

Basic income now: a high-leverage system intervention for sanity, humanity and ecology

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Introduction

We face global overheating and associated climate breakdown; biodiversity destruction and ecosystem collapse; the extinction of animal populations; pollution and associated health problems; enormous waste; extremist politics; severe inequality, and human and animal suffering. All of these problems are interrelated and a change in one will have ecological, economic, social or political effects in other parts of the overall system. Huge changes are needed if we are to avert climate and ecosystem catastrophes and alleviate inequalities. Different levels of awareness of the problems and commitment to alleviating them exist among the population. Politicians seem ignorant or confused about an overall plan of action. In civil society, vigorous, passionate, active activists, thinkers and pioneers have been working for decades alongside extreme denial, lack of awareness and apathy.

In 2009, I published a book called *Enough is Plenty: Public and Private Policies for the 21st Century*.¹ It was an attempt to bring together some of the thinking and practice that has at its heart ideas and practice of sufficiency as a way of caring for people and the planet. A great deal of work is necessary at local, regional, national and international levels to bring about economies and societies that fit the biological capacity of the earth: sane, humane and ecological. *Enough is Plenty* discussed some big frameworks developed over recent decades which, given the political will, could be put in place at the broad parameters of society and economy in order to help us reach a steady state. These include Cap and Share, Universal Basic Income and policies for Intelligent Agriculture, which would help to create basic securities of climate, food and income. These frameworks are structured to allow equality along with maximum diversity, creativity and autonomy for everyone, within safe global limits. Sadly, the frameworks are not in place, and the movement for sufficiency and steady state is still in a minority.²

In the decade since the book was published, I have resisted the temptation to write more books and have instead tried to 'stand in the gap' between what is and what might be, to make real some of the ideas in the book. Acting with other people, I helped to start a community-supported farm in my home town of Celbridge, Co Kildare. I have also put a lot of time and effort into the Irish movement for a universal basic income, because I think it is one of the key changes we could make now, which supports other efforts for change, community-supported farming among them. And I have worked with Feasta to support innovative thinking about upstream or high-leverage interventions - including basic income - that can bring about a strongly sustainable global economy and society: sane, humane and ecological.³

So why am I writing now again? Since early 2019 there appears to be a growing awareness of our problems among groups who have heretofore not given much thought to them. Their curiosity, attention and desire to do something may have been awakened by Extinction Rebels, School Strikers including Greta Thunberg, and David Attenborough's TV documentary, *Our Planet*. We have also recently seen renewed protests about ecocide from indigenous peoples and peasant organisations, and declarations by some countries and regions that we are in a state of emergency regarding biodiversity and climate. The time seems right to draw attention again to the concept of *enough*, sufficiency and limits, addressing people who are newly aware and looking for solutions. This is where I envisage most of the readership for this paper and the series of *Enough is Plenty* blog posts that will follow, hosted by Feasta.

The chief aim of this paper is to make the case for basic income as a key policy instrument for addressing our problems. I begin by sketching some of the practical work that citizen-leaders are doing to address them. I then examine how a basic income, which most rich countries could introduce immediately, could support this useful and necessary work. I also outline viable taxation approaches for funding basic income now and in the future.

The paper then broadens its focus and turns to its secondary aim: outlining the need for the global economy to contract and achieve a steady state, in order to fit into the biological capacity of our planet. The on-the-ground initiatives take place in this context. It is a massive cultural, political and economic shift, but one that we need if we are to achieve a strongly sustainable, sane, humane and ecological civilisation. This is a huge challenge to contemporary growth-oriented capitalism and related ways of thinking. Thinking and practice about steady-state-sustainability is very well developed but it receives little or no attention in mainstream conversations about solutions to our problems. It receives little political support, apart from some Green Parties. And there is low demand for it from civil society, possibly because few people know about it.

The paper then discusses how basic income could help those not already aware of steady-state thinking to live in ways more congruent with limits, care and sufficiency. It also outlines the necessary literacy campaign to help everyone understand steady state culture and policies. The paper ends with a short discussion of leverage points, places in which to intervene in a system for maximum beneficial effects.

On the ground: pioneering work that is currently marginal but that will need to be central in a sane, humane and ecological economy and society

There is a huge gap between what is and what might be and, in that gap, citizen-leaders and pioneers in civil society are doing what they see as necessary and useful work to address our problems. It falls into four broad categories that I characterise as critique, creating, renewing and coping, all, like our problems, interconnected and overlapping. This work is marginal at the moment but it will

need to be central in the future. The pioneering groups, projects, small businesses and enterprises that comprise this work are like seeds of a future sustainable economy and society.

Critique: Showing what is wrong with the current system, resistance, protest and striking are all part of this work. It includes writing, podcasting, artistic work, popular education, and refusing jobs and other paid work that are personally, socially or ecologically harmful.

Creating is about making the new economy and culture through hands-on projects and enterprises. Examples are: Transition Towns; cooperative energy projects, seed banks, pollinator-friendly ecosystems, different kinds of land management and cultivation like agroforestry and all kinds of ecological agriculture; land reform movements; community supported business models for farms, shops, breweries, bakeries, and other enterprises; zero-waste initiatives; local currencies and exchange and trading systems; sustainable/ ecological construction; creative commons; co-production in the arts; shared childcare; local repair and maintenance facilities; tool libraries; developing genuine indicators of progress; Slow Food, Citta Slow; popular education for a culture shift; activism for democratic money; campaigning to cap fossil-fuel use; campaigning for just and ecological taxation systems; basic income campaigns; training and skills development.

Renewing includes reproducing and supporting what is good in the current system or what has recently disappeared or is under threat in the local and community economy: small or medium farms delivering good food with low environmental impact; village shops and cafés; food and agriculture coops; credit unions; libraries; childcare, sick-care, elder-care and self-care; community education; gardening, allotments and grow-it-yourself; cooking and preserving skills; repair services; housing coops; working shorter job hours; community arts; playgroups; book clubs.

Coping: This work is largely concerned with supporting people, social systems, animal populations and ecosystems that have been damaged by the present economy and society. It ranges from surviving to hospicing, to healing and repairing; alleviating inequalities and suffering. It includes mental wellness groups; supporting refugees; bibliotherapy; men's sheds; animal rescue; community gardens; forest and woodland therapy; habitat restoration; rebuilding ecological and social systems; litter clean-ups; invasive plant management; walking, running and other exercise groups.

These far-from-comprehensive lists give just a taste of what is going on. The activities are overlapping - it's hard to separate them into distinct categories, as each one has elements in common with others. A striking number of them are concerned with food growing, production and preparation. Many of them are concerned with local and community economy and society, while others focus on national and international campaigning and networking. For the most part, this is energising, satisfying and convivial work that many people embrace readily.

Care, commoning, sharing, cooperation, justice, sufficiency, and respectful ways of relating to the earth and to each other are at the heart of this pioneering work, even if the participants don't always use those terms. These enterprises, projects and ways of living are part of the economics of arrival ⁴ and have been characterised as 'nowtopias' ⁵ or 'the power of just doing stuff' ⁶ . And alongside them, in the future, there will be other kinds of necessary and useful work that we can hardly imagine from where we stand at present.

For much of this useful and necessary work, no formal 'jobs' exist at present because the market as it is currently organized does not value the work. Many of those engaged in it are precariously self-employed, or doing the work without pay. They work against the odds, without support from governments or the community at large and often facing significant barriers. Some people are doing the work full-time and barely making a living from it, their enterprises just about surviving. Others do it without pay and alongside more conventional paid work but would love to leave their jobs or cut down their job-hours in order to do more pioneering work. Not all of the work needs to be paid but if a number of volunteers are involved in a project, it might need a paid coordinator or manager.

We need our states to support and enable these pioneers. For their personal financial security, we need basic income now, so that they have an immediate floor of support on which to stand. It is notable how many people on pensions - a form of basic income -- are active in this kind of work; but the opportunity to engage in such work without financial worry should not be confined to pensioners. Basic income is not intended to be pay for this work; but it supports pioneers and offers meaningful choice about what kinds of work to do. It allows self-organisation and creativity; it also allows people to try out pioneering enterprises without fear of failure, because they always have a basic income to fall back on.

Alongside a basic income, we also need our states to support the pioneers (and every member of society) with quality and environmentally responsible public services of energy, water, transport, education, housing and medical care. The state also must work to ensure climate and environmental stability. Also required are interrelated and complementary policies, legislation, subsidies, research, education, training and investment. The state should also consider supplementary payments - separate from basic income -- to people who engage consistently and regularly in pioneering projects and enterprises.

By themselves, pioneering enterprises are not the full picture for a complete system that is strongly sustainable (that is referred to in a later section on steady state principles), but they are an essential part of it. They deserve due recognition as seeds of truly sustainable, convivial and satisfying ways to live and work. They are evidence of the desire of ordinary people to participate in the changes needed. Similarly, basic income alone is not a silver bullet; it needs to exist within a progressive politics that ensures a full range of relevant policies at community, regional, national and global levels. The reason for focussing on basic income here is because we could introduce it *now*. With basic financial security in place for the

pioneers, their work would have the chance to be more viable and to inspire other people to get involved in similar projects. It would support a shift away from harmful work and increase opportunities for everybody to do useful work.

What is basic income and what is not basic income?

Basic income is a regular and unconditional direct money payment, distributed by the state to every member of society, whether they engage in paid work or not. Basic income is always tax-free and it replaces tax credits, some core social welfare payments, child benefit and the state pension as we currently know them. Other state services are unaffected by basic income and nobody currently in receipt of social welfare payments would receive less than they do at present. Basic income also extends to all those who currently receive no income from the state. A basic income is set at a rate sufficient for each person to have a frugal but decent lifestyle without supplementary income from other sources.

Because basic income is a universal payment, that is, it is paid to everyone, it reaches people in need without complicated conditions, means-testing or undignified and time-consuming application processes. People with special needs are eligible for top-up payments and a higher rate of basic income is paid to people of pension age. People with already high incomes get basic income too but they pay it back through the tax system. Basic income establishes basic financial security as a right to all members of society, whether they engage in paid work or not.

Basic income would bring into the security net all those not served by the current system for social welfare: casual and short-contract workers who get no or limited sick pay, holiday pay or pension rights; self-employed people and business owners; those doing valuable unpaid work, including care, which adds value to society and economy. Basic income would increase everybody's capacity to cope with financial shocks and uncertainties and would improve general quality of life, while supporting many different kinds of socially and environmentally useful work, with or without pay. It weakens the link between work and money and in this lies much of its transformative potential, because it frees up people to do work that is of direct benefit to people and to society in general and it also gives people some element of choice in rejecting jobs that are harmful to society and environment. ⁷

Basic income advocates concerned with sustainability are acutely aware of the many challenges and crises that need to be addressed and we understand that basic income is not a panacea; it is one part of a progressive politics. Nevertheless, we believe that it provides the necessary floor of support for people working towards larger changes. It supports their right to do useful and necessary work and to avoid harmful work.

What basic income is not

Basic income has a long history and it has attracted increased attention in recent times; however, the term is sometimes used to refer to proposals that are not a

true basic income. These proposals would give a minimal amount of money to people and cut all other state services, leaving people vulnerable and without choices about what types of paid work to take up; other proposals have conditions attached. But these are not a basic income; basic income is sufficient, universal and unconditional.

Strong civil society movements and activists are required to both promote and demand the introduction of a genuine basic income and to protect its integrity once introduced, having it enshrined in legislation so that it survives changes in government. Activists must also insist that the state provide other securities, quality services and a social wage alongside basic income.

Funding basic income now and in the future

Most rich countries could introduce a basic income at this time, given the political will. In Ireland, we could do it at an *introductory* rate of €200 per week for adults 18-65, without any complicated re-organisation of the revenue currently available to the state. Under this introductory scheme, children would get the same as the current child benefit of €140 per month. Top-ups would be available for people with special needs and for pensioners. Nobody would be worse off financially than they are at present and people who currently get nothing from the state would be better off. This basic income provision could be paid for from the current social welfare fund and from the tax credits that people in employment get. An income-tax equivalent to 45% on all earned income would also be necessary. This could be a flat tax or a graded progressive tax. ⁸

This proposal is revenue-neutral and would not take away from spending on existing services. As already noted, it is crucial that basic income exist as part of a suite of quality public services. It is also a key to reducing demand on some services; for instance, the improved health outcomes that accompany reduced stress would mean less need for medical care.

A global basic income could help to create viable livelihoods in the Global South and support appropriate economic development there, alleviating migration flows to some extent. An introductory rate of \$10 per month for every global citizen is possible. This may seem like very little but in regions with low costs of living and high rates of poverty, it would be a lot. ⁹

Making the funding of basic income viable and ecologically sound in the future

Although we could fund basic income now from current tax revenues in Ireland and most rich countries, there is a need to work globally and nationally towards more stable and ecologically and socially sound sources of revenue, for basic income and other services. We also need to stop thinking of taxation as ‘raising’ money for the public purse; instead, we should see it as retrieving public money, already spent, which has helped to create wealth. ¹⁰ It is a common myth that wealth is privately created; on the contrary, wealth arises from the efforts of the community at large;

the state, representing the community at large, should retrieve this wealth for the public purse.

The general idea of just, ecological and sustainable taxation is to use it to bring about the things we need. We should charge people for using things that rightly belong to all of us, which the earth provided, or which were created using investment from the public purse, or which people working together helped to build. If people use or benefit from such community resources or commons, they should pay a fee, which is better thought of as rent collection rather than tax. ¹¹

Tax should also be light on things that are abundant, such as human labour, so that we use them freely. But this does not rule out heavily taxing very high incomes attached to jobs or other paid work. People in receipt of such high incomes are invariably receiving far more return on their labour than is warranted by the value of their work to society; indeed, their work may even be harmful to society (money managers are in this category). Granted, some people doing useful work earn very high salaries but others doing useful work earn very little. Lower pay (and status) is predominantly associated with groups that lack political, economic and cultural power in the larger society. Income tax should be graduated so that it can 'bring the compensation of the highest paid executives into some reasonable relation to the compensation of average wages in, for example, the lowest-income 20% of the economy'. ¹²

Other desirable taxes include 'sumptuary or luxury taxes, set high enough to discourage status consumption'; ¹³ land value taxes; taxes that recover money the state has invested in technological development; taxes on unearned income such as capital gains taxes and transaction taxes. The list is long and mine is by no means comprehensive. ¹⁴

Unfortunately, few countries have these taxes and forms of rent collection to retrieve wealth that is publicly created and then privatised. Civil society groups continue to campaign globally and nationally to have these taxes collected and justly distributed.

A temporary role for carbon taxes

We need to eliminate fossil-fuels and associated carbon emissions from our economies as one small part of the effort for sustainability. Carbon taxes are one of the measures getting most attention in Ireland of late, as they will be increased and the government has consulted the public about how to use the revenue collected.

Carbon tax is not an optimal policy instrument for eliminating fossil fuels. Ideally, a tax and share scheme would be accompanied by a binding cap on fossil fuels, as proposed by CapGlobalCarbon, which combines an upstream cap with a sharing of the proceeds to the population. ¹⁵ But since the tax is in place, we should issue the revenue as a dividend to individuals without conditions attached, similar to

basic income. A better name for this would be tax and share, in order to emphasise the sharing component.

With carbon-tax and share, products with a high carbon-footprint will be more expensive than environment-friendly options, so everyone will have a financial incentive to support low-carbon goods and services, but no form of behaviour will be imposed by government. This can encourage people in the direction of different forms of consumption, which in turn supports technological and other activities that are low-carbon and in general ecologically sound. It could help develop public awareness of the need to manage remaining fossil-fuel sources and also our sinks (the atmosphere in this case) in a way that benefits everybody equally.

It would not be a good idea to build carbon-taxes into permanent funding for any services. Carbon-tax revenues will be finite as the objective is to phase out fossil fuel usage over a number of decades. If we rely on them for regular revenue, perverse incentives could prevent us getting rid of carbon altogether. ¹⁶

Even with no binding agreement globally on carbon capping, quotas or taxation, any nation can go ahead and put carbon-tax and share in place. However, a country-confined carbon tax does nothing to help with a just global transition. In fact, it could lock in a relatively high 'rich country' per-capita revenue and this would effectively 'enclose' the revenue deriving from fossil fuel use in Ireland for the use of Irish people alone. This would amount to economic (and atmospheric) colonialism. ¹⁷ To this end, Feasta and CapGlobalCarbon have proposed a partnership with a low-income country of a similar population, which has relatively low per-capita carbon emissions, such as Eritrea or Liberia. ¹⁸ This could be a model for other partnerships between rich and poor countries in projects to equitably address our problems.

The bigger context: a steady state economy for true sustainability

'Sustainability requires a steady state economy'. ¹⁹ The dominant fantasy, however, is that rich countries can continue to increase GDP and to consume as usual, but in ways 'decoupled' from fossil-fuel use: business as usual but using 'green' technologies. Mainstream policy-makers, trades unions, political parties, business organisations, international organisation, and commentators do not acknowledge that if we are to have any chance of a sustainable, just future, with a satisfying quality of life for everyone, we need to cap global economic production so as to fit within the planet's ecology. People in power seem confused, lacking requisite knowledge, or unwilling to act, even though many people on the ground - citizen leaders -- are making huge efforts.

Ideally, the state would work with civil society and business and in partnership with other states to design, plan and activate the systemic transition to steady-state sustainability. These are political decisions for progressive politics.

A steady state economy 'values longevity with sufficiency, and seeks qualitative improvement rather than quantitative increase'. It is based on the recognition that

the sources on which we draw are finite, as are the sinks where we put our waste. It is very different from the 'maximised, subsidised growth, pushed by ever larger scale and more dangerous technologies' that is 'threatening the capacity of the earth to support life, certainly healthy life'.²⁰ Unfortunately, the dogma of growth at all costs is dominant in today's world; it is even uncritically included in the Sustainable Development Goals.²¹

Steady state is about a planned contraction, reducing economic demands to sustainable levels in a 'slower, more careful journey of no return' ; it is not the same as a circular economy; complete circularity is not possible, even if it is a helpful concept²². We need to slow down 'by design'²³ and reduce growth in the forms that we now understand it²⁴; We have to be agnostic about growth, that is, economies must be designed to 'promote human prosperity whether GDP is going up, down, or holding steady'²⁵ .

Steady state economics channels technical progress in the socially benign directions of small scale, decentralization, increased durability of products, and increased long-run efficiency in the use of scarce resources.²⁶

The *quality* of economic activity must be paramount and all growth must cover its social and ecological costs. Rich countries - including Ireland -- need to understand that we have done our growing and now we need to share the wealth we have created.

A planned and well designed gradual contraction of an economy to a steady state is very different from an involuntary recession where growth collapses in an unplanned way. Good planning and design can ensure that the changes benefit everyone equally. If we don't plan for it, ecological constraints and disasters will cause a contraction to happen, but in the disastrous form of a severe depression.²⁷ Movements based on prejudice and fear will have a chance to take a greater hold.

The much-used current term Green New Deal or GND can mean a genuine transformation to an international social, fair sustainable economy and society. Or it can mean that rich countries continue to strive for growth and do all the things that have caused our problems, only this time with so-called 'clean' technologies. But this ignores the dirty side to the extraction of diminishing supplies of minerals, especially in African countries. Rich countries have already had more than their share of minerals and metals and should not grab what is left. Rich countries need to avoid

eco-nationalism, where proposals for the development of green national economies effectively outsource environmental harm to the countries that supply the indium for solar panels, the lithium for batteries, the neodymium for turbines, etc, while hoarding green tech patents and know-how.²⁸

Others tell us we can 'decouple' our growth from fossil fuels but this offers false hope because it ignores the fact that decoupling relies on exporting resource-intensive production to Asia.²⁹

Poor countries will need to continue to grow to some extent but in ways that are uniquely suited to their needs, and avoiding the harmful and uneconomic aspects of growth. ³⁰ Much depends on the ways that we measure growth ³¹ and some growth can take place in the non-physical sphere. ³² Education, care and renewable energy are among the things that can grow. Most importantly, we also need to share the resources that are available globally; sharing is the chief way forward in addressing the problems that face us. ³³ Without sharing and global justice, the result is climate apartheid. ³⁴

This idea of planning for steady state sustainability can sound as if certain uniform ways of life would be imposed on people by government planners. Design is a better way to think of it. Certainly, states, acting in cooperation, must set and enforce safe ecological limits, using the best scientific knowledge. Equally important, they must ensure that within those limits, the system is designed so that people have autonomy to be creative and diverse in how they live. People on the ground are often experts in what needs to be done locally and they should be enabled to put that knowledge in to practice.

There is much to re-discover and respond to with design appropriate to each unique place. This precludes blanket solutions decreed at national or international level made in a deal between a politician and a multi-national company and requires tens of thousands or millions of designs to match each place - an intrinsically democratic kind of regeneration that big politics cannot order from above - although it can destroy from above. ³⁵

Below is a list of some of the features of a steady state. The kind of work outlined earlier is taking us in this direction but it needs better opportunities to grow, it should be prioritized and supported with legislation, subsidies, grants and education. (The list is numbered for ease of reference but there is no particular hierarchal order and no claim that it is comprehensive).

1. A massive cultural shift that takes us away from the dogma that economic growth at all costs is the chief goal of society.
2. Ways of living and of doing business that are much less dependent on quick, cheap transport and other fossil-fuel-intensive activity;
3. Increased localisation of economic activity while keeping global needs and justice firmly in the picture;
4. Ecologically sound agriculture capable of delivering food security and food sovereignty;
5. An energy transition to renewables capable of supporting agriculture, food and other necessary economic activity;
6. Using as little as possible in the way of materials and energy; sharing what can be harvested sustainably, for maximum conversation; limits on what can be extracted from the earth;

7. Less consumption; different forms of consumption; limits on what can be produced for consumption; limits on everyone's ecological footprint;
8. Resilient individuals and households in resilient communities and community economies, able to withstand shocks of all kinds, including financial shocks;
9. Work (both paid and unpaid) that is of direct social and ecological benefit; shorter job-hours; recognition and support for the essential work of care for human beings throughout life, traditionally done by women;
10. A reduction in and eventual elimination of useless and harmful work;
11. Forms of business-ownership and management that are people-oriented and ethically accountable;
12. A move away from the privatisation of resources that should be managed for the benefit of all;
13. An increase in commons and commoning practices;
14. Democratic and ecologically sound money systems that are not based on debt.

Each item on this list has countless books and articles, as well as practical proposals and frameworks, devoted to it. The pioneering work of creating, critiquing, renewing, and coping is a direct expression of people's desire to make these things real. Projects that fit into the steady state paradigm form a social movement and a political project (albeit weak) premised on global equality. Steady state entails a break with capitalism, and this requires a transformation of our culture and of our social and economic institutions.

How can basic income help society at large make a transition?

We know that different levels of awareness of and commitment to transformation exist among the population. Vigorous, passionate, active pioneers exist alongside extreme denial, lack of awareness and apathy. The groups, enterprises and initiatives currently pioneering the work mentioned above are marginal in an economy and society obsessed with indiscriminate economic growth and consumption. How can basic income have a positive overall effect, given the dominance of the growth discourse and the absence of a widespread knowledge of, consent to and desire for a steady state?

People do not ask for what they do not know about. Most don't know about steady state possibilities. But many know that growth economics is not optimal for the wellbeing of people or the planet, even if they don't engage in an overt critique. In rich countries, debt, stress, precarious work and mental health problems affect many and there is increasing realisation that extreme weather is connected to global overheating and the collapse of ecosystems. Huge numbers of people are

just getting by or coping and this mode of being largely precludes good decision-making and openness to new ways of thinking.

Basic income provides support and security for everybody and takes the pressure off people who are suffering financial stress, no matter what their orientation regarding economic growth. It provides support for varying care needs at different life-stages; support for small businesses and self-employment; a cushion of stability for people in irregular employment; support for low-paid or non-paid activists and grassroots political organizers (including steady-state activists); support for people in jobs who want to work shorter hours or who want to leave unsatisfactory jobs; support for young people who are trying to find their way in society and economy; an alternative to migration; support for a more balanced geographical spread of development; support for artistic and creative endeavours; support for people wishing to take time out for personal development or education.

Anything that takes economic and other pressures off people reduces stress and the absence of stress creates conditions where people are open to new ways of thinking about economics and society. Basic income experiments and pilots are showing this.³⁶ The floor of financial security offered by basic income could mean that people who are currently not aware of the need for change, or not ready for change, will be better placed than at present to look at proposals and projects that are already trying to create a new system. They may better appreciate diverse forms of wealth and wellbeing apart from money and consumption. We could begin to wean ourselves off GDP as a measure of progress.

Because basic income, no matter how it is funded, does not impose any lifestyle norms, nobody is pushed into any particular way of living. It offers freedom to say yes, to say no, to act according to one's conscience. Basic income facilitates the emergence of new demands and new ways of being in the world. It increases opportunities for everyone to leave behind harmful aspects of the current system and their accompanying culture. It makes it more possible for everybody to do useful work and can help with the gradual elimination of harmful work. Ultimately, it can free everybody to participate in designing systems that work for all. The freedom of choice that basic income provides allows the growth of the civic capacity of society; it opens spaces for ideas to be taken up, for movements for change to be sustained.

Nevertheless, in the absence of a widespread adoption of steady-state and related principles in our culture, the freedom offered by basic income could lead to harmful consumption of carbon-heavy and ecologically harmful goods and services. To counter this and to maximise the positive potential of basic income, the discourse of steady state needs to be promoted through a vigorous education campaign for ecological and economic literacy, so that people have the capacity to make new demands. Civil society must spearhead this in the absence of leadership from governments.

None of this is hard to understand, even though intellectuals, politicians and economists sometimes seem to want to make it look complicated. We need a marked increase in the capacity of ordinary citizens of the globe to critique indiscriminate growth and to actively consent to and support steps towards equality, strong sustainability and related steady state economics. Basic economic literacy now and in the future needs to problematise the dominant idea that growth is always a good thing. Politicians, trades unionists, business communities, journalists and the population at large need this literacy. It must promote knowledge of the real possibilities for steady-state sustainability; it must have at its core awareness that rich countries must stop growing and start sharing. It must educate about how wealth is publicly created and expose the devastating trend for privatisation of resources that should be managed for the benefit of everybody. The role of taxation and the rationale for collecting economic rents needs to be understood. It must explore what constitutes useful and harmful work. Building the capacity of all to deliberate in public forums such as citizens' assemblies is a core skill. Literacy is also required about the improved quality of life, satisfaction and wellbeing - detached from consumption -- that are available for everybody if we make the necessary transformations.

Basic income is a high-leverage system interventions for sanity, humanity and ecology

The political project of promoting a steady state is difficult and currently weak. However, if appropriate interventions or adjustments are made at high-leverage or upstream points in our economic and social system, this can facilitate beneficial change in behaviour throughout the system and the emergence of new systems. ³⁷

The most effective leverage point is the adoption of a culture and mindset that value sufficiency, limits, sharing, justice and care. It is essential that activists continue to push the conversation about these principles and participate in democratic deliberative forums, in consciousness-raising and in popular education.

Another high leverage point is 'changing the rules' ³⁸ and some of this can be done within the present system. Carbon caps, sound taxation and collection of economic rents are relevant rule-changes. Basic income is also in the rule-changing category of interventions because it weakens the work-money link that forces many people into harmful jobs and stressful personal finances and it supports those people who are doing work that meets real human and planetary needs. Rule-changes won't deliver all the elements of transformation that we need, but they are like keynote species that support the growth of other virtuous behaviours and characteristics.

The state and its elected politicians have a role to play because they make the rules and also because the state can reach all members of a particular society, ensuring fair shares for all. The state must enable or partner individuals and communities in their efforts for transformation. States must also partner with each other.

Basic income is do-able now and civil society has a strong role to play in ensuring that we get and maintain a proper basic income - universal, unconditional and sufficient - and that other so-called versions of it are avoided. Citizen action has finally forced governments to take notice of the climate and biodiversity emergencies, following decades of activism. We need to keep this up.

In any design for a strongly sustainable, satisfying, sane, humane and ecological future, basic income is an integral part. It will bring immediate benefits to everybody and will also support longer-term, greater transformation. By itself, basic income will not challenge the fallacy of endless economic growth, nor will it bring about ecologically intelligent practices or an appreciation of sufficiency. It won't end harmful work or place a value on care work. We need society-wide conversations about what constitutes richness and quality of life, along with pioneering projects for new ways of living, and movements agitating for progressive cultural change on these issues. But these changes would be made much more possible if everyone had a basic income. Basic income creates conditions under which, if people want it enough, the steady state project could happen. People would be largely self-organising, without excessive control from the state, yet supported by the state. Basic Income creates conditions under which imagination can flourish and the seeds of the new can be nourished.

¹ Anne B Ryan 2009 *Enough is Plenty: Public and Private Policies for the 21st Century*. Hants: O Books

² For an introduction and overview, see <https://www.sufficiency4sustainability.org>

³ The term, 'sane, humane and ecological' (SHE) was first used by James Robertson in *Future Work: Jobs, Self-employment and Leisure after the Industrial Age*. Aldershot: Gower/Maurice Temple Smith, 1985

⁴ Katherine Trebeck and Jeremy Williams 2019. *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a grown up economy*. London: Policy Press. 135ff

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