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Universal Basic Income - Building a new future

It would seem that most people would prefer a society based on care rather than profit and yearn to have work that serves their higher needs. We need to acknowledge that a hunger for respect, love, generosity and a sense of higher purpose to their lives is something many theories overlook.¹

COVID-19 has revealed society's failure to address the needs of many people.

The global market's vulnerability has been exposed with threats to supply chains, and ruthless competition that disregards its impact on people and the Earth.

Despite calls for a return to business as usual, we need to be aware **that our well-being depends on the well-being of all people and the Earth.** We need an economy that meets the needs of people and the Earth's living systems by moving from profit-maximising corporations to self-organising, self-reliant, life-serving communities. We need to use resources that increase the well-being of people and nature while eliminating those that consume resources for such things as military spending and financial speculation.²

Unregulated capitalism has continued to be a failure.³ For unregulated capitalism, organisations are productive, efficient and rational when maximising money and power. Society needs to be dedicated to the well-being of people and the Earth. The economy, corporations, government policies, legal, education and cultural systems and personal behaviour should be considered rational, productive, and efficient when they actually maximise the capacity to be attuned to social, economic and environmental justice for everyone and where people are seen as intrinsically valuable rather than valued as commodities.⁴

The frailty of the social contract has been exposed.

The concept of a universal income payment available to all citizens, once a fringe idea, is now on the agenda and discussed as 'absolutely necessary'. The social cost of not introducing such a payment is great and will be paid by society's more vulnerable members.⁵ Despite objections that we lack the resources to fund such an



income does not mean such a proposal is impossible.⁶

Pope Francis, along with economists, have called for a 'universal basic income.'⁷ In 2018, the UN Secretary General, said that 'governments may have to consider stronger safety nets and eventually UBI' in response to job displacements due to automation and artificial intelligence (AI). Pope Francis' concerns about the market economy, **the 'throwaway' culture, and hyper-individualism in the global North have been countered** by movements among underprivileged and marginalised populations with a social alternative to the West's 'tyranny of money' that 'privileges profit and stimulates competition.' This is not about charity, but justice.⁸

A UBI would allow people greater freedom to pursue dignity in work without being forced to merely work for wages.⁹ It would prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality. It would be periodic with regular payments in cash where each individual, not households, receives the payment. All would receive the payment irrespective of need or willingness to work.¹⁰ This would provide for basic needs and even achieve financial stability.¹¹

The virtues of a UBI are questioned because it may provide an excuse for stopping work and

dissolving associated human relationships rather than strengthening social ties. Despite objections about irresponsible spending by the working poor, it has been found that they actually do invest in their future.¹² As countries see this idea as a Covid-19 stimulus, it is a question of when, not if.

A UBI sounds like an idealistic and left-wing idea, but has long had support in right-wing politics and economics.¹³ Its implementation, though challenging, is possible and would make for a fairer environment.¹⁴ Neoliberalism is struggling and failing to find answers in the midst of a great societal shakeup due to the pandemic. The time has come for ideas that seemed impossible just months ago.¹⁵

The very rich have isolated themselves with advantages that hide the hardships ordinary people endure. **A guaranteed income must not be held up or prevented by the wealthy.** In fact, by supporting a social need, the rich are protecting themselves from global catastrophes such as viral epidemics, environmental disasters and terrorism. But, as Noam Chomsky suggests, *'There's no profit in preventing a future catastrophe.'*¹⁶

A UBI is a good way to maintain social solidarity in uncertain times. This could break down the barriers of inequality, improve trust and maintain cohesion and social stability.¹⁷ As Covid-19 spreads, economic stability is essential for social solidarity. A UBI reinforces the view that when basic needs are met, people can take care of themselves, and each other, with less fear and anxiety.¹⁸

A UBI would enable people to **replace a precarious and anxious work culture with life-affirming, creative, and healthier pursuits** such as meaningful family activities. Rather than struggling to stay afloat in an intense job market, tedious work could be replaced with life-affirming, creative pursuits. While the pandemic may have revealed the weaknesses of an industrial society, it also revealed a world filled with hope and social solidarity. This is our chance to maintain that world.¹⁹

'Where will the government find the money?' is no longer a valid objection to providing an economic safety net for the people.²⁰

A UBI is the **most direct route to economic and**

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social justice. It recognizes the human right of each person's claim to the resources of society. The tie between work and consumption could be cut, opening the way to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.²¹

Forms of UBI have effectively been operating in many parts of the world, e.g., Scandinavia and Alaska, and have helped to build rather than drain prosperity. The question of financing is important but the starting point is an agreement to launch it. Then international best practice can be drawn upon to determine suitable options.

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, countries have cut public services and disadvantaged many. **The number of millionaires increased** then, and now with the pandemic.

It seems reasonable and fair that the privileged class finance the UBI so the great majority can benefit through fairer tax arrangements. Many economists, in proposing how a UBI could be funded, all converge on the redistribution of wealth through tax collection.²²

Stories abound of people showing care and generosity during the Covid-19 pandemic. These are the **foundations of a revolutionary society** - the society humanity needs - where people and planet come before profit. This might not be considered realistic to some, but neither were the civil rights, feminist, anti-apartheid, environment, and LGBTIQ movements.

To say 'not possible' is not realistic. This pandemic can lead to new hope and be world-changing.

Full set of resources and references are on the ERC website www.erc.org.au



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