

**Eliminating Child Labour:
*The Promise of a Basic Income***

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Abstract

This paper attempts to bring together two groups, both with particular objectives: those that wish to eliminate child labour and those that wish to implement a basic income – a universal unconditional cash transfer – as an economic right intended to resource greater human freedom and mitigate the negative consequences of economic insecurity. Up until now the dialogue between these two groups has been limited, and this paper argues that this is to the detriment of both of their objectives. The rationale is based on the observation that *conditional cash transfers* have demonstrated some promise in reducing child labour, even when this was not an explicit objective. Accordingly, one might argue that a basic income could also have a positive impact on child labour by undermining the conditions which induce it. Likewise, addressing child labour could also provide a boost to the legitimacy of those voices calling for a basic income as a life-long and societal-wide economic right. The core contention of this paper is that the advocates of the elimination of child labour and the proponents of a basic income could become valuable assets to one another and feed off each other in a mutually beneficial way.

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This paper is dedicated to André Gorz, who died in September 2007. Gorz has been an important thinker in the Basic Income debate and much of this paper draws on his perceptive insights. One is saddened both by this loss and by the thought that the true greatness of his work will probably only be recognised posthumously.

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Abbreviations

BI	Basic Income
BIEN	Basic Income Earth Network
CL	Child Labour
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer(s)
CSG	Child Support Grant (South Africa)
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO)
PETI	Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour (Brazil)
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labour

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to encourage the establishment of a new dialogue between those parties interested in eliminating *child labour* [CL], what will be called the anti-CL lobby, and those concerned with advancing a *universal unconditional cash transfer*; more commonly referred to as a *basic income* [BI]. The latter is a proposal intended as means to improve the human condition, principally by reducing economic insecurity and resourcing '*Real*' more authentic human freedom (Van Parijs, 1997). In establishing this dialogue, perhaps the agendas of both these groups can feed off one another in a mutually beneficial manner, and therefore help bring the realisation of their two, not unconnected, goals closer.

Up until now the dialogue between these two groups has been limited, and this paper argues that this is to the detriment of both of their objectives. The rationale is based on the observation that *conditional cash transfers* [CCTs]¹ have demonstrated some promising, although not conclusive, evidence in being effective in reducing CL even when not tied explicitly to this objective. This has been particularly true of the CCT programmes in Latin America, and thus explains why discourses centring on CL have become increasingly interested in the logic of CCTs as a mechanism to address the phenomenon of CL.

It is in light of this that CCTs are now considered as important instruments of social assistance and are favoured by some of the United Nations' agencies as well as key development banks. Thus one can reason too, that a BI could also impact positively by undermining the conditions (in particular poverty and insecurity) which induce it. Likewise, addressing CL might provide a boost to the legitimacy of those voices calling for a BI to be implemented as a life-long and societal-wide economic right.

This paper hopes to shift the emphasis of the anti-CL lobby and those practitioners who work in the area of CL, and encourage them to also consider the BI as another promising option that could yield results in terms of eliminating CL. In the same vein, the paper also encourages those individuals working on advancing the BI to privilege the elimination of CL as one of the important effects that could be delivered by a BI, even if the BI cash transfer is not designed to target CL head-on as an explicit goal or outcome. By doing this, it is hoped that new spaces of consideration and action can be opened up. To be more specific, this paper considers critically the notion of a BI or versions of the BI (i.e., a BI-type social transfer for families with children), which could become a welcome new addition to the arsenal of measures that can be employed in the fight against CL.

In essence, CL must be afforded greater intellectual priority in our thinking on the BI and *vice versa*. By coming and working together, perhaps the anti-CL lobby and advocates of the BI might help reconfigure the contours of our social world, by shaping a world more fit for children and helping to transform the life-conditions of the 218 million

¹ CCTs are a form of non-contributory, means-tested social assistance programmes that administer a certain amount of cash to poor households on a regular basis on the condition that the beneficiaries fulfil some obligation(s) aimed at human development, such as sending children to school or participating in health programmes (Tabatabai, 2006: 2-3). They are thus a means for stimulating behavioural changes that are more conducive to satisfying human development objectives and positively changing society, particularly in impoverished societies.

children who are labouring away at present (ILO, 2006: p. x). The principal objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To flag up and valorise how a BI could become an important new addition to those instruments we can employ to eliminate CL.
2. To link the goals of the anti-CL lobby and those of advocates of the BI in a more systematic fashion.
3. To identify how we can develop this link strategically and politically.

Linking the objectives of these two groups should make their arguments stronger. Thus this paper will renew, reinforce and make an additional contribution to a message that has already been expressed: that a BI does appear to hold some promise in reducing CL.

1. The Basic Income and Child Labour: Two ships passing at night

The central problem is that up until now the dialogue and contact between advocates of the BI and proponents for the elimination of CL labour has been rather limited and they both continue to pass each other by, like two ships at night.²

From a specific BI perspective it seems that Cuevas and Gonzales (2004) were the first to raise the topic of the BI and CL in an explicit way during the Barcelona Basic Income Earth Network [BIEN] congress of 2004. They have framed the terms of debate, as well as providing a good introduction to the topic and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the BI as a policy to fight CL. The relationship between the BI and the well-being of children was also discussed at the 2006 BIEN congress in Cape Town, South Africa, although explicit reference to CL at this congress appear to have been quite minimal, and the debate tended to focus more generally on the topic of general child welfare. This paper is therefore coming at an opportune moment as it mirrors and coincides with some of the early theoretical shifts that are already underway. However, it is important not to get too carried away, since the CL issue has still not really climbed very far up the BI agenda, although one suspects it is implicit in the BI agenda since the elimination of CL corresponds to the basic concepts of justice that underpin the BI logic. Nevertheless, this failure to tap into their mutually relevant potential represents a major missed opportunity.

Thus it is the contention of this paper that it would be prudent strategically to move the logic of a BI higher on the agenda of those institutions and agencies that have a commitment to ending CL. Furthermore, one gets the impression that the anti-CL lobby knows little of the BI and that there is an established, credible and rich debate that surrounds the BI proposal. Nor does this lobby appear to be aware that the BI is a proposal that is not just theoretical but manifests itself in various applied forms around the globe. In Brazil the *Citizen's Basic Income* was legislated into law in 2004 (Suplicy, 2006, 2007) and is closely connected with the widely vaunted and much touted *Bolsa Familia* social cash transfer programme,³ a scheme which is of great interest to the anti-CL lobby

² The metaphor of 'two ships passing at night' is very apt to the discussion of this section. Normally, it is used to describe two persons (or other entities) travelling in different directions but who could potentially meet. It is thus a lament about missed opportunities and missed connections.

³ The *Bolsa Familia* programme, which was formed from the amalgamation of four of Brazil's original social cash transfer programmes, is the country's flagship social programme. It targets the poorest people and poorest areas first, and is seen as the first stage in extending cash transfer programmes to all population groups a universal and

because of its impact on poor families and school attendance. In fact, some of the key architects of the *Citizen's Basic Income* in Brazil have helped shape the *Bolsa Familia* scheme in such a way that it is intended to act as a precursor or stepping stone to a fully-fledged BI in Brazil. Today, the BI exists in a universal and unconditional form in the state of Alaska, and it has entered one of the biggest cities in the world in the form of a *Universal Citizen's Pension* for all those residents aged seventy or more, as is now the case in Mexico City. Moreover, the prestigious historical pedigree of the proposal is also little known, along with the fact that many esteemed and important figures have advocated a BI; these include Thomas Moore (author of *Utopia*), Thomas Paine (author of *The Rights of Man*), and more contemporaneously Martin Luther King, and Nobel Prize winners James Edward Meade and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The idea also chimes consistently with the tenets of all major religions and figures such as Confucius and the Dalai Lama.

However, as Alfredo Bruta de Costa has pointed out, in many parts of the world a fully-fledged societal-wide BI is 'too far removed from the thinking of policymakers and public opinion to be feasible in the short term' (Bruta de Costa, 2003: 92).⁴ This does not mean that the BI proposal should be discounted as wholly improbable and therefore dismissed. On the contrary, a historical perspective on social change teaches us that socially transformative proposals are invariably rejected on the grounds of impossibility, and when they come to pass they become part of the normative state of affairs and one is left wondering what all the initial fuss was about. Perhaps introducing the BI by stealth as a universal and unconditional cash transfer for children or the elderly is one way in which we can position the BI more centrally in the mind of policymakers and public opinion, so that the leap to a fully-fledged BI will not appear as such a vertiginous leap or radical shift as it may appear at present to many people. Hence, all the more reason that advocates of the BI ought to attempt to further legitimise the BI by linking it with the goals of the anti-CL movement.

However, despite the lack of awareness of the BI within the anti-CL community there are some promising signs that the conditions are right for the coming together of these two groups. For example, the International Labour Organization's [ILO] International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour [IPEC] has produced a recent report entitled *Action Against Child Labour: Progress and Future Priorities* (2008), where there was an exploration of the future and potential impact of *conditional cash transfer* programmes on CL. In addition to this, there was an implicit acknowledgement that other *unconditional* approaches might be worthwhile exploring in addition to conditional approaches as an option for reducing CL. While responses from representatives of the anti-CL lobby are not resounding ones, one does hear positive noises about the BI and that it may play a role in reducing CL. However, at present the BI still remains a little-known subject in discourses on CL. Nevertheless, perhaps things are beginning to stir that might provide an opening for the BI debate to enter CL discourses in a more concrete and systematic fashion.

unconditional income as a citizenship right. In 2006 it covered 11.2 million families (44 million people), which represents a quarter of the population of Brazil.

⁴ However, perhaps the logic of a BI is not so out-of-touch with the prevailing political 'reality', which, one must hasten to add, is a protean and relative term. For example, a survey conducted in the House of Commons and the House of Lords - hardly bastions of British radicalism - by the Citizen's Income Trust in the UK, indicated that there was considerable support for a BI from both MPs and Lords as a promising proposal for social reform. In addition, this survey indicated that there was support for a Royal Commission to investigate the possibility of the proposal operating in the UK (Citizen's Income Trust, 2005). Having said that, off-the-record political reality is quite different from formal public pledges of support for proposals such as a BI.

The foregoing discussion seems to affirm that CL must be afforded greater intellectual and strategic priority in our thinking on the BI, and *vice versa*. What a boost and additional string it would be to the bow of the BI if it could be advanced as an effective mechanism to address CL as one more justification to add to numerous others that can be invoked in support of a BI.

2. Why a Basic Income may help reduce child labour

While CL is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon not reducible to exclusively economic explanations,⁵ poverty is often the main cause. A BI can address household poverty and perhaps empower families to overcome the need/temptation to insert their children in CL as a way to boost income during times of economic difficulty, or as a *de facto* form of social insurance to off-set and prepare for future economic hardship and insecurity.

The rationale that the BI may hold some potential is also based on the observation that *conditional cash transfers* have demonstrated some promising evidence in being effective in reducing child labour even when not tied explicitly to the objective of eliminating CL. For example, this is demonstrated by Mexico's *Oportunidades* programme (previously called *Progres*a)⁶ which does not specifically target CL as a direct policy outcome. In spite of this, the *Oportunidades* programme has reduced the probability of children undertaking labour quite considerably. In fact, according to Rawlings, *Oportunidades* has 'reduced the probability of working among those aged 8 to 17 by 10 to 14 per cent in relation to the level observed prior to the programme' (quoted in Tabatabai, 2006: viii). More significantly still, we can see that on a continental level there was substantial decline in CL in Latin America during 2000-2004, by as much as two thirds, and this may be in part due to widespread adoption of CCTs in the region (IPEC, 2006: 7-8). In absolute terms, the number of children at work has fallen by 17 million children and now 5 per cent of children are engaged in such work. In truth however, the reality is that in many countries CL still persists in all its forms and we are still a very considerable distance from eliminating it by 2016 as has been called for by the Global Action Plan on CL which was endorsed by the ILO governing body in 2006.

In short, the evidence that CCTs are effective in reducing CL is not conclusive and further research is needed. It is possible that other factors may account for this substantial decline. For example, economic growth or the increasing adoption of anti-CL legislation may have stimulated such an outcome. In spite of this circumspection, it is not unreasonable to argue that the same tentative optimism and call for more research is also

⁵ The causes of CL can be multiple and include causative factors such as extreme poverty and therefore the need for all family members to contribute economically; limited access to education institutions; cultural/traditional practices; employment practices and employer's preference for cheap and docile workers such as children; the fact that vulnerable children can be coerced into illegal activities; discriminatory practices, the social position of girls in indigenous groups; the lack of acknowledgment of the CL problem by governments; the death of parents from HIV/AIDS which has created a generation of child-headed households; armed conflict, children being forced to take up arms; trafficking of criminal practices and a lack of credit (adapted from IPEC, 2004).

⁶ The *Oportunidades* programme is a conditional cash transfer programme that covers 5 million poor families in Mexico. It has been designed in such a way that it (putatively) provides incentives for poor families to invest in human capital, education, health and nutrition. In other words it makes a cash transfer conditional on behaviour that reinforces human capital development. Successful receipt of payment is dependent on parents (usually the mother) ensuring their children make regular clinic visits and receive key vacancies and that children maintain a certain level of school attendance. More money is administered as children grow older and enter higher grade groups in order to keep older children in school and out of work, and therefore preserve the goal of human capital development. It is targeted at the poorest communities, and eligibility is determined through proxy means testing and community reviews.

applicable to the BI, especially when we consider that the *Oportunidades* programme was not tied exclusively to the goal of combating CL yet it seemed to contribute to a reduction of CL. Hypothetically at least, the evidence stemming from the *Oportunidades* programme suggests that the BI could also play a role in reducing CL. This is relevant to the BI since if the BI were to be employed in any given society it would most likely not be employed to specifically target CL head-on, as with some cash transfers such as *La Programa de Erradicación do Trabalho Infantil* [PETI](The Programme for the Eradication of CL)⁷ that operates in Brazil. Rather the BI would be instigated more as a general poverty-reduction device and as an empowerment mechanism to resource and enhance people's opportunities for developing more authentic autonomy/capabilities (Gorz, 1999; Sen, 1999), and thereby weed out some of those CL inducing forces in an less direct fashion. Therefore one can reason that a BI could also have a similar impact on CL as the *Oportunidades* programme, despite the fact that the BI conforms to a logic of universality and unconditionality instead of the targeting and means testing synonymous with the *Oportunidades* programme.

Equally it is important not to get too carried away with the promise that conditional cash transfer pose, and in the case of this paper, the promise of universal and unconditional cash transfers. For one may clumsily fall into the trap of thinking all CL can be reduced by simple cash transfers. This is not true because not all forms of CL are amenable to modification by cash, as demonstrated by what are known as the *unconditional* worst forms of child labour [WFCL]. The unconditional WFCL include children being used for extreme and highly objectionable activity such as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution, pornography and other illicit activities. Addressing these activities through any programme of cash transfers seems rather improbable in terms of ending them or withdrawing children from such activity, although social cash transfers may be effective as a preventive measure by reducing the slide of children into this form of work in the first instance.

This reason why social cash transfers cannot really be used to address the unconditional WFCL is because these forms of activity are highly illegal and morally repugnant. Moreover one supposes that the unconditional WFCL can never be amenable to forms of modification that render them acceptable in terms of their impact on the health, safety and morals of a child. The intrinsic nature of such work simply cannot be altered. The degradation and violation synonymous with such activity is too complete. For instance, it is difficult to conceive of how child prostitution could ever be made acceptable in any fundamental sense. Therefore there is a sense in which this type of work is beyond discussion because the essential nature of the unconditional WFCL can never be ameliorated or legitimated in a civilised and good society.

Furthermore, cash transfers are unlikely to be effective against some of the unconditional WFCL,⁸ since the earnings from such forms of 'work' 'may be so attractive that [a] cash

⁷ PETI started in 1996, and by 2006 it covered 1 million children aged 7-15. It is targeted at poor children working in the worst forms of child labour [WFCL]. It assists these children by providing scholarship and three square meals a day. It also requires the participation of children in after school activities in order to discourage their participation in CL.

⁸ Here it would be useful to make a distinction between the *unconditional* WFCL and the *hazardous* WFCL, as the latter term will be employed later. The former accounts for about 4 per cent of all those children who are economically active, whereas the hazardous WFCL account for as much as 50 per cent of the children who are economically active. While it may be out of the question to directly address the unconditional WFCL through cash transfers by virtue of their absolute illegality and moral repugnance, there may be some scope for targeting the hazardous WFCL. The hazardous WFCL encapsulates work that can be rendered non-hazardous through modification. For example, work

incentive would not be enough to induce them to abandon such activities' (IPEC, 2008: 83). In others words, their attractiveness is unlikely to be discouraged by modest government cash transfers. Perhaps addressing this area of CL is better left to specialised child protection professionals, empowered with resources and both the legal might and right to remove these children working in the unconditional WFCL.

Nevertheless, while one can be optimistic that a BI could be effective in helping to eliminate CL, it needs to be recognised that the evidence is still not unequivocal. More research is needed to discover the potential of the BI in terms of its impact on CL. Hence the intention from this point on is to develop a rationale that outlines how this can be achieved.

3. Cash transfers and child labour: Potential advantages of a Basic Income

The proponents of conditionality in CCT programmes favour it on the grounds that it raises the profile of the social services that are available for the poor, leads to greater and more effective investment in human capital, and makes such programmes more acceptable to politicians who are more likely to support something that places certain obligations on the beneficiaries, and therefore corresponds with the dominant social logic of reciprocity and deservingness. However, these are to an extent mere suppositions and the expression of political preference; they do not have to be taken as gospel. It is possible to argue that universal and unconditional cash transfers such as a BI might have some key advantages over CCTs in terms of impact on CL. These can be divided into two main types: administrative advantages and advantages in terms of the social impact of a BI.

Administrative advantages

1. There are *less administrative costs* with a BI during the actual administrative process because in theory there is no means-testing or targeting. Thus the savings in administrative costs leaves more money available for the actual cash transfer. This is significant as, according to the ILO, as much of 15-33 per cent of the total amount of money available for a welfare programme can be consumed by the administrative process in low income countries (see Kyloh, 2007: 200; ILO, 2008). This is quite different from the situation in the advanced capitalist societies where administrative costs are just a fraction of the total costs of the overall programme. The administration of the Child Benefit⁹ in the UK for example, which is a universal and unconditional cash transfer/BI for children, consumes just 1 per cent of the total available programmatic costs according to the Citizen's Income Trust (2007: 8). Thus the cost-cutting exercise could deliver greater financial benefits to recipients of the social transfer programme. However, of course, the more universal a scheme is in terms of population groups covered, the more expensive it will be.

that is conducted for long hours, at dangerous heights or underground can be modified and improved by simply removing these conditions. In other words, the hazardous WFCL can be changed for the better whereas the unconditional WFCL simply cannot. Thus there is some room for impacting on those forms of CL that can be transformed in a fundamental sense through social cash transfer programmes.

⁹ In the UK, child benefit is usually paid into the bank account of parents or guardians on a monthly basis, although it can in some cases be paid weekly. It covers children aged from 0-17 years of age. As of April 2008, £75.20 (US\$150 as of July 2008) per month is paid for the eldest child (including the eldest of a multiple birth) and £50.20 (US\$100 as of July 2008) per month is paid per any other children. The same amount is paid without reference to earnings or savings (see HMRC, 2008).

2. There is *no need to worry about building exit strategies* into BI programmes because in its fully-fledged form it is intended to be a life-long income rather than transient cash transfer, although this extensivity is perhaps too ambitious in very low income countries.
3. There are *less moral hazards and potential for corruption or divisive discretion* associated with a BI than with conditional cash transfers, something which was a big problem with the Child Support Grant [CSG]¹⁰ in South Africa when it was conditional and means tested. For example in South Africa one witnessed the manifestation of what Standing calls the 'paternalist twitch' (Standing, 2002: 208), which refers to a basic default tendency that seems to exist within people, and expresses itself as a desire/need to impose conditionality and testing on welfare. According to Leatt and Budlender, in this instance welfare officials asked that people provide more evidence than was necessary when applying for the CSG; evidence which was not sanctioned at the national level (see Leatt and Budlender, 2006). While these extra, illegal conditionalities were not of a tremendously disturbing nature, they did increase the number of hoops through which families were obliged to jump in order to satisfy the eligibility criteria. This was problematic as it meant that there were bottlenecks in the delivery systems and that take-up was low, especially in the poorest areas, where some of the eligible children were hospitalised due to malnutrition. Thus one is led to conclude that the hassle and potential inefficiency that is implied by paternalistic testing could be side-stepped and conveniently rolled into one simple unconditional cash transfer that would not engender such damaging outcomes as those described in the preceding discussion.
4. The BI seems to *increase the take-up* by the most excluded as demonstrated by the CSG in South Africa. For example, the CSG in South Africa was originally a conditional grant; however it was far more effective in terms of its take-up when conditions were removed from the grant. In fact, when the CSG was conditional, eligibility was so burdensome it meant that as much as 90 per cent of eligible children failed to receive the grant. According to Samson et al., after conditions had been dropped, take-up had risen by 58 per cent (Samson et al., 2007: 11). The advantage of removing means-testing and conditionality is also demonstrated by the Child Benefit grant that operates in the United Kingdom, which is basically a BI for children. This grant has nearly 100 per cent take-up, which suggests that unconditionality and the absence of testing might be the preferred option in terms of ensuring take-up and the fulfilment of wider coverage.

Social impact

One imagines that the BI would possess some advantages in assisting the goal of reducing CL for the following reasons:

¹⁰ The CSG was originally a conditional grant; however after the Taylor commission of 2000 it was agreed that the grant would be more fit-for purpose if it were an unconditional cash transfer. Today the grant is unconditional and covers 7.5 million children. Eligibility is determined by performing individual assessment of the primary care provider. This means that income and assets are tested. The geographical area and type of household are also taken into consideration to identify eligible children.

1. It would *increase household income and allow families to decide how best to spend money* according to their priorities and thus the need for their children to labour may diminish;
2. By *providing long-term guaranteed security which enables long-term planning* a BI may be better equipped to interrupt the social reproduction or inter-generational transfer of poverty which induces CL;
3. *Less stigmatisation* attached to a BI since every family with children would be entitled to its receipt; and therefore it poses less psychological and social costs.
4. *Less possibility of generating perverse affects* such as generating a swollen realm of non-hazardous CL (i.e. generating a swollen sphere of non-hazardous CL or conversely, the greater concealment of hazardous CL).

With regard to the last point, a BI-type approach to the CL problem may be more preferable than CCTs in terms of the perverse effects that are generated. As Samson has argued in his debates with the World Bank, enforcing rigid conditions risks perverse outcomes. Conditionality can 'punish the poorest, who face high costs to comply with requirements, particularly when high quality schools and health care are inaccessible' (Samson et al., 2007: 101).

Here, it might be instructive to explore a bit further the contention that unconditionality generates less perverse outcomes. For example, if we used CCTs to target hazardous CL – those worst forms of CL that are more amenable to transformation *via* cash transfers – with a condition specifically requiring withdrawal of children from hazardous work, children may merely be transferred from 'very bad' work to 'bad work' as a kind of natural and demographic readjustment response. Or expressed more concisely, the sphere of activity that contains hazardous CL would simply be transformed into a sphere of general bad CL and hence the scourge of general CL would not have been eliminated, only ameliorated. This transference or transformation might operate particularly rapidly in the context of the informal economy in which CL is invariably rooted, because it would set in motion an organic and self-propelling process where employers change the nature of the work they supply, but they would still continue to employ child labourers. Alternatively, employers might develop ways of concealing the hazardous nature of the work that they provide; such measures may place children in even more jeopardy and further beyond the help of child protection agencies. Neither of these options is particularly attractive.

A CCT targeted at hazardous CL may therefore transfer child labourers into a new sphere of activity that contains forms of CL that are less hazardous but are nevertheless bad as children might continue to labour at the expense of fulfilling their educational and developmental needs. Thus, there would be a downgrading of child risk transference and displacement; but still this would represent the exchanging of one evil for a lesser evil. The attractiveness of this outcome is really rather subjective and depends on how one wishes to balance their idealism and pragmatism. No doubt further deliberation would be required to decide whether such an approach would still be worthwhile pursuing in light of the potential that perverse outcomes will be generated.

Conditionality such as those of the *Bolsa Familia* scheme, where children are obliged to attend school and also fill up their day with extra-curricular activities, may help countries

overcome the demographic transformation described above. Also local communities or parents may view the filling up of their children's days as overly protectionist. However, this may be the only way to stave off the possibility that children do not labour. Furthermore, we must also remain mindful that conditions that prohibit even the non-hazardous forms of CL may penalise and damage families, especially when CL represents an absolute survival mechanism; as may be the case in households where parents are AIDS-sick and older family members are significantly debilitated.

Conversely, there is also a problem that if we target specific forms of hazardous CL, employers and parents might take greater precautions to conceal such activities, therefore pushing already vulnerable children further from the reach of social assistance. This might mean that child labourers are placed in more precarious conditions than even before the inception of the CCT scheme. Perversely, we might then intensify and worsen the conditions in which child labourers are compelled to work and we might see a transfer of children from 'bad work' to 'very bad' work or from very bad work to even worse work.

In addition to the social impact advantages outlined previously, there may also be the possibility that a BI is better equipped to deal with difficult-to-defeat untruths and falsehoods that are socially generated, especially if it is articulated as a right intended to engender multiple effects.¹¹ This is because a BI will not be specifically evaluated in terms of its CL impact, and therefore would not have to be justified on this basis alone; although one suspects that the CL lobby will demand this before they will embrace the proposal and thus lend support.

While the outcomes described above are possible, they nevertheless reside in the realm of (well reasoned) supposition and it is conceivable that the course of events will unfold in quite a different manner. Thus, hypothetically at least, clearly there are some potential advantages in using a BI as a measure to reduce CL. Consequently, the pivotal question that needs to be asked now is how one can build and add to the work that has already been done to forge a relationship between the anti-CL lobby and advocates of the BI? In order to build on what has been accomplished thus far, it is necessary to consider how one can kick-start a political strategy that advances the BI in a more concerted way by utilising the goal of eliminating CL. At this point it would be worthwhile to spell out why making this link could be beneficial to proponents for the elimination of CL and advocates of the BI.

4. The benefits of utilising the elimination of Child Labour to advance the Basic Income

¹¹ The BI has been advanced for numerous reasons: that it can improve the human condition by promoting historical social justice; redressing the inequity of geography/birthplace; reducing economic and income insecurity; eradicating unemployment, poverty traps and social exclusion (Veen and Groot, 2000); addressing growing income concentration; being more cost-effective fiscally; destigmatising the act of receiving social security; rebalancing the work-free time disequilibrium; pacifying and democratising violent or war-torn societies such as Iraq (Suplicy, 2008); fulfilling existing human rights and meeting the requirements of new and emerging human rights (Raventos, 2007; Sheahan, 2004; Yanes, 2004); resourcing the development of new capabilities (Sen 1999); resourcing *Real* freedom (Van Parijs, 1997; Bauman, 1999: 188-189); contributing to the greening of society (Gorz, 1993; Lord, 2006); promoting 'gender-neutral social citizenship rights' (Cruz-Saco, 2006: 7); developing more authentic autonomy (Gorz, 1999: 88); enabling participatory citizenship; redemocratising and repoliticising the *polis* engendering a process of work humanisation (Offe in Van Parijs, 2001); strengthening social solidarity (Standing & Samson, 2003); and rewarding and recognising non-monetised/non-pecuniary activity.

It may or may not appear a statement of the obvious, but linking the BI with the goal of CL elimination and the anti-CL lobby could be a powerful move. The anti-CL lobby is a powerful and well-resourced sector that holds significant public and political influence. It includes important UN agencies such as the ILO, UNESCO and UNICEF, as well as numerous NGOs. In addition, the proposal of a BI for children would not fall on unsympathetic ears in powerful continental institutions like the European Commission. For example, as Levy et al. have observed, the European Commission has acknowledged that:

“Material deprivation among children must be a matter of serious concern, as it is generally recognised to affect their development and future opportunities” and urged Member States towards “developing a focus on eliminating poverty and social exclusion among children” as one of the six key priorities that has received a favourable response from departments of European Union (Levy et al., 2006: 5).

Even more promising still, Levy et al. point out that the possibility of a BI for Europe’s children is also shared by a High-Level Group on the future of social policy in an enlarged European Union which has included among its policy recommendations “To reduce child poverty, including through a basic income for children delivered by Member States” (European Commission, 2004: 56, cited in Levy et al., 2006). Clearly there are important continental and international institutions who may favour a BI approach to addressing child poverty and CL, if only such a case can be convincingly made, and this is the challenge that confronts advocates of the BI.

Thus it seems advocates of the BI need to exploit the emotionally and morally loaded subject of CL. The need to eradicate CL could be fertile in terms of eliciting public sympathy and consequently acquiring their support for more general universal and unconditional social cash transfer programmes. And this does not have to be exploited in a predeceous or cynical way or interpreted as carpet bagging or jumping on the anti-CL bandwagon. On the contrary, if both groups can achieve their mutually relevant goals by working together there need not be a clash of interests. For proponents of the BI the need to eradicate CL ought to be championed as one of the key motives for a BI, simply because it conforms to many of the core principles in the multifarious justifications that have thus far been devised to justify a BI (see footnote 11).

Quite simply, emphasising the goal of eliminating CL as an objective and endowing the BI with the capacity to fight CL is likely to make the BI’s chances stronger. For BI advocates to make political capital out of CL is nothing to be ashamed of. It would be an astute political manoeuvre. For instance, some people may tacitly accept that income insecurity for adults is an inevitable part of the landscape of the contemporary economic system, but one supposes that such flippancy is not so easy to espouse against a BI when it is linked to the goal of eliminating CL as one of its possible effects. It is more difficult for BI detractors to reject it when the goal of eliminating CL is also present, since CL is an emotive issue. In essence, linking the BI with the reduction of CL would leave the BI argument less open to attack.

Strategically-speaking, CL might provide a good *point of entry* for a BI to mainstream and implant itself into a society. This would perhaps permit the logic of the BI to be grafted into the core of a society. Just as the *Universal Citizen’s Pension* in Mexico City has been the catalyst for the BI debate in Mexico, a BI as a universal unconditional cash transfer for

children could catalyse further shifts towards the BI in other countries. In this way, the logic of universalism is introduced into society in a more palatable fashion where it can begin to settle and mainstream in the public and political psyche. Having taken this firm footing in that society, it might not be such easy prey to the critiques of its detractors. This could act as a solid launching pad which might permit a subsequent expansion programme of the BI across the age spectrum. The reason for this is that children and pensioners, as with the Mexican scheme, are the most vulnerable social groups and it is easier to convince the public of the merits of such a programme when it is focused on these social groups.

Although to insert a caveat, Claus Offe has argued that this approach could be exclusive and create a 'moral sanctuary for "worthy claimants"' (2005: 76), namely those families whose children are compelled to work in CL. In other words, if unconditional and conditional cash transfers are targeted to one particular vulnerable social group, their potential reach is diminished. With specific reference to a BI there is a danger that if linked exclusively with the goal of eliminating CL it would become instrumentalised as simply a social policy device, and although it does embody many of the hallmarks of a conventional social policy mechanism, one ought to stress that it could also be much more than this. For example, a BI in particular has been articulated as representing a more visionary strategy; as exemplifying something much more transformatory than simply a one destination social policy (see Bauman, 1999 & Orton, 2008). Thus there is a danger that the BI would never be extended further beyond this group and its wider emancipatory thrust would be curtailed. This is a risk that advocates of the BI will have to contemplate. Having said this, one imagines that introducing a BI-type grant to the most vulnerable social groups would be the most appropriate strategy in developing and low-income countries.

5. Promoting the Basic Income to the Anti-Child Labour Lobby

How can we best promote the BI to the anti-CL audience? It seems that there are several key observations that would have to be factored into any attempt to promote the BI to the anti-CL lobby. First and foremost is the need to valorise the existing debate; there is already quite a well-developed movement backing the BI, hence those organisations oriented to eliminating CL should be made aware that they would not have to advance the idea from scratch. In addition to this important observation, there are others that ought to be considered and these are expressed in the subtitles below.

Providing evidence of impact on CL

One suspects the BI will encounter problems with the anti-CL lobby if it is not advanced in a way that satisfies demands for demonstrating outcomes in terms of its impact on CL. Before this lobby would give its stamp of approval, they would want to be able to evaluate and assess the impact of BI on CL either as a real actually existing scheme or through simulations. To elicit their support will require hard facts, statistics and demonstrable evidence that a BI is fit for purpose in the arena of CL.

Need to pay heed to the affordability issue

The affordability argument will have to be broached in a careful way. It must be aware of contextual diversity and how what is affordable in one place is not in another. A BI to

reduce CL must not fall into the trappings of a fiscal ethnocentrism, where it neglects to recognise the severe resource constraints that afflict some countries and regions.¹² For instance, a universal and generous BI for children with families may not be that impossible or strange a thing to envisage for developed countries and other nation states with a history of a welfare/social state, but it would be quite another thing to implement such a programme in sub-Saharan Africa for example. Perhaps it will not be possible to grant a universal unconditional cash transfer to all families with children, if purse strings are so tight, and universal grants might have to be restricted to families only with very young children. For example in Nepal, and according to the economic modelling of the ILO and UNICEF, universal cash transfer could only be made available to families with children less than five years of age, given the existing fiscal constraints in that country (Kylloh, 2007: 200).

The lack of resources is likely to characterise those countries where there are high levels of CL, hence some targeting may be needed, but not targeting in the sense of individual households, but perhaps specific age groups or entire regions which is quite possible where adequate social data exists. Therefore once inside these groups or regions the cash transfer would still conform to a BI and remain consonant with its core principles, as it would be universal across the entire region. Unless one is wholly puritanical about the BI assuming such a form, this approach would link with the gradualist political strategy, by slowly introducing the proposal into society in a palatable form, and in such a way that it would not appear too disturbing to the delicate sea-legs of the politically queasy and squeamish *quid pro quo* establishment.¹³ Equally, it is also important that one does not concede too much ground on the affordability issue, since what is affordable can often be a question of priorities in low income countries and, as Monbiot argues, money is always seems available to terminate life but never available to preserve it (Monbiot, 2007a; 2007b).

In a similar fashion, the Social Security department of the ILO has attempted to demonstrate that that there is considerable fiscal space/latitude in how far countries can finance a basic floor of social security, which would include a child benefit; their costing simulations suggest that less 'than 2 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be necessary to provide a basic set of social security benefits to all of the world's poor' (ILO, 2008: 3). Thus it is important to remain mindful of the political nature of the affordability question, and one should not abstain from stretching the parameters of this debate in such a way that political conditions more conducive to the implementation of universal social security are created.

Connecting CL with the BI would contribute to mainstreaming CL concerns

Quite simply there is also the need to flag up the fact that a connecting with the BI could be advantageous to the anti-CL lobby and it would help with the mainstreaming of CL. The anti-CL lobby has set itself the goal of developing a world-wide anti-CL movement

¹² According to an ILO study, it is estimated that the elimination of CL would cost US\$760 billion by providing universal lower secondary education. Importantly, this study has estimated that benefits of eliminating CL would be nearly seven times greater than the costs, or in actual financial terms it would be worth an estimated 'US\$5.1 trillion in developing and transitional economies where most of the child labourers are found' (quoted in Inter-Agency Working Group on Child Labour and Education 2008: 10).

¹³ This refers to a common objection directed against a BI by a social group that believes that a BI would violate *the social norm of reciprocity* or *quid pro quoism*, a norm which states that there can be no rights without obligations and that financial assistance must be earned through the seeking of employment or making some other form of effort or social contribution, or that there is such a notion as the deserving and undeserving poor. Of course, this same social norm is never extended to those classes who live off rent or inherited wealth which was simply a gift of birth.

that will abolish CL in the next two decades and this movement has grown quite considerably in recent years. The linking with the BI proposal would serve to help develop and extend this movement. Thus there is an open-door to advocates of the BI if they can make a sufficiently convincingly case for the merits of the BI in the domain of CL.

In addition to these important observations, there is a need to insert some further words of caution that ought to underpin any attempt to promote the BI to the anti-CL lobby, especially if BI advocates embark on a concerted campaign to promote it to this lobby. The following must be the watchwords or watch phrases that ought to be borne in mind.

CL is a complex multidimensional issue

One imagines that in order that the BI is introduced successfully to this group, it must be articulated in a proportionate way, and as an argument that inscribes within its own rationale the recognition of the complexity and multidimensionality of CL. The determinants of CL are complicated and not all of them are money related (e.g., some are based on rituals, custom, parental values and education). It is important that the BI is not presented as the panacea in the arena of eliminating CL. Rather it needs to be presented as one policy instrument among several others, and to portray it as anything other than this would mean that it simply flatters to deceive.

BI is likely to be more effective as a preventive rather than corrective measure

A BI is more likely to have more of an effect on CL, in terms of reducing it, as a preventive measure rather than corrective one. For long term prevention a BI seems to hold some promise and, as crude as this sounds, that would be its major selling point. As has already be mentioned, the BI is unlikely to be effective as a device for promoting the withdrawal of all types of CL, as some forms of CL are not amenable to change and improvement through cash transfers, but rather as a mechanism to arrest the slide of children into such work. In some instances conditional approaches might be more appropriate to activate the removal of children for CL.

The need to introduce the Basic Income along with other integrative and complementary measures linked with eliminating CL

Since the receipt of a BI would have no direct conditions connected with CL, owing to the absence of conditionality in the BI, it will have to be introduced with an indirect link in order to satisfy the anti-CL lobby. One way to link a BI or BI-type grant with the goal of reducing CL might be to get families to sign onto the BI scheme with an 'on paper' pledge stating that they will not involve their children in CL. Simple awareness raising exercises as this can be effective. This would avoid the trappings of conditionality and paternalism whilst flagging-up in the public's mind that CL should not be tolerated. This would also mean that countries would not have to renege on their commitment to address the WFCL as is implied in their ratification of the ILO's Convention No. 182, which obligates ratifying countries to pledge to and devote resources to eliminating the WFCL. No doubt, linking a BI with universal and compulsory education would also be an important move in reducing CL.

The need to be wary of the BI becoming a one-issue social policy

There is also a danger that if BI advocates try the hard sell to the anti-CL lobby they may compromise the idealism and other potentialities of the BI, and may assign it to a future of perpetual 'log-rolling and haggling' (Bauman, 1999: 185). The BI may become one-dimensionalised and a one-issue social policy and simply a problem solving device or a social lightning rod that diverts and diffuses social dissatisfaction rather than acting as something much more transformatory. This particular balancing act of forwarding the BI as an important instrument for preventing CL and keeping alive its wider emancipatory purpose will be a tricky tightrope to walk.

BI is likely to be ineffective against some worst forms of child labour

As already mentioned the BI is unlikely to be effective against some worst forms of child labour and it should not be promoted on this basis. Other complementary measures of removal may also be necessary to emancipate children from such forms of CL.

6. Recommendations for advancing the Basic Income to eliminate Child Labour

In this penultimate section the paper will suggest some practical steps and recommendations that could be taken to pursue the idea of a BI in relation to CL, if readers consider a BI as displaying some potential to combat CL.

In terms of our current knowledge, quite simply there is little understanding of the implications of a BI for CL, although what evidence exists suggests that a BI or BI-style grant could impact positively on CL, by removing poverty as one of the conditions that compel children to labour.

Nevertheless, these knowledge gaps ought to be bridged, in order to ascertain whether a BI should be adopted as a policy principle to advance the fight against CL. Undoubtedly, more policy research is needed to inform and direct future action. Those agencies committed to eliminating CL should consider linking with each other and other relevant bodies in a more concrete way in order to consider ways in which a BI could be launched or experimented with in relation to CL. Perhaps there is a need to start to develop a fund that could be used to run pilot projects, initially requiring only modest resources in order to develop the technical know-how to replicate these schemes elsewhere if they deliver satisfactory outcomes. This would help develop a knowledge base and an ability to provide technical assistance when necessary.

The steps which could be taken by advocates of the BI to develop the link between the BI and CL can be laid out in the following explicit fashion:

- Establishing dialogue with the anti-CL lobby would be important (e.g., presenting at CL conferences) in order to obtain push-back on the proposal.
- Further research and discourse is needed on this topic (i.e., to demonstrate fiscal, political plausibility and lessons from case studies). Knowledge gaps ought to be plugged, in order to ascertain whether a BI should be adopted as a policy principle.
- Identifying which agents/agencies might be willing to support and resource the exploration of the relationship between BI and CL would be important too.

- Exploring the best strategy for introducing BI into a society is also important (i.e. to introduce to the most vulnerable first and then expand as in Brazil).

With regards to the latter step, a BI or a BI for families with children could be pushed through various political approaches such as the gradualist way, the instantaneous overnight 'big bang' approach or the *rapid gradualist* approach which aims for the *most advanced yet achievable* speed of implementation, what Van Parijs calls the MAYA principle. The gradualist approach may be more suitable in developing and low-income countries. In short, perhaps the most appropriate way to implement a BI in developing countries would be to implement a BI on the grounds that it is available for both ends of the age spectrum: for all families with children (as was the case with child benefit in the UK), and for pensioners, just as is being done with the universal pension at the district level of Mexico City for example, which is effectively a BI for pensioners aged over 70 years.

This gradualist approach which targets the most vulnerable first would fit the agenda of BI advocates and those committed to ending CL, and not many people would object to the vulnerable being covered. What is more, one can easily argue that a universal unconditional cash transfer for children (i.e., a BI for families) will be paid back with in a deferred style through *filial love* (caring for or supporting parents when they are old) and the generation of future economic productivity and security; (i.e. the human capital augmentation argument). This might pave the way for an upward spreading (from benefiting children) to cover the adult population. This would satisfy the principle of rapid gradualism and the principles of the wider BI debate. This would also serve to legitimise the logic of universality again, especially in a context where the legitimacy of universalism has been waning (see Mkandawire, 2005).

Further down the line, if there appears to be great potential in the idea of a BI, perhaps advocates could push for the development of regional or even global fund, very much along the lines of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and grant funding for a BI to countries to fight CL. Providing programmes such as IPEC were convinced of the merits of the idea, they could provide technical assistance to these countries to help implement a BI programme or a BI programme for families, although such a possibility is still a considerable distance away.

Conclusion

This is not a closed debate and the foregoing discussion is by no means comprehensive; rather it is tentative and cursory attempt to understand better universal and unconditional social cash transfers and how they might impact on CL. Asking for a movement towards a BI society or at least a BI-style approach to addressing the CL problem, is not asking for the moon. Far grander and ambitious demands have been made and satisfied throughout the course of human history. If those organisations that wish to end CL see the value and virtue of a BI they could add depth to the justification behind the proposal, and their support would lend tremendous weight to the progressive implementation and moralisation of the BI proposal and this would give substance and meaning to Van Parijs notion of the need for the *swelling* and *spreading* of the BI proposal.

To summarise the discussion that has taken place in this short paper, it seems that collaboration between proponents for the elimination of CL and advocates of the BI

could be strategically and politically advantageous for both groups, and that there is something to be gained by both by joining forces. More specifically still, the political chances of a BI are stronger because the goal of eliminating CL adds value and appeal to the proposal.

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