



Basic Income, Social Polarization and the Right to Work

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**DRAFT, SEPTEMBER 2002. NOT TO BE QUOTED
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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s),
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Acknowledgements

We thank Fernando Aguiar (High Council of Scientific Research, CSIC, Spain) for raising our interest in the relationship between basic income and social polarization, and for his remarks on this issue.

(This is a first draft: comments sent to authors' e-mails will be welcome)

Abstract

Critics of Basic Income often reject its unconditional nature. In this paper we examine such objections from a quite undiscussed point of view, that of social polarization. First, we define this concept and sketch how it may be related to those objections. Second, we analyse whether social polarization in the distribution of income would be tackled better by an income-conditioned transfer than by a BI. Third, we consider whether social polarization in the distribution of work may be reduced better by a work-conditioned policy than by a BI; hence, “right to work” proposals are critically addressed. Finally, we raise the normative question of why to fight social polarization at all.

1. Introduction: two classic objections to basic income and two kinds of conditional benefits

From the first time Basic Income (henceforth, BI) was introduced into the academic and political agenda, two well-known objections have been frequently made by critics all along the political spectrum. These criticisms have often led to the defence of a conditional income guarantee (henceforth, CIG), and may be posed as follows:

- § why should we pay a BI to those who have enough income of their own -included the rich-?
- § why should we pay a BI to those who do not want to work -even if we understand “work” in a broad sense-?

These criticisms raise two central issues for the structure of any given society: one is the distribution of income; the other is the distribution of work -be it paid or not-. Critics of BI argue that any income guarantee should rely upon some entitlement condition beyond pure citizenship; but this condition may be of two different sorts, depending on which of the two objections is taken into account:

- § the first objection leads to an income - and maybe wealth condition: that is, to establish some degree of means-test as a condition to be entitled to public income guarantee (even if it is some kind of indirect test: for example, a “life minimum” in income tax requires indirectly to have some income to declare);
- § the second objection entails a work condition: that is, to establish some kind or degree of work-requirement. The work-requirement, as it will be understood here, means that the benefit is received because of past, present or future participation in paid work: either claimants must have worked a certain number of years - as in contributory schemes-, or are expected to work if they are offered the opportunity, and/or to seek that opportunity, and/or to participate in activities to

enlarge their employability -as is the case in social assistance and unemployment benefits-; finally, the work requirement may also consist of being currently in paid work as in tax credits, for instance.

Of course, some critics of BI may support both conditions at the same time. And in fact, in most advanced countries the two conditions are brought together in many of the existing benefit schemes. However, it should be noted that they are in principle independent from one another:

- § the existence of a means-test does not necessarily imply the existence of a work-requirement: some means-tested benefits do not require any work condition, as for instance disability benefits, non-contributory pensions, child benefits, or, in some countries, social assistance for poor or unemployed people;¹
- § conversely, the existence of a work-requirement does not necessarily imply the existence of a means-test, as may happen with contributory benefits.²

This independence can be seen in Table 1, which displays a classification of possible social and tax benefits according to their entitlement conditions.³ The table includes traditional social benefits -as those mentioned in the last paragraph but also different kinds of tax benefits and allowances. Other more unusual responses to the problem of income guarantee also appear in the table:

¹ Even if social assistance or unemployment benefits usually entail some degree of work-requirement, its “weak” implementation in some countries makes it almost vanish or become a pure formality.

² The Spanish Government, for example, has recently hardened the work-requirement of these benefits preserving at the same time their contributory non means-tested nature.

³ Groot and Van der Veen (2000) have elaborated a related although different taxonomy of “basic security” transfers. They also take the “work condition” in a broad sense, and they include as a relevant axis the “enforcement of entitlement conditions” -more or less lax or stringent-.

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- § workfare -in the form of a “right to work”, or “guaranteed work”- would require work contribution as much as a means-test;⁴
 - § negative income tax entails a means-test but no work requirement;
 - § one can think also of a CIG which requires means-test but no work contribution; this is conceptually the same as negative income tax: the only difference being that the benefit is not claimed and paid through the tax system but through social services administration, that is, we would not have a tax-benefit integration; in fact some European countries are very close to this “extended social assistance”, and in Spain, the Basque Country is the closest example;
 - § participation income (PI) as proposed by Atkinson (1996) implies a work requirement - although in a broader sense than any workfare scheme - but no means-test;
 - § finally, BI does not require any work or income condition.

The two objections mentioned above have been challenged in many ways by advocates of BI. However, these debates have always pointed to normative notions of equity, equality or reciprocity, as well as to efficiency considerations. In this paper we want to examine such objections from a different point of view, that of social polarization. In section 2, we will define this concept and sketch how it may be related to those objections. Section 3 will deal with the claim that social polarization in the distribution of income would be tackled better by an income-conditioned CIG than by a BI. In the same way, section 4 will consider the idea that social polarization in the distribution of work may be reduced better by a work-conditioned CIG than by a BI; in addition, the specific form of that CIG which is represented by a “guaranteed job” or “right to work” approach will

⁴ Certainly, one can think of a “universal” workfare program without means test, by which the state would offer guaranteed paid work to every citizen who claims it, irrespective of his/her income. The question here is whether the workfare program is understood as a social assistance scheme for those who need an income, or it is rather designed to fight “parasitism” and grant social participation to each citizen: we will come back to these issues in section 4.2.

be critically considered on another grounds. Finally, section 5 will raise the normative question of why to fight social polarization at all.

Table 1. Social and tax benefits according to entitlement conditions

		Work requirement	
		Yes	No
Yes		Non-contributory unemployment benefits	Non-contributory pensions
		Social assistance	Child benefits
Means-test or income condition	No	Tax credits and other in-work benefits	Negative Income Tax (NIT)
		Workfare or "right to work"	Income-conditioned CIG (social assistance without work requirement)
			Some income tax allowances (including "life-minimum")
		Contributory pensions	
		Contributory unemployment benefits	
		Universal tax credit or tax allowance for employed people	Universal pensions
		"Chosen-time" subsidies (parental or sabbatical leave, early retirement, subsidies to reduction of working time)	Universal child benefits
		Participation Income (PI)	Basic Income (BI)

Source: Author's elaboration

2. The concept of social polarization

How to define social polarization as conceptually different from social inequality? This task has been developed by Esteban and Ray (1994); although their attention have focused on applying the concept to the analysis of income distribution, it is clear -and so they acknowledge- that it may be also applied to the distribution of work, rights or any other "primary good".⁵ These authors proceed as follows: inequality can be measured with the help of tools like Gini coefficient (or many others: see Sen, 1997), or by comparing percentiles or income groups.

⁵ Anyway, Esteban and Ray are right to remark that if the relevant attribute or variable -the distribution of which is more or less polarized- is scalar, the analysis is much easier; but this fact will not affect our general argument on the distribution of work in section 4.1, because for our purposes we will not need a scalar measurement but just some hypothesis about general tendencies.

The point, however, is that a society “S” may be very unequal but not very polarized, and conversely, a society “S” may be very polarized but not very unequal. This happens because polarization has to do with how the population forms relatively extensive clusters; the relevant attributes or characteristics like income, wealth, jobs or rights of the members of each cluster are very similar, but different clusters crowd together members with very different attributes. In other words, we can speak of social polarization when we face great groups or social classes, which are internally very homogeneous but very heterogeneous in relation with the others. As Esteban and Ray point out, polarization appears when “each cluster is very ‘similar’ in terms of the attributes of its members, but different clusters have members with very ‘dissimilar’ attributes” (Esteban and Ray, 1994, p. 819). Polarization entails a high degree of homogeneity within groups, and a high degree of heterogeneity across groups.

Esteban and Ray add a third condition: that the number of groups significantly sized must be small. Then, when in a society S the population forms two clearly different groups - rich and poor, for instance - which are very far from one another, but inequalities within these groups are low, we can speak of polarization without -great- inequality. On the contrary, when in a society “S” the income of the better-off is very far from the income of the worse-off -so that the value of Gini coefficient is high -, and the population does not form two clear and distant groups but different income groups along a continuum, then we can speak of relatively high inequality without polarization - taking income as the relevant attribute. So inequality does not require polarization, but polarization requires some degree of inequality even if low.

It follows from this definition that the difference between polarization and inequality may be understood too in dynamic terms: a given decline in inequality is fully compatible with an increase in polarization, and vice versa, an increase in inequality is compatible with decreasing polarization. Then, as far as BI is concerned, even if it is showed that it would produce a decline in social inequality, it does not follow that it will reduce social polarization - and in fact, it could increase it. And quite often the two mentioned objections against BI have to do with the concept of social polarization:

§ the income condition is necessary, according to some critics, in order to avoid that the rich take more than they should; in that case, even if a BI could fight income inequality, a CIG would fight better income polarization (Aguilar, 2001).

§ the work condition would be necessary, say some critics, because otherwise society would be polarized between two groups, those in and out of work, in any of its forms; this would encourage parasitism, create social conflicts, and weaken incentives to social participation for those out of paid work.⁶

We will try to discuss some pros and cons of these two statements. We should keep in mind, however, that to say that BI can fight social polarization better than a CIG of any sort is not to answer the question of why should we fight social polarization as such. This question will be addressed in section 5; for the moment, we will assume quite dogmatically that social polarization, either of income or of work, is unjust and should be tightened.

3. Basic Income and social polarization in the distribution of income

The first criticism to BI has to do with its income-unconditional nature: why to pay an equal transfer to the whole population -including the rich-, and not just to those in need? The objection points at one of the traditional controversial issues of modern social policy, which was already considered by Beveridge or Titmuss: should we focus our resources on the needy - as advocated from a liberal, residual or targeting view - or rather universalize social services and transfers as supported from the universalist philosophy of Nordic Social Democrats? The debate has not yet come to an end, and it is not our aim to study it here. But it should be noted that it is this same debate, which appears under the opposition between CIG and

⁶ See Krebs (2000), White (1997), Riechmann (1996), Gorz (1992), and Elster (1986).

BI: CIG relies on a philosophy of targeting, of focusing help only on those who really need it.

In Spain, we have recently been confronted with such criticism in a new form: Fernando Aguiar (2001) has supported the idea that BI is not “well-armed” to fight social polarization, because it is paid also to the well off. Following him, a CIG paid only to those under a specified income level or out of employment would do better on these grounds.⁷ Aguiar does not deny that, so far as income inequality is concerned, BI can be at least as effective in fighting it as any form of CIG; it is well known (Van Parijs, 2000b) that a CIG in the form of a Negative Income Tax may produce exactly the same income distribution that a BI plus a sufficient tax rate -either flat or progressive-. But then, for exactly the same reason, it follows that social polarization is also entirely indifferent to the conditional or unconditional nature of BI: it rather depends on the amount of BI and on the sort of tax system and rates which go together with it.

Of course, Aguiar did not bear in mind that one of the keys to understand BI proposals is tax-benefit integration; virtually all of BI concrete costed proposals assume such integration, so that the well-off get worse -because they pay more in taxes than they receive by virtue of BI-, and the less-off get better - because their BI is higher than the taxes they pay. This is - or should be - obvious for BI proponents, or at least for egalitarian ones. Therefore, it was easy for us to show that exactly the same income distribution may be the outcome of different proposals as CIG and BI: it is just a matter of properly adjusting such parameters as the amount of the benefit, the tax rates, or the tax exemption below some income level (Noguera and Raventós, 2002).

Let us see an example and some implications of this fact in a more formal way. Our claim is that given an income distribution (D), if we want to achieve a less polarized distribution (D'), we can do it in three exactly equivalent ways:

⁷ Of course one can support CIG for other reasons than fighting social polarization; but we think all these other reasons have been deeply criticized by BI supporters, who, in addition, have made clear the shortcomings of any CIG scheme (estigmatization, low take-up, low coverage, administrative cost, poverty and unemployment trap...).

- § introducing a CIG of amount A paid only to the less-off, plus a system of tax rates T paid by the well-off - Aguiar's proposal;
- § introducing a BI of the same amount plus tax rates T' for the well-off, such that for them the difference between paying T and T' is equal to A; with a BI, that is to say, there is always some tax rates T' which effect on polarization is equivalent to that of alternative “a”;
- § introducing a BI of amount A', higher than A, plus some tax rates T for the well-off; that is: there is always a BI of amount A' which effect on polarization is equivalent to that of alternative “a”.

Table 2. Equivalence between three different ways of fighting income polarization

	(A) Very poor	(B) Poor	(C) Rich	(D) Very rich	Polarization index (A+B/C+D)
Initial income distribution	10	20	150	300	0.066
Option (a) CIG, paid only to A and B Amount=15 Tax rates: 25 per cent for C and 35 per cent for D	25	35	112.5	210	0.172
Option (b) BI Amount=15 Tax rate: 35 per cent, with total exemption for A and B	25	35	112.5	210	0.172
Option (c) BI Amount=16.5 Tax rates: same as in (a)	26.5	36.5	129	236.5	0.172

Source: Author's elaboration

The distributive equivalence of these three options in terms of polarization may be clearly seen in the hypothetical example we present in Table 2; in this example, we suppose a quite polarized society S where the population is broadly divided in four income groups: two of them are poor and the other two are rich; the two poor groups include 50 per cent of the population, while the rich groups

represent the other 50 per cent. The table shows the average income of each group (measured in “imaginary” income units) under the three reform alternatives mentioned in the last paragraph. The column on the right displays a “polarization index”, which expresses the quotient between the income of the two poor groups and that of the two rich ones: as the index comes close to 1, polarization declines, and vice versa. We can easily see that polarization does not depend on the conditional or universal nature of BI: to chose (a), (b) or (c) is indifferent in terms of polarization; and at the same time, to chose (a) or (b) is also indiferent in terms of inequality, for the simple reason that, in distributive terms, to cut benefits is exactly the same as to raise tax rates, and vice versa.

Therefore, if we have to choose between CIG and BI, polarization in the distribution of income is not a relevant criterion. Our conviction is that BI is preferable because CIG would require complex bureaucratic controls, additional to those implied by the tax system alone; besides, these controls would bear on the poor and not on the rich, and would hence promote well-known effects of stigmatization, non take-up and poverty traps; furthermore, as Van Parijs has convincingly argued (Van Parijs, 2000b), CIG would have to be paid *ex post*, so it would leave many claimants unprotected during the periods -often long- in which applications are handled and controls are carried on. It is much more transparent and equitable, even if somewhat tricky, to give the benefit to all and after that withdraw it through the tax system from those above some income level.

4. Basic Income and the “right to work”

4.1 Social polarization in the distribution of work

The second objection we aim to address has to do with the unequal polarization of work that BI would allegedly produce. Now the problem is more difficult than with the distribution of income, because then it was easy to show that the distribution did not depend on the conditional nature of benefits. But this cannot be showed so easily regarding the distribution of work, because it is no longer a matter of adjusting some parameters in tax and benefits, but of people's

expected behaviour. So we can say that the question of which is the relationship between BI and social polarization is not so much about income, but about work.

Are the critics' fears justified? To start with, what they overlook is that BI is precisely meant to fight the effects of social polarization in the present distribution of jobs, that is, the polarization between people in and out of the labour market, and also between “good” jobs -well-paid, stable, with social rights, and with chances to develop a professional career and search for personal fulfilment - and “bad” jobs -temporary, low-paid, without social protection rights, and without any chance of fulfilment or career developing-.⁸ BI wants precisely to fight the unequal and polarized distribution of “employment rents” in a non-walrasian labour market (Van Parijs, 1995), and also of the benefits linked to employment. And, if we take “work” as meaning something more than “employment”, BI seems to be clearly better than present situation in this respect: it is likely that with a BI people would work in a more heterogeneous way, in and out of the labour market; the diversity of work life and styles would be much higher, and this would easily decrease and prevent polarization; as a result of economic security combined with labour market flexibility, BI would probably lead us to a less polarized society than present one, as far as distribution of work is concerned.

Let us think that even an extended income-conditioned CIG, because of its mentioned effects of stigmatization and unemployment traps, would perform worse than BI with regard to social polarization; in fact, it may reinforce the polarization between people in and out of paid work.⁹ But this is certainly not the case of other conditional proposals (as Participation Income), which could have similar positive effects as those expected from BI; and other schemes (as a legally guaranteed right to work) may even claim to correct directly the distribution of jobs while BI tries simply to “compensate” it in a monetary way. So it is with

⁸ See Offe (1992), De Wispelaere (2000), Van Parijs (1995), and Groot and Van der Veen (2000).

⁹ Or between people entitled to contributory protection and those who are only entitled to such an income-conditioned assistance: see Noguera (2001).

these two alternative forms of work-conditioned income guarantee that BI has to be compared in terms of social polarization.

Consider first Participation Income (PI): would it prevent (or reduce) social polarization more than BI? If it was introduced, the most likely effects would be: (a) that some people with “bad” jobs would move to non-market activities; (b) that a certain number of employed people (whether in “bad” or “good” jobs) would probably reduce their market work time to make it compatible with other activities or with more free time; (c) and, as a result of (a) and (b), some unemployed people would fill in the gaps, partially compensating the movement from employment to non-market activities. The barriers between being in and out of work, and between paid and non-market activities would then partially blur. What difference can BI make in this scene? Quite little, it could be argued. It may well increase slightly the tendency to move from market to non-market work, but that may be all. In that case, polarization would increase slightly compared to the PI scene. The difference would be slight, we think, because with a PI the work-condition would be extremely difficult to enforce and control, and fraud could be as easy as “pretending” to be a student, a caregiver or a volunteer: the cost of administratively checking the reality of these situations would make the work-condition extremely weak in fact. So we can consider that PI and BI would have almost equivalent effects on social polarization.

Consider now the “right to work” or “guaranteed work” approach (henceforth, RW), as another possible form of CIG. It seems likely that RW would raise a more polarized situation than PI and BI, because it would tend to concentrate the working population in two - and predictably only two- groups: those with market jobs and those with state-guaranteed jobs; non-market activities would tend to be commodified or statized - unless a substantial reduction in working time went together with the RW, something that does not seem very probable-. Thus, the polarization a RW would produce would be even higher than that of present situation, or of a situation with an extended income-conditioned CIG.

We have so far understood the distribution of work only in a brute or “quantitative” way; but if we include in our analysis the quality of work, that is, the satisfactions and pains which different kinds of work may produce to those who perform it, then the comparison is -again- quite favourable for BI: a guaranteed RW would have to reduce in some degree the free choice of work by the individuals, and it is to be expected that most state-guaranteed jobs would not be a very promising field for personal fulfilment; on the contrary, BI would enhance individuals’ choices of any combination of any kind of work, and would make possible for them to reject painful and unpleasant jobs which do not offer any compensation. So from the standpoint of the quality of work, BI (or PI) would also perform better than RW in avoiding a high degree of social polarization.

In short, the most plausible hypothesis seems to be that social polarization in the distribution of work (whether in quantitative or qualitative terms) would be raised by RW proposals, and reduced in a very similar way by BI or PI proposals. So the work-condition objection to BI on grounds of social polarization appears as quite untenable. Note that, even if this would not be the case, it would not necessarily suppose a definite reason to reject BI in favour of RW, because BI could still be better on another grounds or with regard to other valued ends. As Fitzpatrick (1999) or Groot and Van der Veen (2000) have made clear, a comprehensive comparison between BI and other policy alternatives has to be developed along a complex set of policy aims: then it may be possible that, even if BI performs worse than other measures in each of these aims, its global performance made it better than any other alternative. In the next sub-section we will leave for a while the polarization issue, in order to compare BI and RW on another grounds.¹⁰

¹⁰ This comparison is significant for us because the main opposition to BI from a left-wing point of view often comes from the idea that it would be better to grant paid work to all rather than to give a BI.

4.2 Basic income or guaranteed work?

As we have said, BI may have to be compared with a guaranteed right to work (RW) on other grounds than social polarization. One of us has tried to make this comparison (Noguera, 2002). Here we will offer a brief summary of skeptical arguments about RW and in favour of BI, without entering in the philosophical foundations of the debate on parasitism and reciprocity, but from a rather pragmatic point of view.

The advocates of the RW approach rely mainly on two reasons to prefer it to BI: first, the RW would avoid parasitism, and second, it would grant the right to social participation, as a necessary ground to personal self-esteem. BI would allegedly not satisfy these two conditions: it would reproduce barriers to social participation and encourage parasitism. But what may a “right to work” mean? What would it consist of exactly if it were to be institutionalized? We think that proponents of this measure have not yet answered these questions with enough precision. Let us mention, to start with, three conditions that any RW approach has to accomplish if it aims to be a real alternative proposal to BI:

First, as Elster (1988) has convincingly argued, if the RW has to be a coherent proposal, it should be posed as the right to something more than an income, be it recognition, reciprocity, self-esteem, or something similar. This is implied by the adduced rationale for the RW: to grant social participation and/or to avoid parasitism. Otherwise, if the only objective were to secure an income to every citizen, there would be no reason at all to reject BI.

Second, we are speaking here of a “right to work” in the sense of state-guaranteed employment of last resort for those who cannot find it by themselves in the labour market. And this is so even if some activities which today are not paid -such as most care giving or some kinds of community work- are included as guaranteed-jobs in the program: when we talk about a right to work, we are talking about paid work: otherwise the idea would not make any sense, because we would be defending the right to work for free (which is absurd, and, in fact, does not seem necessary to defend at all).

Third, recall that we are speaking of working as a condition to receive an income; so it is somewhat the “duty” - and not only the right - to work what is advocated -provided you are able-to-work and want to receive some income from society. This is required if RW is to be consistent with the parasitism objection to BI. Of course, here “duty” may be understood in two different ways: as a coercitive legal duty - which certainly we would like to think that nobody is proposing - and as a condition to obtain something valuable, for example rights or income. Otherwise, the RW would not be an alternative to BI, but fully compatible with it, because there is conceptually no problem at all with having a BI and at the same time a right to a state-guaranteed job for those who freely claim it. This “duty” component of RW proposals is somewhat surprising, because many left-wing advocates of this approach are at the same time fierce opponents of workfares and active-welfare measures: the contradiction seems to be obvious.¹¹

To provide the right to an employment of last resort, as a condition to receive an income would at first sight satisfy the two mentioned conditions: to avoid parasitism (every able-to-work citizen would be supplied with an employment) and to grant the right to social participation through employment provided by the state to all claimants. But let us think of how could the state implement such a right. In the first place, it is clear that, if a RW has to stand as an alternative to BI from a left wing and egalitarian point of view, then it has to satisfy certain conditions. A RW cannot be the right to any kind of work; for the proposal to be defensible from the Left, (a) it should guarantee decent jobs (with sufficient wages, proper labour conditions and social rights); (b) these jobs would have to satisfy some ethical conditions (it would not be acceptable to achieve full employment by producing weapons or polluting the country); and (c) they would

¹¹ In Spain, for example, most of the left-wing people who reject BI because of its work-unconditional nature have recently gone to general strike against Government's measures, which harden the work-requirement for recipients of unemployment benefits. However, it should be said that critics of BI from the Left have often supported something like “basic work”, that is, the just distribution of socially necessary work, be it paid or not, among all able-to-work citizens (Krebs, 2000; Riechmann, 1996). Needless to say that this proposal is far from our scope here: its feasibility seems near to zero in a complex modern society, and anyway it would require an unthought degree of authoritarianism and state control over the economy and the life choices of citizens. See Noguera (2002).

have to make some sense for the worker (it is dubious that the right to put stamps on envelopes for seven or eight hours a day is a right to work which is worth to be gained).

We can now evaluate this RW approach in relation to BI. Proponents should show that RW is at least as feasible, as desirable, or both, as BI. However, we think this statement has never been proved with some detail. This has to do, to our view, with the huge difficulty of imagining a feasible institutional design for the RW, a design, which do not have inefficient or ethically undesirable effects. Indeed, the problems a RW would have to face are considerable; let us mention the main ones:

- § To start with, the net economic and organizational costs of implementing such a RW -for example, in Spain- would doubtless be much higher than those of BI. It makes anyone dizzy to think of the number of decent and socially useful jobs, which would have to be created, even if many of them were part-time. For example, today in Spain there are about 12 million able-to-work people who are not in paid employment; if we add those who have temporary or bad-quality jobs, we may easily go up to 15 or 16 million. To provide all these jobs - with its entire wage, training, infrastructure and supervision costs - would be quite unthinkable without a social revolution or the implantation of an authoritarian regime (or both).
- § Which would be the entitlement conditions for having a state-guaranteed job? Should those jobs be “appropriate” for claimant's qualifications, interests or job careers? Could the state ask claimants to change residence or to travel? Which degree of competence or productivity would be fair to demand in “guaranteed jobs”? How would the state monitor and supervise the whole project?
- § It would be necessary to establish some normative criterion to decide which activities are to be considered as “socially useful”.

However, this would lead to contradictions: for instance, why to demand “social usefulness” for the “guaranteed jobs” and not for paid work in the market? Maybe it is a *boutade*, but why to let weapon producers or property speculators to have more rights and less control than community workers and care givers?

§ There is another serious problem with the RW approach: the different quality of the jobs the state would be able to offer, that is, the equitable distribution of painful or unpleasant jobs. A lot has been said in recent years about “job sharing”, but very few on the just sharing of the satisfactions and pains produced by different types of work. To solve this problem in a non-authoritarian way should be one of the main aims of any egalitarian defence of the RW; but we still have no clarification in this sense from its proponents.

§ How should the state deal with those who, nevertheless, refuse to accept “guaranteed jobs”? To force them to work would lead us back to the “poor laws” or the work camps, while to give them an income would be in fact very close to BI. So the only coherent policy for those who defend the RW would be to do nothing, that is, to leave these people on their own. However, such policy is problematic: first, it would be a clear discrimination by comparison with rentiers or speculators, who are allowed to live without working -so that the rationale for RW proposals crumbles-; second, and far more important after all, the RW would not have ended poverty in our society. At last, a consistent and sensitive egalitarian government would have to implement some income transfer for those individuals, so how far -or how close- would it be from BI?

§ Finally, it has been repeatedly argued and experienced that any guaranteed-work policy which aims to offer “social

recognition” and “self-esteem” has self-defeating results, and comes to generate frustration, disappointment and lack of motivation for a lot of workers; additionally, it tends to create a second-tier of “artificial” and “charity” jobs which often are socially stigmatized. As Elster (1988) or Van Parijs (2000a) have made clear, social recognition, like love, cannot be granted as a right.¹²

To sum up, it seems to us that the RW cannot be sustained as an alternative to BI in terms of economic feasibility nor on normative or ethical grounds, so maybe we should agree with Elster when he says that any RW we may reasonably create would not be a RW, which is worth having. On the contrary, BI could be, for reasons widely studied by its proponents, a much more efficient and feasible way of raising the number of people in employment, and at the same time fostering a more equitable distribution of work -paid or not- and a higher degree of social reciprocity, without administrative control and without linking survival to paid work. In a complex post-industrial society, the remedy of the RW could be worse than the illness it aims to heal.

5. Conclusion: should we fight social polarization?

We have argued that BI proposals are at least so good as an income-conditioned CIG in fighting income polarization, and much better than a work-conditioned CIG or RW in fighting work polarization. But to finish this paper we could ask the following question: what is wrong about social polarization? Should we fight it *per se*? Nothing has been said about this question so far. Even when we speak of social inequalities, it is not clear that all of them are unjust. Usually, only those inequalities, which come from circumstances not chosen by

¹² In Spain we have recently witnessed the failure of this type of “charity jobs” in the form of a workfarist “active income” policy for long-term unemployed with dependent children: during the two years this program has been running, very few people have applied; the reason can easily be imagined: the wages are so low, the jobs so unpleasant, and the means-test so tight, that it is better for unemployed workers to seek their income in Spanish extended shadow economy.

individuals, are considered unjust ones, but not those, which come from circumstances which individuals, can be made responsible of (Rawls, 1971; Van Parijs, 1995; Domènech, 1996). It might seem that the same would be true for social polarization, which is, in fact, only another sort of inequality or better a certain “settlement” of that inequality. Is it so?

Esteban and Ray (1996) have suggested a reason to fight social polarization *per se*, as distinct from social inequality: polarization is very often at the origin of serious social conflict. Their contention is that “polarization is closely linked to the generation of tensions, to the possibilities of articulated rebellion and revolt, and to the existence of social unrest in general” (Esteban and Ray, 1994, p. 820). But this is just a stability claim: it still says nothing about why polarization is unjust, because some social conflicts or tensions may be unjustified as such in moral-distributive terms -think, for instance, of envy and anger against the Jews in Europe all through the centuries-, and, conversely, it is not totally clear why “social unrest” or “social conflicts” - and even “revolutions”- should always be avoided, prevented or frightened - think of a revolt against a dictatorship, or how some groups of the radical Left have for many years regarded social conflict precisely as a political aim in itself-.

The reason suggested by Domènech (1996) seems more tenable: polarization is unjust because it has a harmful effect on social participation, civic virtue, and active citizenship. As far as we assume some degree of republicanism, or some concern for “public good” and “civic virtue”, then we must fight social polarization. As Domènech says, “the republican conception of political life has to be sensitive to increase in polarization; instead, egalitarian theories of justice have no reason to be it” (Domènech, 1996, p. 26). This is true, although to non-republican egalitarian liberals it may sound like begging the question: the neutrality of liberal-egalitarian theories of justice may be seen as a problem for these theories, or, instead, as a reason to be quite indifferent towards social polarization (as different from unjust inequality).

Furthermore, the two arguments might be somewhat conflicting: if Esteban and Ray are right and polarization leads to social unrest, then we may expect

precisely from a polarized situation a high degree of social mobilisation and participation in public life - even if not institutional or “deliberative”; of course this kind of “participation” and “active citizenship” may not be the same Domènech was thinking of. In some sense, the decrease in social conflict produced by lower polarization may well be the ground on which republicans want to build a strong participatory public life, and an active conception of citizenship and civic virtue. And, as we said, there is no doubt that, if one subscribes the republican ideal, then fighting polarization, as different from unjust inequality, could be desirable.

But this republican justification of the fight against polarization raises another problem, this time related to BI. Because if we really value social participation and active citizenship as ends in their selves, then why should we not prefer a RW, or better a PI, more than an unconditional BI, which seems to be more sympathetic to liberal neutrality? This could be suggested, for example, by White (2000). We could reply that, as BI fights polarization better than RW (see section 4.1.), and to fight polarization is a genuine republican aim, then BI is not at odds with republicanism; but this argument would not stand against PI, for as we saw it is likely to expect that PI would fight polarization slightly better than BI. So it may appear that PI is a more “republican” approach, while BI is a more “liberal” one. Of course, for republicans this is not necessarily a reason to support PI in front of BI, because, as we already said, it is the global performance of these measures in a complex set of different goals what should be considered.¹³

But let us go back to our first question: should we set the fight against polarization as a specific aim of social policy, different and independent from the fight against unjust social inequalities? Or does this latter aim alone exhaust and include the former? Let us think again in a pragmatic way, and imagine some possible or real polarization situations, for example: the disappearing of middle classes, “feminization of poverty”, or ethnic segmentation of the labour market. All these situations would certainly not pass the test of a Rawlsian liberal-

¹³ On the relationship between BI and republicanism, see Raventós (1999).

egalitarian idea of distributive justice -not to mention Van Parijs, Sen or Dworkin-; so, if it is empirically the case that most of social polarization situations are quite well frightened as a result of the fight against social inequality, why should we bother so much about the first after all? Think about “feminization of poverty”: poverty, be it feminine or not, is something to be frightened *per se* from any liberal-egalitarian point of view -and even from some non-egalitarian ones, like Hayek's; another different issue is what kind of policy instruments are more appropriate to fight each kind of poverty; but on normative grounds, it is not certainly the “feminization” the reason to fight poverty as such.

Are we then concluding that BI proponents should not be too worried about social polarization, but just about compensating unjust inequality and secure real freedom, as Van Parijs argued in *Real Freedom for All?*. Well, at least from a pragmatic point of view, it is not evident why to fight social polarization further than we fight unjust social inequality. But, if we had to fight the first too, we are convinced that BI can do as well as any other form of income guarantee, and probably better than some of them.

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