BASIC INCOME 31
Newsletter of the Basic Income European Network

Winter 1999

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BIEN's VIIth Congress (Amsterdam 1998)
Most of the papers presented can now be downloaded from

BIEN's VIIth Congress (Berlin 2000)
will take place on 6-7 October 2000 in Berlin.
The organiser will be Prof. Claus Offe (Humboldt Universität)

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GENERAL INFORMATION
THIS ISSUE OF BASIC INCOME
was prepared with the help of Godfrout Camauer, Kurt Groscurth, Laurence Jacquet, Francisco José Martinez, Yannick Vanderborght, and all those who spontaneously sent relevant material. The reviews it contains are not protected by any copyright. They can be reproduced and translated at will. But if you use them, please mention the existence and address of BIEN (including its web site) and the exact references of the events or publications concerned. Please send the newsletter editor a copy of any relevant publication (by yourself or by others) you come across, with full references and, if possible, the author's address and a brief summary. Many thanks!

EVENTS

London (London School of Economics), 12 November 1998
"Flexible Labour Markets and Welfare Reform: Increasing Labour Market Participation"
A seminar organised by the Citizen’s Income Trust, with the participation of Bernard Casey (European Institute, LSE), Guy Standing (International Labour Office), Bill Jordan (Exeter and Huddersfield Universities) and Beatrice Hertogs (Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, Brussels)
For further information: Carolyn Armstrong, Citizens Income Study Centre, St Philips Building, Sheffield Street, London WC2A 2EX, United Kingdom, tel.: 44-171-9557453; fax: 44-171-9557534, citizens-income@lse.ac.uk.

Barcelona (Collectiu Ronda), 13-14 November 1998
"Jornadas sobre el derecho ciudadano a la renta basica / Jornades sobre el dret ciudadà a la renda bàsica"
A two-day conference on the citizen’s right to a basic income organised by Ecoconcern (Barcelona) in co-operation with the incipient Spanish basic income network (Asociación Renta Básica or AREBA), the Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas (Madrid) and the Castillan Green Party.
With the participation of Francisco José Martinez (UNED), Agustin Morán (Centro de Asesoramiento y estudios sociales), José Iglesias Fernández (Grupo de Economía Crítica), Daniel Raventós (Universidad de Barcelona) and Ramiro Pinto Cañón (Verdes de Castilla y León). Written versions of the papers by Martinez, Iglesias and Morán are available.
For information: José Iglesias Fernández, Salvador Espriu 89, 2º, 2a, E – 08005 Barcelona, Fax: 34-93-225.48.20.

Paris (Assemblée nationale), 26 November 1998
"Un revenu pour tous: les voies pour y parvenir"
A panel on "Roads towards an income for all" organised by the Association pour l’Instauration d’un Revenu d’Existence, with the participation of Yoland Bresson (Université de Paris Val-de-Marne), Laurent Degroot (Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants), Béatrice Majnoni d’Intignano (Université de Paris-Sorbonne) and Ignacio Ramonet (Monde Diplomatique).

London, 3 March 1999
"Citizen’s Income: A Recipe for Exploitation ?"
A lunchtime seminar chaired by Keith Dowding (LSE) and introduced by Gijs van Donselaar (Amsterdam) on "Who Shall Inherit the Earth? An Argument against Basic Income" and Jo Wolff (University College London) on "Basic Income, Justice and Respect"
For further information: Carolyn Armstrong, Citizens Income Study Centre, St Philips Building, Sheffield Street, London WC2A 2EX, United Kingdom, tel.: 44-171-9557453; fax: 44-171-9557534, citizens-income@lse.ac.uk.

Brussels, 8-9 March 1999
"Prélèvements publics et emploi"
One session of this two-day conference of the Association of economists from the Free University of Brussels is devoted to basic income, with a presentation and discussion of some relevant microsimulation results from the Euromod project.
Organiser: Prof. Robert Plasman, Université libre de Bruxelles, DULBEA, CP 140, fax 32 2 650 3825, rplasma@ulb.ac.be
Frankfurt, 26 March 1999
"Was heißt Real Freedom for All ?"

A one-day meeting organised by the Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain on both the ethical and social-policy dimensions of basic income, with Ph. Van Parijs’s *Real Freedom for All* (Oxford, 1995) as a point of departure. Prospective participants include Andrea Fischer (federal Minister for Health, formerly social policy spokesperson for the Greens, to be confirmed), Axel Honneth (philosopher, University of Frankfurt), Joachim Mitschke (economist, University of Frankfurt), Ulrich Steinvorth (philosopher, University of Hamburg), Stephan Lessenich (sociologist, University of Göttingen) and Philippe Van Parijs (philosopher, University of Louvain).

Organiser: Prof. Fritz Rüdiger Volz, Marthastr. 16, D – 44791 BOCHUM, fax 49-234–58.43.76.

Berlin, 6–7 October 2000
BIEN’s 8th CONGRESS

The 8th International Congress of the Basic Income European Network will be held in Berlin on 6–7 October 2000 under the title “Economic Citizenship Rights for the 21st century”. It will consist in plenary sessions (with simultaneous translation) and parallel workshops. The organiser will be Professor Claus Offe (Humboldt Universität, Unter den Linden 6, D – 10099 BERLIN, fax 49-30–20315.271, coffe@rz.hu-Berlin.de), one of the co-founders of BIEN back in 1986 and one of Germany’s leading academics in the areas of social policy and political theory. More information in due course.

PUBLICATIONS

DUTCH


This is the second edition of a 1994 book in which, under the title “Belgium Inc. Report to the Shareholders”, the Belgian engineer and businessman Roland Duchatelet explains his solution to the unemployment problem. Since the first edition, in which he declares that he has no political ambition, Duchatelet decided, in view of the existing parties’ lack of response to his proposals, to create his own party under the label "Vivant". The core of the party’s programme is set out in this book: an individual basic income of EURO 500 per adult and per month (EURO 750 above age 65), accompanied by the abolition of most other assistance and insurance benefits, of all social security contributions and of all income taxation on earnings below EURO 750 (a flat rate of 50% beyond), but also by a doubling of the consumption tax VAT (to an average of about 45% of the final price). Some price control will need to be in place in the transition stage, to make sure that the dramatic reduction in labour costs (owing to lower taxation of labour) is fully reflected in the price level, and not more than offset by the increase in VAT at the expense of the basic income’s real value. Importing firms are automatically subjected to this tax, but not exporting firms, for which an ad hoc compensatory tax will therefore need to be designed (the scheme is not meant to subsidise exports). Employment is expected to be fostered by the massive subsidy to comparatively low-paid and part-time work provided by the basic income, and also by the fact that any taxation relating to these jobs only needs to be paid when the product is being sold (in the form of VAT), not when the labour is being hired (in the form of income taxes and social security contributions) — which makes the hiring of new workers by small employers more attractive. VAT rates can be differentiated to introduce some progressivity (higher rates on luxuries) and to exempt activities that cannot realistically be monitored (domestic services), and VAT fraud must be effectively repressed (all business accounts computerised, no bank notes above EURO 100, no legally valid cash transaction above EURO 500).

(Author’s address: Van Steenbergenlaan 52, B – 2100 DEURNE, rdu@elex.be.)

NIEUWSBRIEF BASISINKOMEN 25 (Vereniging Basisinkomen, Herman Heijermansweg 20, 1077 WL Amsterdam, E-mail: basic.income@wxs.nl), September 1998, 16p.

In addition to a satisfied editorial about BIEN’s Amsterdam congress and a more focus account (by Paul de Beer) of those aspects of the Congress that focused on various ways of fighting unemployment without worsening poverty, this issue of the Dutch basic income network’s newsletter contains a sympathetic but sceptical discussion of proposals to fund a basic income out of “green taxes” (by Loek Groot and Frauke van Iperen) and a presentation of the platform of Belgium’s new basic-income-focused political party Vivant (by Gosling Putto).
There is no culture in which solidarity is exercised in an unconditional way, with some producing what others can choose to consume without working. Moreover, real jobs are valuable for their own sake and not just as means of access to an income. This turns an unconditional basic income — interpreted as an alternative to the right to work — into a cultural nonsense, which will not and should not be introduced.

This is a non-technical exploration of a basic income at a "decent" level, restricted to citizens, and meant as a full replacement of all social insurance benefits, except in the area of health care. The author, an economist at Brussels University and one of the intellectuals behind the new basic-income-focused political party "Vivant", has made some calculations for two variants, one with a basic income of BEF 18,000 for all adults aged 18 to 64 and 25,000 for the over 65's, the other one with these amounts for single people only, and BEF 13,000 and 19,000, respectively, for married people of the corresponding age groups.

ENGLISH

An interesting set of two presentations to the Board of Trustees of the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, followed by a transcription of the subsequent discussion. One, by Thomas R. Stauffer (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University) is devoted to "How oil countries have handled the windfall" in terms of re-investing (internally or externally) or spending (private consumption by the elite, public expenditure, distribution to the citizens). To the question whether "any of those funds paid out dividends along the Alaskan model", Stauffer replied: "There was nothing structurally comparable to the dividend program, except that Nauru will have it at some point when they get around to determining how they pay off annuities, but that has not been settled at least as of a year ago." (p.10) The other presentation, by Peter J. Smith (Department of Political Science, Athabasca University, Alberta) is devoted to "The Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund and the Alaska Permanent Fund: A Ten-Year Retrospective". It systematically compares the Alaskan scheme to its closest kin. Despite similar sizes and origins, the two funds had very different fates, with the use of the fund being far more politicised in Alberta than in Alaska. "There's one single striking difference between the two funds and that's the dividend", a member of the Board of Trustees remarked. "Everybody, man, woman and child, has a direct personal stake in the survival and success of that fund, which wasn't or isn't true in Alberta." (p.34) But Albertans have a different perception. "Dividends were tried in the late 1950s by the social credit government", Smith remembers; "people got $20 every year around Christmas-time to help buy a pair of shoes. Those dividends now are seen by Albertans as a quaint little measure of a responsible, progressive time that has passed by." (p.35)

A revised and updated version of three lectures given by Tony Atkinson, Warden of Nuffield College (Oxford), in Helsinki in 1990. The first two respectively deal with the measurement of poverty in Europe and the economic analysis of poverty and unemployment. The third one is devoted to the "political economy of poverty". It includes a critique of targeting, and particularly of means-testing, and ends with Atkinson's recommendations as to the direction European social policy should take.

In line with the subsidiarity principle, he argues that the organisation of social insurance systems, based on a contribution principle and yielding net benefits to
workers, can be left at the national level: "Where social insurance furnishes a transparent link between contributions and benefits, then it is less subject to the downward pressures of fiscal competition." Countries with generous and secure social insurance systems may even be more attractive to workers and firms. But this does not extend to the redistributive aspect of social policy: "the fiscal competition argument "applies with particular force to anti-poverty policies. National governments will be under pressure to reduce transfers to the poor." (p.144) True, there is little empirical evidence to show any differential migration of labour or capital. But "in a world in which the presentation of policy, and its reception by markets and the media, are seen to be of paramount importance, it may well be that the perceived pressures of virtual tax competition become the most important restrictions on the freedom of national governments to carry out social protection. A Europe-wide anti-poverty policy can be justified on these 'political economy' grounds." (p.145)

What form should it take? A means-tested minimum income guarantee is definitely not the way forward, because it unfairly penalises the work of poor households more than anyone else's, but also because a European-wide minimum "has to be based on a benefit that is simpler than means-tested social insurance" (p. 146). The alternative, which Atkinson favours, is a universal basic income that would replace all income tax allowances, but not social insurance benefits. Why is it that, "despite finding supporters in all political parties, the scheme has not got close to being introduced". In Atkinson's judgement, "a major reason lies in the fact it does not require any counterpart on the part of the recipient. "I believe therefore that, in order to secure political support, it may be necessary for the proponents of basic income to compromise — not on the principle of no test of means, nor on the principle of independence, but on the unconditional payment. In terms of the question posed by Philippe Van Parijs — Would we pay basic income to surfers? — my answer is 'no.'" (p. 148). Atkinson then presents his idea of a "participation income". He is aware that the question of how to interpret his broad participation condition would be even trickier at the European than at the national level. Nonetheless, he believes "that such a Participation Income offers a realistic way in which European governments may be persuaded that a basic income offers a better route forward than the dead end of means-tested assistance." (p.149)


In this crisply written booklet, the president and founder of the Institute for SocioEconomic Studies (White Plains, New York), "whose foresight led to ISES becoming among the first US policy organisations to host Margaret Thatcher" (p.125), makes a vigorous attempt to sell basic income to the American electorate by appealing to Reaganian values: "Trust the people; believe every human being is capable of greatness, capable of self-government" (Ronald Reagan, quoted p.98). Hence, the government must shrink and give people their money back: "The National Tax Rebate would refund a substantial portion of our tax dollars and return the decision-making to us." (p. 34) How? It "would cash out the myriad costly government assistance programs and replace them with a simple, universal cash grant of $1000 month for every American family of four." (p.27) More precisely, it would get rid of 115 social assistance programmes and of personal tax exemptions, while making the tax rebate itself taxable. Can it work? It has been in operation in Alaska for 20 years (at about a third of this level), and the Alaskan people are pleased about it (pp. 58-68). Moreover, Greene's Institute is conducting an experiment with three families picked at random: they will receive $1000 per year for a period of 20 years, while their behaviour is being observed (pp. 69-93). Is it the best available option? If work and enterprise are to be encouraged, is it not obvious that one should go for tax cuts rather than tax rebates? But the aim is also to end poverty. Not by giving enough to live on, but by making work worthwhile, while making it possible to make ends meet even with a low-paid part-time job: "Unfortunately for those who would most benefit from entry-level work, the wages these positions pay are often difficult, if not impossible to live on, particularly for large families. The National Tax Rebate would demolish this barrier to opportunity by lifting every person onto the first rung of the ladder."
A substantive appendix (pp. 101-120) shows the results of microsimulations performed by Irwin Garfinkel (Columbia University) for five versions of the proposal which differ from one another in terms of age differentiation and whether or not single parents get an extra sum. The overall pattern shows a slight increase in the disposable incomes of the middle three quintiles, a somewhat firmer increase in the incomes of the lower quintile (from 5.1 to about 5.5% of total disposable income, and to about 6.1% after labour supply adjustments), and a clear decrease for the top quintile (from 42.7% to less than 41%, and even 39% after labour supply adjustments). The poverty rate is predicted to fall from 8.59% to 7.83% in the standard version, and to 2.56% after the predicted labour supply adjustments. These adjustments rest on the assumption that 100% of able-bodied adults find a half-time job at the minimum wage as soon as the tax rebate has replaced all welfare programmes, admittedly rather an upper limit of what can be expected (p. 118-119). Can such a massive reform be implemented gradually? No way: “In this case, prudence would be recklessness. A go-slow, piecemeal approach would mortally compromise the concept.” (p.45) Who is willing to take the risk?

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An important reason for the deficiencies of standard economic theory with respect to environmental problems and unemployment lies in the fact that it systematically underestimates the role of energy and overestimates the role of human routine labour. This is the essence of the work of Reiner Kümmel and his associates at Würzburg University. This article by physicist and environmental economist Helmuth Groscurth summarises their results and then discusses how the financial transfer mechanisms of our society could be changed in order to contribute to solving these two fundamental problems. A universal basic income funded by an energy tax is at the core of his proposal.

(Author's address: Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung (ZEW), D-68161 Mannheim, groscurth@zew.de)


Includes short basic-income-related pieces by James Robertson, Philippe Van Parijs and some North-American Georgists (Mason Gaffney, Alanna Hartzog).

(Editor’s address: Cholsey, near Wallingford, OXON OX10 9NU, robertson@tp2000.demon.co.uk)

FRENCH


Includes an article in which Yoland Bresson connects the idea of a citizen’s income to the Gaullist ideal of “participation” by all, and a substantial account of BIEN’s Amsterdam Congress by Jacques Sourgen.

(Address: Ch. Bernard, Association pour l’instauration du revenu d’existence, 33 Avenue des Fauvettes, F-91440 Bures-sur-Yvette.)


The final chapter ("Prospects and proposals") of this brief account of recent economic and social trends in France includes a sympathetic discussion of the relevance of a universal basic income to both unemployment and social protection. Inconclusive on basic income itself, the discussion contains a firm plea for the introduction of a universal basic pension on the Dutch or Danish model.

(Author's address: UFR Faculté des sciences économiques, B.P. 47X, F – 38040 GRENOBLE Cedex)

Written by the former chairman of France's Consumers Association (Union fédérale de la consommation), this book elaborates a project that should help our democracies cope with recent economic trends. At the core of this project is an unconditional basic income ("revenu d'existence"), universal and combinable with other types of incomes.

(Author's address: c/o AIRE, 33 Avenue des Fauvettes, F-91440 Bures-sur-Yvette)

A report on the microsimulation of the distributive impact of three variants of an unconditional basic income of nearly Euro 300 per month for all adults funded out of a proportional or progressive tax on all income and with total or partial replacement of the current guaranteed minimum income system. Getting rid of the progressive schedule and/or of the whole of the current system would involve significant losses for some poor households. But if progressivity and part of the means-tested system are maintained, all poor households will be made better off at the expense, in particular, of more affluent two-earner households.
(First author’s address: DULBEA, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt 50, 1050 Bruxelles, iterraz@ulb.ac.be)

Perhaps the first plea for an unconditional basic income in Europe’s (arguably) most unreceptive country: "the benefits traditionally associated with paid work function better in justifying a right to a basic income than a right to work". A revised English version was published in Thesis Eleven 54, 1998, 63-77 (reviewed more fully among the English-language publications).

(Author’s address: SEFOS, Prof. Keysers gt. 2, 5007 Bergen, Norway, nanna.kildal@sefos.uib.no)


Norwegian version of a plea for basic income as a solution to Europe’s unemployment problem, originally published in French in the Revue du Mauss and Liber.

(Author’s address: Chaire Hoover, 3 Place Montesquieu, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, vanparijs@etes.ucl.ac.be)


Under the title "The revolution of unemployment", this short book aims to present the theoretical basis of the vigorous plea for a citizen’s income put forward in the last few months by the Green party of the region of Castilla and León.

(Author’s address: c/o Los Verdes, Apartado de correos 587, E-24080 León)


This is for the most part a collection of essays originally published between 1991 and 1997, by José Iglesias Fernandez, a Barcelona-based critical economist, eloquent advocate of basic income, and initiator of the new Spanish basic income network AREBA. The book opens with a long and impressive quotation from the "Discourses of the protection of the legitimate poor and of the reduction of the fake ones (1598) by Cristobal Perez de Herrera, chief doctor of His Majesty's galleys.

Iglesias does not believe in anti-poverty policies based on the old (and not altogether forgotten) distinction between the deserving poor and the others, who hide their ability to work, don't attend services and eat meat on days on which it is prohibited by the Church. He argues against the "revenu minimum d’insertion" and related schemes, which he regards as a dignified form of public charity, has more sympathy for the redistribution of work, but considers a universal basic income an ethically more desirable alternative. One of the chapters investigates the financial feasibility of introducing a basic income in Spain. Funded in a variety of ways, it would eventually absorb about 12% of Spain’s GDP. Another essay, entitled "Basic income according to St-Paul" investigates the source of a frequent religious-labourist opposition to basic income, especially on the part of the Trade Unions.

(Author’s address: Salvador Espriu 89, 2º, 2a, E – 08005 Barcelona)
BASIC INCOME
is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.

THE BASIC INCOME EUROPEAN NETWORK (BIEN)
aims to serve as a link between individuals and groups committed to or interested in basic income, and to foster informed discussion on this topic throughout Europe.

BIEN’s SECRETARIAT
is now under the responsibility of Alexander de Roo, European Parliament, Rue Belliard 97–113, B–1047 Brussels, Tel: 32-2-2843052, Fax: 32-2-2307837, E-mail: aderoo@europarl.eu.int

BIEN’s NEWSLETTER
appears three times per year. Its editor is Philippe Van Parijs (Chaire Hoover, 3 Place Montesquieu, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Fax: 32-10-473952, vanparijs@etes.ucl.ac.be. Its internet version is sent free of charge to anyone who requests it by sending the message "subscribe BIEN" to bien@etes.ucl.ac.be. Hard copies can be mailed to any member of BIEN who so wishes.

BIEN’s FIRST LIFE MEMBERS
(who did not express a wish to remain anonymous)
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NATIONAL NETWORKS ON BASIC INCOME

CITIZENS’ INCOME STUDY CENTRE (UNITED KINGDOM)
Secretary: Carolyn Armstrong, Citizens Income Study Centre, St Philips Building, Sheffield Street, London WC2A 2EX, United Kingdom. Tel.: 44-171-9557453; fax: 44-171-9557534; citizens-income@lse.ac.uk, Web site: http://www.citizens-income.org.uk
Publishes a quarterly newsletter (hard copy only).

VERENIGING BASISINKOMEN (NETHERLANDS)
Co-ordinator: Emiel Schäfer, Herman Heijermansweg 20, NL-1077 WL Amsterdam. tel. 31-20-5731803, fax: 31-20-6713541, basic.income@wxs.nl, Web site: http://wxs.nl/~schafer
Publishes a quarterly newsletter (in Dutch, available on the web page and in hard copy).

BIEN IRELAND
Co-ordinator: John Baker
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ASOCIACION POR L’INSTAURATION D’UN REVENU D’EXISTENCE [AREBA] (SPAIN)
Coordinator: José Iglesias Fernández, Salvador Espriu 89, 2º, 2a, E – 08005 Barcelona, Fax: 34-93-225.48.20

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME NEW ZEALAND (UBINZ)
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http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/3142/ubinz.html.

ORGANISATION ADVOCATING SUPPORT INCOME IN AUSTRALIA (OASIS)
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URL http://www.satcom.net.au/supportincome

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as well as three honorary members:
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   • into BIEN’s bank account (001-2204356-10 at the CGER, Brussels),
   • or in cash directly to a member of the Executive Committee
   • or in a well-sealed envelope sent to Alexander DE ROO.
In all cases, an acknowledgement will be sent upon receipt.