

## **Presentation to BICN Congress Winnipeg 2016.**

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Before I begin let me be clear that I am talking strictly in the Canadian context. I find a problem with some BI organizers is they do not get it that the US and Canada are different countries with different cultures and very different political systems.

Conditions within which a guaranteed income is to be achieved are also very different. In fact, in the US there is no route. You have developed a neo-feudal oligarchy in the US. You can forget about a BIG or any other progressive program until you overthrow that and establish some form of democracy. It is almost certainly going to be very violent and protracted. Go home and get on with it.

In Canada we still have at least a limited form of democracy. We have a route for achieving political reforms and progressive programs like a GII. So we can talk about that.

### **1) Introduction**

#### **a. Who am I?**

I am 61 years old, born in Alberta. I suffered undiagnosed medical problems all my life. I started getting proper diagnosis and treatment after moving to Toronto in 1994. My life and health greatly improved since then. I completed a degree in political science from University of Toronto in 2014.

I have been an advocate for a guaranteed income system for over 40 years. I was talking about the Dauphin experiment when it was going on. I have worked on other causes as well, including Proportional Representation and social housing reform. I have seen a lot about how advocacy groups succeed or fail.

I am also a committed socialist. I adhere to the maxim 'socialism or barbarism'.

#### **b. Why am I doing this?**

Because I am convinced that a guaranteed income is the key social reform around which a post capitalist social order will coalesce. It is important that we get this right. With the economic gun taken away from everybody's head, democratic and economic reform becomes possible.

#### **c. My key points**

- A Guaranteed Income is absolutely necessary for any form of society and economy to function in future.

- The form of income guarantee will determine the society of the future, which could be good or bad for most people.
- Getting the good form of a GLI will require developing a grassroots social movement for it, which must be properly grounded in the idea of human rights.

## 2) What is the purpose in advocating for an income guarantee?

### a. The growing economic necessity

Because I am convinced that a guaranteed income is the key social reform around which a post capitalist social order will coalesce. It is important that we get this right. With the economic gun taken away from everybody's head, democratic and economic reform becomes possible.

The central fact is that the economy will not function in the future without some form of income guarantee to enable people to buy what they need. One side will call this an issue of maintaining effective demand. The progressive side will talk about ensuring people's human rights in this way.

But while a form of this income is guaranteed to come about, this does not mean it is automatically good for underclass people like me. There could be a very bad form of a Basic Income. That is what the political fight will be about.

### b. Good forms of Income guarantee

These will be based on human rights. That is the way to keep a movement for it correctly grounded. It would be better called a Guaranteed Livable Income as the Green party recommends. A GLI is Universal, Unconditional, and Adequate for a dignified life, and we have to mean it. U, U, and A.

Realistically, this can only be done by a demogrant system; a deposit in everybody's account every month. We now have the technology to make this work. There is no excuse for people continuing to talk about a negative income tax, like it is still 1974.

Some legitimate issues within GLI design are; different rates for people in higher and lower cost areas, a housing allowance attached to it, and different rates for elderly or disabled people, and for children. And of course, just how much is adequate, which is partly a subjective judgement.

### c. Bad forms of Income guarantee

These come in three basic categories according to the three types of ideological distortions to Basic Income advocacy. These are libertarian, neoliberal, and welfarist.

- Libertarians of course see BI as an excuse to eliminate all other forms of social welfare. Everybody has their few hundred a month so they are okay in an otherwise government free environment. No public health care system, no public education, a complete toll booth economy.

Modern Libertarianism is something thought up by Plutocrats of the kind who see democracy as getting in their way. They want to create their own system of private government, which amounts to a new form of feudalism. Which is why, Libertarians should be relabelled as what they are, neo feudalists.

- Neoliberals want society arranged to suit the needs of large business organizations. They do want some form of government in order to regulate the human herd in their interests. They see a guaranteed income as a wage subsidy so they can get cheaper labor, and to keep people, in their delightful term, "attached to the labor force".
- Welfarists have always wanted to use the welfare system for social engineering, to "improve" the underclass. They will want receipt of an income to be tied to participation in various sorts of programs. Victims might have to do some sort of "community work" or enroll in training of various kinds. The income might be withdrawn if we get caught smoking funny cigarettes or if they don't like how we raise our kids.

### **3) How to achieve a living grant**

#### **a. active citizens, not activists**

About 90% of the people who show up wanting to be 'activists' for a Basic should be given a swift kick in the ass. Usually what they are looking for is a philosophical ball to bat around. A movement should be started by active citizens, who have some above average organizing and analytical skills.

#### **b. an organized movement, not a floating discussion.**

A big problem with some BI/GLI groups right now is they have the idea that everything happens on the net. They do not want to get up from the computer and go and eyeball some people. Especially they do not want to exert their brains on planning and organizing, fundraising, or even on getting out in the weather.

You need large numbers of people who are enthusiasts and volunteers, but you need a core of thinkers who can define what exactly is being advocated for and how, and a paid staff who can carry out policies.

### **c. cycles of rising interest followed by failure**

If you look at the history of BI, you see a peak of interest every 15 years. But it was interest among an elite. Ordinary people did not engage with it because no movement engaged with them. Without a push from below interest fades away as resistance to BI is mobilized and there is no real response to it.

### **d. push from below, not an elite dispensation**

There has never been a real advance in the human condition without a really powerful grassroots movement for it. This does not happen so often in Canada. There is a kind of deferral to authority which means our social programs are not what they could be. They are as much about solving problems of managing human herds by an elite, as about public will. This is the way to the 'welfarist' version of BI, not to a truly liberating 'Human Rights' version.

### **e. distinguish public from political class & chatteratti.**

The biggest mistake would-be leaders of social movements make is failure to distinguish between real public opinion and that of the political class or chatteratti. It is the former you have to reach and win over. The latter should be ignored. It is actual leaders of government, ministers and civil servants, who you will talk to once you have done your homework and have policy to propose.

## **4) what a proper LI campaign will look like.**

### **a. get the name right**

It has been said over and over that the name "Basic Income" is a semiotic disaster. The slogan is "freedom is not basic." One of the founders of BIEN admits that little thought went into the title when the group was first formed. It was intended to be temporary.

But we find that opening up the name to debate opens up a can of worms. Yet we have to solve this problem and we have to solve it with the science of meaning making. The Green party seems to have thought this through well. They call their proposal "Guaranteed Livable Income". I suggest going with that.

### **b. incrementalism won't work**

Some people in Canada are in love with the idea of incremental application of social programs. Never mind that it has never worked. Almost all social programs in Canada have been put through in one shot. Rarely have they advanced in any further increments. As all programs have flaws, the flaws are used to attack the program and prevent reform or further progress, rather than being used to guide reforms.

**c. pilots will not work- what do they prove?**

They will take about ten years when we need something sooner. People will likely lose interest. And because no pilot will be perfect, its flaws will be used to attack the idea of an income guarantee. Pilots can be set up to show whatever the designers want.

**d. have a fully worked out prop to present to the broad public.**

In other words, get your homework done. You don't just go ahead with a set of vague principles or contradictory ideas. Have a fully researched and developed policy to sell to the government and to the public.

**e. class war is real; socialism vs neo-feudalism**

If you are going to struggle for a good Income guarantee program, you are going to be engaged in class war. You are going to have class war waged back at you with all the tools the ruling class has learned over centuries. Their most powerful weapon will be cooptation. Failure to define exactly the program you want to put across is a guarantee of cooptation and a route to the dark side of BI.

**5) what a proper LI proposal would look like**

**a. for everybody, child benefit to mother.**

Of course, a GLI is for everyone. That does not mean it has to go to people above a certain income level or asset level. There would be a GLI for children, reflecting the cost of child rearing and of course paid to the mother.

**b. monthly deposit- no NIT nonsense.**

The needs of the people who would use the GLI are that it must come every month as a cheque or bank deposit. I am baffled by these adherents of a NIT. This is not 1976 anymore. We have electronic money transfers now; get it?

I have been involved in tenants rights in social housing and I know how much of a hassle it is for people with fluctuating incomes to have to calculate their rent subsidy every month. They would now have to figure out their BI every month, quarterly, yearly?

What if they lost their jobs halfway through the year? Do they have to starve until tax time?

Most proponents of NIT seem to tie it to elimination of all other taxation, thus all other government programs. They want it to be 'revenue neutral'; meaning not just the NIT program but all taxation. This is villainous, and these creeps are here. They should be shown the door.

**c. replace most benefit programs, many are too lucrative**

Oh yes, and the social engineers worry about the elimination of all or most other social programs. Many programs are too lucrative and should be abolished. Others are designed to manage people in extreme poverty. You can ask the people who have to live on these poverty programs how wonderful they are, and how we should think carefully about abolishing them just because they have been around so long.

**d. amount depends on local cost of living**

Some people have a problem with a GLI being variable according to zones. But it costs much more to live in large cities than small ones. This would be easy to do and none of the objections to it make any sense at all.

**e. affordability problem is nonsense; progressive taxation on wealth**

The worst nonsense around a GLI comes from the ideas for funding it. The more real economists look into the costs the more clear it becomes that it would not cost much more than what we have now. We do not need any exotic new tax systems to fund it; just reverse the tax cuts for the rich and corporations.

**6) compartments with an LI**

**a. needs a high minimum wage so does not become a wage top up for employers**

The problem with low labor costs even with a decent GLI, is that it encourages laziness among employers. It allows inefficient companies to stay in business. It disincentives adoption of labor saving technology, which we want. We want to keep reducing the hours of work, without reducing the total wealth of the country and thus people's incomes. This last should not be a problem. It is the whole point of technological progress.

**b. rent control and strong housing programs required.**

If people, especially the lowest classes of people, get any kind of income boost, the capitalist class will be looking for ways to capture it. After wage labor, the big way this is done is through rent and mortgage interest. This is why a GLI must comport with a strong housing program.

But no housing programs will really work without changes to the system of land taxation. Land is most of the cost of housing and the cost of land is the cost of speculation, where the capitalists take their cut. Put very simply, the present almost universal system must be turned upside down. Instead of taxing more as land is progressively utilized, and taxing little if it is vacant, underused land must be taxed so as to strongly discourage holding it. Taxation must be withdrawn as it is made the best use of.

**c. Not a reason to withdraw health or education**

No further comment required.

**d. social services will be able to focus on hard core problems.**

If all these social workers really want to help their fellow humans, they can have all the resources they need to work on the hard cases and leave those who just need to have enough money to live, to get on with their lives unhindered.

**7) probable outcomes of a good LI**

**a. strengthen democracy**

Democracy really is the greatest system of government ever devised. But it has always had two great weaknesses. It can work well only at a local level, like a city state, and can work only if there is relative equality among people.

We live in Canada in a caricature of democracy. The Americans were once gifted at local democracy, but now...

I am interested in the subject of developing authentic democracy, but I can't get into a tract about that here. One of the problems with democracy is that people do not have the time and basic resources to be able to participate. They are also often ruined in mind by years of grinding, servile employment, exposure to poor education systems designed to produce worker drones, and relentless social propaganda.

A GLI will largely solve this problem. It will go some way toward solving the inequality problem as well.

**b. economic stabilization; demand**

You never want to try to sell GLI simply as a solution for the capitalists problem of ineffective demand. But technology has now brought us to a point where the powers of production are indeed nearly complete. We can easily produce everything we need and for less and less effort and cost.

This of course will require a new economic system because it makes capitalism unable to extract the profits necessary to keep their interest based system going. The two forks in the road go to socialism or back into feudalism. Neofeudalism will be the ruling classes solution. Different modes of Basic Income will facilitate either of these two options.

Both paths will lead to stable systems, where demand can be regulated. Which system do you want to live in?

**c. increase automation & reduce work hours, junk employment.**

We are already getting this fetishization of "robots". It is not going to happen that quickly. There will still be plenty of need for humans, just not as much as before. With a socialist turn to GII, we can reduce work hours and eliminate junk employment.

**8) conclusions**

**a. LI not ready to happen yet, despite febrile atmosphere**

As I said above, there seems to be a wave every fifteen years. BI is always a conversation among an elite classes and the public does not really engage with it, because there is no grass roots movement. I have seen this same excited atmosphere around a BI before. I do not think GII is ready to happen yet, for these reasons.

**b. much work to be done.**

Before we get a real GII, we need a real movement for it. This requires the work of building one. It involves getting out of the netisphere and the ivory tower, to where people really live. It also involves developing the political and organizational skills to make it happen.

**c. class war must be waged.**

As I said, this is going to be a social war. It will be a class war between the socialists and the neofeudalists. Go and read up on Gramsci, folks.

**d. consequences of bad BI, turn to neo-feudalism not discussed.**

I have some ideas about what a neofeudal society would look like, and how it could come about, but I am not going to get into it here. I say that about 90% of the population really will not like it, even with a Basic Income.

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