

The 14th Kilbrandon Lecture (University of Strathclyde, 23 November 2016): 'Every man, every woman, every child should have a basic income as a right'

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The Kilbrandon Lecture

On page 1 of my book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, published in 2011, it was stated that unless the insecurities and needs and aspirations of the precariat were addressed as a matter of urgency, a political monster would emerge. Following the election of Donald Trump in November, a number of readers have written to say the monster has arrived.

Unfortunately for us, he is not going to be the only political monster. We have the prospect of Marine Le Pen. We have disgusting people running Turkey and Hungary, and we have our own types in the wings, waiting to take over. We are on red. Not amber. We are on red.

And the story, of course, trickles down to children, because children are ultimately the worst-off victims of the economic and social policies these types support. And the young precariat is not far behind. On their behalf, we should be angry. That is the first point I want to make this evening. The insecurities and deprivations they are experiencing are totally unnecessary.

The second point is to recall some contextual background. Those who have heard me before, when I have come to Scotland, will not be surprised to hear it again. I apologise for that.

The starting point for understand contemporary events is that we are in the midst of – and at the darkest point of – a Global Transformation, the painful construction of a global market system. The first dis-embedded phase – the term 'dis-embedded' signifying that the economy is out of control by society -- has been dominated by financial capital and by the neoliberal ideology of competitiveness, individualism and commodification.

Neo-liberals have a very atomistic view, believing we are and should be individuals competing endlessly. To achieve an economy of competing individuals, they have pursued a systematic dismantling of all institutions and mechanisms of social solidarity. That has been in the foreground of their agenda. They have achieved much of that, at the social cost of leaving more and more people exposed to vulnerability, exposed to insecurity.

An underlying theme of my new book, which has just come out, and which is called 'The Corruption of Capitalism', is that actually we have moved beyond the period of neoliberalism to a period of what I call *rentier capitalism*, where the rentiers - the owners of properties and holders of property rights - are extracting more and more income from the rest of us. In doing so they are hurting the precariat most hard, in new and more intensive ways.

What we have today is a system that gives most of the rewards of economic growth to property owners - including intellectual property owners and those who are systematically taking 'the commons'. It is a central theme of the book, which I will be talking about tomorrow in a seminar for students and staff at the University of Strathclyde.

In particular, I want to stress the commons, which are so vital for children, so vital for the precariat. We live in the commons. We need the commons - the parks, the land, the spaces, the social amenities, the libraries - all of those are so vital for a good life. And they are being taken away and privatised and commercialized. That may not affect children directly. But it does in the longer term. Plundering the commons tends to dissolve society.

The claim I will just pose rhetorically, and come back to it later if I have time, is that rentier income is morally and economically unjustifiable. John Maynard Keynes in 1936 predicted 'the euthanasia of the rentier' during the course of the twentieth century. He thought that as capital became more widespread, that would chip away at the capacity of capitalists to take rental income. He did not foresee the ability of powerful elites and finance, Goldman Sachs and the others, to create an institutional and regulatory structure that would empower rentiers to take even more from us.

That rental income is actually a potential resource for paying out a basic income.

That leads to a derivative question that I want to leave in the air: If a basic income were shown to be affordable, from using the rent and building capital funds, as I described in the final chapter of '*The Corruption of Capitalism*', would you support a basic income? It is a rhetorical question. Because often people dress the opposition to a basic income on the grounds that is unaffordable. Right?

The claim in the book is that it is affordable.

For the moment, I want to put that on the background, and for the sake of most of you who have never heard me talk on the subject, give a little background on the precariat. What has been happening - and I am not going to go into the

reasons why - is that a new class structure has been taking shape around the world superimposed on old class structures.

At the pinnacle in income terms, there is a *plutocracy*. Mostly we know their names. We wish we didn't. Many of them are ugly individuals, with their billions and billions, up in the stratosphere. One of them has just become US President. Others are funding right-wing organisations and political campaigns, including Brexit

Below the plutocracy in the emerging class structure is an *elite*, making their multi-millions mainly from rentier income, usually on top of very fat salaries and fancy pensions to come. Underneath them - a long way below - is the *salariat*. Some in this room will be part of the salariat, with employment security, good pensions to look forward to, lots of paid holiday, and things like that. But that group is shrinking numerically. And they are worried about their children - their teenage children in particular - who are likely to be entering something further down the class spectrum, and not rising out of it.

Below the salariat is the old *proletariat*, which long nurtured Labour parties and Social Democratic parties and so on. That is shrinking fast, and its agenda - so long taken almost for granted - has lost force. The twentieth century was the century of the proletariat. The twenty-first is not.

Underneath the salariat, proficians and proletariat is the precariat. And under the precariat is a lumpen - an underclass - out in the streets, dying prematurely.

Understanding this emerging class structure is essential if we are to devise a new progressive social policy. At the moment, we are struggling to see it clearly, due in large part to the simple fact that most politicians are failing to listen to the voice and concerns of the precariat.

To illustrate the current impasse, consider the platitudes about the 'squeezed middle'. It invites comparison with the 'squeezed bottom'. Don't they count? In the same vein, one acronym that has just gained popularity is one that makes my blood boil - JAMs. Please tell me I'm not alone in thinking it's pathetic. It means 'Just About Managing' families, no doubt 'hard-working'. What about the people who are not just about managing? Are they 'Not-JAMs'? What a stupid way of conducting public debate on social policy.

By contrast, the precariat means something specific. It is still a class-in-the-making, because it consists of millions of people who are being habituated to accept a life of unstable labour and unstable living, without an occupational narrative to give to their lives. When young, it is normal to want to be something, and then become something, and then in retirement, speak to one's grandchildren and say, 'I was something.'

If you are in the precariat today, you don't have the prospect or opportunity to apply that narrative to your life. That is far more important than being in unstable, casual jobs. We could all put up with that. In fact, there is a virtue in not being stuck in the same boring, full-time job for years and years and years. Who thought that was nirvana? Crazy. But you cannot easily accept a life of

unstable labour if you are not going anywhere, if you feel you are not developing yourself. That is the more critical issue.

In addition, the precariat - the young precariat, in particular - face a life in which they have to do a hell of a lot of work that is not labour, work that is not recognised, not rewarded, that is not captured in our statistics, nor in our political rhetoric. But if you don't do that work, you pay a heavy price. It is another critical part of being in the precariat.

In addition, the precariat has to rely mostly on money wages. Those in it do not have access to paid holidays, occupational pensions, paid holidays, more paid holidays, lovely retreats in manors where they have stewed coffee in the morning and whisky in the afternoon. They do not have the prospect of any of those benefits. They must rely on money wages. And those money wages are falling in real value and have been stagnant for 30 years in the United States, in Britain, in France, in Germany, and in many other countries. You can document that. Those wages are also becoming more volatile and unpredictable.

So, if you are relying on money wages and if you do not obtain the security-providing forms of income, it means you are facing more and more insecurity, more and more uncertainty - unknown unknowns - for which you cannot insure. This means that people in the precariat are always living on the edge of unsustainable debt.

Debt is not an incidental aspect of modern life. Financial capital - and the book cites a number of top financiers as admitting it - wants us all to be permanently in debt. All the public rhetoric about reducing debt and balancing books - it's a lie. They want debt, because debt is a mechanism for extracting money and making profits. I will talk about how they do it tomorrow in the seminar at the University of Strathclyde.

Anyhow, in addition, most of those in the precariat find they have a level of education that is above the level of labour they can expect to obtain. So, in effect, they lose, or never attain, the economic right to practise what they have qualified to do. It is very frustrating as a way of living. It is the first time in history that this has happened.

As an aside, we face another crisis. I am not going to speak about it here, but it is a crisis associated with the commodification of education. More and more people who are in the precariat have gone through an education system that is close to being a fraud. In the United States, when I give lectures, and ask people afterwards - students - about their own history, many will say, 'I don't need to know about that. Why do I need to know about that? It doesn't help me get a job.' The result is that many emerge from their schooling years without deep knowledge of civics, knowledge of philosophy, knowledge of their culture. So, when they hear a man telling a lie after a lie, they have only weak intellectual defence. They are inclined to shrug, and say, 'No problem. No problem. It is what he means really, you know.'

You can dumb down people, but you pay a price. Society pays a price. This aspect of the precariat is very important.

But let us return to the main narrative. For a Scot, or for anybody in Europe, there is another aspect, which is that if you are in the precariat you are being pushed into a means-tested social assistance system, in which you have to prove to some bureaucracy that you are a deserving poor person in order to obtain state benefits. You must demonstrate to a bureaucracy that you are obsequious and humble and obedient, and do what you meant to do.

Now, if anybody here doesn't know this phenomenon, shame on you! But I am sure you do know it. It is the daily humiliation being experienced by vast numbers of our fellow citizens. Besides the stigma and shame, the means-testing means that people in the precariat face enormous poverty traps. The politicians have allowed that to happen, many knowingly. They are charlatans - excuse me, I should not talk like this with a vice-chancellor present - I should be more erudite and academic, especially at the Kilbrandon Lecture. But those people who don't understand the poverty trap that the precariat experience should not be legislators.

Let us reflect on current reality. Today, in the Autumn Statement, the government announced that it would lower the 'taper rate', the rate at which claimants for means-tested benefits will lose their benefits, by 2p¹.

That magnificent cut means, in their vocabulary, that Universal Credit will be withdrawn more slowly. For someone in the precariat, it means you will face a marginal tax rate of 65% rather than 67% as you start to earn more money. Actually, in reality, that marginal tax rate today is over 80%. In plain English, what that means is that you face a marginal tax rate, if you are in the precariat, which is three times as much as higher-income groups are facing. What sort of system of equity and justice is that?

It is the reality. There is no incentive for someone on low benefits to go into short-term low-wage jobs, because they would gain only 20p in the pound. But it is even worse than that, because you also face what I call precarity traps. If you lose your short-term job tomorrow morning, do you think you get benefits the morning after? You are joking.

Many people - and many write to me about their stories from all over the place - have to wait months. They have to queue, they have to fill in forms, they have to do this, they have to satisfy that. They must not argue; they must not show frustration or anger; they must put up with it. And then, sooner or later, they make a mistake. They were five minutes late, and they are 'sanctioned'. We didn't need Ken Loach's film² to tell us that, but it is great that it has been made. Every politician should be required to see it. It is the reality.

So, you have a situation where people wait, then eventually start receiving benefits. And then along comes another bureaucrat saying, 'You have got to take

¹ This is a reference to the budget statement by the UK Chancellor in November 2017, in which it was announced that the rate at which benefits for low earners (Universal Credit) is withdrawn would be cut.

² 'I, Daniel Blake'.

a short-term job the other side of Glasgow paying the living wage - perhaps - but it may only last three weeks.'

Think about it. Taking the job means accepting a marginal tax rate of 80%. Tell me, which young person would be sensible to take that job? Perhaps three weeks later, they will be back at the end of the queue waiting to ask for benefits again. They will end up with a lower income than if they had stayed on the low benefits. That would not be their fault.

So, what happens is that people in the precariat are reduced to being supplicants. This is the essence of the precariat. It is the most important aspect of it. A supplicant is somebody who has to beg. And this leads to the origin of the precariat concept. In Latin, precariat means to obtain things by prayer. You have to plead. You can do that secularly, asking for charity or favours, or you can do it religiously, and hope your particular god can help. The key point is that you do not have rights. That is the reality for the precariat.

That is the background, for proposing an alternative. What I have been arguing for, for 30 years, is that we should move to a system where every individual - every man, every woman, every child - should have a basic income, as a right. It should be regarded as a human right, a citizenship right, a legal resident right. Call it what you like.

I will give a definition, but it can be defined in several ways. The idea of a basic income is that everybody should receive a modest basic amount, paid regularly. It could be from a capital fund that I was talking about earlier, it depends on how you want to do it. It should be paid in cash. It should be universal, so everybody should receive it as a right. It should be unconditional, in behavioural terms. The only condition is that you should obey the law, obey the law of the land. And it should be individual. So that every woman receives it, every man receives it, and every child receives it through the mother or surrogate mother, probably as a lower amount. That is the definition.

I have always believed that a basic income is justified most fundamentally on grounds of social justice. And I go back to Thomas Paine, and I would like to read you his wonderful statement in 'Agrarian Justice' of 1795. He wrote it in the winter, a very hard winter for him - he was participating in the French Revolution and the American Revolution - and wrote this wonderful text:

'It is a position not to be controverted, that the earth in its natural, uncultivated state, was and ever would have continued to be, the common property of the human race. It is the value of the improvement only, and not the earth itself, that is an individual property. Every proprietor, therefore, of cultivated lands owes to the community a ground rent, for I know of no better term to express the idea, for the land which he holds. And it is from this ground rent that the fund proposed in this plan is to issue.'

He went on to argue, effectively, for a basic income. And he went on to say why it should be universal and not just for the poor. Very advanced thinking for his time. But today, you could extend the Painian rationalisation to all forms of property, justifying a sharing of the rent. And for me, the principal justification

for a basic income is precisely that it is a matter of social justice. To strengthen that, I draw on a principle that I have slightly modified from John Rawls's Theory of Justice. I call it the 'Security Difference Principle'. It goes like this: 'A social policy is socially just only if it improves the security of the most insecure groups in society.'

I challenge social policy thinkers, particularly the old social democratic variety, to tell me of any scheme that meets the security difference principle better than a basic income. Means-testing certainly does not. Means-tested social assistance schemes have low take-up, they stigmatize, many of the most-impooverished people don't get it, don't receive the benefits. It imposes costs on the most insecure people in our society. It doesn't match up. Nor do others that have been tried. So, in terms of social justice, a basic income is a powerful policy.

The second justification for a basic income is that it would enhance freedom. There are two types of freedom that it would enhance.

First is the liberal approach to freedom. In that regard, every social policy should enhance freedom, or be regarded as suspect. I would say this to the Scottish Government considering social policy reforms they are contemplating now, and I wish them success: You could lead the debate.

The second principle is what I call the 'paternalism test' principle, which is as follows: 'Every social policy should be judged as socially just only if it does not impose some controls on some groups that are not imposed on the most free groups in society'. The paternalism test principle is abused every single day with the current welfare system. Every single day controls are placed on the most insecure people in our society, controls that most of us in this room would not tolerate. And we would feel indignity if we had to face those.

The third principle is the 'Rights-not-Charity Principle': 'Any social policy, to be socially just, should advance the rights of the recipient and reduce the discretionary power of the bureaucracy.'

A basic income would pass all three social justice tests with pride. The ways successive governments have gone in welfare reform do not.

Justice and freedom. At this point, I would like to read you a lovely liberal principle, as enunciated by T.H. Green in 1879. It is subtle, but any welfare reformer, considering children and teenagers and young people in particular, should reflect on it.

'The real function of government being to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible. And morality consisting in a disinterested performance of self-imposed duties. Paternalism...paternalistic government does its best to make it impossible, by narrowing the room for the self-imposition of duties and for the play of disinterested motives.'

In other words, you cannot be moral if governments are telling you what to do all the time. You can only be moral if you are a free person. Only then can you be responsible for your own decisions, your own actions, your own opinions. If

government, even if it is most benign, is constantly telling young people how to behave and how not to behave, they cannot escape being infantilised. It is an important liberal principle.

But I believe we should go beyond that, in promoting republican freedom as well. Republican freedom goes further than liberal freedom, in the sense that you can only be free if you are free from the unaccountable domination by others. That does not mean the others are bad or good. It means, to be free, I can make crucial decisions without having to worry what they tell me or may tell me. This is republican freedom. The great Greek philosophers understood the difference between that and liberal freedom. Aristotle, in particular, taught us about republican freedom. Hannah Arendt took it further. It is extremely important in understanding what a basic income is all about. Basic income is paid individually. So, for a woman, it empowers her. For a disabled person, it empowers, whereas means-tested and behaviour-tested benefits do not.

I have tried to take this perspective forward in a number of papers, which stemmed from the Indian pilots. During those, I kept wondering: Why are the effects greater than the money seems to promise? Why are we seeing so many improvements that are worth more than the money that they are receiving in the basic income?

The answer is that the emancipatory value of a basic income is greater than the money value. It gives people a sense of assurance, of security, and a greater ability to make individual decisions, based on particular needs and priorities that the individual decides.

I want to give two examples. The first comes from a basic income pilot done in Namibia, where every man, every woman, every child in a rural area received the basic income. Towards the end of the period in which they had been receiving the basic income, I went to one of the villages and called some of the young women, teenagers, across. I asked them, 'What's been the best thing for you about having the basic income?' They giggled, they didn't want to answer, they were shy, understandably. Then one of them plucked up courage, and said, 'You know, before, at the end of the month, when the men came down from the fields with their wages in their pockets, we had to say, "Yes." Today, when they come down, we say, "No."'

That's emancipation.

The second example comes from one a pilot we did in Indian villages. When we went to one of these villages at the beginning of the pilot, all the young women were wearing veils. They had to have their pictures taken, because phot-ID cards were needed to entitle them to their basic income. They would not take their veils off. So, we had to arrange for the photos to be taken in a little hut. Thus, they obtained their cards.

About seven months later, I went back to that particular village, where they were collecting data. I said to one of my Indian colleagues, 'Have you noticed a change?' He said he did not see any. I said, 'Look at the women - none of them are wearing veils!' So we called some of the women across. Again, there was

nervousness, no-one wanting to speak. Then they chatted, and one of the women said, 'Look, before we had the basic income, we had to do what the elders told us to do. Now we have our own income, our own bit of money, we do what we want to do.'

It's rather important. That's emancipation.

If you think about about means-testing and behaviour-testing, you quickly realise that in our existing system the emancipatory value of any benefit that you receive is less than the money value. With a basic income, it is the other way round. The emancipatory value is greater than the money value. I could give you numerous examples. Better, I'll leave it to your imagination.

One last relevant point. I have long argued this, and we did it with our Indian pilots, there are two meta-securities, two meta-needs for freedom. One is basic income security, and the other is voice – agency. That means we need to have access to organisations to represent us, collectively and individually. In the Indian pilots, we divided the sample into four where everybody received the basic income and where there was a collective body representing people in operation, and four where they had a basic income but where no such body was operating. In some respects, the combination made a positive additional benefit, although in all communities the overall effects were very positive.

A third justification for basic income, particularly in our societies today, is that it would reduce poverty more effectively than any existing program out there. Not only would it reduce poverty, it would reduce economic insecurity. It would do that better than existing schemes, because it would be universal, because it would be transparent. Everybody would know what everybody else is receiving as a basic income. If I am not getting it, then someone else could speak for me if I cannot speak for myself. The key point is that you would not be a supplicant.

More important than addressing poverty as such - income poverty - is that a basic income, being a permanent guaranteed payment, would give you security, basic security. Not total security - we're not talking about a huge amount, we are talking about, in extremis, being able to survive. But the key is that you *know* it is coming. That security is extremely important for what I call the 'precaritised mind'.

The precaritised mind is a mental state that anybody in the precariat understands. You are so insecure and so worried about making the wrong decision or misusing your time, that you lose control of your time. That intensifies stress. You will not be surprised that psychologists have found that insecurity lowers your IQ. If you are experiencing chronic insecurity, your IQ suffers, at least while you are experiencing the insecurity.

Nice fancy terms have been used in the growing literature on all this. But the essence is easy to understand. Insecurity shrinks your 'mental bandwidth'. It is a reality. People who are under stress and insecurity are less likely to make rational decisions. They concentrate on the present. They concentrate on just getting through the day, or whatever it might be. And the psychological

insecurities play through into dysfunctional behaviour and dysfunctional development and, of course, play through to their children.

We know these things. They make sense. Yet why has nobody seemed to be listening? Why is nobody saying, 'We must introduce systems that give people basic security?' Why is security given so little value? Maybe it is because social policy has been in the hands of toffs who have had silver spoons from birth, have had pocket money and inherited wealth, all without means-testing or demands that they do this and that in order to obtain those 'hand-outs'. Perhaps they cannot understand the simple need for basic security.

In that context, there was a Canadian basic income pilot done some years ago, and there were some ambivalent findings. Some neoclassical economists became upset because they found that some teenagers reduced their labour supply after they started receiving a basic income. Then further research showed that the reason they were reducing their labour supply was that they were spending more time in school. What a terrible outcome! And they were graduating with better standards, and more of them were going to university! Are you surprised? Of course not.

There was another wonderful 'accidental pilot' among a group of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina. It is a fascinating, unique study.³ What happened was that a group of scholars decided to do a longitudinal study of child development over a 20-year period. They were looking at all the standard things that sociologists like to look at. Then, by chance, a casino was operating in part of the area where the Cherokees were living. Purely coincidentally, the Cherokee elders decided that all the profits from the casino would be distributed equally as a basic income to all the men, women and children of their community. So, while the child-development study was going along, a basic income was being paid out to these Cherokee Indians and their families. The combination of the two developments produced very interesting results.

Bear in mind that the same questions were asked over 20 years. What happened was that in terms of the children's development, those who were in families receiving the basic income had higher levels of conscientiousness. This was a dramatic finding. They were more conscientious about what they did, and they were more agreeable inside their families, with friends, and so on. But all this fed into something even more dramatic. After about 10 years, those children were roughly, on average, about one year ahead in school of those who had not received the basic income. Other benefits must have helped. Their parents were drinking less alcohol. On average, stress in relationships was less among those that had been receiving the basic income. The lesson I took from that wonderful study is that improving the income security of parents is one of the most effective ways of improving child development. None of you will be surprised by that. But the fact that it emerged in a longitudinal empirical study gives it more weight.

³ The design and results are summarised in a book published shortly after the Kilbrandon Lecture. G.Standing, *Basic Income... and how we can make it happen*. Pelican, Penguin, 2017.

As already mentioned, we have done basic income pilots in Namibia and India. There is a book that resulted from the Indian pilots. But the main findings can be summarised quickly. We gave 6,000 people a basic income, and compared what happened to them to what happened to 6,000 similar people in similar communities who were not given the basic income. The first thing that happened was the nutrition of the children improved. This was contrary to what Sonia Gandhi had told us. She said, 'They will all waste it on alcohol and tobacco.' Instead, not surprisingly, they spent it mainly on improving the nutrition of their children and their living standards.

In one of several ways, this emerged through changes in the WHO's z-index, which is a measure of weight-for-age. It should be distributed as a normal distribution. But in Indian villages, it is skewed to the left, implying that a high proportion of the children are malnourished. And indeed in those villages, at the beginning of the pilots they were all off to the left, and not surprisingly the girls' distribution was even more skewed to the left. In other words, the girls suffered from worse malnutrition than the boys.

We organized weighing and measuring every six months. By the end of the year, something dramatic had happened. When I saw the results, I said to my Indian friends, 'Mozart is playing in my ears.' This became a joke among us. Not only had the distribution of z-score for the children gone towards being a normal distribution of weight-for-age, but something wonderful had happened. The situation had improved more for the girls than for the boys. It improved for both, but it had improved more for the girls.

That finding, we believe, was due partly to the fact that the mothers had their own basic income, the children had their individual income, and the priorities started to change within the families. They all had their basic income.

Not only did nutrition improve, but sanitation improved - toilets, things like that. And schooling improved. The children were not only attending school more often, but were performing better in schools. The reasons were basic but very diversified. They could afford shoes, and afford transport, and afford to have a breakfast in the morning. Indian children are no different from Scottish children or any other children. And, wonderfully, again, the girls' school performance and girls' attendance improved more than for the boys. They had further to improve, if you like. But, these were dramatic changes. And health and healthcare improved, so generally welfare improvements were great.

Next, the equity effects of the basic income were also encouraging, because it was the most vulnerable, the most downcast - the lower castes, the disabled - who benefited more than the others. The picture on the front of our book is of a disabled woman.⁴ When I first saw her, she could not even afford a sari. But by the end of the pilot - you see her resplendent on the front cover - she had her own sewing machine, her own sari, and she was the seamstress of the village.

⁴ S.Davala, R.Jhabvala, S.Meyta and G.Standing, *Basic Income – A Transformative Policy for India*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

The equity effects fed through to the children of the most disadvantaged. But we also saw economic outcomes. Contrary to the prejudices of people, when you have basic security you work more, not less. And when you work you are more productive, not less. And you also, as we have shown and as other experiments have shown, if you have basic security, you are more tolerant of others. You are more altruistic, and you value your community more. These are equity effects. But we also saw economic output go up in all basic income communities.

The final findings were those to do with emancipation. Besides the case mentioned earlier, the basic income was correlated with a reduction with debt bondage, indebtedness, and all that went with it.

The objections to a basic income - which I've discussed at length in the second of the 'Precariat' books⁵ - can be refuted forcefully, and surely convincingly. It is not true to say that if people have basic income security they will stop working. It is the current system has disincentives to people working in the legal economy. They construct artificially huge disincentives, and introduce moral and immoral hazards in doing so.

Similarly, it is not true to say it's unaffordable. And when people say, 'Why should we give something for nothing?', they should look at the aristocrats with their estates and their inherited properties, and the giving of something for nothing to the affluent of all our societies. Huge something for nothings. And many receive hefty subsidies from the state to bolster their already huge wealth.

To help meet the costs of moving towards a basic income system, I propose that there should be a bonfire of subsidies, and a Commission for the Eradication of Subsidies. I don't know who we would like to be chair, but perhaps we should ask the Vice-Chancellor⁶ - maybe he would be interested in taking that as a secondary job. It would be a wonderful job. Because if you look at it, there are huge amounts of subsidies that are handed out, they are regressive, distortionary and take a lot of money out of the economy.

Similarly, there is no reason to suppose a basic income would lower wages. It would give people power to say 'no' when faced by exploitation. And it would be emancipatory for women, because its value - even if you pay the same amount - is worth more for a woman, and because it would be paid individually, women could escape abusive relationships more easily.

In short, it has good properties in the sense that it responds to the insecurities and the maldistribution of income, which is a primary crisis of our time.

And why I think so many people are suddenly interested is that it is becoming a political imperative. Even the corporate elite are worried. They are worried that the world economy is at a critical juncture, when monsters like Trump are suddenly taken seriously, and are even elected President. That sort of thing is not in their script. They want a nice, stable, global economy. But they know that

⁵ A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens (2014).

⁶ A reference to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde, who was present and introduced the lecture.

they have over-reached, and that the inequality and insecurity have become unsustainable - socially, economically and ecologically. In that context, we now have the potential of mobilising a coalition for a new progressive politics, in which a new income distribution system is feasible. We have a chance.

It is only a silver lining, but it's up to us to be energised and to oppose what is happening. And we can only oppose a paradigm if we have a new paradigm to put in its place will stop Thomas Kuhn taught us that. Fortunately, a new paradigm is taking shape. There are basic income pilots in various countries. There are new groups emerging, new political groups, young people forming precariat movements, with new energies. The old politics is giving way to the progressive part of the precariat, with a new set of ideas. Us oldies should be saying, 'Go ahead. You must lead us.'

Thank you very much.

Commentary

The lecture was followed by commentaries delivered by two students which we also publish.

Kieran O'Neill

Can I just really take this opportunity to say thank you, Professor Standing. That was enlightening. It was absolutely exemplary. I wish I could have the entire Youth Parliament here to hear it, but they're probably outdoing something a bit more lively and youthful!

Just to introduce myself. My name is Kieran. I'm the elected member of the Scottish Youth Parliament for the Glasgow, Maryhill and Springburn constituency. And I also sit on the Executive Committee of the Glasgow Youth Council, with responsibility for policy and public affairs. So I get to all this fun stuff. I was asked to come along this evening to provide a youth perspective of the notion of a basic income and the needs of young people, but more specifically to provide a very Glasgow-specific perspective. And that is by no means easy, so I hope that if I slip up you can all forgive me.

That constituency I represent, the constituency I am very proud to represent, because it's the community I grew up in, is in the bottom decile of every ranking of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, and has been since records began. Now, that is not something that should be accepted or expected, but for some reason it is. Now, no-one should be happy for that, and especially the fact that it is repeated over and over in communities across Glasgow. The best set in Scotland, obviously. And many people, many organisations, many people who have made very well-intentioned attempts and actions to try and remedy this situation, and none have succeeded.

Now, the notion of a basic income – a universal basic income, a citizen income, call it what you will – was completely alien to me and all of my colleagues until a few months ago. Because it seemed absolutely mad. The idea that we could somehow afford to give everyone a block grant of money just seemed completely unfeasible, even though someone who is a bit of a left-winger like myself would gladly welcome such a policy.

Many had serious concerns. That was until, of course, my colleague, Thomas McEachan MSYP, who represents Glasgow Pollock and is a student at this university, proposed a motion at our national sitting of the Youth Parliament, which was held in July of this year. And the motion read, 'The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that universal basic income, otherwise known as a citizen's income, should be introduced to ensure that all citizens, no matter their circumstances, can live with dignity and economic security'.

Now, my first reaction to this was, 'Oh God, no'. And that's not because I don't support the motion. I completely support it. But we all knew that it would have very little hope of passing. And I understand that the common sort of misconception is that a Youth Parliament is a sort of left-wing cabal of young people who are revolutionaries and care not for fiscal implications – we simply want to do something, we do it now. If only.

We are anything but. The Scottish Youth Parliament has a bit of a history for being very representative of the sort of broad political flavour. We are lucky in Scotland – there is representation from all sides of the field, and it is a very, very tough crowd.

So, when Thomas came to me and said, 'Oh, Kieran, by the way, I'm proposing a motion about universal basic income', I said – I made a noise, I can't really describe what it was – and we knew it would be close, and when the debate eventually took place, our assumptions were absolutely proven. There were a number of very well-intentioned pleas saying that we need this, that Scotland needs this. And there were also a very large number of objections raising that, 'Why should we get this? This demotivates people to go out and work, to make a living. It's welfare state, it's nanny state'.

And sadly the motion failed: where 41% of Youth Parliamentarians agreed with it, 39% disagreed with it, and 20% abstained from the vote. And while we had the majority, our rules set out you have to get more than 50% support of the Youth Parliament, so the motion sadly failed. And that was incredibly disappointing, because a lot of work went into ensuring that proposal passed. There were a number of very well-orchestrated, helpful interventions that did absolutely nothing to change the result. But that is how democracy works, and you are totally entitled to have issue with that, given the result in America.

Now, I believe the motion failed, not because of opposition to the notion of a universal basic income, but what we in the Glasgow group now are calling 'blissful ignorance'. Not in any way malicious, not in any way negative. Simply a lack of understanding and experience of the sort of environment and the people who need this, who need the basic income to be implemented in Scotland.

Now, that wasn't the case in Glasgow, not for myself or any of my colleagues. And the Glasgow Youth Council, of which I am also a member, met the following week, debated the exact same motion. The only difference, instead of 100 MSYPs from communities across Scotland, from Shetland to Dumfries, we had 50 youth councils from across Glasgow. And the motion was supported with 86% of the vote.

We concluded that a basic income for everyone should not be a radical demand for change. It shouldn't be this fantasist delusion of this sort of claim. It should be what it says on the tin: a basic fact. It's an absolute and assured minimum by which each individual should receive, to ensure that they can live with the absolute, most basic quality of life. Now, that isn't radical; that's simply what's right.

For as long as there are children in Glasgow whose only meal – sometimes their only hot meal – is a school lunch; For as long as there are parents who are in full-time employment and have to go to food banks to feed their children; For as long as there are young people who cannot reach their full potential through education, because they cannot afford to; For as long as society keeps on refusing to help those who need it the most, the basic income is not a fantasy – it is an absolute necessity. And it should not take a film to remind people of that.

Now, the Scottish Government now, of course, have the power to do something. They are in the process of designing their own completely unique and ethical social security system, something we in the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Glasgow Youth Council fully support. And the governing party of the SNP themselves, in our opinion, now have a political obligation to explore the potential of this basic income. As you may know, a motion was passed at the March conference unanimously supporting further research into it. Of course, at this stage, it is only a promise of more research, but it's much more of a start and we can't really urge anything more than they commit to that.

And if I could urge anyone to do anything, it would be to advocate that the Scottish Government are bold and govern in the interests of the people who elected them. And I completely support Professor Standing's commitment to a broad coalition in favour of supporting this. If this isn't something that myself as a young person can't support, then I think we should all just pack up and give up, and just let President Trump – I don't know – build a wall around us!

The question of this lecture is addressing the needs of children and young people in Scotland. And I think I can say with absolutely no uncertainty that for a very long time, and certainly for as long as I've been alive, no administration of any colour, whether it is based in London...whether it is based in London or Edinburgh, has been doing this effectively. We need to be bold, and we need to change the way things are. We need to ensure that things simply do not stay the way they currently are. We need to do something. And we need a basic income. Thank you.

Gary Paterson

If I could just first of all say, it's a real honour to be asked to speak at this event as well. I am someone who went through the care system myself. The focus of Lord Kilbrandon's work for the Children's Panel has had a real great impact on my life.

But my care experience and my wider access experience is very much compounded by social economic challenges. So for me, this topic, I think, was very interesting – something that I'm keen to delve into a lot deeper. We are now seeing more visible warning signs – signs that we've seen, for those of us on the left, for probably many years before I was born, anyway. Growing up, I witnessed the economic challenges of my parents' lives and my own life which have given me focus to improve the lives of people from my background, And indeed we can see that this is not just a working class issue, but also warning signs are showing we have to address inequality if, not only workers, but the rest of society which to maintain everything that we hold dear in society. And one of those solutions can be the idea of a basic income which has perhaps been seen in the past as a kind of rather radical proposal.

I did actually write some notes beforehand, and I was actually encouraged to hear about your experiences with the elite at the Bilderberg. But I think it is actually encouraging that they are looking at perhaps alternatives that are not part of their normal framework. Because the fact of the matter is, these scenarios like Trump, Brexit, Le Pen, what's happening in places like Turkey – these are movements that have actually people from backgrounds similar to myself, but don't see politicians and society listening to their concerns. They're not hearing about the problems that they are living with.

And really, not just for people that are on the left politically and academically support this idea, what we really and genuinely need to see is people beyond the left and centre and the in right, actually, start to see that things we hold dear are at risk if we don't address this issues of inequality. If you hold dear those international institutions, if you hold dear the political system that you have at the moment, if we don't look at alternatives such as this to start to challenge the status quo of the economic winners and losers' system, it won't just be us that

suffer as people on the left, or even just working class people like myself, it will be everyone. We are all tied into this together, so we really do need to see a response, across society, to the challenges that we are facing, politically and economically.

So I just wanted to say that from my particular aspect it was very encouraging to hear from Mr Standing, and I'm sure there are a lot of people today will have some food for thought, going away. So, that's pretty much my point. I just wanted to thank you very much for a very good lecture. Thanks.

Guy Standing

Guy Standing is a Professorial Research Associate at the [School of Oriental and African Studies](#) (SOAS), University of London, and a founder member and honorary co-president of the [Basic Income Earth Network](#) (BIEN), a non-governmental organisation that promotes a basic income for all. He has held professorial appointments at the Universities of London, Bath and Monash, as well as senior posts with the International Labour Organisation. He is the author of many books, journal articles and reports. www.guystanding.com

Kieran O'Neill

Kieran O'Neill is an elected member of the Scottish Youth Parliaments for Glasgow, Maryhill and Springburn and also sits on the Glasgow City Council's Youth Engagement Policy Commission which will be reporting to the Council in 2017 with a number of recommendations to improve the lives of young people in Glasgow.

Gary Paterson

Gary is a student of international relations at the University of Strathclyde. Gary is a 'care-experienced' young person involved in campaigns, in politics, focused on improving, widening access, welfare and support, and closing barriers to opportunities. He is a former president of the Strathclyde Students' Association and was previously a member of the executive of the National Union of Students – Scotland.

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