

Universal Basic Income (UBI) or the “Corona Virus Stimulus Check”: Economic Liberation or the First Step Towards Slavery?

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*During the [2020] Democratic primaries, **Andrew Yang** brought up universal basic income (UBI) and made it central in his vision for the economy of the United States. The theme was echoed by **Bernie Sanders** who cited the income guarantee that is offered by countries like Denmark and Finland as a possible model for future development.*

Both Yang and Sanders argued that automation of production and other technological changes taking place in America have created a lag in job creation even as the economy flourishes, and that such a state can be responded to best with a universal basic income.

There are advantages and disadvantages to a basic income that demand a thoughtful debate among citizens, in the media and in the halls of government. Such a debate is absolutely impossible in the current environment of oppression.

What we have now is a universal basic income being forced upon us without any democratic due process or accountability. It is known as the “corona virus stimulus check.” The newspapers tell us that we may get another \$1,200 in the mail soon if congress passes a bill.

So let us step back and think about this check for \$1,200 that the government offers us. **For many of us, the current shutdown has ended our economic lives, left us unemployed. The stimulus check is the only form of payment we receive. It is our de facto “universal basic income” -like it or not.** But does this universal basic income allow us to be creative artists, to volunteer in our neighborhoods, to have the financial security that will allow us to fully realize ourselves?

No, sadly, this universal basic income has been imposed upon us from above. Who knows

who made up the idea. Certainly no one asked our opinions. We have no say in how much it is for, or who gets it. One thing is certain: for most of us, it is not anywhere near enough.

Also, the debate on the universal basic income assumes that income is the critical issue for Americans. No serious economist believes this fraud. The primary issue in the United States is assets, ownership. And assets are dominated by a tiny handful of the rich.

The over-the-top response to COVID-19 has shut down the United States economy and led to massive unemployment in the course of just a few months. This pre-planned controlled demolition of the economy has left us begging for a universal basic income and we are getting it.

Meanwhile, billionaires are getting billions of dollars in subsidies, as are CEOs. They do not need a universal basic income because they make their money off of speculation, off of the money they print up, off of what they take from us. COVID-19 is about a massive transfer of wealth and unless that transfer is stopped, basic income will be of little help.

Most of us are facing eviction, our small stores are being shut down by arbitrary regulations on our free movement, and no small number of us face starvation and homelessness in the next few months unless action is taken now.

Giving us a basic income without addressing the massive concentration of wealth, which has grown exponentially worse over just the last five months, is a recipe for disaster. Doing so after creating an environment in which we have no choice but to accept those checks is criminal.

The super-rich have spent the last twelve years, and especially the last three months, printing up money through the Federal Reserve and giving it back to themselves. If we do not take that money back, economic inequality cannot be countered.

Between five and ten trillion dollars disappeared while you were distracted. If we leave the artificially created economic disparity in the United States untouched, if we let the looters at the top keep their loot, the free money from the government will not be free. It will be paid for with your taxes (certainly not taxes on multinational corporations with their headquarters offshore) or it will raise the national debt and eat away at your buying power.

We cannot grow our own food, we cannot produce our own energy, and we cannot create our own clothes, furniture, and other products for daily life. We can only use the money that we are paid by corporations to purchase products at big stores run by multinational corporations, offering products produced overseas by poorly paid workers.

The government has become the toy of the rich and powerful. High government officials, judges and even middle-level officials are appointed with the backing of multinational corporations and investment banks. The politicians are even worse.

The actual experts in government have been removed and government functions, which are essential, have been outsourced to private corporations who do today what the government did, but with a focus on short-term profits, and not on the people. These companies are paid with your tax dollars to do the job of government, but they never swore an oath to the constitution, and their primary mission is delivering profits to their owners.

The redistribution of assets, the complete transparency of the government and the complete end to the unwarranted and dangerous influence of the wealthy, and of the banks and corporations that they control, over the formulation of policy must come before we can start to discuss basic income.

We need to consider why the banks want to cultivate in us habits of dependency and passivity. After all, if all we can do is sit around watching TV until our stimulus check comes, we will be unable to organize ourselves into groups capable of taking action, we will be unable to build our own economies.

Let us talk for a moment about the relationship between technology and the proposed universal basic income. The argument advanced by Yang and Sanders was that automation, and the growth of AI and other technologies, are reducing jobs because they are not being formed in other sectors even as productivity increases. Therefore, we need a UBI to assure that workers displaced by new technologies have employment and can adapt to a new work reality.

It is assumed that, just as the sun rises in the East, automation, the implementation of AI and the end of human to human interactions is a natural law that cannot be violated, that is beyond the realm of policy discussion.

But are we truly forced to tear apart the natural order of society in order to satiate the cruel god of technology demanding endless sacrifice for the sake of an inevitable fourth industrial revolution, for the sake of the inevitable domination of the Earth by automation, driver-less cars, robots and drones? Is the internet of things truly the Kingdom Come?

Is the promotion of AI (artificial intelligence) in accord with God's covenant with man? Or is it rather a scheme to increase profits for the few, and drive the common man, the common woman, into poverty and dependency?

The answer to this question is not obvious. It demands an open discussion involving experts on society, on technology, on governance and on economics, but also ordinary citizens who understand better than anyone else what the impact of technology can be. Moreover, the discussion should be transparent and scientific in nature, leaving no space for the wealthy who benefit from automation and AI to disguise their wish list as scientific truth.

Productivity without job growth is the standard line used to justify this basic income. Productivity is the holy cow that cannot be approached by any but the anointed high priests, a false concept cooked up to justify just about anything. It is not the law of gravity or the second law of thermodynamics. It is the biased and warped idea that holds that certain forms of economic activity to be more important than others.

If you spend the day helping your sick mother, tending vegetables in the community farm, volunteering with the handicapped, or playing with your children, that activity is not considered productive by those who make up the rules of productivity.

But if you destroy forests or farmland to build unnecessary shopping malls, if you poison rivers and lakes with the run off from factory farms, or from uranium mines, or if you wage wars abroad, that is consider productivity. The gap between employment and productivity is most certainly not simply a result of technological change.

Finally, we need to consider where the United States stands in history at this moment, and

where we have come from, before we can talk about where we are going.

In the previous generation there was a profound ideological and economic competition between the market economies of the United States and Europe and the socialist economies of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. We refer to it, imprecisely, as the Cold War.

The United States held up the ideal that there was no limit to what the individual could achieve through his or her efforts and we argued that individual freedoms were more critical than the common good.

The socialist economies assumed that economic equality was central for a healthy society and took preemptive measures to assure a relatively egalitarian economy.

I grew up in the United States. We assumed that we could have economic fairness and at the same time the ability obtain rewards in accord to our special efforts in an appropriate manner.

But, what we assumed to be a natural state was not at all natural. The massive accumulation of wealth, the exploitation of workers, and the abuse of child labor were standard practice in the late nineteenth century, and even into the 1930s.

But the existence of the socialist block out there, imperfect though it was, put unending pressure on the United States to modify the system and to allow for a more just society — granted there were profound limits.

In the late 1930s, the threat of revolution within the United States also was real and it forced action on labor issues that would otherwise have been ignored.

We may not have been aware of that pressure, but it made things like welfare and the minimum wage possible.

The salaries of CEOs were capped. Taxes on the rich went up to 90% and there were no billionaires, or offshore tax havens. America was not that way because the rich were virtuous. It was that way because there was endless pressure.

When the so-called "communist block" was subject to commercialization from the 1990s on, and the ideological opposition dropped off, the United States slowly shifted back to the ruthless market economy it had once enjoyed, one in which workers were expendable. This time, however, automation and drones, AI and robots, made it possible to engage in an even more ruthless experiment.

But the shifts in American society, like climate change, were too slow for us to grasp. We were too caught up with email and Facebook to notice.

We could not perceive that the rules we had accepted had disappeared, that a ruthless shiny brave new world had been born.

Ultimately, we cannot discuss a universal basic income in the United States until we start to create a culture, a system, in which some counter force exists to stand up for the interests of ordinary citizens. That is the ultimate question. That counter force, however, must be built by you, by me and by us, and not by experts or by politicians and most certainly not by

corporations with their drones and robots.

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