

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

*by Maurice Bisheff*

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*"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](http://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. %us, 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 multivalent, 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 (nongovernment, 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/>

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## THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE

*by Raghavan N. Iyer*

Raghavan N. Iyer was a Fellow and Lecturer in Politics at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, from 1956 to 1964. He was a member of the staff of the Center from 1964 to 1966, when he assumed a full-time teaching post in Political Theory at the University of California at Santa Barbara. He remains with the Center as a Consultant. His book, *The Glass Curtain*, was published by Oxford University Press, which will also publish his exhaustive study of the political and social thought of Gandhi.

The central assumption of this paper is the possible provision of a guaranteed annual income (or its equivalent in goods and services) to every American citizen in the abundant economy of the foreseeable future. The main purpose of the paper will be to indicate some of the drastic implications of this proposal for social theory and contemporary values, and for a more daring vision of the future than is now commonly contemplated.