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One Question: Do we need a universal basic income?

Danny Dorling

Yes we need a basic income. Yes we will get one. But we in the UK will very probably have to wait until other European countries have had one for some time. The UK in 2018 is the European country with the widest economic inequalities and in many ways is the least progressive large country in Europe.

One manifestation of this is scepticism over whether a basic income could work, be possible, or is even desirable. Unlike other countries in Europe, outside of Scotland where there is some enthusiasm, in the UK we are not even experimenting with different models of a basic income in different towns and cities to see what might work best when it comes to its introduction. Instead arguments are raised against basic income on principal in a similar way to how universal health care is derided as socialist health care in the United States, the country with the worst health record of the entire affluent world.

A basic income is needed for freedom. It is the only way in which people can be given a genuine choice over whether to undertake paid work or not. Where people have more choice over whether to work and what they do, the quality of their work is far higher. We need a basic income if we are to get good jobs. We also need it so that some can choose to live a very low consumption lifestyle. A basic income is what it says – basic. Consumption by the affluent also reduces in those places and times where basic incomes are introduced. There is a three hundred year history of basic income that we can learn from, and many studies, of which the best in my view was written by Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght and published in 2017.

A basic income is not, by its very definition, enough for people with special needs to live on. It is not enough if you are in a wheelchair or have a large number of children and no work. But it is not beyond the wit of imaginative people to realise that a basic income needs to be augmented for a few with greater needs. Like universal child benefit, or a minimum basic income for pensioners, no one would claim that all children or all pensioners could survive on those minima. A basic income is also not an alternative for basic universal services. We need both.

Basic income will likely come late to the UK. When you are old and dying the person turning you over in bed and inserting the catheter in your body may well be doing that because they have to. Not because they want to. In a country with basic income it would be because they wanted to. You will be able to tell the difference. Basic income sets us all free.

Further Reading:

The other contributions to this blog post which can be read at:
<http://stateofnatureblog.com/one-question-universal-basic-income/>

And, **Three hundred years of arguments for a basic income**

Review of 'Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy, by Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght'

Reviewed by Danny Dorling, March 16th 2017:

<http://www.dannydorling.org/?p=5985>