

on Citizen's Income in Canada

Not many people in Canada have heard of 'citizen's income'. The other names that the same general concept is known under ring few bells, either; basic income, mincome, guaranteed annual income.

The definition is always on the lines of; 'an adequate income payable to each individual as a right of citizenship and without conditions'. Some people, especially older ones, will blink a light bulb and say "oh, you mean a negative income tax!" No.

A wage supplement is now being talked about in political circles in Canada. Only people who are working would get it. It amounts to a subsidy for cheap labour employers so they can get even cheaper labour. It cannot help the working poor and of course it would be another big kick in the teeth for welfarists.

We now have a child benefit payment that could be expanded into a citizen's income but the provinces have to be prevented from 'clawbacking' it, as some do the child benefit.

elsewhere

Other countries are now implementing demogrant schemes, but the payments are small or focussed on specific population groups. Several countries much poorer than Canada have something much like our child benefit and are attempting to expand it into a citizen's income.

In the American state of Alaska, with huge natural resource revenues, the Alaska permanent fund has been in operation for awhile. These revenues go into a

fund, and every long term resident of Alaska gets a dividend from the interest, as a right of being an Alaskan and an owner of these resources. It is not large enough for anyone to survive on.

The governments of several European Union countries are studying a basic income plan. Ireland seems to be furthest along with it. There are well organised movements for basic incomes in places like South Africa and the United States.

ways of implementing

By the way, a demogrant is defined as “a lump-sum transfer based on demographic characteristics, such as sex or age, and is paid to an individual irrespective of her/his income or wealth”. Everyone gets it. Everyone is taxed on all income above the demogrant.

This is different from a ‘negative income tax’ (NIT) in which everyone receives a refund if their income falls below a set level. The NIT is too complicated to administer. Most people already have enough trouble doing their tax returns once a year. People with low incomes need it in regular instalments at least every month, not yearly or even quarterly.

arguments

The reasons for a guaranteed income plan should be intuitive. Society is stratified into those who own and those who work; it always has been. This is enormously destructive to human well being and to the natural environment, it retards all forms of progress, and it makes a true democracy impossible.

There cannot be a democracy unless all the people are on a reasonably equal standing and everybody has the free time to participate if they choose. Nobody should be forced to take orders from other people in order to live.

Production should be to meet real human needs, not status driven competition. People will only accept limits on consumption if everyone is assured a minimum standard of living that allows full participation in society.

All arguments against a basic income are disguised hatred for humanity. The most obvious example is the idea that people will sit around and drink beer and watch television unless something forces them to 'work'. If some people want to spend their lives that way, that is their right. Most people will not.

Next; there is not enough money to fund a basic income plan. But right now there is enough money in Canada to give an average income of over \$40 000 a year, however unjustly distributed. There will still be the same productive capacity and the same amount of money in circulation the day after a basic income is implemented. It will be distributed more justly.

Finally; the pseudo-philosophic 'free rider' argument. 'A' should not have to work twice as hard so that 'B' can 'lay around'. But nobody asked 'A' to work twice as hard.

Here is the real argument against basic income plans; they will create a democratic social revolution which will dissolve the present social arrangements and those who benefit from it. These people will not give up their positions of privilege without a very hard fight.

supressed history

The first weapon of these elites against change they do not want is silence. This is why, despite the idea of a guaranteed income or basic income having been around for a long time, most people have never heard of it.

In the eighteenth century Thomas Paine, the apostle of the American revolution, proposed a basic income for every citizen. Such figures as Bertrand Russell and Martin Luther King have advocated it. There were successful experiments with guaranteed income schemes in Canada and the United States during the nineteen sixties and seventies.

In Canada it was called the 'mincome' experiment. The people of Dauphin, Manitoba were selected as the guinea pigs. Three groups were given three different types of guaranteed income plans, and a control group got nothing. Even in the most generous of the income plans, almost everybody kept working the same hours as the control group.

After seven years, the Dauphin experiment was quietly stopped. All the data disappeared until the mid nineties. In 1985, the MacDonalld commission recommended a universal basic income. It was dismissed as 'grandiose'. Around 2001, the Chretien government floated some trial balloons about guaranteed incomes. They were shot down.

now

Now the idea of a basic income is coming up again in Canada. But countries all over the world have well

developed advocacy organisations and are making headway on implementation. Canada has no nationwide basic income group yet. There is a group in Quebec called 'revenue de citoyenneté', (citizen's income) but it has published nothing in English. There is a group in Victoria, B.C. called 'Liveable Income For Everybody (LIFE).

Canada will not be the first country to have a citizen's income. An important step is to establish a national network. For that, enough local groups have to be developed. That is why the attempt is being made to establish a local citizen's income group in Toronto.

The language has changed over time, from guaranteed income to basic income, and now many national organisations are styling themselves 'citizen's income'. The term 'citizen's income' better explains what the point of the income is, and is harder to argue against.

To join citizen's income Toronto, go to qaz.ca/citizensincome.html.