

Basic Income and the Revolt of the Caring Classes

As the saying goes, history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes. Echoing Karl Polanyi's classic work, we are living in the midst of a great transformation, both in terms of geo-politics and the structure of the economy. The Corona crisis has been only but the catalyzer. The neoliberal regime has started to break down, just as its liberal predecessor did during the dawn of the 20th century, bringing down the gold-standard, World War 1 and the rise of fascism internationally.

This time around, the crisis of capitalism carries with it the real threat of mass extinction for all forms of life. The series of unfortunate events that follow will impact the lives of the most vulnerable all over the planet. The consequences of the breakdown to our social morphology, of the change in the structure of society, remains to be seen. One thing is for sure: the world has changed. Only our actions will determine the shape of the future.

It has been three years since I started serving as social outreach for the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN). Over the last decade, there has been a growing surge of interest and popularity in universal basic income. Pilot experiments performed all over the world have proven to science that giving people money unconditionally and universally is holistically more beneficial than targeted, conditional programs and their corresponding bureaucracies.

All over the world, basic income networks have risen up to the challenge of our times, with researchers, advocates, activists, local leaders and communities organising together in order to claim the right for an unconditional income. The struggle is for dignity in a world filled with injustice and precarity. The challenge is not just to get the current political powers to accept and implement the paradigm shift of values which a basic income carries with it, but to politicise the issue in peoples' minds and to truly democratise the institutions of our day.

We must go beyond the work-ethic that has destroyed the planet for the sake of private profit. The current crisis has demonstrated that unpaid care work is foundational to the making of society everywhere. The United States has now a brewing income movement which sprung about after Andrew Yang's candidacy in 2019. This movement reflects on the social necessity of basic income as a response to the neoliberal reforms of the last decades. From South Africa to Brazil, the caring classes have shown that life cannot be automated away. Despite the circumstances, people continue to care for their next of kin and their communities, revolting against those who dominate over their lives. The revolt of the caring classes is a revolt for dignity, a revolt to live well and to have the power to say no.

Basic income is not a far away ideal, it is a social change which is already happening. The city of Marica in Brasil, also known as the city of Utopias, now provides about one third of its citizens (about 42,000 people) with a basic income given in Mumbucas, the social currency of the city. The region of Gyeonggi in Korea has been leading the way, being one of the most innovative places where basic income lives today. Albeit only focusing on a specific age group (24 years old), Gyeonggi is the second biggest region in the world after Alaska providing people with a basic income, paid in a local currency, amounting to a total of 175,000 recipients to date. As

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Pablo Yanes from CEPAL and the Latin American Basic Income Network once told us, we should look to the social experience of basic income rather than to abstractions when arguing for it. People's experiences are worth more than the philosopher's stones.

Basic Income is about care. The caring classes all over the world who make life possible to begin with are rising up to demand a world with more dignity. UBI is a means towards a world where many worlds can fit, as the Zapatista saying goes. The people who receive a basic income know the peace of mind that it brings, the power it gives one to be able to plan ahead and have a bit extra to do what normally one cannot, to have more time to care.

If the economy is ultimately about people, then why does the current system only care about profit? The gradual abolition of wage-labor is but a moment in a set of moments towards human liberation. Basic income is the beginning of a transition towards other systems that are possible, different social, political and economic forms, enabling both freedom and equality without the need for false binaries.

As a messenger of BIEN, I am only a facilitator among many in this global historical process of transformation, connecting people and bringing the message to as many people as possible. There are many people like me, working tirelessly behind the screen, going to countless meetings and doing a lot of unpaid work, all to spread the word in their communities, put basic income on the map or to organise the yearly basic income marches in their respecting cities and countries, bringing world wide attention to the idea. I would like to thank those people. Without you, basic income would not be where it is. Our work is only beginning.

As my late mentor and friend David Graeber used to say, there has been a war waged on the human imagination for the last few decades, where we were taught that there is no alternative. Basic income is the imagination fighting back.

What are we waiting for?

In my first full term as social outreach for BIEN, we have:

- Successfully started the organization of the Latin American Basic Income Network, which unites voices from all countries in Latin America to discuss basic income in the region.
- We conducted an international survey together with Annie Miller and other BIEN members, to understand government responses to COVID-19 In relation to UBI, which will be presented at the Scottish congress in 2021.
- Furthermore, we have recently established the Basic Income Research and Action Lab (BIRAL), to organize practice oriented research seminars and municipal leader roundtables, connecting the municipal mayors and governors of the world that are either already issuing a basic income to their citizens or are interested in doing so.

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It has been a privilege to serve BIEN as social/public outreach and I look forward to serving one more term.

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