

Universal basic income, human security and grand strategies: an exploration of the linkages

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Introduction

This paper grew out of my involvement with a network of people and civil society groups and organisations in the UK called *Rethinking Security*. As its name implies, *Rethinking Security* (RS) seeks to bring about a profound shift in the strategic defence and security posture of the UK based on the fundamental insight that we are all part of a common and interdependent humanity. The approach of RS is informed by the conviction that sustainable security for a section of our global society cannot be achieved on the basis of denying others the opportunity to live out their lives enjoying the same basic rights and life-chances that we seek for ourselves. We live in an interdependent world and, to put it simply, our security cannot be achieved through creating the conditions that threaten and undermine the security of others. The orthodoxy that RS seeks to challenge is one that views external threats to our national well-being through the lens of lethal force, i.e. threats require responses which rely to a greater or lesser degree on the military capability to make credible threats of violence. After all, it is a Hobbesian world out there, a view articulated by the then Chief of the Defence Staff of the British Armed Forces in 2015: 'We are in a state of permanent engagement in a global competition. To win or even survive in such a competition means that all the instruments of national power need constantly to be in play.'

In challenging this orthodoxy RS has proposed a radically different conception of security, one that draws quite clearly on the core insights of human security and gives primacy to the vision of people living their everyday lives in dignity free from want and from fear. As the authors of the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report expressed their core understanding of what was then the new concept of human security: 'The world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives. 'The 1994 report reminded us that 'security' is multi-dimensional. Alongside the state-driven focus on projecting power externally in order to safeguard the 'national interest' in the global arena, there is the 'domestic security' that people should have the right to experience in their everyday lives. When we broaden our understanding of security to embrace its significance in relation to how we live our everyday lives - beyond the narrow focus on the state's external posturing - then it becomes abundantly clear that security cannot be considered as the sole preserve of the military and the state. As RS has made clear, 'Security is a common responsibility; its challenges belong to all of us.'

However, despite the radical nature of this critique of the established approaches to national security within the UK, RS is to some extent constrained by the very fact that in order to challenge the elite-consensus it is required to share much of the conceptual

ground already occupied by the national security specialists and decision-makers.

And by challenging the orthodoxy on its own ground RS has necessarily focused on the 'external' dimension of the UK's security policy and posture and has not yet managed to extend its critique to highlight the abject failures and abuses that have become an increasingly common feature of the UK government's approach to addressing such threats to the everyday security of its citizens as poverty, health care, food security and housing.

The aim of this paper is to begin to address this lacuna and to broaden the debate about alternative approaches to security by centring human security at the heart of such an endeavour. Just as war planners and security specialists work with a concept of a grand strategy, seeking to mobilise all available national resources in order to further national security aims, so those of us who seek an alternative approach based on the recognition of our human interdependence must include in our critiques and visions some exploration of how to enhance the human security of citizens alongside positing an alternative approach to current state postures and policies in the international arena.

As part of this project this paper presents an overview of one approach which appears to be gaining traction at the moment – the policy of paying each citizen a certain regular sum of money without conditions: universal basic income.

Human insecurity in contemporary UK

On 11 April 2018 *The Independent* reported that one in three workers surveyed in the UK believed their jobs would be automated within a decade, with one in ten believing their job will be taken over by a robot by 2020.¹ A few weeks prior to this news item, Ivana Bartoletti, writing in *The Guardian*, expressed her fears about how automation would impact disproportionately on women.² Citing a report from the World Economic Forum, the prediction is that women face twice the risk faced by men of losing their jobs to automation. For example, 97 percent of cashiers in the USA are expected to lose their jobs to automation over the coming years – 73 percent of cashiers are women.³ For Bartoletti the fear is that if the only jobs available will be in science and technology, what will be the impact on women's employment prospects given the gender gaps in those professions? She raises the spectre of a future in which men go out to work and women stay at home. Meanwhile a survey of young people aged 16 – 25 in the UK has revealed that their happiness and confidence in their individual and collective future has reached its lowest ebb ever. One in four feels trapped in a cycle of jobs they do not want and feel anxiety about the future. Half of those surveyed expressed the belief that the job market would continue to deteriorate, making it difficult for them to entertain hopes for a brighter future. Indeed, two out of ten actually admitted that they believed their lives would never amount to anything.⁴

¹ *The Independent*, 11.04.2018.

² I. Bartoletti, 'Women must act now, or male-designed robots will take over our lives', *The Guardian* 13.03.2018.

³ K. Taylor, *Automation will affect women twice as much as men. This is why*, <https://tinyurl.com/yb4uyx72> (23.04.2018)

⁴ The Princes Trust Macquarie Youth Index 2018, accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y88hz9j8> (23.04.2018)

Perhaps we should not be surprised by such a terrible statistic at a time when all the evidence indicates that child poverty is worsening across the UK. Roughly a third of children in the UK now live in poverty, in part due to the years of austerity and in part due to the increasingly punitive benefit entitlement rules and regulations shutting out more and more families from the welfare benefits system. The headteacher of one primary school in the south of England was quoted in April 2018, 'Over the last 18 months the number of child protection issues I have seen has increased fourfold – and I'm in a small school. Every single one of those issues has been related to poverty, debt, not eating enough, and that has increased dramatically.'⁵ The same week, on 24th April 2018, there was a report in the British press that a record number of emergency supplies were handed out by food banks in 2017-18. A growing proportion of the referrals were due to welfare benefits not covering the cost of essential goods and services, whilst a fifth of referrals were due to low income.⁶

In the context of these depressing figures and the evidence they show of the condition of the UK as it is at present and for the foreseeable future, is it any wonder that British citizens tend to be more concerned about the threats to their well-being posed by unemployment, ill-health and debt than they are by such 'global threats' as war, nuclear accidents, pandemics or even the presence of a bullying, ignorant egomaniac in the White House or the likelihood of North Korea's dictatorial ruler pressing the nuclear button? A 2011 survey of public perceptions of threats to security within

the European Union (EU) indicated that people's main concern was the fear of economic and financial crises, followed by terrorism, organised crime and poverty. The fear of the threat of war ranked 12th behind concern about cybercrime.⁷

The fact that a 2014 survey in the UK found that terrorism topped the list of perceived threats to the 'British way of life', followed by immigration does, however, indicate the ways in which global threats identified by political elites and security specialists worm their way into everyday life.⁸ There is a spiral of fear-making whereby threats to the national interest as defined by state leaders – such as the unrestricted global movement of refugees, insurgent groups and 'jihadists' around the world, political leaders who fail to play by the established rules – permeate through and influence popular attitudes and concerns which in turn legitimise new policies. This process involves fears regarding perceived threats being communicated and mediated through various agencies such as the mass media and associated social media outlets, which in turn inform and influence aspects of popular culture and policy-making that invariably involves new modes of regulating and manipulating everyday life.⁹

Significant in this type of process has been what some would term the globalisation of risk – perceived threats to national and individual well-being are much closer nowadays than they used to be. Threats travel fast these days – whether it be avian flu, the impact of climate change, international terrorism or mass

⁵ Quoted in R. Adams, 'Teachers warn of growing poverty crisis in British schools', *The Guardian*, 2 April 2018.

⁶ Trussell Trust end of year stats, accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y6wzu5v9> (28.04.2018)

⁷⁷ D. Zandee et al, *The relationship between external and internal security*, The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2015, p. 8.

⁸ Yougov, *Report on British attitudes to defence, security and the armed forces*, 25 October 2014. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/hq2jgfm> (26.04.2018)

⁹ I am drawing on insights contained in R. Pain & S. Smith, eds., *Fear: critical geopolitics and everyday life*, London: Routledge, 2016. Espec. pp. 1 – 17.

movements of people in response to humanitarian tragedies caused by war and other forms of violence. Distance is no longer a guarantee of security, and one result is that global threats impact quite clearly on our everyday lives and relationships. Even for relatively privileged middle-class folk like myself, there has been over the years a steady erosion of my 'right to roam' and a corresponding weakening of my preparedness to trust my fellow human beings. More and more areas of what used to be public spaces are now cordoned off with access denied or restricted. I can no longer find waste bins in public spaces, and do not even think of asking me to look after your bag in this stationary queue for a railway ticket while you just pop to the toilet! And if you happen to be a young man from a South Asian family-background with a backpack on the London Tube, then do not be surprised if you catch me giving you a suspicious glance and moving down the carriage, because you never know... In just these few personal illustrations we can start to understand just how phenomena defined as threats at the international level can generate a politics of conflict and control within the domestic sphere of everyday life. What we are witnessing and experiencing is the burgeoning of what might be termed the securitisation of everyday life.

Grand strategy and Machiavelli's warning

This securitisation of everyday life should not surprise us. It is part and parcel of the state's grand strategy, defined by Thomas Christensen as 'the full package of domestic and international policies designed to increase power and national security' in war and in

peace-time.¹⁰ Way back in the 16th century Machiavelli emphasised that the national security concerns of any state have at least two main dimensions – protecting the national interest in the international arena and preserving public order within the domestic sphere. He advised:

... rulers should have two main worries: one is internal and concerns his subjects; the other is external, and concerns foreign powers. Against the latter good troops and reliable allies are an effective defence ... But with regards to one's subjects ... one's only fear must be that they may be plotting secretly. A ruler will effectively protect himself from this danger if he avoids incurring hatred and contempt, and keeps people satisfied with him.¹¹

Machiavelli was writing his treatise in the 1500s, a period when mass poverty began to be seen as a potential source of social unrest and thereby a dangerous threat to the status quo. As a consequence, initiatives were taken to provide the poor with enough work to keep them from starvation and thereby avert popular revolt whilst also reinforcing the work ethic.

Central to such measures aimed at defending the state and the established order from social unrest have been welfare strategies that have combined a mix of state-authorized violence and humanitarian concern. Thus, according to Michielse, the policing of the poor has been a structural phenomenon of nation-states from the 16th century onwards.¹² Certainly the history of social policy in Europe has shown how the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor has been an enduring

¹⁰ Quoted by A. Roberts, 'Grand strategy isn't grand enough', *Foreign Policy*, 20 February 2018.

¹¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 64.

¹² H. Michielse, 'Policing the Poor: J.L. Vives and the 16th century origins of modern social administration', *Social Service Review*, v. 64, n. 1, 1990, pp. 1 – 21, p. 21.

element of state strategy to deal with the poor. From the early Middle Ages, a distinction was made between the infirm who were incapable of work and should be provided with a basic minimum of support, the 'deserving' poor who were willing to work if employment could be found, and the 'undeserving poor' who were capable of work but preferred a life of idleness. Such vagrants came to be seen as criminals to be hunted down and 'corrected' through exposure to the repressive punishment regimes of the workhouses that came to play a central role in the management of poverty. Commenting on this confluence of care and moral outrage, Gereinek observed, 'The hanging of beggars did not replace compassion: the gallows and the alms houses have stood side by side in good times and bad ...'¹³

My own experiences as a volunteer with my local Citizens Advice Bureau brought it home to me how a welfare state that should foster human security has degenerated into a Kafkaesque system of control, forcing people to find their way through a maze of red-tape and then subjecting them to a humiliating and threatening regime of surveillance and other forms of policing during which, as Rutger Bregman has pointed out, they are required repeatedly to provide evidence of their dependency and debilities. It is not so much a war on poverty as a war on the poor, who are deprived of their privacy, their autonomy and their self-respect, which in turn exacerbates their sense of dependency and associated feelings of resentment and frustration.¹⁴

¹³ Gereinek, p. 8.

¹⁴ R. Bregman, *Utopia for realists: And how we can get there*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 96.

What is the alternative?

What is apparent is that similar values and organising principles inform both dimensions of the grand strategy - the state's efforts to protect and further its version of the 'national interest' in the international sphere and its efforts to address the human security requirements of its citizens in the domestic sphere.¹⁵ These include:

- A set of binary divisions between friend and foe, ally and enemy, deserving and undeserving, hard-working and feckless, us and them.
- The maintenance of the state's definition of security in the international and in the domestic sphere is dependent, in the final analysis, on the capacity to deliver credible threats of force, to impose sanctions in order to make the recalcitrant come to order.
- The legitimating belief that whatever the weaknesses, failures and occasional criminal abuse of basic human rights incurred by the state's grand strategy, there is no other 'workable alternative' in the world-as-it-is.

It follows from this analysis that if we want to undermine this grand strategy it is imperative that we generate alternative approaches to enhance human security in relation to both spheres – international and domestic. In the remainder of this paper I want to explore the potentialities of one possible alternative approach towards the enhancement of human security in the domestic sphere – the introduction of a universal basic income.

¹⁵ The United Nations Development Programme's 1994 *Human Development Report* argued that ensuring freedom from fear and freedom from want for all people (human security) was the best way to tackle problems of global insecurity.

Universal basic income (UBI) – a proposal whose time has come?

In his book *Utopia for realists and how we can get there* Rutger Bregman presents a powerful argument for the introduction of a universal basic income – offering every citizen a regular payment sufficient to meet basic needs without means testing or requiring them to work for it.¹⁶ He is not alone in his advocacy of such an initiative, it has backers as disparate as Mark Zuckerberg and other Silicon Valley billionaires through to Green Party members. It is an idea I first encountered when I was teaching a course called ‘Social Alternatives’ in the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK. One of the works that influenced me in preparing the teaching programme was Ernst Schumacher’s *Small is beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered*. What struck me about Schumacher’s presentation of what was essentially a Gandhian economics as developed by J. Kumarappa was his conviction that at some stage in the future people would begin to adopt the practices advocated in the book, but not because they were swayed by the moral arguments. Rather, he believed that with the passage of time, resource depletion and other ‘costs of production’ would reveal the need for a transformation in modes of production and patterns of consumption (a focus on meeting basic needs rather than unlimited wants). It strikes me that a similar argument can be made about the theory and practice of UBI – it is an idea that was once confined to small circles of utopian thinkers,

but which is now being taken seriously by increasing numbers of people.

Before going on to explore the reasons why this idea is resonating with widening circles of people, it is relevant to cast a brief view over its ‘utopian antecedents’.

Brief historical overview of proposals relating to universal basic income

Some people trace the history of the idea of UBI as far back as the 16th century, citing Thomas More’s *Utopia* in which the traveller observes that the provision of a means of livelihood to all would reduce the incidence of theft and thereby promote social cohesion.

Petty larceny isn’t bad enough to deserve the death penalty ... And no penalty on earth will stop people from stealing, if it’s their only way of getting food... Instead of inflicting these horrible punishments, it would be far more to the point to provide everyone with some means of livelihood, so that nobody’s under the frightful necessity of becoming first a thief and then a corpse.

A century later, in 1649, the leader of the English Diggers, Gerrard Winstanley (1609 – 1676), gave voice to another theme that has informed advocates of UBI – the belief that we are all responsible for each other, a common humanity. For Winstanley ‘The earth was made to be a common treasury of relief for all, both beasts and men ... a common storehouse for all.’¹⁷

¹⁶ For a full and appreciative review of what he considers to be a ‘fascinating and inspirational book’, see Brian Martin’s blog, ‘Boldly promoting alternatives’, 7 January 2018. Accessible at <http://comments.bmartin.cc/tag/rutger-bregman/> (30.04.2018)

¹⁷ G. Winstanley, *The true Levellers standard advanced* (1649). Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y7v7b3xc> (14

December 2017). Like many revolutionaries of this period the Diggers were inspired in part by the example of the early Christians who, according to Acts 2:44-6: ‘And all that believed were together and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.’

Underpinning both these themes (the promotion of social cohesion and the pursuit of the common good) was the felt need to address poverty and social exclusion in societies riven by inequality. It was this concern that led Thomas Paine (1737-1809), writing towards the end of the eighteenth century to advocate his own variant of UBI –

... a National Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property: And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age.¹⁸

Around the time Paine was advocating a national fund as a source of payments to enable people to escape the worst consequences of poverty, the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772 – 1837) was developing his critique of capitalism. He thought a possible cure for its many evils might be realised through the establishment of small cooperative communities or associations of producers and consumers. The roots of poverty lay in the economic system, and in particular he condemned the waste and the dishonesty that was characteristic of economic life. He believed labour was the key to human happiness, but in civilization not only was work made repulsive but there was not even enough of it. Political freedom was meaningless so long as a person was reduced to working ‘under the penalty of dying of hunger’. Therefore, as part

of his ‘utopian planning’ and to remove the fear of want, Fourier proposed that everyone should be provided with the means to meet their basic needs - a social minimum.

The eradication of poverty through the provision of a basic social minimum was also seen as necessary for the sake of social solidarity within the communities. Although a trenchant critic of capitalist society, Fourier did not believe in class conflict as the motor of historical change. Within the communities that he dreamed of creating he anticipated both rich and poor living alongside each other. This raised the question of how, within these ‘imagined communities’, class antagonism might be muted and social harmony maintained? How might the poor be swayed into acceptance of the socio-economic inequalities they encountered every day? The answer lay in the social minimum, because Fourier was convinced that it was not so much inequality that aroused the anger and resentment of the poor, but their experience of poverty itself:

Inequality, so much maligned by the philosophers, is not displeasing to men. ... Only if he lacks what is necessary does he begin to detest his superiors and the customs of society.¹⁹

However, it is worth noting that Fourier anticipated one of the prime criticisms levelled at UBI schemes - he feared that if the social minimum was introduced for all, then people would not work given the repugnant nature of so much employment. Hence he included in the pre-requisites for his social minimum

¹⁸ T. Paine, *Agrarian justice* (1796). Accessible at <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Paine1795.pdf> (14 December 2017). Given the average rate of inflation in the UK of 2.2 per cent, £10.00 in 1790 would be worth over £14,00 in 2018.

¹⁹ Quoted in J. Beecher, *Charles Fourier: the visionary and his world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992, p. 248.

scheme the transformation of repugnant work.²⁰

Moving into the twentieth century we come across another utopian/libertarian socialist writing in France advocating a variant of UBI – Andre Gorz (1923 – 2007). Well-versed in Marxist philosophy Gorz began to question some of the basic axioms about the pivotal role of the working class as an agency for social transformation.²¹ In the eyes of Gorz the traditional working class was disappearing in the face of increasing automation and related technological development. Work as traditionally understood was becoming obsolete. This in itself, according to Gorz, was not a problem. The problem lay in the attempt to perpetuate the ideology of work (as more or less full-time employment) as the source of one's right to an income. As far as Gorz was concerned economic growth destroyed more jobs than it created; consequently he urged us to seize the opportunities presented by the heightened productivity made possible by technological development to enhance the quality of individual and social life rather than enduring a debilitating rate of increasing social inequality, exclusion and the consequent erosion of the public/common good.

In other words – as robots take over we can be freed from the need to sell our labour-time in order to survive. Instead we can benefit from a dramatic increase in our 'disposable time', an autonomous sphere within which we can pursue our own self-fulfilling activities. Gorz's vision was of a dualistic economy i) A sphere of 'unfree' labour to which people would commit

to contribute a certain number of hours over a time-period (maybe a life-time), and ii) a sphere of autonomous activity within which people could engage in self-directed, self-fulfilling activity at the individual, family or group level. To make this possible Gorz anticipated the wider provision of the kinds of facilities necessary for people to develop their creative capacities, such as resource centres, convivial tools, access to land and so forth.²²

He also recognised the need for a psychological revolution to accompany and make possible the wider social transformation of an economic system that is ecologically balanced, which would require us to limit our wants to those that could be fulfilled by the finite resources available. This would require a limitation on growth and a greater emphasis on self-reliance and sustainability. Like many others before and since Gorz, like Schumacher, was advocating a change in what might be termed the organising principle of life - from quantitative to qualitative. This would entail a devaluing of production for its own sake and the associated traits of consumerism and competitiveness, and a corresponding heightening of one's commitment to the values and the practice of cooperation, creativity and the limitation of wants.²³

Gorz's vision was certainly 'utopian' inasmuch as it portrayed a world and a way of life beyond the bounds of what many might think of as realistically possible, however attractive it might appear as an alternative to the mundane world we currently inhabit. But he devoted some of his intellectual and political energy to

²⁰ J. Cunliffe & G. Erreygers, 'The enigmatic legacy of Charles Fourier: Joseph Charlier and basic income', *History of Political Economy*, v.33, n. 3, Fall 2001, pp. 459-484, p. 465

²¹ Gorz's most well-known publications in English include *Farewell to the working class: An essay on post-industrial socialism*, London: Pluto, 1987, *Ecology as politics*, London: Pluto, 1987, and *Critique of economic reason*, London: Verso, 2011.

²² Gorz was influenced by the work of Ivan Illich – see his *Tools for conviviality*, London: Marion Boyers, 2001.

²³ This recognition of the need for a change in the organising principle of life, particularly in the spheres of production and consumption, is very reminiscent of the key principles of Gandhian economics, particularly as developed by J. C. Kumarappa (1892 – 1960), see M. Lindley, *J.C. Kumarappa: Mahatma Gandhi's Economist*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2008.

adumbrating issues around which people might campaign and mobilise in the here-and-now. These included:

- i. A politics of collective facilities – campaigning for the widest provision of community resource centres of all kinds.
- ii. A politics of voluntary cooperation and association – campaigning for the development of mutual aid services, particularly through setting up experimental projects in developing alternative modes of delivering services based on the principles of mutual aid and our common responsibility for the well-being of our neighbour.
- iii. A politics of time: campaigning for an ongoing reduction in the length of the working week.
- iv. A politics of ‘wages for life’ – campaigning for what we would now call UBI.

UBI – its contemporary relevance

In the UK, as in so many other countries dominated by neo-liberal economic and political dogma, we are experiencing mounting unemployment rates, social and economic insecurity and unprecedented levels of inequality. These are just some of the factors that have pushed the UBI proposal back up the political agenda.

Its proponents make a number of powerful claims about how offering every individual, a non-conditional flat-rate payment might help address some of the domestic challenges to human security that appear to be mounting at the present time.

Let us start to review such claims.

i) Enhance community cohesion/social solidarity:

Because everyone would receive the same basic flat-rate payment, regardless of personal circumstances, this would minimise the experience of exclusion and marginalisation by those subjected to the stigma of claiming means-tested benefits which is such a pervasive element of the benefits regime these days.

ii) Enhance personal freedom

To the extent that UBI can create a level of financial security that will enable people to have access to food, shelter, health-care and other fundamental human rights, it can help lay the basis for a significant degree of social security and the enhancement of personal freedom.

This idea that a basic income can increase freedom by enabling people to work less and devote themselves to more creative pursuits or unpaid work in the ‘core economy’ has a common-sense appeal, particularly when job insecurity is on the rise and people are increasingly questioning how to balance their work-life commitments. In particular it is argued that UBI could help transform the life of women. By ensuring that everyone enjoys a degree of financial independence, UBI would ensure no woman is ever dependent on her partner to meet her basic needs. And for those in abusive relationships, one of the barriers against leaving would be removed.²⁴

iii) Undermine barriers to work

One of the concerns that has led to an interest in UBI is the fear that existing systems of social security act as a disincentive to job-seeking, particularly amongst those who are only likely

²⁴ J. Flanigan, ‘The feminist case for a universal basic income’, *Slate*, 25 January 2018, Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y6utnw5q> (20 March 2018)

to obtain short-term, casual employment. It is argued that the steep rate at which benefits can be clawed back when claimants obtain paid employment, plus the possible exposure to a marginally higher income tax rate can leave people financially worse off in employment than when they are claiming benefits. For those whose realistic options in the employment market are for short-term and casual work, there is the added disincentive that each time they become unemployed they have to go through the administrative maze of reapplying for benefits, which can incur significant financial penalties.

iv) Simplify an increasingly complex welfare system

It has been estimated that a third of eligible people in the UK during the period 2009-10 were not claiming the means-tested benefits to which they were entitled.²⁵ One reason for this is that many people remain unaware of their entitlements to benefits, or are confused by eligibility criteria or put off by the stigma of being labelled a 'scrounger' that can be levelled against those seeking to claim benefits. As one report has observed,

Apart from the obvious financial savings that streamlining the benefit systems would generate, a single universal payment to all citizens would address a range of issues that currently plague welfare services across the world. These include abolishing complex administrative procedures associated with testing the eligibility of

claimants, as well as preventing the benefit trap. ... it is fair to conclude that means testing is simply not providing the economic security it was designed to deliver.²⁶

iv) UBI and the post-work future

Back in 1933 James V. Delahaye pronounced 'We are coming to the end of the work era and entering that of leisure. We must plan accordingly for an age ... in which the unconditional right to existence of the human being is effectively recognised, and in which justice, liberty, equality and fraternity can for the first time become realities instead of visions.'²⁷ He went on to advocate what the New Britain Movement of which he was a leading figure termed 'social dividend': 'As productive capacity grows, and as the necessity for human labour lessens, a decreasing proportion of money will need to be earned as wage and salary, and an increasing proportion will be issued as an unearned social dividend.'²⁸

The New Britain Movement was ahead of its time. Nowadays increasing numbers of observers, analysts and information-technology wizards believe that we are on the edge of an artificial intelligence revolution that could take us into a 'post-work' future. The great fear is that this future might be one within which social fragmentation and conflict escalate as the gap between a wealthy minority and the impoverished mass of unemployed becomes increasingly intolerable.²⁹

²⁵ D. Finn & J. Goodslip, *Take-up benefits and poverty: An evidence and policy review*, Inclusion/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/ya7z86frs> (20 March 2018)

²⁶ 'From basic income to social dividend: sharing the value of common resources', *Share the World's Resources*, 18 March 2015. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y6w72avv> (14 December 2017)

²⁷ J. V. Delahaye, *Principles and plans for a New Britain*, London: New Britain, 1933, p.10.

²⁸ Delahaye, p. 14. For an overview of the history of the New Britain Movement see A. Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinovic - A Biography*, York: William Sessions, 2006,

²⁹ The 2018 Princes Trust survey of the state of well-being amongst young people in the UK revealed that they were unhappier than ever before, belayed with

There does seem to be a consensus that within the not-too-distant future there will not be enough paid work to go around, and the work that will be available will not be sufficient to pay the household bills.³⁰ Moreover, as the journalist Gaby Hinsliff has commented on the lack of autonomy enjoyed by so many in employment, 'The debate about whether robots will soon be coming for everyone's jobs is real. But it shouldn't blind us to the risk right under our noses: not so much of people being automated out of jobs as automated while still in them'.³¹ James Livingstone has phrased it rather more pithily: 'Shitty jobs for everyone won't solve any social problems we now face.'³²

According to some researchers almost 50 percent of existing jobs in countries like the UK and the USA are at risk due to computerisation within the next two decades.³³ With so many jobs at risk it is clear that a strong and secure welfare system is vital. The time when people might anticipate a 'job for life' and a 'one-track career' are over. The future employment market will require a degree of flexibility that our current welfare system is ill-equipped to support. As the 2015 report from the Royal Society of Arts predicted:

Periods of retraining, entrepreneurship, lower hours and periods of unemployment could become more common. Indeed, a welfare system supportive of mobility across the life cycle will be critical. The

current system fails in this regard focused as it is on work at all costs when workers might need periods of lower or no work to retrain. They may also wish to experiment with setting up a business without having the state breathing down their necks as they are claiming Tax Credits.³⁴

What will our society look like if and when we have no secure means of 'earning a living', if leisure was no longer an optional spare-time pursuit? This is where UBI offers a way into an acceptable future – providing people with the means to live by redistributing income. The alternative scenario is one of gross impoverishment, mass structural unemployment and burgeoning social conflict.

Yes - but does it work? A brief overview of UBI programmes

Alaskan Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD)

In 1969 oil was discovered in Alaska. In 1982 the state began distributing some of the income from the oil royalties, with each resident receiving \$1,100. Since then the amount of this annual payment has fluctuated depending on the amount of royalties received, the financial situation of the state government and general economic conditions. Research carried out in 2017 has shown that most recipients use their payments productively: 72% of Alaskans report saving

worries about jobs, money and health. (*The Guardian*, 6 April 2018)

³⁰ 25 percent of employed U.S. citizens remain below the official poverty line. U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational employment statistics*, May 2015. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/yawqkzpk> (21 March 2018)

³¹ G. Hinsliff, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2018.

³² J. Livingstone, *Fuck work: What if jobs are not the solution but the problem*. Accessible at

<https://aeon.co/essays/what-if-jobs-are-not-the-solution-but-the-problem> (9 March 2018)

³³ C. Frey & M. Osborne, *The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?* 17 September 2013. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y9mcxlep> (14 March 2018).

³⁴ A. Painter & C. Thoung, *Creative citizen, creative state: the principled and pragmatic case for a Universal Basic Income*, London: RSA, 2015, p. 9.

their annual dividend payment for essentials, emergencies, paying off debt, or for future activities like retirement or education. 81% said that the PFDs helped improve their quality of life. Contrary to belief that cash transfers disincentivize work, just one percent of employed Alaskans polled stated their belief that the PFD resulted in them working less. Furthermore, the research found that the PFD had an outsized impact on the most economically vulnerable sections of the Alaskan population, leading some to raise the possibility that the Alaskan PDF might be a model of a US-wide basic income scheme.³⁵

Tribal profit-sharing in North Carolina

In 1995 a longitudinal study of the mental and emotional health of over a thousand children from poor backgrounds was launched in the Great Smokey Mountains region of North Carolina. A few years into the study the families of a quarter of the children being studied received a boost to their annual income. They were members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had built a new casino on reservation land and started distributing a share of the profits on a bi-annual basis to each member of the tribe. As a consequence, family incomes were boosted by about 20 percent on average, resulting in a reduction in the stress experienced by parents and spouses who had been struggling to make ends meet. More remarkable was the impact on the personalities of the children. Researchers found there was a significant decline in behavioural and emotional disorders amongst the children and improved relationships between the children and their

parents, with a reduction in parental alcohol consumption consequent upon the improved relationships between spouses who were experiencing a significant improvement in their financial circumstances. As one of the researchers commented:

We know that low income kids are worse off in a number of ways, in terms of cognitive abilities and behavioural disorders than their counterparts in much more affluent areas. Now we have a sense of what even just a little money can do to change these things, to change their lives.³⁶

'Something new and utopian' – Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada (1974-79)

Between 1974 and 1979 a guaranteed income was provided to one thousand poor families in the Canadian town of Dauphin. The project's original intent was to evaluate if providing the poor with enough funds to top up their income to a living wage would reduce their motivation to work. It did not. Only two groups appeared to be discouraged from seeking employment – new mothers and teenage youths who used the funding to continue their schooling, resulting in a higher proportion of students graduating from high school. Subsequent research has also indicated that the scheme had a significant impact on the health and well-being of the target group, with a reduction in hospitalisation, especially of mental health cases.³⁷ Called the Mincome Experiment (a neologism for minimum income), it was terminated when there was a change in government in Ottawa. However, in recent years the provincial government of Ontario has attempted to replicate the Mincome

³⁵ T. J. Isenberg, 'What a new survey from Alaska can teach us about public support for basic income', *Economic Security Project*, 28 June 2017. Accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y9qlm8g9> (22 March 2018)

³⁶ Quoted in R.A. Ferdman, 'The remarkable thing that happened to poor kids when you give their parents a little money', *Washington Post*, 8 October 2015.

Accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y9rnahgh> (22 March 2018)

³⁷ E. L. Forget, 'The town with no poverty: The health effects of a Canadian guaranteed annual income field experiment', *Canadian Public Policy* 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 283–305.

Experiment with a three-year scheme being run in three regions.³⁸

European initiatives

In recent years there has been something of a surge in the number of basic income trials and pilot projects sponsored by governments and private research groups. In January 2017 the Finnish government launched a two-year experiment to study the impact of basic income on unemployed citizens. In the Netherlands four cities have been running a two-year trial driven by the desire to make social assistance delivery simpler and less conditional. Barcelona has also been experimenting with alternative ways to address poverty and social exclusions, including the provision of cash income supplements.

In Scotland four municipalities are exploring the feasibility of basic income projects, working in association with the Royal Society of Arts and with financial backing from the Scottish government. The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, explained why she supported the initiative:

...it might turn out not to be feasible. But as work and employment changes as rapidly as it is doing, I think it is really important that we are prepared to be open-minded about the different ways that we can support individuals to participate fully in the new economy.³⁹

³⁸ Z. Lum, 'A Canadian city once eliminated poverty and nearly everyone forgot about it', *HuffPost Canada*, 3 January 2017. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/y78gms6x> (24 March 2018\0

³⁹ Quoted in L. Brooks, 'Scotland united in curiosity as councils trial universal basic income', *The Guardian*, 25 December 2017.

Cash transfers in the Global South

In October 2016 GiveDirectly, a U.S. charity that specialises in cash transfers, launched a pilot in Kenya for what might well become the largest basic income trial in history. Unconditional cash transfers will be provided to the residents of 120 villages, comprising more than 16,000 people in total, with some receiving payments for up to 12 years. The cost of the experiment will amount to \$30 million, most of which has been raised from private donors.⁴⁰

At least 45 countries in the Global South now give cash transfers to more than 110 million families.⁴¹ Researchers are discovering that it is better to give money directly to poor people so that they can create their own pathways out of poverty. According to the authors of one of the most authoritative studies of this approach:

Cash transfers work. They provide the essential boost to lift people out of the poverty trap – they supply the boots that enable people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. All the evidence is that people spend grant money wisely and that grants do not encourage people to be lazy or workshy. ... Giving people money is proving to be the best way to stimulate local economic development in low-income countries. Cash transfers are not social programs that can wait until after development; instead they are an essential precursor to growth and a driver of development.⁴²

⁴⁰ K. McFarland, 'Overview of current basic income related experiments', *BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network)*, October 2017. Accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/ybz196qs> (18 November 2017)

⁴¹ J. Hanlon et al, *Just give money to the poor: The development revolution from the Global South*, Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2013, p. 47.

⁴² Hanlon et al, pp. 173-74.

A single example will suffice to show the transformative impact such initiatives can have. In Madhya Pradesh state in southern India between 2011 and 2013 nearly six thousand people received payments for more than a year. Investment in housing increased, nutrition improved and school attendance and performance rose. Other changes were noted:

The Basic Income grants led to small-scale investments – more and better seeds, sewing machines, establishment of little shops, repairs to equipment, and so on. This was associated with more production, and thus higher incomes. The grants led to more labour and work. Women gained more than men. Debt declined.⁴³

But how feasible and do-able is this utopian idea?

There have been three main concerns voiced by people sceptical about the feasibility and the desirability of UBI: i) It would undermine the work ethic and encourage idleness; ii) It would cost too much; iii) It could undermine social solidarity and reciprocity.

i) Subsiding laziness!

This argument points out that people benefitting from a basic income scheme would be guaranteed enough money to live on, without any obligation to seek employment or contribute to the rest of society by volunteering in socially valuable roles. They could spend their time lazing about, taking drugs – the archetypal scroungers and

layabouts. Moreover, if people did drop out of the labour market in significant numbers would it not ruin the economy – and how could we afford the scheme if people were still receiving government payments with no strings attached, eroding the tax base on which such a scheme would depend?

Unfortunately for the proponents of this critique, the available evidence does not support their thesis. Iona Marinescu, a University of Chicago economist, conducted a review of North American unconditional cash transfer programmes. Her conclusion was ‘Our fear that people will quit their jobs *en masse* if provided with cash for free is false and misguided.’⁴⁴ In a similar research exercise Eric Hanushek found some labour force decline, but the bulk of this seemed to be due to longer periods of unemployment as people used their money to fund longer searches for more attractive employment opportunities. He also found a slight reduction in youth employment but concluded that this drop was ‘almost perfectly offset by increased school attendance’.⁴⁵ In the case of Canada’s Dauphin experiment, there was some evidence that once again some people dropped out of the labour market, but researchers found that ‘participants that left the labor force typically cited limited employment opportunities, engagement in care work, disability, old-age and illness related leaves, or educational investment’.⁴⁶

The evidence would seem to reinforce common-sense experience that dropping out of the work-force entirely is just not very appealing to most people. And even when

⁴³ Painter & Thong, p. 40.

⁴⁴ I. Marinescu, ‘No Strings Attached: The Behavioral Effects of U.S. Unconditional Cash Transfer Programs’, Roosevelt Institute, 11 May 2017. Accessible at <http://bit.ly/2pB1RfD> (25.03.18)

⁴⁵ E. Hanushek, ‘Non-labor-supply responses to the income maintenance experiments’, in A. Munnell (ed.)

Lessons from the Income Maintenance Experiments, Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and the Brookings Institution, 1987, pp. pp. 106-121.

⁴⁶ D. Calnitsky & J. Latner, ‘Basic income in a small town: Understanding the elusive effects on work’, *Social Problems*, v. 64, n. 3, 1 August 2017, pp. 373–397.

people can enjoy some sort of basic guaranteed income, they work anyway.

ii) The cost critique – we can't afford it!

In the UK one of the most carefully argued proposals for UBI, by Anthony Painter and Chris Thoungh estimated that their scheme would incur a shortfall of between £9.8bn and £16.4bn. Putting this in context they wrote:

This sounds like a significant extra cost but it is in the range of the discretionary tax decisions taken in the last five years - and, indeed, over the course of the last generation. In GDP terms, this change is likely to be in the region of 1 percent of GDP. Far more significant changes have been made to our system of tax and benefits in recent times.⁴⁷

They went on to point out that in the midst of a period of prolonged austerity the Government found scope for significant tax cuts totalling £19.5 bn.

Other proponents have acknowledged that a basic income scheme would require significantly greater funding than is currently devoted to welfare benefits, but campaigners argue that there are a variety of ways in which the necessary public funds might be raised:

... such as implementing higher taxes on extreme wealth and very high incomes, closing tax havens, ending corporate tax avoidance or implementing a financial transaction tax. Alternatively, governments could

divert a percentage of their colossal military budgets or withdraw a proportion of the vast subsidies currently paid to agribusiness and the fossil fuel industry. Similarly, new levies on environmental 'bads', such as pollution or waste disposal, could help raise revenues while providing a disincentive to ecologically destructive activities.⁴⁸

In the USA researchers have modelled a negative income tax scheme large enough to wipe out poverty. They costed it at \$219bn a year – a significantly large sum but in fact roughly equivalent to the combined cost of existing programmes to support the poor such as food-stamps, school meal programmes, housing subsidies, earned income tax credit and supplementary security. They concluded that funding a guaranteed income to eliminate poverty in the US was 'doable'.⁴⁹ More recently a paper prepared by Scottish government civil servants advised that the provision of a basic income for all Scotland's citizens would require an additional £12.3 billion a year in public expenditure – the arguments continue and are likely to do so for some considerable time.⁵⁰

iii) UBI would undermine social cohesion and reciprocity

There are a number of threads to this critique of UBI, all of them centring on the consequences of introducing such a scheme as part of a neo-liberal agenda of privatising public services and cutting public expenditure on social welfare provision. In a report

⁴⁷ A. Painter & C. Thoungh, *Creative citizen, creative state: the principled and pragmatic case for a Universal Basic Income*, London: RSA (Royal Society of Arts), 2015, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁸ 'From basic income to social dividend: sharing the value of common resources', *Share the World's Resources*, 18 March 2015

⁴⁹ J. Wiederspan, E. Rhodes, & H. L. Shaefer, 'Expanding the discourse on antipoverty policy : reconsidering a negative income tax', *Journal of poverty : innovations on social, political & economic inequalities*, v. 19, .2015, 2, pp. 218-238.

⁵⁰ T. Peterkin, 'Nicola Sturgeon's Universal Income is costed at £12.3bn' *The Scotsman*, 18 October 2017. Accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/ybg478xl> (4 April 2018)

published by the New Economics Foundation, the authors make the point that investing in a basic income scheme to provide funding on an individual basis would result in diverting funds from public goods such as education and health care. Continuing their analysis of how a basic income scheme might undermine social solidarity and the practice of mutual aid, they point out:

It is an individualised measure, not a collective one, focusing resources on providing everyone with an income at all times rather than on pooled risk-sharing mechanisms which provide help for everyone when they need it. This may reduce people's capacity to act together, by encouraging them to provide for themselves with their income rather than promoting social solidarity, collectively funded services, and shared solutions.

The authors conclude that 'the weaknesses of the citizen's income idea considerably outweigh its strengths'.⁵¹

There can be no doubting the risks that would be involved in the introduction of a basic income scheme at a time when welfare services are under assault. As the author or another report has warned:

Introducing the scheme during a period when welfare services are being dismantled by economic austerity could mean that individuals would be left to pay for essential services ... Although this approach might appeal to those who favour freedom and personal choice, the individualistic nature of a citizen's

income is also the reason why many free marketeers favour the measure as an alternative to state funded social services. For these reasons, it is prudent to be wary of any attempt to implement the scheme within a political context characterised by laissez-faire capitalism.⁵²

In addition to the fears outlined, the scepticism with which proposals regarding UBI have been met by people on the left of the political spectrum has also reflected the fear that such schemes would undermine the role of trade unions as guardians of the collective interest of working people. After all, if a person has a guarantee of a basic income they always have the option of walking away from jobs without needing to turn to the union to support them in the struggle for improved working conditions and remuneration. As one of the leading advocates of basic income in Scotland observed, 'Reactions to basic income have not split along the usual left/right party lines. Some people to the left of the Labour party think that it undermines the role of trade unions and others take the opposite view. But there should be room for scepticism; you need that to get the right policy.'⁵³

The criticisms reviewed briefly in this section should caution us against believing that the introduction of a universal basic income scheme would solve at a stroke all the ills and threats to everyday security that continue to affect so many of us. It is inconceivable that the introduction of such a sweeping change in how we address the ongoing challenges to our well-being will not have some negative impacts and downsides.

⁵¹ *People, planet, power: Towards a new social settlement*, London: New Economics Foundation, 2015, p. 44.

⁵² *From basic income to social dividend*.

⁵³ Quoted by L. Brooks, 'Scotland united in curiosity as councils trial universal basic income', *The Guardian*, 25 December 2017.

Concluding comments

In *The structure of scientific revolutions* Thomas Kuhn presented an episodic model of scientific development, a process whereby the periods of conceptual continuity that characterised ‘normal science’ were disrupted by periods of ‘revolutionary science’ when the recognition of anomalies within existing bodies of accepted knowledge led to new paradigms, characterised by new questions being asked and new maps created to direct research.⁵⁴ It seems to me there are grounds for believing that we are in the early phases of such a revolution in how to respond to existing and emerging threats to human security. UBI does represent a new way of addressing the challenges faced by increasing numbers of our fellow citizens who feel threatened by a post-work future in which employment opportunities are drastically reduced whilst public services such as the welfare and health systems are increasingly under assault, at a time when the inequality gap between rich and poor has been increasing.

I am not claiming that UBI is *the* answer to our ills. But it does seem clear that the established systems and structures intended to provide an adequate level of social and human security necessary to ensure a sustainable level of social cohesion are no longer fit-for-purpose. We need new paradigms, new approaches – and UBI represents one such innovative scheme that is worthy of our consideration.

The value of utopian thinking and practice has always been how it can act as a prophetic guide towards desirable futures, and UBI points to one possible facet of our emerging future. It provides one possible way in which we can embody and put into practice at the level of everyday life the same values that inform the RS critique of establishment approaches to national security – the recognition of our common humanity and our responsibility to care for one another.

Furthermore, if such a paradigm shift can be achieved at the level of human security, then undoubtedly it will have a significant impact on the frameworks through which people consider national security. For this to happen it is important that domestic welfare policies and paradigms are clearly and firmly framed within the wider context of the state’s grand strategy – that aspect concerned with ensuring the degree of domestic social cohesion necessary for the state to continue to pursue its understanding of the national interest in the international sphere. When the linkage between the two core dimensions of the grand strategy is grasped, then the radical revision of the ‘domestic sphere’ based on the core values of mutual aid and cooperative endeavour can serve to strengthen corresponding initiatives to bring about a similar value-driven transformation in the state’s external posturing on the global stage.

⁵⁴ T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.