:

- Revenues from September 2004 to November 2006 (new life-members and new “bienefactors”): EUR 2.844,24
- Expenses from September 2004 to November 2006 (Executive Committee meetings travel costs): EUR 248,64
- Bank Balance (interests – bank charges): + EUR 211,5

Financial situation on November 2006: EUR 16.290,10

- Sight Account: EUR 1.588,05
- Savings Account: EUR 14.702,05

David Casassas reminds that BIEN made the decision at the Barcelona’s General Assembly (GA) meeting to keep at least a minimum balance of 10.000 euros in the savings account at all times.

Guy Standing points out that the expenses have been very low, mainly because members of the Executive Committee (EC) have paid their own travelling costs. At its Cape Town meeting, on November 1, the EC has made the decision that each EC member will get at least one meeting covered per term of office.

Ingrid van Niekerk asks BIEN’s GA to write a letter to EPRI thanking this organisation for having funded out of its own coffers the expenses of the Congress and for all the staff time it has dedicated to the effort. Also, she proposes that the teams who host BIEN Congresses and raise funds on behalf of BIEN should send a report to BIEN’s GA which includes a detailed accounting of the use of such funds and any balance remaining. The GA agrees that it is a good proposal.

Revision of BIEN Statutes

Karl Widerquist goes through the revisions to the BIEN Statutes. He explains that as BIEN went from a European network to an earth network – and from a small group of scholars and activists to a large group with multiple interests - the EC took on the task of codifying a clearer set of procedural rules to make for a smoother general operation.

There are a total of 10 revisions. The current Statutes and the proposed amendments (see proposal sent to BIEN life-members on October 4 2006) are distributed to the GA.

Al Sheahan, who is absent, and Karl Widerquist are thanked for having drafted these amendments to the BIEN Statutes.

Karl Widerquist suggests that the GA go through each amendment. He will provide the rationale for the amendments and members of the GA will have the chance to discuss them before voting (raising hands) on them.

Amendment 1: modification of article 2

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 2: modification of article 3

Philippe Van Parijs points out that, although the introduction of the “rule keeper” is a good innovation, he is concerned about the adoption of the “Roberts Rules of Order”, which is a procedural codebook too close to a single legal tradition, in this case, the North American. He says he is not sure this is the best set of rules to follow. However, he agrees that it is important that there is a third party to whom to appeal when there is some question about procedure.

It is agreed that if the GA comes up in the future with another set of procedural rules that appear to be better than the “Roberts Rules of Order” they will be adopted.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 3: modification of article 4

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 4: modification of article 5

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 5: modification of the Appendix

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 6: addition of article 6

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 7: addition of article 7

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 8: addition of article 8

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 9: addition of article 9

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

Amendment 10: addition of article 10

No one wants to discuss.

The GA votes to pass.

The GA proposes to change all references to pronouns to “he or she” or “she or he”.

Karl Widerquist says that since these changes are already effective at this meeting, the GA needs to elect a rule keeper. He nominates Richard Caputo, who has been consulted beforehand with respect to his willingness to fill this role and has accepted (he has come with a copy of the Roberts Rules of Order). Richard Caputo accepts this role and is elected by the GA. He reiterates that he understands that he will be called upon only when there are questions about procedure.

Recognition of new national affiliate networks

“Basic Income Guarantee Australia” (BIGA) has sent an application asking for official recognition by BIEN some months before the Cape Town Congress. In addition, John Tomlinson, one of its members, makes a short speech explaining BIGA’s historical background, leadership, aims, primary tasks – he places particular emphasis on the dynamism of BIGA’s website -, regular activities and longer term goals. BIEN’s GA decides to recognise BIGA as an affiliate network.

French organisation “Association pour l’Instauration du Revenu d’Existence” (AIRE) has also requested official recognition and has sent information on its activities. After careful analysis of AIRE’s application, BIEN’s GA concludes that at present AIRE does not meet the requirements for being recommended for BIEN’s official recognition.

BIEN’s EC informs the GA that the Swedish organisation “Folkrörelsen För Medborgarlön” (FFM) has announced it is preparing its application for official recognition. However, it has not yet submitted it. It is expected that FFM’s application will be considered at the next GA meeting.

Ingrid van Niekerk reports that the South African BIG Coalition also made an application but it was finally withdrawn. She informs that the body that used to exist as the BIG Coalition no longer exists as such. The South African group has had some organisational infrastructure and financial challenges that will need some time to overcome. It has returned to being a campaign for the time to come.

Philippe Van Parijs highlights the importance of making clear the criteria for application for recognition of networks. He reminds the GA that, according to the new Statutes, the main criterion for a BIEN regional affiliate is that it is a network of individuals and/or organisations that is not pushing for a particular version of Basic Income but that it promotes broad discussion and the general progress of various ideas of Basic Income that are currently under consideration.

Regional Report

Eri Noguchi presents the draft compilation of the “Report to the General Assembly on the State of Basic Income by Country”, which is distributed among the participants at the GA.

She reminds the GA that two years ago, when BIEN went from “European” to “Earth” network, it created the position of the “Regional Coordinators” on the EC. One of the tasks that the EC decided it would be interested to do is to create a bi-annual report, to be presented at each Congress, reviewing Basic Income related activities around the world. The main sources of information for this report would be BIEN’s newsletters and continued contact with BIEN affiliated networks.

Eri Noguchi also urges BIEN’s general membership and especially the affiliate networks to submit revisions, additions, and especially overviews that will be incorporated into the final version, to be completed by the end of December. The GA asks Eri Noguchi to send both the report and the request for revisions to all networks. Deadline for affiliate networks to send their feedback will be December 15 2006.

The GA also suggests announcing this project in the Newsletter and on BIEN’s website.

Venue of the next Congress

Guy Standing has been asked by the Irish local team to present its proposal to host the next Congress.

Guy Standing asks if there are any other countries that were proposing to host it. There are no alternatives.

Guy Standing highlights that one of the great things of the Cape Town congress has been that it has made development issues central to BIEN. He says there will never be another BIEN congress where development issues will not be at the centre, which should be seen as a great achievement of the 2006 Congress.

He suggests that during this transition period from being a “European” network to being an “Earth” one, BIEN should consider having alternate congresses in Europe, where most of BIEN’s life-members are based, and developing countries. This is why the 2008 Congress should be in Western Europe.

Eduardo Suplicy says that if the Brazilian evolution of Basic Income becomes positive it would make sense to consider Brazil – Sao Paulo, most likely – for the 2010 Congress. In principle, 2010 is the year that the “Bolsa Família” program is supposed to become fully a Basic Income.

The Dublin proposal, as it is presented by Guy Standing, suggests a 3-day Congress in late June 2008, beginning with a day devoted to the Irish debate on Basic Income that would be held at University College Dublin. The theme proposed by the Irish team is “The Economics and the Politics of Basic Income: Moving from Why to How”.

Karl Widerquist proposes that Dublin be the venue of the 2008 BIEN Congress. The motion is seconded and approved by the GA.

The GA raises the question whether the theme suggested by the Irish team is too narrow and, hence, too limiting. Although everyone agrees that choosing a theme is essential in terms of organisation, there is need to explicitly make room for other debates that are

not specifically responsive to the theme suggested by the Irish team. The question about whether it would be better to limit the title to the first part – taking out the “moving from why to how” – is raised. Some participants note that it is especially important to focus on the “how” since a lot of scholars and activists are working on that issue. Others say that the “moving from why to how” expression does not necessarily exclude theoretical approaches to Basic Income. The GA decides to inform the Ireland Committee about all these thoughts and concerns for them to make the decision.

There are concerns about whether the date – late June - is during a time that is difficult for those on an academic calendar. It is suggested late August, later in June, or the first week of July. The GA asks the Ireland Committee to consider this and make a decision. One possible way for them to decide would be sending out an email to BIEN’s membership with a couple of different proposed dates to see if there are certain dates that are better than others, and certain dates that are prohibitive.

Elections

As per new statutes, Guy Standing hands over the chairmanship of the meeting to the Chair of BIEN’s International Advisory Board, Philippe Van Parijs.

Philippe Van Parijs announces the nominations that have been presented:

Co-chair – Guy Standing
Co-chair – Eduardo Suplicy
Secretary-Treasurer – David Casassas
Newsletter Editor – Yannick Vanderborght
Website Coordinator – Karl Widerquist
Regional Coordinator – Ingrid van Niekerk
Regional Coordinator / at-large member – Eri Noguchi
Fundraiser / at-large member – Louise Haagh

The section of the new statutes regarding elections is read.

Philippe Van Parijs, as the person responsible for conducting the elections, asks if anyone wants to discuss the nominations. No one wants to do so. He asks the GA to vote for each position by affirmation.

Voting:

Guy Standing – elected as co-chair
Eduardo Suplicy – elected as co-chair
David Casassas – elected as Secretary-Treasurer
Yannick Vanderborght – elected as Newsletter Editor
Karl Widerquist – elected as Website Coordinator
Ingrid van Niekerk – elected as Regional Coordinator
Eri Noguchi – elected as Regional Coordinator / at-large member
Louise Haagh – elected as Fundraiser / at-large member

There is no need to elect the Congress Organizer: this is a decision that should be made by the local organising team.

Philippe Van Parijs hands over the chairmanship of the meeting again to Guy Standing. Guy Standing announces that Philippe Van Parijs has been nominated to be the Chairperson of the International Advisory Board. The GA votes by affirmation. Philippe Van Parijs is elected as Chairman of the International Advisory Board.

Guy Standing thanks the GA for its vote of confidence for the EC. He says that his concern was the transition of “BIEN Europe” to “BIEN Earth”. Now that BIEN has come through that transition in a quite healthy way, he would like to retire after this next term. During the next two years he will make an effort to make sure the Dublin Congress is a major international Congress. He urges the BIEN membership to start contributing to the planning of the Congress as soon as possible.

Any Other Business

1. Letter to Iraq.

Eduardo Suplicy proposes that BIEN write a letter to the Iraqi Government inviting it to consider the adoption of a Basic Income, as well as offering the assistance of BIEN to make a Basic Income for Iraq possible. The EC would be called upon to draft the letter.

There is no second to this proposal. Eduardo Suplicy withdraws the motion

The question about whether BIEN should call on governments to consider Basic Income, which has been done in the past, is raised. There is a short discussion on whether taking on such an advocacy role is a direction that the membership wants BIEN to go or not.

2. On quorum.

Philippe Van Parijs asks whether the GA should consider adopting a resolution according to which its decisions should be only ratified if there are enough life-members or enough countries represented.

Karl Widerquist explains that the main reason why there is no quorum provision in the new statutes is the fact that BIEN’s sovereign body is the GA – those assembled at the bi-annual GA meeting -, not the membership.

3. Proposal to send a letter to the South African Government on behalf of BIEN’s Congress that calls upon the government to adopt an unconditional universal Basic Income.

Guy Standing makes this proposal. He raises the concern that the conditionality of the current “Disability Grant,” which is especially focused on people with HIV/AIDS, has horrendous human implications: it gives incentives to people to stay sick so they can remain eligible for that grant. The unconditionality of Basic Income would put an end to that situation.

Again, many of those present raise the question whether BIEN should take such an advocacy role or not. Besides, there is concern about the appropriateness of BIEN holding a Congress in South Africa and then telling the South African Government what

to do. Some argue that as an organisation BIEN should not be making statements about what governments should and should not be doing, which would undermine BIEN's standing as an organisation representing research and linking individuals and groups committed to the cause of Basic Income. However, it is said that this does not preclude BIEN's members from addressing letters to political institutions.

South African delegates suggest that in case the proposal is approved what South Africans would appreciate is a friendly statement showing ways to improve the current schemes. Litigation should be left to the South African groups.

Guy Standing proposes that BIEN's Congress draft a letter to be reviewed by the EC recognising the progress that has been made over the last five years thanks to the "Disability Grant" and highlighting that this program has some cause for concern because of its dangerous consequences.

The proposal is put to the vote. The result is a tie. Thus, the proposal does not pass.

The question about whether or not BIEN should sometimes take on the role of advocacy is analysed. The decision is made to discuss this issue at the next General Assembly.