

THE NEW UNIVERSALISM--BEYOND THE WELFARE STATE: REFLECTIONS ON AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

by Maurice Bisheff, TPF Board Member



“Impartiality forms the foundation of the egalitarian imperative which affirms the solidarity of humanity.” ----Shri Raghavan Iyer. Thomas Paine, in his essay *Agrarian Justice*, suggested a variety of welfare and progressive taxation proposals. These include cash grants, not means-tested, to those reaching early adulthood and retirement. Many--including both Martin Luther King, Jr., and the conservative economist Milton Friedman--have since made **basic income** proposals. The philosophy of **universal basic income** has supported a variety of concrete economic proposals which have converged into a political movement.

Jenny Bisheff, also a TPF Board member, and I attended a 2018 conference in Tampere, Finland on “The New Universalism: Beyond the Welfare State for the 21st Century”. Tampere is the second largest city in Finland. It was the 18th such conference sponsored by the **Basic Income Earth Network** (www.bien.org). At the time of conference planning, Finland was embarking on a national experiment in one province on implementing a basic income. By the time of the conference, a political change had occurred, and the experiment in progress was prematurely canceled without any formal evaluation. Nonetheless, the conference in Tampere attracted over 300 participants from all over the world (including China, South Korea, and Taiwan). The participants were a mix of academics and activists.

A pre-conference day was devoted to the Nordic nations famous for their highly developed welfare state. Would the new universalism move them beyond traditional categorical, means-tested benefits?

Two themes emerged:

- Economic globalization and technological change were seen as the impetus for the practical need for a basic income beyond demeaning and sometimes irrelevant means-tested welfare for certain categories of people. With traditional jobs uncertain, there is a precarious employment system for citizens and recent immigrants. In an era of “disruption” and shifting “skill-sets”, a precariat work force can easily be denied subsistence and suffer the indignity of unemployment. Further, many modes of constructive, unpaid work, such as child care or communal work, remain unpaid. Thus, there is a need for support individual choice in phases of one’s life for lifelong learning, and for creative, non-market social collaboration.
- It is the liberal, Social Democratic political parties and labor unions which oppose basic income as much as various conservative groups. Liberal groups tend to want to hold on to existing corporate job structures and/or fear job mobility could lessen corporate control. In addition, they fear many workers would simply free load and become lazy (though a minimal income hardly makes a middle class life style).

When the conference began, there was a whole variety of workshop sessions including two levels: one was on the multi-valent, multi-dimensional impact of a basic income on the family, the changing structure of social institutions, and economic

initiatives; a second focused on a number of small-scale experiments around the world in direct cash grants.

- A whole host of experiments in basic income is occurring all over the world on modest scales. Contrary to opponents who claim human nature will not support realistically a basic income provision, an internet survey of the results of BI experiments in the past twenty five years showed that in 95% of the cases there was no decrease in tendencies to work, concluding, so far, there are no major patterns of “laziness” developed if one received a cash grant.
- Cities and smaller scale jurisdictions all over the world are experimenting with cash grants. Stockton, California is using a blend of public grants and private funds for a limited experiment of a select group of recipients receiving \$500 per month for over a year. Presenters at Tampere shared a staff report for elected officials of the District of Columbia that demonstrated the feasibility for a limited cash grant program to supplement and not interfere with regular social welfare benefits.
- The basic income was not viewed as a social panacea. For some speakers, it must be paired with democratically based National and Local Charters establishing a commons (non-government, non-private ownership provisions) in a variety of ecological, energy, and environmental domains which could include taxes for support. In addition, a single land tax which does not fuel real estate speculation and the inordinate development of a rentier society (Henry George) was also viewed as important for a more “just” society.
- Currently, Sikkim, a state in India, primarily Buddhist, is considering a guaranteed annual income, and farmers in a province in south India are weighing a cash grant.
- Andrew Yang, a current USA presidential candidate, has a campaign that centers around what he calls “UBI” (Universal Basic Income for all). In the context of explaining the philosophy on his website, he evokes the name of a certain “Founding Father”:

The idea of guaranteeing every citizen an income from the government is an old one, first recorded during the Renaissance. In America, it was picked up by founding father Thomas Paine, who referred to the payments as a “natural inheritance.” If you are interested in reading about his ideas on UBI, a full rundown can be found here: <https://www.yang2020.com/what-is-ubi/>.

Continued on page 7, *Universal Basic Income*

ACTIVISTS FOR THOMAS PAINE

Add your name to the Thomas Paine Friends network and news exchange.

- [] YES, I will join Thomas Paine Friends, Inc. Annual dues, \$10. Member benefit is *BULLETIN of Thomas Paine Friends*.
- [] YES, I will work on THOMAS PAINE DAY in my state.
- [] YES, I want to work on a project of Thomas Paine Friends. Please contact me.
- [] YES, I want to participate in and suggest activities related to public recognition of Thomas Paine.
- [] YES, I want my Paine organization / group / project listed in the *BULLETIN*.
- [] YES, I have news of Paine activities to post in the *BULLETIN*; or a short article (about 1,000 words) for the *BULLETIN*.
- [] YES, I want to receive the *BULLETIN* ~ suggested donation of \$10, to cover costs of four issues per year.

NAME.....

MAILING ADDRESS (No., Street, Apt.).....

CITY/TOWN, STATE, ZIPCODE.....

TELEPHONE..... FAX.....

EMAIL..... WEBSITE.....

To pay dues or make a donation, make your check or money order to Thomas Paine Friends, Inc., and mail to

Thomas Paine Friends, Inc.
185 Middle Street
Amherst MA 01002-3011

To Know Paine, Read Him ~ Florence Stapleton, Thomas Paine Chronicler

NEWS! LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS IN TPF

The Board of Directors approved a Lifetime Membership to any donor or dues-payer of \$100. Some members have taken advantage of the offer, and we encourage others to do the same.

... From page 3, *Universal Basic Income*

In conclusion, at an evening Conference dinner, I asked a non-academic, young Irish woman why she came to the Conference, she casually answered "Equality." Basic income has become a vibrant movement. It was enjoyable to be with a truly global group with universal aspirations. It was also pleasing to know that most of the participants knew that Thomas Paine, a luminous forerunner of global citizenship and universal rights, embodied the spirit of

the current egalitarian impulse of universal basic income for each and all.

See, also, *Basic Income, A Guide for the Open-Minded*, by Guy Standing, 2017, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, at: <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300230840/basic-income>

Maurice Bisheff, past-president of TPF, was the initiator and chief organizer of the 2014 Tour, :In the Footsteps of Thomas Paine." He is a longtime member of the Institute of World Culture.

FROM: www.leftforum.org

Faced with ongoing economic and political crises, recent spikes in reactionary movements, and the prospects that we /have reached a point of no return with respect to ecological destruction and life on this planet; one may wonder, "what is left to be done?"

[W]hat types of progressive and radical responses and possibilities can be proposed? What can we learn from past and current struggles and traditions moving forward?

With these questions in mind, this year's Left Forum seeks strong and creative workshops and proposals which understand the myriad challenges we face and the urgent task at hand. We welcome and encourage submissions [for panels] from a broad array of struggles and perspectives which can assist in radically imagining and building different presents and futures.

Left Forum convenes the largest annual conference of a broad spectrum of left and progressive intellectuals,



activists, academics, organizations and the interested public. The conference is held each year in New York City.

tags: safety, solidarity, sanctuary

As of end of April, the keynote speakers, the plenary sessions and the panels are not published at the website. Go to the website from time to time for updates.

<https://www.leftforum.org>

Date and Time, EDT

Fri, Jun 28, 2019, 4:00 PM -

Sat, June 29, Sun, Jun 30, 2019, 8:00 AM -

Long Island University Brooklyn Campus

1 University Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tickets: From \$30 to \$170, see categories, and \$0 for high school students. Low early bird prices (\$30 to \$70) apply until May 12.