

BASIC INCOME STUDIES
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EDITORIAL

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Launching a Basic Income Journal

The Editors

We are pleased to announce the launch of *Basic Income Studies* (BIS), the first academic journal specializing in unconditional basic income and cognate policy proposals. BIS provides a forum for the discussion of theoretical issues and empirical research on the design and implementation of basic income schemes, and aims to address broader questions regarding the future direction of universal welfare policy.

The publication of this inaugural issue marks the start of an exciting new venture and, we hope, will contribute significantly to research in what is often described as one of the most radical proposals in contemporary social policy. In this editorial we briefly chart the background to the BIS project and outline what readers can expect in this and next issues.

1. Basic Income Studies: A Timely Venture

The launch of BIS in 2006 is a timely venture, a natural extension of the exponential increase in basic income research by philosophers and social scientists over the past two decades. But the date also has considerable symbolic significance. Whilst basic income is an idea with a long pedigree in the history of economic and political thought, its recovery in recent times appears to be closely linked to two events – both of which took place precisely 20 years ago.¹

¹ For a good discussion of the historical context of basic income and cognate proposals see Cunliffe and Erreygers (2004), reviewed in this issue.

In 1986 *Theory and Society* published a special issue devoted to Robert van der Veen and Philippe Van Parijs proposal for a basic income.² Their article, “A Capitalist Road to Communism”, published with a set of comments by Johannes Berger, Joseph Carens, Jon Elster, Alec Nove, Adam Przeworski and Erik Olin Wright, caused considerable controversy amongst those researching the future of the welfare state. However, while only a few commentators were sympathetic to the idea at the time – and many even downright hostile to anything remotely resembling universal welfare – van der Veen and Van Parijs’s article brought the idea of an unconditional basic income in clear view of the broader academic community. Over the next two decades, the debate on basic income sparked a wealth of scholarly research, culminating in numerous articles as well as a growing number of monographs, edited collections and special issues of academic journals.³

The year 1986 also marked the first meeting of the Basic Income European Network (BIEN), a group of basic income enthusiasts which, by the start of the 21st Century, has evolved into a world-wide association.⁴ BIEN now forms an overarching network encompassing activists and academic scholars in Europe, the United States, Australia and, increasingly, in Latin-America and Africa. BIEN maintains strong ties with numerous associated networks at regional or national level in a sustained effort to put basic income firmly on the policy agenda. Through the dissemination of a regular newsletter and the organisation of a bi-annual congress, BIEN has been instrumental in boosting scholarly activity. In addition, activist interest in basic income as a core strategy for combating poverty, unemployment and social exclusion has grown exponentially.

Networks, newsletters and regular conferences notwithstanding, not all of the good research on basic income captures the interest of the wider academic community. This is in large part because the bulk of basic income research is still disseminated in a very patchy manner across a wide variety of journals and books. Much of this research remains inaccessible to those with an

² See van der Veen and Van Parijs (1986), reprinted in this issue.

³ Numerous monographs on basic income, or where basic income takes a prominent place, have been published in recent years. An important early reference work gathering essays on basic income is Van Parijs (1992), with many more volumes published in recent years (Groot and van der Veen, 2000; Cohen, Rogers and Van Parijs, 2001; Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003; Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005; Standing, 2005; and Ackerman, Alstott and Van Parijs, 2005). Special issues on basic income have appeared in *Theory and Society*, *Analyse & Kritik*, *Politics and Society* and the *Journal of Socio-Economics*. Many more books, edited collections and journal issues have been published in Spanish, French, German and so on.

⁴ In 2004, the Basic Income *European* Network transformed itself into the Basic Income *Earth* Network to accommodate the increased importance of basic income in countries such as Namibia, South-Africa, Brazil and Argentina and growing calls for a genuinely global basic income movement. For more information about BIEN and its associated networks, visit <http://www.basicincome.org>.

interdisciplinary interest in basic income and as such often fails to attract a critical mass of academic attention. BIS aims to remedy this situation by offering a central forum for the scholarly discussion of basic income and other universal welfare schemes. At the same time, BIS is committed to ensuring that such discussion satisfies both the requirements of quality and excellence in research while remaining accessible to the wider basic income community. BIS research articles will be written in a non-technical style, while the book reviews and debate sections are deliberately intended to facilitate communication and debate with the broader policy community.

BIS began at the initiative of Red Renta Basica (RRB), the Spanish basic income network.⁵ After hosting the 2004 BIEN Congress in Barcelona, RRB decided to put in motion an idea that had matured for some time within the network: to launch a journal that would broadcast the basic income proposal and would enhance its debate both within and outside academia. It is fair to say that, without the continuing support and enthusiasm of RRB, BIS would still be a proposal rather than a reality. The BIS editorial team would like to express their gratitude for this support. In addition, we would also like to acknowledge the support received by BIEN and the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network (USBIG), as well as many individual members of the basic income movement.

2. What Basic Income Studies Has to Offer

BIS will appear twice a year, publishing peer-reviewed research articles, book reviews, as well as short accessible commentaries (organised into a debate section) discussing a central aspect of basic income and related schemes.

Each BIS issue will publish peer-reviewed research articles discussing the empirical or normative analysis of basic income. BIS may also include articles on related policies such as citizens' pensions, stakeholder and sabbatical grants, negative income tax or earned income tax credits, and various job guarantee policies. Articles that discuss the state of modern welfare regimes or aspects of social security or employment regulation in more general terms will be considered, provided there are clear implications for basic income research. Although BIS places considerable emphasis on rigorous conceptual development or thorough empirical analysis, all articles must be written in clear, non-technical language to ensure that they are accessible to non-specialists. BIS encourages publication both by established scholars and by researchers at the beginning of their careers.

⁵ More information about RRB can be obtained from <http://www.redrentabasica.org>.

Each BIS issue will also publish a special debate section with a number of short comments by scholars or policy-makers. These comments cover a specific topic of special interest to the basic income debate, such as basic income in the developing world, a global basic income, basic income and gender, basic income and political efficiency, etc. Each BIS debate section will be guest-edited by a recognized scholar in the field, ensuring the quality and accessibility of each contribution as well as the balance between different “voices” in this particular debate. In the debate section, we want to stimulate controversy and dispute, opening up new themes or expanding existing ones into previously uncharted territory. The debate section should be of specific interest to non-academic readers as it offers accessible targeted snapshots rather than the more elaborate arguments of the research articles.

Finally, in each issue BIS aims to publish several book reviews, which aim to contribute to the basic income debate by providing informative, engaging assessments of scholarly work. In line with the inclusive philosophy of BIS, these too will be written with a diverse audience in mind. At the same time, they aim to provide the level of analytical insight required to appraise the strengths and limitations of the different proposals – which, we believe, is of invaluable service to the advancement of the debate.

3. Content of This Issue

As mentioned above, this issue reprints van der Veen and Van Parijs’s seminal article, “A Capitalist Road to Communism”, as the lead article of a retrospective with a new set of comments by Jerry Cohen, Andrew Williams, Doris Schroeder, Catriona McKinnon, Harry Dahms and Erik Olin Wright. These comments, most of which were specially written for BIS⁶, examine the original case made by van der Veen and Van Parijs twenty years ago against the backdrop of research carried out on basic income since 1986. In their reply to the critics, Robert van der Veen and Philippe Van Parijs also take this opportunity to reconsider the impact of their original piece, in light both of these comments and of their own work on basic income since the publication of “A Capitalist Road to Communism” two decades ago.

⁶ The exceptions are Jerry Cohen’s comment, written around the time of the original publication and published here for the first time, and Erik Olin Wright’s piece, initially delivered as a plenary at the Fourth USBIG Congress in New York and subsequently redrafted for present purposes. We are grateful to both authors for allowing BIS to include their comments in this retrospective.

In addition to the retrospective, this issue of BIS publishes three original research articles. In their aptly entitled piece, “The Failure of Workfare: Another Reason for a Basic Income Guarantee”, Joel Handler and Amanda Sheely Babcock take issue with recent moves towards introducing a more active welfare state. Taking a closer look at the administrative failures of workfare regimes in both Europe and the United States to deliver on their promises, they find ample reasons to favour unconditional basic income schemes over the host of conditional measures that form the hallmark of workfare in the United States and welfare-to-work in the United Kingdom.

The second article, “Basic Income and Migration Policy”, by Michael Howard, scrutinizes the extent to which introducing a basic income in a single country might introduce a pernicious moral dilemma: instituting a basic income in a single country only appears feasible when combined with the strict regulation of economic migration. This would suggest that basic income advocates can only endorse one form of inclusive social policy by introducing exclusion elsewhere. Howard’s careful and detailed examination of this dilemma and the interaction of welfare policy and migration policy more generally, tackles one of the nagging worries of basic income advocates on the Left.

In the third article, “Why Trade Unions Oppose Basic Income”, Yannick Vanderborght examines the ambivalent relation between basic income advocates and trade unions. Vanderborght’s article discusses the theoretical arguments that might lead trade unions either to favour or to oppose basic income schemes, followed by a brief illustration of the reception of basic income by trade unions in Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands. Vanderborght’s exploration of the politics of basic income suggests another insidious dilemma facing its advocates: while basic income appears acceptable when trade unions have little power or influence on economic policy, trade unions seem altogether rather eager to drop it once they gain prominence.

Finally, the Books Review section includes four pieces that reflect the diverse areas of basic income research today, from the historical evolution of the proposal to the more contemporary debate on how a basic income can deal with a number of new, unprecedented challenges.

The editors sincerely hope that the current issue will meet with the readers’ approval and will live up to the expectations it has created in the past year. We want to thank again the many people who have made its production possible.

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