

Virginia Woolf understood the need for basic income in 1929. As Woolf wrote then: "[Shakespeare's sister] who never wrote a word and was buried at [a] crossroads...still lives in you and in me, and many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity...is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live another century or so....and have five hundred a year each and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think...then the opportunity will come."

Well, we're only 15 years away from that century.

I'd like to thank BIEN for making space for this plenary discussion about two huge developments in the past year, the Swiss Popular Initiative and the European Citizens Initiative for Unconditional Basic Income. BIEN is itself to be greatly honoured, I think, for keeping going on this idea for so many years, ready to be picked up when the time was right. Like now.

Until recently I thought the big divide in the developing movement for unconditional basic income was essentially marked by class. There are those who study basic income, but by and large don't need it themselves. Then there are those who are active in organising to get it, because by and large they do need it, yesterday. Academics vs Activists. The academics are afraid that somehow the 'wrong' scheme will happen; the activists are afraid nothing will happen.

But in the course of the past year, having met many active academics and (often self-taught) scholarly activists militating for basic income, I think the divide is more conceptual than the material differences between us. Do we need the precise numbers first, with evidence of good financial and social outcomes; or do we need to get across to people the hope for a better world which UBI could make possible? Head vs heart.

In London at the beginning of this month, at a conference organised by the Citizens Income Trust, this was the real question underpinning the problem of how we move forward. Some participants insisted that the actual level needs first to be determined. Others, equally vehement, felt that regardless of the final numbers the movement needs to rest on the moral arguments.

Of course in the end we need both. We need actual numbers (for which there may be no empirical method of arriving) and we need real hope. Across our broad constituency - everybody, unconditionally - there will be those who respond better to one or the other, and some who want both.

And to speak of levels, which I normally avoid myself, the benefits advisor in me is panting for any relief whatsoever, even just £ 50 a week clear for everyone, while the campaigner in me knows that no one loses by demanding everything we want from the outset.

I feel what we've seen in the past year in Europe marks the beginning of a melding of the two sides. The Swiss initiative set a comfortable rate, the ECI did not, although it defined UBI to be 'high enough for a dignified existence, with full social participation'. Still, both campaigns succeeded largely on the hope arguments - the freedom from coercion, from bullsh*t jobs, or really, in Buckminster Fuller's words, to do the things we dreamt about as kids, 'before someone told us we had to go out and earn a living'.

Just as basic income has synthesised my campaigning for women's rights, housing, welfare and health for the past three decades; the grassroots organising in Europe over the past year now allows a more fundamental synthesis: we can come together in solidarity using both our hearts and our heads.

What both initiatives have done is to bring UBI to public attention as never before. Virginia Woolf would be cheering.

So it is with great pleasure I present the two speakers you're about to hear: Enno Schmidt is an artist and filmmaker; Stanislas Jourdan, a mediactivist, has a background in business and journalism.