



# Care

Creating  
sustainable, holistic and  
green societies with basic  
income

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TOM POGSON

*"It is no bad thing to celebrate a simple life."*

*JRR Tolkien*

*"The health of the soil, plants, animals and mankind is one and indivisible."*

*Sir Albert Howard*

*"What's this we chanted? What's this we planted? Come on, progeny!"*

*Kurt Wagner*

## *How safe are we?*

Here as I begin creating this work, my province of British Columbia on the west coast of Canada languishes at the end of what meteorologists are calling a once in every thousand- year event. In the same week climate scientists warned that this could easily become a once in a decade event or even another example of "the new normal."

The "heat dome" weather pattern arrived here in Victoria where I live on southern Vancouver Island, from Saturday June 26<sup>th</sup> through to Tuesday the 29<sup>th</sup> 2021. It brought the temperatures in the capital region past 40 degrees, causing not just extreme discomfort but hundreds of fatalities in our province. The punishing heat also caused some businesses such as our famous Butchart Gardens, University of Victoria classes and many of our local restaurants to shut down for the entirety of the event. It baked not just the province of British Columbia but the entire Pacific Northwest, effecting over thirteen million people from Portland, Oregon to Anchorage, Alaska.

Temperatures were higher elsewhere in the province, especially in the interior with the worst being in Lytton, British Columbia at over 47 degrees. Only a few days later a sudden raging inferno of a forest fire, brought on by repeated lightning strikes hitting trees and the dry forest floor, burned the town of Lytton to the ground. Images circulated the world of smoldering remnants of homes and the curved, destroyed tracks of the train bridge that ran past this small community on the Fraser River Canyon.

An article in the British publication The Telegraph talked about a worse heat wave in Jacobabad Palestine, where temperatures passed 52 degrees, people deserting the city streets to find what shelter they could. Electrical at that temperature starts breaking down by both direct assault from the heat but also from demand of services including that of air conditioning. Here in BC, I saw images of the glass below the railing of the deck of someone's home had actually exploded in the heat. Lurking beneath the Siberian and North American permafrost is a breathtaking amount of both carbon and methane, which can be released by a slight increase of around 2 degrees in overall global temperatures. According to 97% of climate scientists, once this train starts rolling it will be impossible to stop. Our ability to wait and

see is not just at an end but some more conservative scientific predictions have stated that we are well past that and now it is about controlling what damage we can.

The general spirit of combatting climate change is all around. You see it in the rhetoric of most center and left-wing parties. We see it here in Victoria's push for less car use, such as Car Free Day. We see it in the push to stop using grocery bags, start using bike lanes and reduce packaging initiatives.

But I also see its blatant counter. I see not only lots of traffic still in this community, a smaller city on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, but a use of vehicles far bigger than are necessary. I see an inability to not only let go of the idea that we need to keep everyone busy, and that work is not just seen as something that needs to be done but that it is placed in a hierarchy of value, demanding that citizens must work more and harder than ever, produce like they've never produced before so that way if they are good people they will stop being "embarrassed millionaires" and join the ranks of the better people with the better jobs. Meanwhile history is full of the names of incredible human beings who supposedly failed by our financial measurements before the end of their lives. Names like Nikola Tesla, Vincent Van Gogh, Nick Drake, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Franz Schubert, William Blake, Herman Melville and Jesus of Nazareth are just some of the names of people that died in relative poverty let alone the extreme poverty that still exists.

Not only are full-time workers not making enough but an ideology has risen around work as though we worry that our society will fall to pieces without as many people of working age keeping as busy as possible. We do not see that work and jobs are different things and that jobs cannot even exist without the work that provides for them. There is seemingly shame for those who are not becoming conventionally successful between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. There is the incredible disconnect with how many of those we once called "essential workers" for keeping us fed and supplied during the initial lockdown have returned to experiencing derision for not having more successful jobs or worse when some in the United States, with the aid of the stimulus package, actually dared to contemplate looking for better options. There is an aggressive mentality towards those who cannot work even if they have legitimate reasons such as disability, blatantly visible in the below poverty line incomes in which they dwell. It is the same ideology that helped trickle down stand strong despite its obvious failings. The rich can never be faulted for their work ethic, even if their wealth was inherited. This is virtually a return to feudalism when royalty was seen as somehow connected to the heavens.

Forty hours a week was once considered a full-time. The idea was that along with two days off, one of which was the "Christian day of rest" Sunday, weekdays would give you eight hours work, eight hours sleep and eight hours for what you will. Between the rise of gig work, wage stagnation since the 1970s and the erosion of non-monetary benefits, we see people working sixty, seventy and more hours per week. To combat this problem, people have started working more jobs, most part time, zero hour and precarious. The biggest competition for basic income is the almost inherent political "Jobs! Jobs! Jobs!" slogan of the "Federal Jobs Guarantee." In 1930 John Maynard Keynes said we would be working less than fifteen hours a week which was a common idea back in those days. It was amplified by voices like Bertrand Russell in his work "In praise of Idleness" and from the "Simplify, Simplify" mantra of Henry David Thoreau. Thirty-two years later the famous cartoon character George Jetson mentioned on our television sets that his boss Mr. Spacely had him on a grueling nine-hour work week in 2062. Somehow, despite the influence of the Jetsons and others, we have been convinced our future is otherwise. We have been convinced we must earn our right to simply survive in a society that makes surviving without

each other's involvement impossible. We are a civilization that is at the point of considering settlement on the planet Mars where hardware of ours is already active, including a working helicopter. We can produce what we need. In the documentary "Cowspiracy" a researcher mentions that we have presently the productive capacity for fourteen billion people, nearly double our present population at 7.875 billion. Of that population only .5% in the Global North use 25% of the world's resources. We are already consuming the resources of one and a half earths. If the Global North and the Global South produced and consumed at the same pace, we would need between two and three additional earths.

The problem with this has been the discussion of academics from all disciplines for decades with our changing habits associated to the aggressive rise in industrialization. It first emerged as a specific concept at the Club of Rome Report on Limits to Growth in 1972. The concept which will be discussed further is that of "Degrowth" which has been more recently alluded to in both the film "Planet of the Humans" by Jeff Gibbs and the book Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth who both explained how our planet has a sustainable threshold that we are already dangerously crossing. Scientists have warned us that the generation has been born that could see the world become uninhabitable before the dawn of the next century. Not only do we not yet have the kind of starships that could give us the necessary exodus from the home we destroyed but should we have to get to that place? It is a heartbreaking thing for anyone to consider no matter which way their view of civilization or politics fall.

During the rise of the heat dome my loved one and I sheltered in the bedroom with our air conditioner. I bought it two years earlier when I was already feeling like it was no longer becoming a luxury product. Both of us are over forty and do not have perfect health. Even though we have that machine and we tried to be extra careful with drinking lots of water, doing all our cooking in the morning and following all the recommended advice it was still not easy going. Coming out of the bedroom was like facing the blast from an oven. This was present no matter where in the community you tried to go, with one interesting exception, under the trees in Beacon Hill Park. The situation of air conditioning is not only a fix that more people are considering, it is an unfortunate but regrettably necessary backwards step, one that will take us from walking towards the cliff to sprinting towards it, and I say this as someone who has used them knowing full well the impossible hypocrisy of it. This is according to a book that was part of my research, and one that I recommend, "Drawdown, The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming," (2017) by Paul Hawken. In it the manufacturing of refrigeration is the highest form of carbon emission due to the manufacturing use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons. It is the number one cause for global warming overtaking its two largest contenders, fossil fuel use and animal agriculture. There are those of us who have no option but to employ air conditioning over fans. Examples of this are the tragic stories such as the seniors who passed away in a Chicago heat wave in 1995 when they had to keep their first-floor apartment windows closed because of the threat of break-ins. There is also the potential for overload which an electrical grid can experience when such energy draining devices turn on simultaneously during temperature extremes. While it had to do with freezing temperatures, the early 2021 Texas power crisis is a good example of this, with a general power failure that directly affected food distribution, water distribution and heating. These shutdowns can affect us in tragic ways such as the failure of power for essential services such as fire, police, and hospitals even despite attempts to create a backup system. This leads to the point that some climate change deniers may not understand which is the difference between climate and weather. One is the overall activity and the other is just that moment. Climate change can also ramp up and alter things in terms of hot *and cold weather*. An example of this is the concerns right now over the effect on

the gulf stream that could bring colder temperatures rather than hotter ones. Therefore, the subject does not go by the phrase “Global Warming” anymore. Climate change causes every kind of atmospheric event and weather pattern to go haywire.

Humankind is amazing at adapting to situations, but some things are just a step too far like large losses of land for agricultural purposes and therefore food production. There is work happening on vertical farming but so far at the current rate the implementation can be more costly and due to production factors at present, it has a larger carbon footprint than traditional farming. As Delta, British Columbia farmer John Lindrian told a reporter from The Tyee over his cellphone while sitting on his tractor “We are living in a society where the population is growing but the land base isn’t. All the farmland that is being farmed is so valuable we cannot afford to lose it. You can’t make farmland. What’s there is there.”

Sea level rise is already happening. It is not just something that is in the future, and its rate has only increased over the past century. If it continues at the present rate, only a few meters would put not just Delta underwater, but Vancouver Airport, the lowlands of White Rock stretching past Cloverdale to Langley BC and large chunks east of Port Coquitlam near Pitt Meadows. Here in Victoria, sections of our Inner Harbor such as Dockside Green, much of the Gorge area, James Bay, sections of Dallas Road, Willows, and the lowlands of the Saanich Peninsula such as Sidney would be threatened by sea level rise. This would create displacement from work and homes as well as from other essential parts of our communities. With temperatures already seasonally higher than decades ago, the largest ski facility in North America, Whistler Blackcomb could be in severe difficulty trying to keep snow on the mountains to maintain the heart of their world-class business.

It was just over a year ago now that Covid 19 swept across the world, shutting us down and plunging us all into a way of living we never expected. The experience of It exposed the inequalities and showed how we are only as strong as our base, our workers, our health personnel, the people who make sure we are fed and supplied with our essentials. In those early days we all said how going back to normal was not good enough before the idea of this “new normal” was taken up by conspiracy theorists.

But why was it taken up with such gusto? Something has taken the simplest things and made them polarized. Over the last few years names have risen into our shared consciousness of people that divide us into opposing sides. Subjects like masks, immunization and immigration are now more divisive than ever. The story of climate change and ways to make sure everyone is economically stabilized also fall under this same suspicion. The challenge is they must be both addressed before it is too late.

But it was not always like this. In fact, this climate emergency we face was not only bipartisan but verified by a very notable Conservative.

## *Not Nature or Carbon*

*"We must learn that less is more. We must learn that infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide. It's not carbon that's killing the planet, it's us. If we can get ourselves under control anything is possible."*

*Jeff Gibbs, Filmmaker and Director of The Planet of the Humans.*

In 1958 a thirty-year old Dr. David Keeling arrived at the summit of black volcanic rock, three thousand meters above the sparkling Pacific Ocean. Pulling up near the entrance of the Mauna Loa Observatory, surrounded by the quiet of low-lying clouds, he took his briefcase and went inside. Amongst the cluster of white geodesic domes, Dr. Keeling would use the instrument he developed in CalTech years after leaving Northwestern University, the first instrument to measure atmospheric samples of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

These findings were made twice yearly by Dr. Keeling, in summer and winter. He noticed immediately that the amount does change seasonally, in a way that he described as "breathing" where in summer it would reduce the amount of carbon and in winter it would gather the amount back again. But soon he noticed that numbers on a yearly level were rising, especially climbing steeply after 1979 which led to the findings being called the "Keeling Curve", a graph showing the rise of carbon levels from that point onwards. He would be one of five scientists who in 1965 would report their findings and concerns about how our activities were already affecting the climate and the danger of global warming to President Lyndon B Johnson. The report called "Restoring the Quality of our Environment" sadly was ignored, Johnson's administration wanting to focus on more visible things like reducing highway litter.

Further efforts of drilling into the ice in Greenland and Antarctica show an expanded story. Deep under the surface of both locations the air became trapped in the ice going back centuries. In this way, like the rings of a tree, scientists can graph exactly what our carbon footprint has been like on the planet since the building of the Great Pyramids.

What they have found is that our planet does warm and cool, the amounts of carbon and other greenhouse gases in our atmosphere moving from approximately two hundred parts per million (ppm) to 300 ppm and back again over a period of decades. The warming and cooling on larger scales like ice ages were mentioned in an interview with Dr Brian Fred-Schneider when discussing the movement of glaciers "Glaciers are dynamic," he explained "They surge, they retreat. But with what we are seeing in Alaska it is the rate of this activity, hundreds of years versus decades."

The same thing is happening with the carbon footprint in our atmosphere as well, which is hard to withdraw once the carbon is up there. Our present point on the increasing and decreasing of ppm mentioned above should be presently on the decline and we should be cooling down.

Instead at last count our numbers sit at just below 419 ppm. Humanity has never lived here before.

So, carbon is the bad guy? Not necessarily. Carbon, methane, water vapor and other things in our atmosphere keep us from freezing to death. Our solar system has put us in orbit between our two potential extremes, outside of the distance from the sun. According to Nasa, Mars does have CO<sub>2</sub> in its atmosphere, but this amount of shielding against the Sun's rays is one hundred times thinner than Earth's. So, between the further distance from the Sun and less atmosphere it is freezing cold in triple digits at night.

Venus is on the other side literally and metaphorically. It is closer to the Sun, but it has the densest atmosphere of the four nearest consisting of mostly CO<sub>2</sub> as well as nitrogen, sulfur dioxide, argon and others which makes it a pretty toasty 867 degrees Fahrenheit on average.

Between our solar proximity but also our atmosphere, humankind has been incredibly fortunate to have the metaphorical "just-right" bowl of the three bear's soup. So, carbon is not bad. In fact, it is the thing that creates growth on our planet. The soil, the trees, the grass, animals and even ourselves have some level of carbon in our general make up. But the problem is that it works as a form of greenhouse. This metaphor is not technically perfect either, too be fair, as a greenhouse does not allow heat to escape through its glass, but otherwise this is what gives us trouble. And the amount it must move to gives us trouble is quite small.

The destructive power of climate change is more dramatic than many realize. Only a small rise of two degrees in our overall temperature base can set off chain reactions, some of which scientists are worried we are already past of the point of no return to stop.

One of these is the bleaching and destruction of the coral reefs like the Great Barrier Reefs between both effects of rising ocean temperatures and acidification. Thirty percent were already gone by 2009. This has effects on food chains all the way up from plankton to small fish to bigger fish to a food source for millions of human beings. Elsewhere in the world we are already seeing the loss of entire species. There are shepherds who have worked the same flocks for generations who now do not have any animals because of less and less grassland to keep them fed. In Morocco young men have seen how the number of natural Oasis have dropped dramatically while sand dunes continue encroaching on communities. Water in those communities is becoming scarcer with wells that used to be only six feet down having to plunge to twenty-one feet get what results in salt water. Between this and the crushing heat mentioned before we risk the conflict inherent in human migration into other countries. Under not just the Alaskan and Canadian but the massive Siberian permafrost are both carbon and methane which are on a hair trigger to be released into our atmosphere. Arctic Ice is almost completely gone, the sun heating the dark water instead of being reflected into space, the heating of the water causing the oceans to expand due to heat. Sea level rise is already here, its effects being felt in Boston, New York State and elsewhere where oceanfront homes are already being abandoned. Making people move has already started, a kind of climate gentrification that forces people into areas that push low-income dwellers out as the costs of living rise more.

Climate change takes ordinary weather events and amplifies them. In Louisiana, five record breaking hurricanes hit the bayou in 2020 alone. In total there was twenty-two climate disasters in that one year. Right now, in British Columbia we have a state of emergency with a no campfire rule that absolutely did not exist when my family used to go to our property south of here on Camano Island for the summer.

In their book *Enviromedics* (2017) medical doctors Jay Lemery MD and Paul Auerbach MD go over all the potential health outcomes of climate change including increases in asthma, allergies, mental health, cardiovascular failure, increase in transmittable diseases and other ailments due to air pollution, animal migrations due to warmer weather (such as mosquitoes) and of course the effects on food and water supplies. Climate change will affect our economy globally, nationally, and locally just like every other system on earth.

Which brings me to the moment I mentioned before. There was one rather famous former English Tories (Conservative party of the United Kingdom) who took a stand at the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. This person held a science degree before going on to become Prime Minister. Her name was Margaret Thatcher.

Now as amazing as that moment was, and a clear indication of how certain politics have changed, it did have a small hiccup within it. Holding the line on the idea of a trickle-down economy like her American equivalent Ronald Reagan had championed, she declared that the best way to tackle climate change must be through unleashing the power of the free market.

What is wrong with this? Put simply, the rise of greenhouse gases started with the Industrial Revolution and follow the level of production, its steepest climb beginning in the late seventies, early eighties where the effects of the neoliberal agenda of unfettered capitalism began. So, while Thatcher made excellent points about how we must work with nature instead of trying to dominate it, industry that views shareholders, growth, and profit above all else is a little bit like letting dogs off the leash, hoping they do not get into trouble, only for them to immediately bite the first available mail carrier. It comes down to the firmly drilled in believe of the Gross Domestic Product being our loadstar. The problem with this is that its own creator Simon Kuznets saw it as only useful during time of war, when production was key to survival. In peacetime he tried to explain that it would prove harmful because it would see anything, even things that destroy the planet or hurt communities as positive.

Up until 1971 the world worked under the economics of John Maynard Keynes, often called Keynesian economics. There was regulation and unions. The effect of technology had already begun to have its effect, but as production went up, so did wages. But by 1979 that ideology had been replaced by the idea of getting government out of the market, and indeed anything that would stand in the way of market activity. This is what neoliberalism was. It is not connected to the idea of being liberal, but to do with freeing the market or becoming more libertarian like its founders Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman and others that came from the traditions of the Mont Pelerin Society. But it was not just the effects of this economic way of thinking. Like how one hundred years had taken us from the Wright Brothers strange flying machine to stealth fighters, times were changing dramatically.

We had a rise of technology that was beginning to make jobs disappear. Simply put, global trade in a competitive marketplace with governments and unions having power reduced began the process of stagnating wages while production grew and grew, our carbon emissions growing with it.

By the 2000s the gig economy had begun, the pressure of straining inequality really beginning to be felt by the majority. In 2008 the market made its historic crash felt in America and beyond. The Occupy Movement began. Tent cities started to rise throughout the western world. And in 2010 a Cambridge Doctor of Economics wrote in page one of his soon to be explosive bestseller "The Precariat" that if things did not change the world would see the rise of a populist monster.



“It should not surprise you to hear,” said Guy Standing to his audience at Davos, a place the left-wing economist never expected to be talking “that in November of 2016 I got hundreds of emails saying that my monster had arrived.”

As Professor Standing explained to another audience in Italy, he knew why the famous wealthy and powerful of Davos sought his advice. They all were scared as to what was going on. The world in 2015 saw a rise of the hard right that was only made more incendiary with the actual success of Trump’s presidential run along with the success of Brexit in Standing’s own country.

They knew that change had to happen and Professor Standing they also knew was a researcher and economist who had advocated for what had long been called radical change. This was the idea of basic income.

“We used to be seen as mad, bad, and dangerous to know,” he explained with a grin “but now suddenly we’ve become respectable.”

Like so many things the idea of climate change has become polarized as have masks and vaccines in the middle of a pandemic. It is this writer’s opinion that all these things that become polarized do so for the same reasons.

They all stand against the market. They all look like more economic trouble to solve a problem that possibly does not exist (even when it clearly does) for people who have suffered enough. One of the effects of economic hardship is that it pushes the political ends into their respective corners. The left goes harder left. The right goes harder right. The situation effects mental health of course. Dr Rupy Aujla on his “the Doctor’s Kitchen” podcast when he interviewed Guy Standing explained how so much of what he ends up as a family doctor and in emergency rooms trying to heal is the downstream effects of widespread stress.

So surely what needs to happen to cool things down would be something that turns down the economic heat. Our ability to delay, as Swedish activist Greta Thunberg has explained, is at an end. The Paris Agreement of NetZero by 2050 does not mean much when European cities are being ravaged by flooding, and the Global South are the first in the gunsights of global warming right at this minute. We need to switch to renewable energy sources but as Jeff Gibbs explained in Planet of the Humans “we can’t just windmill, electric car, and solar panel our way out of this” because to suddenly produce these in the millions would also affect the climate.

Within all production is an element of destruction. As Jeff Gibbs also stated, his words dating back to the Club of Rome reports that “Infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide.”

The people are unwell.

The planet is unwell.

It is our commons, and we are its commoners.

Both of us are being starved into lashing out.

This cannot last.

## *Homecoming*

*"This could be heaven for everyone."*

*One of the last vocals recorded by Freddie Mercury*

It was a brisk day in London as the old knight climbed the stairs with the bishops and other dignitaries. They entered the grand expanse of St Paul's Cathedral, London where the young king and his court were waiting. A few of the guards of the child king nodded to the old knight and he smiled back as they walked towards the tiny figure seated on the regal throne that rose high above him.

The Knight was Sir William Marshall, First Earl of Pembroke. After his hundreds of incredible battles and tournaments, history (starting with Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton) would come to label him as the finest knight the world had ever known. He was older now and his role had become that of the diplomat, mentor, and businessperson as well as a friend and right-hand man of both the late Henry II and the late Richard the Lionheart. The child was a ten-year-old Henry III. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1217, he was to give his seal to something he did not really understand. He wanted to go out and play after all. Along with an updated version of the Magna Carta, or the "Great Charter," was a single parchment called "Carta Foresta" or "The Charter of the Forests." This smaller document that would one day make its way to influencing the new world, would give every free person access of the land that was the "commons" meaning not private nor specifically land of the throne but the heathlands, wetlands, grasslands, forests of course, and other natural amenities. With this one seal commoners had enshrined the ability to have basic subsistence from the land.

We could lodge on this land without harassment. We could forage the land. We could graze our animals there. We could hunt for our food. We could fish. The commons was considered an inheritance of all, like a birthright of each commoner.

This same young king would spend the rest of his life trying to claw this back. Indeed, the story of people trying to be able to have the right to exist without punishment or poverty would be an underground, almost silent battle that continues to this day. But in 1516 another name in history made the first written address to the concept.

"It would be far more to the point to provide everyone with some means of livelihood so that nobody is under the frightful necessity of becoming first a thief and then a corpse," wrote Thomas More in his book "Utopia."

From this moment onward this idea would slowly gain ground, the idea of all persons having the inherent right to existence, especially as the ability to access the commons became scarce in an increasingly privatized and enclosed world. In a strange, almost fitting bit of coincidence, the law of the Charter of the Forests ended in 1972 at nearly same moment as what will be later described as the great decoupling.

During the birth of the United States of America, Founding Father Thomas Paine produced an idea to address this, his writings called "Agrarian Justice" that would give each citizen ten pounds sterling on their twenty first birthday, the equivalent of ten thousand dollars today, and then another amount later in old age. The idea was to set someone up with the basics to start a decent life and based on lack of land. In his own words "Men did not make the earth. It is the value of the improvements only and not the earth itself, that is individual property. Every proprietor owes to the community a ground rent for the land on which he holds."

This same idea would emerge almost a hundred years later in the inspired writings of Henry George who believed in a land value tax that could be shared, which he wrote into his bestseller "Progress and Poverty." This made him an overnight sensation and created a movement called Georgists.

One Georgist, Elizabeth Magie, created a game that could help explain to people why this was better than the present system. She created two versions of the same game, one a cut-throat land grabbing game called "The Landlord's Game" and the other with the land value tax that was redistributed, "Prosperity." Of course, as the devil plays the best tunes, it was the more aggressive game that caught on. Versions of this game started popping up everywhere in 1904 including one version that would soon become national and then international. The creator was Charles Darrow and he paid Magie off an amount that would soon become clearly too little. His version was based on his favorite vacation spot in Atlantic City and featured such locale as "Boardwalk," "Park Place" and "Marvin Gardens." So even though, no, it is not the GO! space but a feature of an older version, Monopoly was based on the idea of giving everyone their share of our commonwealth of resources.

It would finally be called the words "basic income" in the early part of the next century by names like engineer C.H Douglas, political economist G.D.H Cole, social psychologist Erich Fromm and mathematician Bertrand Russell.

It would be a good idea to step out of this history for a moment to discuss the subject of basic income itself. Considering how it is based on a reclaiming of the commons as a form of human right and common justice and of being an economic program which can alleviate poverty, stimulate an economy and more you can mentally file the idea of basic income as a hybrid branch of both Economics and Philosophy. In fact, even before the Charter of the Forests the ancient Greeks who created those two disciplines had a form of basic income in 461 BC. This gave men of their society more ability and incentive to take part in the both the polis (politics) and the scholae (the Latin derivation of the original Greek word for academic study) of the time. It is easy to see the rights-based reasoning here in Victoria as well as in Toronto and elsewhere. If you wanted to live off the land these days, it would be pretty tricky. You might have to spend money and take a flight somewhere where the land is not yet privatized but even that would be a stretch. In fact, in just checking for fun, there are eleven places left in the world as of 2017, mostly islands the size of an apartment at best but there is a bit of land (as of 2019) called Bir Tawil which has been let go by both Egypt and Sudan as it sits near that border. So, with all respect to the area, I do not think that's going to work out for everyone.

Here in Victoria, we all saw what happened when people tried to camp on common land, and both the demonization and the crime that fell on them because people that are in such circumstances are more easily targeted by both crime and a "not in my backyard" stigma. So, as we clearly do not allow people to live by their own means, basic income makes up that difference with enough money to survive and to be able to say no to those that wish to dominate them.

Within the study of basic income are the two primary branches which speak primarily to the question of affordability, even though it is this author's opinion that the basic income is immediately affordable without any form of heavy taxation to "take money from Peter to pay Paul" as the old saying goes. I believe albeit intrinsically that "there is enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." We have the money. Money itself is a measurement and a construct of a system of our own creation that we can alter any time we wish. Economists and theorists have found multiple ways to divert cash so that we, in a sense, turn from an increasingly flawed trickle down to a trickle up economy where the market is controlled by the people it is meant to serve.

Regardless, I turn to the two variations that are presently most dominant.

In one branch is the variation made famous by people like Professor Standing, researcher Scott Santens and most famously, American Democratic presidential election candidate Andrew Yang, the "Unconditional" or "Universal Basic Income" also called the "UBI." In this "democrat" version every single person in a country receives an amount of money in cash or equivalent on a regular basis (usually monthly but could be weekly or bi-weekly) of enough money to pay for basic expenses, granting the person enough to lead a dignified life. A wealth tax can be applied afterwards to high income earners.

In the other branch is the variation proposed by Milton Friedman and many others in the sixties and seventies as a way of targeting low-income people and eliminating poverty. This was called the Negative Income Tax by Friedman but has also been called the Guaranteed Livable Basic Income, Guaranteed Annual Income, Basic Income Guarantee or some other such phrase with the word guarantee in it to signify that no person in the country will ever fall below a certain amount. In this version a person who makes no income receives the full amount and then as they make money from a job the payment is taxed back or clawed back in comparison to the paycheck at a rate of usually fifty cents on the dollar.

Milton Friedman would eventually say near the end of his life that these two programs are essentially two different ways of doing the same thing. It simply comes down to putting a tax apparatus before or after the payment. The benefit to both compared to the current system of welfare is that you either always keep the base amount with the UBI or it is clawed back slowly with the GLBI. With the latter version of guaranteed income if the new employment income suddenly disappears for any reason the program's disbursement snaps back to the full amount. With this the GLBI is much like your television that is always on in at least standby mode, but it is still on and ready when you need it.

The advantage to the UBI is that it does not do an income test but sets the amount as a rule. This makes the program the way every Canadian gets the same Medical Services Plan Care Card, or how every five-year-old is eligible for twelve years of elementary, secondary, and high school education. You get it as a right, not because you are poor, which can single out the recipient. The GLBI is less expensive as an upfront cost and is politically easier to pitch because it is going only to people in lower incomes. This takes away some concern that a regressive government could roll out a low UBI, making things worse for low incomes while benefitting wealthy people. Such a horrible version of UBI would be suicide for the government doing it, would solve nothing and should be of course denounced. That said there is the idea floated by Alex Howlett of "Boston Basic Income" of the calibrated basic income which favors the idea of layering a tax exempt UBI on top of what money is already being made. This is based on the straightforward theory that the economy needs people with money, so a UBI is just a more efficient way to inject cash into the system. This amount is calibrated to how much the economy can handle which is

interesting as you could technically start low and then start raising it until for any reason the economy can't handle it. What I find interesting about this is the fact that the starting cost of what in pilots worldwide has been called a "partial UBI" (not the full amount) makes the cost for trying it not as staggering for a politician to pitch.

In Canada there is not only cross-party support for a less expensive GLBI version that is not seen as a panacea or silver bullet for everything (most advocates like me do not see it as one) but one that lifts all Canadians out of poverty and gives the most support to lower income persons. It would be a pillar of a new structure going forward, or a floor that we can then put other programs or extra amounts on top of, such as extra monthly dispensations for persons with disabilities. I personally believe that not only is the money there and does not need to be printed but that it is better to create a system with up front redistributive ideas such as transfer tax, land value tax and capital gains so that we are not trying to chase down wealth after it is already landed in a wealthy person's bank account.

I also believe that when a basic income is in the people's hands it becomes *their economy and not the corporations*, how it was always meant to be going back to the writings of Adam Smith. The people can decide what is best for them, what is sustainable, healthy, progressive with the rediscovered time to finally choose.

Returning to the rest of basic income's history, which I will try to keep brief, the idea continued its underground status going into the middle of the twentieth century. It gained support from the left and the right. The United Church of Canada supported guaranteed basic income in those early days as would eventually many more social groups such as Food Banks Canada and the Canadian Association of Social Workers. Eventually it would find champions in the libertarian economists Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, 1200 economists who signed the same petition for a guaranteed income in 1968, the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr. who spoke and wrote about the idea as a way to "address poverty directly" before his assassination and Richard Nixon who tried enact a negative income tax for working men with families called the Family Assistance Plan. As the basic income was considered inevitable back then Nixon thought he would be the progressive Conservative to make it happen. He got it through the House of Representatives twice but was shot down both times in the Senate by Democrats who thought it was not enough.

Pilots began across America and Canada and showed positive results such as a reduction in health costs and increase in economic activity. One of these was the experiment in Dauphin, Manitoba and in parts of Winnipeg from 1974 to 1978 called Mincome that notably gave every member of the small prairie town a guaranteed basic income for the four years.

Going into the eighties the politics began to shift to a "trickle-down economics" and there was concern from evidence of some of the American pilots that it had caused family breakups. Truth was the stats had been distorted and the few women who had left marriages had used the basic income to flee actual domestic abuse.

Despite the quiet of the 1980s around the subject of a basic income, the idea managed to hold on in many who had discovered it before, such as Conservative senator Hugh Segal and Belgian political philosopher and economist Philippe Van Parijs. This is when organizations focused around the idea started to grow, beginning with the Basic Income European Network (BIEN) formed in 1986 by Europeans like Van Parijs, Guy Standing and political sociologist Claus Offe that would become the Basic

Income Earth Network in 2004. In the late nineties, professor of philosophy and economics Karl Widerquist formed the North American Basic Income Guarantee Congress with his friend and sociologist Michael Lewis.

Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century the subject around automation started to take the limelight more and more, along with the explosive economic tensions that occurred after the 2008 crash. This dubious beginning to the Obama administration made a decision that would never go well, one where the government of United States bailed out the people who caused the problem but not the people who were losing everything including their homes because of things like cheap credit and sub-prime mortgages. Only a few years later a discussion on Reddit about automation would benefit this cause of “creating a floor on which everyone can stand” one of its brightest stars, New Orleans-based researcher, writer, and speaker Scott Santens.

Scott would go on to write and create content on basic income in a way that boiled down the philosophy from the different voices throughout the ages like Thomas Paine, Alan Watts, and Milton Friedman in such a way that its content moved from the stuff of debate between economists and intellectuals to something that seemed that much more practical and workable. Around this same time the next series of pilots began in different places around the world, but this time powered by non-profits who were genuinely interested in seeing how this would work, one of the first ones being created by BIEN in Namibia, with more to come of either universalistic approaches or one-time cash transfers in Liberia, Vancouver, London, India, Kenya, Finland and in 2017 a group of pilots in Northern Ontario, Canada. This last one gave a sense of pronounced déjà vu for the researcher who brought the story of Mincome to the world, Dr. Evelyn Forget. Her work, which became “Basic Income for Canadians: From the Covid 19 Emergency to Financial Security for All” (2020) showed how the only people who changed their employment were kids finishing school and young mothers who wanted to extend their maternity leaves beyond the one month. It also showed, as the book goes into, reductions in health costs at 8.5%.

In one talk, Dr Forget voiced her concerns that a pilot or its research could be ended abruptly like how the newly elected Manitoba provincial Conservative government had done in the 1970s. The findings of Mincome in 1978 were immediately shelved into an office where they would sit until Dr. Forget hunted them down decades later. Sadly, Dr Forget would again see a change in government bring a basic income pilot’s work to a very abrupt end. Specifically in March 2019, Doug Ford, the leader of the newly elected Conservative provincial government, cancelled the pilot within one week of obtaining office, despite having promised twice to let the pilot run its course. Some of the four thousand participants found out about the cancellation through the news, some did not find out until the cheque that was supposed to be there never showed up.

Despite this setback, the truth remains. Basic income pilots around the world have continued to show the same positive results. In fact, the closer the pilot sticks to the rules of a UBI or GLBI without adding other conditions, the more pronounced the results become. For example, spreading the recipients across the country along with only giving it to people on income assistance is what happened in the Finland experiment that still managed to yield mostly positive results. The results from Finland were slight employment gain, more flexibility in work options, less stress, greater autonomy, security, less depression, less sadness/loneliness, and more feelings of general well-being. These results are common amongst the list that came from the other pilots worldwide, even for the short-lived pilot in

Ontario. People not only continue to work but they actually work more, choose work that they find inspiring and more in line with their abilities, health improves, truancy decreases, crime decreases, entrepreneurial activities increase, hospitalizations decrease, women's status improves and, as Guy Standing discovered from some of the pilots such as the one he oversaw in Madhya Pradesh, India back in 2010, "the emancipatory value of a basic income is greater than the money value." It frees people up to take chances, he found, giving each person that sense of possibility. It gives them a power to say yes to work they want to do. It gives them the power to say no to exploitation of any form including abusive relationships in and outside of employment. There was a claim that basic income would give employers an excuse to pay less. This has been proven clearly false as was seen by the rebalancing of power given to workers by the stimulus checks in the United States in 2021, along with many other workers concerns and considerations. Some of these are the still on-going coronavirus, waiting for a better deal before suddenly re-entering the job market, child-care, and more recently people looking at jobs that they were not certain about, that the pandemic has given them the moment to reconsider what they want to do in a changing, fragmenting work economy.

In this way a basic income gives workers their own bargaining power. It also addresses the technological work displacement problem of automation that has only accelerated out of the wartime-like necessity of using more technology and remote work during the coronavirus pandemic. In terms of the economics of the idea, or simply how to pay for it which is another common counter argument, economists like Guy Standing, Karl Widerquist and Evelyn Forget have devoted chapters and multiple talks on the fact that it is affordable and does not cause run-away inflation. Most recently in Canada the Canadian Center for Economic Analysis has run the numbers on a basic income and has discovered that it has the potential to speed up Canada's recovery from Covid 19 and grow the economy \$80 billion per year, generating nearly 600,000 jobs in five years. As I am for sustainable infrastructure over sheer growth, I see this as the potential to effect the change we need to have happen. Work can be done in such a way that its impact is lessened, the creation of which is a form of work itself. This was mentioned in a segment on John Oliver's show "Last Week Tonight" when taking on the idea of their being new work. As he explained it is mixed. There will be work but it will require a more flexible mindset than the stable forty-hour workweek and non-wage benefits of yesteryear.

In Alaska, a form of partial Basic income has existed since 1982 in the form of the Conservative state's oil revenues. The payout called the "Alaska Permanent Fund" is not enough for anyone to live on at an average of \$1500 per person per year but despite this there is some interesting findings that can be made. The state has the lowest inequality, not even minor inflation around the time of the payout and, in defiance to the idea that prices might go up, researchers like Scott Santens have noted that the stores actually lower their prices to try to bring the money from the fund into their tills.

The thing about basic income is that it is a return to who we really are and who we were back when things were not on the economic high wire that too many now walk. This is why we went from Keynes saying that we would all be working a fifteen-hour work week by now and The Jetsons in the 1962 had us on a nine-hour work week. Somehow, we have been taught to believe we must serve the market, our technology, and the economy instead of all of that serving us.

Somehow work has been put on a pedestal, which does not benefit the worker. Like the so-called "Tragedy of the Commons" (a theory conjured up by William Forster Lloyd in 1832 at Oxford) which was the excuse by the powerful to justify the enclosures of our commons, we are made to believe

that its someone else amongst us is at fault for why we struggle when it is the system itself. We are told to see certain people as lazy, be they immigrants, of a different income class or a different age group such as millennials or boomers. This started with lies like the Tragedy of the Commons which stated that common people are too foolish and unorganized to not destroy their own land, which was only was repeated again in 1968 by environmentalist Garret Hardin, basing his information solely on Lloyd's "research."

As Jason Hickel explained in "The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions" (2018) the idea of calling people lazy is weaponized against any group from low-income workers to Indigenous persons to the Global South. So when addressing the classic questions about who is deserving and undeserving of help (a remnant of the Poor Laws of 1834 that used actual violence and even death to force the people to work where the state decided), about who works and who doesn't, the mistake that I think is made is that we have only had this work, these jobs that have been part of the damage actually done, many of which are the "Bullshit Jobs" explained in the book of the same name by the wonderful writer and speaker David Graeber who we sadly lost in 2020. The truth is we have always worked. As American economist James Suzman explained in an on-air interview "if you think about it, all life works."

Take our civilizations back to their earliest forms. We had to work together. We have neither claws, nor fangs nor incredible dexterity. If you put the average human in a cage with the average lion, it is the average lion who emerges picking his teeth. The idea of us being individualistic entities separated in a vacuum is deeply removed from how and who we are. We all prefer to have our own privacy of course, but humankind is deeply social and tribal. The 2020 pandemic, like other sudden dramatic moments in history showed how when the chips are down, making sure everyone in our tribe is ok is our automatic go-to procedure as opposed to the veneer theory that as soon as the lights go out, we will all turn on each other.

Basic income rewards the most important work, that of forms of reproductive care. It recognizes that all human life has value, and this includes those who do work that is ignored by measures like the GDP. As New Zealand politician Marilyn Waring explained on the TED stage "on the other side of the boundary of production there was this extraordinary phrase in the rules...that of the *non-primary producers*. If you do the work of transporting members of your family and their goods, shopping, cleaning, preparing food, cleaning up after, caring for children, caring for other loved ones, doing laundry or ironing, the statistics claim you are at *leisure*." American historian Peter Linebaugh has stated outright that in this way women and most notably their often-reproductive work (referring to the things Waring stated and more as opposed to just childbirth and childcare though that is part of it) is the heart of the commons. He made in one talk a direct reference to the mostly young woman in charge at the Standing Rock protests in North Dakota where young women where not only the prime water protectors but also ran the entire communities' diverse needs such as medical, administration and childcare. Like a guitarist who spends one hour on stage but has spent over a thousand hours playing chords, scales, and arpeggios every hour of productive work is the result of thousands of hours of the work of care. Without this unpaid work, the paid work of our lives would grind to a halt instantly.

The earliest tribes of our different peoples eventually understood that if they wanted to fend off the equivalent threat of lions to keep them from killing the tribe, individual members could not go at it alone. So, for the best chance they learned to work together as a team. This way the lions were out of



luck if they tried to attack. When it came to hunting, and yes warfare, our warriors or hunters would be the ones to go out and defend the village or make the kill and bring the bounty back to the community who would share it across every member because every member was part of the whole and still considered valuable. In this way basic income is not a deviation or radical, it is actually a return to our better instincts of cooperation and sharing. From learning about the subject in online sources and books, mostly since these have been my primary sources over the last year in the pandemic I have heard from every walk of life, from every political group, from every social class that people find something from their angle that they like about basic income. The Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has stated its importance. Famously top entrepreneurs have come out for it as they have seen how technology will make jobs obsolete. This was the work of people like the late Gerald Huff who worked for Tesla and wrote about and talked about how he saw what was coming. There are also many people who cannot work for no fault of their own but who either end up on disability or are unable to obtain the slightly higher incomes of disability which still place a person in poverty. Just because someone cannot work, which I hope I have made clear, does not mean they cannot contribute to our society. Most of our actual productivity comes from machines and even sales now are moving over to machines with things like the Amazon Go store where you swipe your phone to enter, take what you want and leave. The software knows what you took and charges you on the way home. It really comes down to what is the future we want to see happen. Over the last thirty years of my working life here in Victoria I have seen the worrying trend. I saw work go from paying a competitive wage with in-house 100% full dental, pharmaceutical and even life insurance. I have seen our homeless population grow from just a few to a few thousand not counting the people who are the hidden homeless, sleeping on friend's couches, becoming reliant on favors from family and friends to make ends meet. This is not ok and if nothing changes the trend will simply continue. As British epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson explained on the TED stage, inequality effects all of us, not just those in poverty. Basic income upstream is superior to gates and fences, alarms and extra police, bigger health budgets and less trust downstream. We pick the future we want. Do we want Mad Max or Star Trek?

It is like the African idea of Ubuntu which states "I am because you are."

Basic income lays a foundation below our different national, and one day, even global households. It is a trust that declares "I give this to you because it is yours and I trust you." It creates a feeling of belonging to the whole in black and white terms you can actually see, not just believe in an abstract concept of citizenship. I am reminded of Dr Suzanne Simard's work "Finding the Mother Tree" (2021) in which she discovered that our forests are made up not of competitors but of a supportive community. It is as though the natural world is quietly teaching us from every blade of grass, from within the chlorophyll of every turning leaf the truth of our heritage, our connection, our family. You are one of us. You belong to the commons and it to you.

## *Making the Connection*

*"We can have an economy that is focused on making lives better for people or we can focus on just keeping everyone busy, like cancelling a tractor and giving everyone shovels."*

*-Scott Santens, writer, and activist.*

*"Care is self-actualization through the investment, growth and development of others."*

*Milton Mayeroff from "On Caring" (1971)*

In the Rocky Mountains of Basalt Colorado stands a sleek, shining new office building. It is a two story 15,600 square foot building that is insulated with an 83-kilowatt solar photovoltaic system that produces more energy than the NetZero building needs. Called the Rocky Mountain Institute Innovation center it also boasts state of the art heating, cooling, and water systems all focused on efficiency. The actual glass of the building can change tint to help control temperature in cooler or warmer seasons and the entire building inside is designed to make use of as much natural daylight as possible to also reduce electrical need.

This is just one example of what is possible from the pages of Paul Hawken's "Drawdown" which goes over specifically what are our greatest problems at what is producing carbon, methane and causing the problems that we must face if we hope to survive. Earth itself will always survive. But the survival of life on Earth clearly depends on our actions.

Another example from the book of a community level initiative comes from the solar settlement in Freiburg Germany where a rooftop solar panel project gives the community a high positive energy balance making it almost year-round detached from the grid.

For myself here in Victoria, I do not have to look far to see how the connection wants to be made but cannot completely reach in an age of pipelines, big oil still getting hundreds of billions in subsidies, old growth logging, thermo-coal and most visibly, people paying those climbing prices on gas, often fueling up giant sized trucks and SUVs.

A contentious issue here on Southern Vancouver Island, along with our rising problem with homelessness due to poverty and people coming to our city to try to find both housing but more importantly climate you can survive, is our mayor Lisa Helps and her initiative to put in new infrastructure of bike lanes and other things to move Victoria towards the future. This is not going to be an essay attacking our mayor as sadly our own town has its own partisan divide on the subject of Mayor and Council. I believe that many of the ideas are good while others leave me less convinced. But that is the normal situation any mayor would find themselves in. From my perspective it would seem as though Helps found herself as the incumbent in an age of rising homelessness across the western world along with climate change and the rise of the precariat. I can't vouch for her reasoning but one thing she may have felt responsible for was creating the Victoria of the future that has to emerge. I just feel that for

that to work everyone must emerge with it. A report in the Vancouver Sun by Jill Tipping, CEO of the BC Tech Association revealed that our biggest industry in British Columbia, despite our belief that we are primarily a resource source is the service sector. This sector is notably target in the sights of developing automation as well as streamlining and understandably online purchasing.

Returning to Victoria and its bike lanes, the construction of these new divisions in roads and entire systems has been for a decade now a source of frustration for those who drive in Victoria. This is because motor vehicles are still the standard for business with the use of bicycles a newer, technically better in some ways and desired but not yet fully reachable goal.

Many of these initiatives like bike lanes and other community-centric amenities speak to a concept of the fifteen-minute city (an idea from ancient city layouts with the goal of placing all weekly activities within fifteen minutes of your front door) and the overall idea of the concept of Degrowth, a new vision for where we must go next in our journey. Like Paul Hawken of Project Drawdown said on stage in a talk “within every problem is a solution in disguise.” Learning to work with the Earth instead of trying to dominate it through industry brings us into an actual relationship. This is the part about the idea that I wish to inspire amid a present that may seem impossibly dark. With basic income we can set a simple floor beneath each person as a base and foster the idea of learning to slow down and live sustainably. In this way we become as any other system or cycle in nature, so that we not only emerge alive in the year 2100 but have taken our civilization to its next level.

We become like a rider and steed, like a samurai and his katana or like an old sea captain who knows the vessel he calls his lady. We, the human race and her, mother earth, can develop a deeper relationship that takes us past sustaining to really listening to the nuances of the causes and effects, to the actions and reactions from our activities. It is like we begin to listen to the heart of the earth. We can feel it in the topsoil and see it high in the clouds. We can see our world from the mindset of abundance that there is more than enough for everyone instead of the mindset of scarcity that puts us as not a community but as independent competitors. Like Sting sang in his song History will Teach us Nothing from the album Nothing Like the Sun (1987) “the constant fear of scarcity, aggression as it’s child.”

The concept of basic income is suggested in nearly every chapter of “Degrowth: Vocabulary for a New Era (2015) edited and compiled by Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis. One point amongst the in-depth chapters of this book is that the longer degrowth economics is delayed in favor of the current model of endless growth, the steeper the level of degrowth will have to be for us survive. This is now glaringly clear as the International Panel on Climate Change (or IPCC formed by the United Nations in 1988) just released their report during my final edits of this manuscript, that according to over 200 scientists we humans are responsible for climate change and that drastic action must be taken. Degrowth is a way of sensibly slowing our economic metabolism, getting more from what we do and emphasizing the work of care which is our most vital. Also called the “Steady State Economy” it aims towards wellbeing over endless production, quality over quantity especially considering that despite our level of production that towers over where it was fifty years ago, we have not necessarily become that much happier. Degrowth, like basic income, has many names throughout history connected to its legacy such as William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 1860s and Leo Tolstoy.

Put simply, we all saw what happened, even if for a moment when we had no choice but to slow right down in spring of 2020. Places like the northern Indian state of Punjab experienced a drop in

pollution so much so that they saw the Himalayas for the first time in decades. In Los Angeles and other places around the world we saw smog lifting as we reduced our overall activity.

It did not last of course because we had only hit the pause button, but for a moment, as Michael Moore stated on his Rumble podcast “Mother Nature sent us to our time out.” We were taught again how we are not masters of the world but organisms dependent on the success of other organisms in our biosphere.

Obviously, we cannot work at the no-activity level of the lockdown, but we also cannot use the wartime measure of endless GDP to send our combined civilization off the proverbial cliff. Scientists said that the 5% reduction in early 2020 was great, but still short of the 7.6% needed to stop the overall dangerous threshold of a 1.5 degree rise in global base temperatures. Considering this disparity of 2.6% we cannot just tinker around the edges of how we change things. I’m reminded of when the horse was overtaken by the internal combustion engine. The early designs looked like a carriage with the horse simply missing. It was not until visionaries like Henry Ford that the entire idea was shaped into what we call the car. Like this we need to completely re-envision a new way of living on our earth, not just fewer plastic bags and more electric vehicles.

At the same time this is happening we have people who are working jobs that do not necessarily always need to be done or are driving around to multiple jobs per day. This makes their ability to really take part in the much-needed slowing pace of bike lanes, fifteen-minute cities, shopping local and other sustainable or environmentally conscious concepts only fanciful and “maybe one day” thoughts. We want the majority to do more things beyond this too, such as changing buying habits, eating habits and making the decisions as to what is actually important and of real value. We could invest in making our own homes more NetZero. In production we could decide not only what work is desirable, but what to produce as we would not feel the need that we have to produce something even if it’s not good (or worse) because we have to make money. An example of this was the anti-poverty program in Indonesia that resulted in a 30% drop in deforestation because the people did not have to do something they knew was not environmentally good just to make ends meet. IPCC findings have stated that 20% of greenhouse gases are derived from deforestation alone. The obvious tragic conclusion that plays out is that making ends meet no matter what just makes it that much harder to survive for the same struggling people in their own future. It is literally the opposite of paying it forward.

In Canada we have over 3.2 million of our people living in poverty, many of which are working more than one job. I have seen clips of young couples, working Canadians who are clearly well spoken, educated, and have done all the things we told them to do while growing up abandoning their apartments for the last time to try to find some other way such as living in whatever vehicle they happen to own. It has become its own concept called “Van Life” where people make do with a large vehicle as a home, some who make them quite well organized and maintained but of course, even their most enthusiastic advocates have stated it is interesting as a way to see the world, but it is not without hiccups. Something like this should be an interesting project or an adventure, not how someone is forced to live the rest of their life because being able to be in your own home is permanently out of your reach as a working person. The situation for too many is simply damage control where they know they will never see the inside of their own home. They know they will be living below the poverty line no matter what they try and can only set about with the goal of making that reality as painless as possible. Even with the lobbyist side of politics and all the blatantly frustrating things around certain issues it

always seems to me like this reality as the foundation to all activity is simply going to provide us all with more polarization, and like climate change I am worried as to where it might lead. Do we really want to go out like that, our civilization ending simply because we could not trust each other? Pointing fingers and saying “they did it” at our tragic bitter end? I refuse to believe that this is our future after centuries of so many great lights in human achievement.

Like the opposite direction of basic income, poverty makes everything harder. As many people struggling within its slick, black, towering walls have explained, it is a full-time job all by itself with the amount of daily work one must do just to stay alive, let alone to make anything resembling forward progress. Money for bills goes into past bills, like you are living in one month ago. As soon as you begin to see your next income as the “thing that will do it” that becomes that next income's death warrant because it means that the money will not last longer than a few days as you make those demanded minimum payments. The world of payday loans makes this situation only that much more horrible but tempting as we are often hopeful creatures and sadly to some of our people's detriment. As Rutger Bregman noted, struggling financially is like a computer running ten heavy programs at once. Poverty can cause people to lose mental bandwidth equivalent to between 13 and 14 IQ points. This is comparable to drinking heavily or losing a night's sleep. Freeing people up to think would give everyone more space to not only do what must be done at the grassroots level but allow them to pursue other ideas on how to set us on a better course. Maybe there is something else we had not thought of that is even more sustainable but takes a bit of work or effort that most would say no to right now.

We want people to make better choices, but it is like asking them to solve a complicated algebra problem hanging from a rope over the brink of Niagara Falls. Even if the algebra problem is important, or solvable, they have other things on their mind at that moment. Poverty does not, and I say this with the most respect for anyone below our poverty line, and as someone who has been below it myself, lead automatically towards morally higher grounds. As Anthony Robbins said in *Personal Power* “wherever I see poverty I see crime, I see lack, I see people doing things and justifying it with I had to survive.” Even Alfred P. Doolittle from “*My Fair Lady*” explained it saying “No, poor men like myself are not in the position to be moral.” Basic income would take the threat of having to make horrible choices away. The idea that work saves us from vice is confused here. Being out of poverty, out of lack keeps us from falling further. Work is something we will always do as we always have. A financial floor is the thing that, as the character Brian Quigley said in the BBC Irish drama *Ballykissangel* “is the thing that will keep you safe and warm.” Living in poverty you do not have the luxury to think ahead. You are in a boat drifting towards the brink of the waterfall. So, when it comes to what you eat, what you do with your time and how your overall focus is placed, it can only be on the right now. This naturally sets those in poverty to fall in some unforeseen way. This, along with the other determinants of health, is why the concept of income dictating health is a basic concept in the study of Sociology.

Basic income would especially be needed if things start getting harder than they already are with climate change. Forty-six percent of Canadians cannot afford an unexpected two-hundred-dollar expense. Expenses that can be caused by loss of land, food shortages and other financial requirements to deal with a changing planet could be too much for too many. One trailblazer that already exists in this comes from, of all people, Dolly Parton. In 2016 around 1300 homes were destroyed by wildfires in Gatlinburg Tennessee. The famous singer and actor created the My People Fund that gave \$1000 USD per month for each family that lost a home from December 2016 to May 2017, with the last payment being \$5000. 900 families received the amount. In a report from The University of Tennessee in

Knoxville, the cash payments were considered the most helpful support at 65% with item donations at 27% and emotional support at 11%.

There are many ideas as to what people could do on a local level for sustainable living. One is called permaculture where small to large agricultural practices can work more within natural “laws-of-nature” systems of species interaction than the more commercial ways of farming such as producing only one product en masse. One is regenerative agriculture which is a variety of other methods in farming that, like permaculture, looks at practices that keep carbon in the ground such as not tilling land, the familiar idea of composting and the idea of using cover crops to avoid erosion. There is carbon farming which is an idea based on the concept of sequestering greenhouse gasses from the air, and farming in such a way that few are produced to create carbon drawdown. These ideas deserve (and, of course, have) entire books of their own and are just part of the story of how we must shift how our economic system. We must move from the linear method of make - use - destroy to the natural and cyclical method of make – use – renew, so that it comes back around to the start through repurposing, recycling, and other practices of green sustainable development.

At the same time, we are in the middle of what is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution where more and more of our work is being replaced on a physical level that has the capacity to feed the world. More and more we will develop the technology to grow food through better sustainable methods, get everyone the things they want and need with little human intervention but what we must do is create the foundation where people can volunteer for what work they wish to do to help with creating this sustainable future. As I stated before, if someone cannot work, or will not (which pilots of basic income do not point to and they may be contributing in some way beyond simply being an agent of activity in the economy) then that’s not bad as reduced activity is certainly better than the overwork direction that is our current trajectory. It is absurd that those in the precariat, gig, or concierge economy are trying to climb to the numbers of 70 to 90 to goodness knows how many hours a week because our current system expects that of them. The first job interview question everyone gets is “why do you want to work here?” I’m fairly sure the answer isn’t supposed to honestly be “who cares? I need more work!” I mentioned this on social media and Floyd Marinescu, CEO of C4Media, angel investor and founder of UBI Works said “I would never hire someone who said that!” If people work a job they voluntarily, genuinely, in their heart want to do then everyone benefits. Customers have service from someone who is really into what they are doing. The boss has a wonderful team, and the employee feels they are doing what they love.

There is also the idea that has been around for a while of a carbon tax but with the connection that it is targeted towards the largest polluters and that along with other funding sources this could be used to pay for a basic income through a carbon dividend, something already happening on a small scale here in British Columbia in connection with the Goods and Services Tax. This is far better than the concern over the idea of consumer-targeted carbon rationing, though that is a concern for the future if we keep going with fossil fuels. Even though it is logical, politically trying to make something like carbon rationing work would be a much harder sell than using the dividend and giving people the positive choice and not negative punishment. Anything that effects our commons naturally should be included and not be harmful to low-income persons.

As I am creating this a piece just came out from "Sciencealert.com" that nearly 14000 scientists are warning that earth's vital signs are rapidly worsening and we need to ban fossil fuels, protect biodiversity, and carbon sinks.

With a basic income in place, automation and the gig economy become workable. Let us say you get yours tomorrow and you are in the gig economy. Rather than racing through four gigs per day you can ask yourself "what do I want to do?" Perhaps there is a job nearby you that you really like but it is hard to make the connection to it. While he was mayor of Stockton California, Michael Tubbs created the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED). This was a \$500/month basic income to 125 residents for two years. Mayor Tubbs founded Mayors for a Guaranteed Income inspired by both Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's writings on basic income and on how the two-year Stockton pilot had improved lives and showed that with a basic income people, like Guy Standing has echoed "work more, and when they work, they are more productive and energetic." Like Mayor Tubbs said "Poverty makes it hard to be fully human. You should not fear a birth in the family because of money. You should be able to live life properly, get off your phone and play with your kid. You should be excited for a child being born."

With a basic income the fifteen-minute city idea and other progressive ideas become far more easily reachable. You can go to work by bike, transit or even on foot because you could reduce your workload. In a degrowth format work could be shared so you do not need a five-day 40 hour (or more) working week. Your week is now more open, so you are not as stressed which improves your overall health and those around you. You could stop by the grocery store or your favorite place on the way home. You could choose to buy better-quality items over the cheap items so there's less overall production, especially by the most environmentally damaging companies that make short term or "planned obsolescence" goods. You could think "let's try buying some food that's both good for us and good for the earth" as opposed to the choice that you know probably is not. You could shop local which our own Prime Minister Justin Trudeau suggested last Thanksgiving as opposed to having to go to the big box stores which invariably mean more driving (unless you happen to live above one, in which case, great!) As I alluded to it makes ideas like the "four-day work week" actually work without any concern about loss of income, or loss of income for those who support workers in the current system. In fact, the idea of a reduced amount of office time, a reduction in the idea of one career forever is not only happening but it is becoming more people's actual choice. This is not only because it is interesting but as has been shown, people are more effective in shorter bursts of work than grinding away at the grindstone for hours at a time. As a musician and researcher, I learned that sitting in your seat for four hours does not necessarily equal four hours output. As the old "Where there's a Will there's a A!" school program I took years ago stated, "As the hours drag on the actual focus and productivity go through the floor!"

One thing that is often tabled as the counter idea to basic income is the Federal Jobs Guarantee. The problem I have with this is can you guarantee and why would we want to guarantee something that does not need to be there just to keep everyone busy? And it holds to the desperate belief that somehow, we can find a way to make all the effects on what has happened to jobs since the great decoupling in 1972 just disappear. We still hold to a "Great Again" belief that we can just somehow fling open a door and its suddenly the equivalent of 1973 with great union jobs everywhere. Work can and should be optional, flexible and sustainable so that the doing of it has as little impact on our environment as possible. We should move away from the unsustainable mentality that every last one of

us must make extreme efforts to prove themselves via production and actually allow themselves to just simply be. As Scott Santens said, “you are a human being, not a human doing.” The most incredible creativity often comes at us from a kid in his parents’ garage, from a guy sitting at café with a laptop, from someone taking time off. Home is where our dreams are made. Like George Thorogood said in his song “Get a Haircut and get a Real Job” from the 1992 album “Haircut” “I’d sit and listen to my records all day with big ambitions of when I would play.” As a musician that plays shows and entertains audiences myself, I can tell you that in those early days nobody looks that amazing. But one of my most profound experiences as a musician was not necessarily playing some big venue, thought that is wonderful. It was when playing a senior’s home. A worker and the residence told me after the gig “do you remember that one fellow who was clapping along the whole time? That is the first time I’ve seen that resident move his hands, do anything like that.” You cannot put a price on that, and it has nothing to do with conquering the world or showing anyone how much better I am than this person or that. I am not against competition as that is also a fun part of our culture, but the prize should not be being able to come home.

Returning to musicianship, practicing, and developing to the place where you can perform takes time and is not something that immediately looks productive. This reminds me of something I had read years earlier in a guitar book. It was quote by Andy Summers of the band The Police saying “people think a guitarist can pick up the instrument for the first time and make the universe sound like its crying and singing but it’s not like that. We all start small with scales and chords. We start with the possible and build towards the impossible.” Creativity is not only in the domain of the fine arts. Richard Stallman, open-source software creator explained how “If anything deserves a reward it is for social contribution.”

In his 2010 “Life is What you Make it” book Peter Buffett talked about his dad Warren and family friend Bill Gates taking the bullet train across mainland China. Warren said to Bill looking at all the migrant farmers in the fields “out there could be the next Bill Gates and we’ll never know.” Whatever we think of the sentiment, he is not wrong. Too often people in poverty, trying to get by, are cut off from being able to really show the world their potential.

If all this seems extreme, we must stay focused on the fact that we are up against an extreme situation. We are still going through the different variants now of the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, uncertain what will happen next within the Fourth Industrial Revolution and every crisis in history has been a trend accelerator in changes in work. With the existential threat of climate change there are people alive today that are worried they will not live to retirement age because no one their age will be able to. We do not have decades to make this change, massive change must occur before the decade we are in is over. This was the point that was shouted at us as loud as the 2021 IPCC report could. A basic income would help with what Elin Kelsey talked about in her book “Hope Matters” (2020) that, like Chris Jordan said in his talk on the Sustainable Human YouTube channel, we are better off if we don’t despair at the size of the work and how it seems too much for us to handle. Having income security could give people the breathing room to believe that there is possibility. It gives the ability and the mental bandwidth to decide what is the next best step to take. As I stated before, with a basic income people can choose products that are more sustainable, the decisions made by the majority. It reminds me of the project of animal protection for young people that Jane Goodall called “Roots and Shoots.” The name comes from how the sheer force of all of us can force even the biggest obstacle aside, like roots and shoots of trees and grasses can push solid concrete out of the way.



I suggest an entirely new branding to this idea of future work, returning it to the spirit of the Charter of the Forests, or as Heather Menzies titled her book, a “Reclaiming of the Commons” (2014). I recommend calling it simply “Commons Care.”

The commons are, as Guy Standing can expand on further than I ever could in his amazing book “The Plunder of the Commons” (2019), our natural world, but also the developed world we share as a heritage that we have both the rights to and the responsibility to protect how we can. In the fashion of this verses a bureaucratic program, each person will have autonomy. This gives each citizen, each commoner as we all are, the power of choice. This gives the dignity of choice. This gives people the thoughtful, unjudged ability to decide where their specific and individual role fits. Like Jesus himself said we should do our good works in secret. If you are wealthier, you could take the shorter work week and decide how would you give back, especially if you were also a UBI beneficiary. This is not to say you would have to, again the rule is that each person decides for themselves. Within the work of Commons Care, supported for each with a basic income, we can pick projects we want to help on whether it is the refitting of buildings for NetZero status, developing new systems for power including in-stream hydro that does not cause giant reservoir flooding or whatever works best. It would also free up the creativity of not just the arts but the finest minds who, considering the drive many young people today have, may have ideas we have not each learned about yet on how to fight climate change better, store electrical energy in ways we do not know about or other forms of potential drawdown.

Basic income gives each citizen the ability to prioritize the best version of themselves. It makes thinking of the future truly possible. We, from the mighty roots and shoots of our communities, can take large scale combined action to fight climate change, ensuring each person can aim for a better future, a stronger community, and a brighter tomorrow.

There is no question anymore. Our shared future is job one.

Thank you for reading!

Tom Pogson.

Writer, musician, and creator of

Basic Income Victoria BC.

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