

# The five "Fuck offs" of a Basic Income

from T. Rourke me@qaz.ca

May 2018

Feel free to print off or download and circulate widely

I have been a proponent of what is now being called a "Basic Income" since the 1970s. I have become disgusted with the way the impulse toward a BI has developed in recent decades. I don't think it ever deserved to be called a "movement".

I have seen interest in the idea come and go in cycles. The problem has always been that it was a discussion between academic and government elites, with the public barely engaged. No serious organization ever developed to formalize the concept and build public support around it.

The problem even with the present BIEN group and its Canadian affiliate BICN is that it is made up of academics who are only interested in BI as an abstract idea to be batted around. They are actually contemptuous of any idea of defining it and building a political movement around it. Into this vacuum are attracted every kind of charlatan, trying to tag their ideologies and hobby horses onto the BI idea even though they do not actually fit; Georgists, Libertarians, ecofanatics, monetary cranks, and so on.

The most sinister thing is that periodically, government bureaucracies get interested in income schemes as an easier way of administering social welfare. What they always come up with is a version of the "Negative Income Tax" idea formulated by Milton Friedman in the 1960s, a chief theorist of the neoliberal movement which has caused so much harm in recent decades. This is the "anti-GLI", the capitalist reaction against a Guaranteed Living Income.

These initiatives usually get some support initially, but eventually people understand that it is just a new technique for administering welfare. It continues the same basic problem as with present systems; it is the working class subsidizing the underclass, while the privileged class pays

nothing. It cannot provide enough money to eliminate poverty for everyone. It will be extremely cumbersome to administer.

This is what is happening right now in Canada with "The Pilot". Eventually enough people with good thinking skills will work out that this is not really going anywhere. Some will start learning the evolution of the concept from the 1960s on, what it is really about, and how it keeps going off track.

They will be able to answer the question which present day BI "experts" cannot answer: what is the problem for which BI is the solution? Answer: the inability of industrial societies to realize Human Rights as defined in national and international declarations. Particularly, the obligation of states to eliminate poverty and to ensure that work is freely chosen.

Further to this, an equitable distribution of the means of living cannot be achieved through "jobs". No country has ever achieved full employment at decent wages or ever will. Attempts to create more jobs by economic expansion lead to war, and to the waste and destruction of natural resources.

This is the basics of what a Basic Income is really about. Right now this message cannot be heard over all the nonsense from people who are using the term to mean completely different things. In a few years the time will be right to try bringing the discussion back to the point.

I have disabilities and I am getting old. I do not have time and energy to waste. In a couple of years I am going to start a blog again on the BI topic. I think my message will be better received by then. Meanwhile, I want to focus on some things that can give me greater economic security and some resources for public activism.

For now I will respond to all the nonsense ideas around a BI with a hearty “fuck off”, on behalf of all those who would be badly compromised by them. That is all this ignorant noise deserves. I have consolidated all this bad noise into “The Five Fuck-offs of Basic Income”. I urge people to respond thus whenever they hear them. They are;

1. Any talk of BI which does not conform to the basic principles of universality, adequacy, and unconditionality. That means, going to everybody, adequate in itself to live a dignified life, and without any qualifications or obligations.

2. Talk about any scheme other than one delivered in a predictable amount at predictable intervals, with no withdrawals for other income, and funded by taxes on wealth. Especially, talk about a negative income tax as though it were a BI, rather than the anti BI thought up in the 1960s by the neoliberal ideologue Milton Friedman.

3. Talk about BI as the answer to a supposed looming technological unemployment crisis, or any other phoney crisis spun up to justify regressive social measures.

4. Failure to ground an income guarantee in the concept of Human rights as in the Universal Declaration, which is where the concept of a GAI originated from in the 1960s.

5. Any talk about ‘pilots’ or ‘experiments’, as though they could tell us anything we do not already know, could do other than delay implementation of a BI, and as though we have a right to play around with other people’s lives.

That is all that can be done right now. The anti-democratic structure of BICN makes it impossible to reform it. Something new will have to be build once there is a critical mass of people who have come to properly understand the Guaranteed Living Income concept and what is to be done to further it.

The focus must be on clarifying what exactly is being proposed. It must be grounded in Human Rights and enacted by a constitutional amendment. This will require building a mass movement on the ground.

This is done by linking with progressive social forces such as labour and the “social sector”. Especially, links must be made with groups linking issues such as poverty, housing, inequality, and lack of democracy to the Human Rights concept.

The stupidest recent trope about BI is that it is not “left or right, but forward”. The GLI concept only makes sense within the frame of socialism. This concept is coming due for a reset and relaunch. Whoever is interested in this can keep in touch with me through my web site at <http://www.livinggrant.ch/> and my discussion list at <http://www.livinggrant.ch/oldbreezes/top.html>

