

Basic Income and the Canadian
Welfare State:
Exploring the Realms of Possibility

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Situating the Canadian Debate Within the International BI Debate

1. Canadian Unease With the *Left-Libertarian* Position
2. Canadian Unfamiliarity With the *Republican* Position
3. *Feminist* Reluctance to Embrace Guaranteed Income in Canada

1. Canadian Unease With the *Left-Libertarian* Position:

Political left in Canada

- less strong and massive than in many other countries
- more (reformist) social democratic than (radical) socialist in ideological terms
- less influential in electoral terms than in many European countries

Canadian economic policy (e.g. taxation, regulation) significantly influenced by the ‘hyper-capitalist’ orientation of its neighbour and major trading partner to the south

- pressure towards harmonization of social policy and lowering taxes

1. Canadian Unease With the *Left-Libertarian* Position (cont'd):

More emphasis on provision of *collective* services and social insurance, as opposed to redistributive justice as opposed to direct income support to individuals

- universal public health insurance (“medicare”)
- Beveridgean social insurance model of collective pooling of risks against common hazards (e.g. unemployment, loss of income upon retirement)
- Child Tax Benefit is related ideologically to parents’ duty to the “collective” to do a good job of raising children

Old Age Security is the only demogrant program left

2. Canadian Unfamiliarity With the *Republican* Position

Republican justification for BI: freedom requires the enjoyment of a basic set of material assets granting individuals socioeconomic independence from others

In a superficial but psychologically important way, a republican justification for BI initially sounds strange to Canadian ears

2. Canadian Unfamiliarity With the *Republican* Position (cont'd):

Canadian system of government is a constitutional monarchy in the British Westminster model

“republican” equated with “doing away with the Queen” as the head of state

→ a “thin” notion of republicanism

tends to impede interest in or understanding of a “thicker” understanding of republican political theory, along the lines of:

2. Canadian Unfamiliarity With the *Republican* Position (cont'd):

- the state should be under the active control of citizens keen to realize freedom from domination, protection of their right to make personal and political choices, and access to resources necessary for the exercise of their civic responsibilities.
- Arguments inspired by T. Paine about common ownership of societal wealth (e.g. individual entitlement to a share of resource revenue) a ‘tough sell’ in Canada
 - no equivalent in any Canadian province to Alaska Dividend
 - Canadians talk about resource “royalties” not “dividends”

3. Feminists' Reluctance to Embrace Guaranteed Income in Canada:

Rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s led to a broad reassessment of social policy

Patriarchy, gender roles, and women's paid and unpaid work were examined, as part of the critical analysis of the "gendering of the welfare state" (J. O'Connor, A. Orloff, etc.)

In more recent years, BI has come under feminist scrutiny.

3. Feminists' Reluctance to Embrace Guaranteed Income in Canada (cont'd):

BI has both opponents and proponents among feminist writers and researchers.

Some feminists see BI's unconditionality as having the potential to create a domestic labour trap, in which many women will forego (recently improved) access to the labour market and careers.

3. Feminists' Reluctance to Embrace Guaranteed Income in Canada (cont'd):

- Key role played by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in 70s, 80s, and early 90s, but NAC is now dormant
- FFQ in Quebec committed to anti-poverty activism and collective service provision
- FAFIA committed to resumption of strengthened standards in income security
- Pictou Statement of Guaranteed Liveable Income (2004)

Reference:

James P. Mulvale, “Basic Income and the Canadian Welfare State: Exploring the Realms of Possibility.” *Basic Income Studies* 3 (1), April 2008 [on-line].

Thinking About Basic Income: Focus Group Reflections from Saskatchewan

1 - The unacceptability of the status quo in economic security and social welfare programs

#2 - Underlying rationales for basic income

a) *The principle of universality*

b) *The definition and personal meanings of work*

c) *BI as a protection against vulnerabilities in labour market*

*Focus Group reflections from Saskatchewan
(cont'd)*

#2 - Underlying rationales for basic income
(cont'd):

d) BI as an ideological counterweight to neo-liberal and related anti-welfare discourses

e) BI as a means of addressing environmental concerns

#3 - Affordability of Basic Income (and potential targeting)

*Focus Group reflections from Saskatchewan
(cont'd)*

#4 - BI delivery, and its possible articulation
with other social programs

5 - Impacts of Basic Income on specific
populations

6 - Questions of political strategy in regard to
BI implementation

Reference:

James P. Mulvale, “Desperately Seeking a New Model of Economic Security for Canada: the Basic Income Approach.” *Canadian Social Work / Travail social canadien* 10 (1) [Autumn 2008 - forthcoming].