



Basic Income as a fundamental Human Right in the People and Planet paradigm – Basic Income in a truly democratic and sustainable ethos

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Following is my commentary as part of the Roundtable discussion on Kathryn Sikkink's piece on human rights: "Human Rights: Advancing the Frontier of Emancipation," organised by the Great Transition Initiative. I contribute the following brief, particularly from the perspective of a universal basic income as an economic right. In case you are not familiar with the concept, the universal basic income is a cash allowance, unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, including children, without means test or work requirement to fulfil their basic needs for the simple reason of existing. Kathryn Sikkink's main argument in her essay is that human rights play a key role in the transformation that we need to build a just and flourishing future. I agree, but for human rights to play a key role in the transformation of societies, we must work to create a radical tectonic shift to build a completely new paradigm.

I would agree that human rights must be the driving force in the transformative change in human values for many reasons, including the four reasons offered in her essay: universal, supranational, emancipatory and expansive; with emancipatory perhaps being the most sought after by the people, "the Demos", to break the shackles that the current system has imposed to capture most societies in the world. Human rights must be at the core of a pillar of a new ethos that we must endeavour to build, but the new ethos requires a radical paradigmatic change for we live in a diametrically opposed ethos to the just and sustainable ethos that we envision building. We are enduring market-based oligarchic governments, the market, or marketocracy,

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reigns supreme and the vast majority of elected officials are truly proxies of the market's owners, the institutional investors of international financial markets, instead of representatives that were bestowed with the sovereign power of the Demos to carry out their will.

The new People and Planet paradigm to which we must aspire is anchored on two pillars: true democracy and true sustainability. True democracy requires that the Demos be in permanent control of the public agenda, so that it always sits in the driver's seat. This cannot be done under so-called representative democracy as practiced today, for it is a hoax, an indelible

the least. It must be done the Demos permanently the public sphere to set the monitor its execution –with public servants elected by of a truly democratic ethos go in pursuit of the welfare special emphasis on the purpose of a community of not truly the Demos, and

The welfare of a community must be anchored in the full enjoyment of all human rights. Until these rights are enjoyed to the utmost by all members, the welfare of the community cannot be achieved. Consequently, true democracy, human rights, and welfare are inextricably joined. One cannot exist without the others.

twentieth-century utopia to say under direct democracy, where participates directly in all areas of agenda, establish priorities, and the power of correction– by the the community. The sole purpose is for communities to organise to of every rank of society, with dispossessed. If that is not the people, then the community is therefore there is no justification

for us to be members of any community lacking this *raison d'être*. Furthermore, the welfare of a community must be anchored in the full enjoyment of all human rights. Until these rights are enjoyed to the utmost by all members, the welfare of the community cannot be achieved. Consequently, true democracy, human rights, and welfare are inextricably joined. One cannot exist without the others.

As part of this imaginary, human rights are essential to the true democracy ethos. Sustainability, the other pillar of the new paradigm, demands that we seek the welfare of communities by providing a dignified standard of living that is sustainable by our planet. Maintaining a consumeristic lifestyle, the dominant understanding of “welfare” today, is completely unsustainable if we want to recover and preserve the resources produced by our planet. Our ecological footprint, a major driver of climate change, must be drastically reduced until we reach a stage where we can reach a stationary state that would allow the planet to replenish its resources at the same rate we consume them. We can imagine this as a process of a gradual but strong shift from consumerism to holistic sustainability through a process of degrowth in all our human activities. This would drastically decrease our ecological footprint by completely changing our values system and lifestyles.

Relative to the economic rights, as part of the tectonic shift to the People and Planet paradigm, the concept of basic income is gaining traction conceptually as a right that must be incorporated into our set of economic rights. However, many, including myself, see it as commonsensical as part of the new ethos. Currently, materialising the basic income as a human right is completely unrealistic. We cannot even guarantee a living wage as a human right in today's marketocratic order. The minimum wage, which has been sanctioned as a right for many decades in the International Labour Organisation, is often flouted. Nearly two billion people in the world work in informal economies where the minimum wage is usually not respected. Additionally, slavery and human trafficking have become in the last decades a major problem where governments have shown a more lenient tendency to tolerate them rather than combat them in the most decisive manner. By the same token, all governments of the metropolises of the marketocratic ethos have systematically stopped any attempt to establish strict binding norms that would govern the social, economic, and environmental responsibilities of business. Voluntary regulations, where companies can cherry pick the norms where they look good

and avoid the rest, have made a mockery of this. Yet, even in this strictly voluntary scheme the living wage standard has always been systematically blocked as a guideline.

Henceforth, the basic income should be seen as part of the third generation of human rights that would be at the core of the pillars of the new ethos. In the new inherently anti-capitalist paradigm, the concepts of minimum wage, living wage and basic income are redefined to transcend the market. These three concepts are distinctive both in practice and in the end result. From the perspective of true democracy and sustainability, the living wage obviates the need for a minimum wage because the lowest

become, by design, a living wage would then to be fully incorporated in international law. They kindred and complimentary provides the wage dignity, appropriate for the family. The basic income and not families—the live with human dignity; it is any income from other requiring the performance of accept a job if offered. It is but every member of the The basic income and the

The basic income should be seen as part of the third generation of human rights that would be at the core of the pillars of the new ethos... The basic income guarantees every individual—and not families—the fulfilment of the basic needs to live with human dignity; it is a fixed sum paid irrespective of any income from other sources; and it is paid without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job if offered. It is provided on an individual basis, but every member of the household would receive one.

form of remuneration would wage. The basic income and serve as two new human rights the new human rights charter in address two clearly distinct yet purposes. The living wage remuneration, worthy of human work rendered to sustain a guarantees every individual — fulfilment of the basic needs to a fixed sum paid irrespective of sources; and it is paid without any work or the willingness to provided on an individual basis, household would receive one. living wage would then

complement each other as newly enshrined social/economic rights. The living wage provides an income earned for work rendered, while the basic income provides a source of security and stability to both wage earners and everyone else. Moreover, in principle the inherent emancipatory power of the basic income would provide workers with a powerful bargaining power to demand greater labour conditions or to the use of their right to strike that they could not enjoy in any other way. Yet, in the new paradigm this should be unnecessary.

Let's elaborate further on the imaginary of the new paradigm. Nation-states, as we know them today, might be dismembered. The new paradigm must allow communities to be supranational in the sense that they may abandon this concept so that they can freely organise as they best see fit to fulfil their purpose. Kathryn Sikkink rightly argues that nation-states have gained a reputation for being the worst kind of human rights violators. Under the new paradigm, we will surely need new forms of societal organisation. They could be called anything the new communities would like to choose, including a nation-state, but their new edifice must be completely changed to be anchored on a truly democratic ethos, where the community wields the power of decision making as the sovereign of its entity through direct and permanent democratic vehicles and not the way it is today, through the mockery of representative democracy.

Kathryn Sikkink comments on the doctrine of popular democracy, suggesting it would be suitable for the advancement and protection of human rights. If we aspire to build a truly democratic ethos, the Demos must be the only sovereign of an organised community. This is not a new notion whatsoever. It is closely associated with the concept of the social contract with Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke, and it has made its way in some cases to current constitutional law. One example is the current Mexican constitution of 1917, where article 39 explicitly declares that *National sovereignty is*

bestowed essentially and originally upon the people. Every public power derives from the people and is instituted for their benefit. The people possess, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or change their form of government. To be sure, there is a long distance between established law and daily praxis. Given that we are enduring marketocratic governments, nation-states as we know them today must cease to exist and be replaced. The same goes for all the multilateral supranational organisations, such as the UN system, that respond to nation-states who have been captured by the marketocratic system.

Under the new paradigm, all members of the Demos enjoy the entire spectrum of human rights: social, economic, cultural, civic, political, and environmental. We would also comply with all of our corresponding responsibilities, which are earmarked to enable us to preserve our rights. There must be a balance between rights and responsibilities in the equation to make the ethos sustainable.

Evidently, this paradigm is completely incompatible with capitalism, which is utterly anthropocentric and undemocratic. We do not live in a democratic ethos, not even in an imperfect one. Representative democracy is a ruse, a euphemism to mask the true paradigm of the dictatorship of the market that we are enduring today. The public matter has been privatised, and politicians discuss and decide on the matter in private with the owners of the market, their true constituents. Thus we do not have governments that work for the people. We have politicians who, for the most part, act as market agents to impose the conditions demanded by their partners to maximise their wealth accumulation, where they together benefit through the revolving-door system. Therefore, if we want to aspire to a sustainable planet where future generations would enjoy a dignified quality of life, we must completely replace capitalism. The sole purpose and principle of capitalism is the reproduction, accumulation, and maximisation of capital regardless of any other consideration and at the expense of all other stakeholders. Needless to say, that the argument in favour of the concept of a capitalist democracy or of a democratic capitalism is unsustainable, for we can hardly find a more direct antagonism between the *raison d'être* of democracy and that of capitalism.

Welfare of people and planet, human rights, freedom, and true democracy are completely anathema to capitalism. The most emblematic and pervasive example where a human right is supplanted by a private good is access to healthcare in the United States. Contrary to the values of most societies, healthcare is treated as not a right but a privilege, a mere piece of merchandise that can be purchased by those who have the purchasing power to buy it. As a result, it should be evident that the condition *sine qua non* for achieving the entire spectrum of human rights is to put an end to capitalism as the system for societal organisation. According to the marketocratic ethos, we are not citizens. Societies have been captured to make us strictly consumer units to feed and reproduce the system, and only if in a Darwinian war of competition we are able to garner enough purchasing power to consume. If we don't, then we are disposable units that the system will seek to eliminate. The underlying rationale behind capitalism is beset with contradictions. This is why it has always been in conflict with a truly democratic ethos. Nonetheless, beyond the many contradictions and our philosophical beliefs, it can be asserted as an axiom that capitalism is completely unsustainable for the simple reason that it requires the infinite consumption of resources in a planet with finite resources. Hence, we must replace it as soon as possible if we aspire to bequeath to future generations a planet worthy of human dignity. I state this well aware that we may have already crossed a threshold where this is not possible, and that even if, for a miracle, all leaders of the world would agree to do without capitalism and replace it with a people and planet paradigm at once, it may be already too late to reverse the damage we have inflicted on the planet to make Mother Earth truly sustainable for humans and all other living species.

Now that I have put in context the overarching challenge that we are facing, working to make human rights the driving force of this tectonic shift should be considered as the core element of the new People and Planet paradigm where true democracy and sustainability ethos. True democracy human rights is not true unsustainable derision. By the without enjoying the right to a ecosystem for humans and all vested human rights ethos. human rights the driving force require designing strategies peacefully dismantle the current paradigm. This may entail strategies that should be explored exhaustively, but they must all begin with creating widespread awareness about the overwhelming existential challenges that we are facing so that we instil in the Demos the urgent need to imagine solutions and organise to materialised them.

True democracy without the full enjoyment of human rights is not true democracy but an unsustainable derision. By the same token, human rights without enjoying the right to a sustainable planetary ecosystem for humans and all living things is not a fully vested human rights ethos.

are the two pillars of the new without the full enjoyment of democracy but an same token, human rights sustainable planetary living things is not a fully Moreover, working to make of the new paradigm will that will have the power to

Lastly, there is a fundamental question to ponder. If we aspire to build a completely new paradigm, then many elements of our values system will cease to have meaning. How can we envision, therefore, a new system with a living wage and a basic income as fundamental rights in the new ethos? I will advance the idea that under the new ethos, the basic income would remain a fundamental right to provide access for all to a life worthy of human dignity. However, the living wage is a concept of the marketocratic existence of capital and paradigm, we must redefine how work will be must redefine the role of truly democratic ethos with rights is contingent on our market. This entails

The achievement of a truly democratic ethos with full enjoyment of our human rights is contingent on our capacity to transcend the market. This entails imagining a completely new conception of life and of our role as individual members of the new society.

system that implies the labour. Hence, in the new transcend the market in order to remunerated and to do this we business. The achievement of a full enjoyment of our human capacity to transcend the imagining a completely new

conception of life and of our role as individual members of the new society. In this way, I would propose that under the new paradigm, there are no global corporations, but only businesses that serve both the private as well as the public good. By design, if they exist, it is because they have transcended the market. Consequently, their workers are also stakeholders in the mission, goals, and management of any business, regardless of the size. Building the new paradigm inevitably requires conceptually redefining the purpose of business to make it congruent with an ethos of true democracy and to transform the market into a vehicle for generating the adequate level of sustainable welfare. This is to place people and planet over the market. Hence, the new *raison d'être* of enterprises must be to generate the people's welfare in a sustainable manner. The maximisation of profits, as the only purpose of business, is evidently eradicated given its absolute incongruence with the common good and its proven capacity to generate ever greater levels of inequality, exclusion, poverty, and depredation of the planet, which are absolutely intolerable in true democracy. Two paramount features of the new enterprise: full respect for the entire spectrum of human rights and authentic sustainability require an equilibrium between the private and public responsibilities of business. As organs of society, businesses must take full responsibility for the impact of their activity on the social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

In a transformative scenario that societies embark on to transcend the market, the market's flaws as an agent of equity—work remuneration or otherwise—would be recognised by all parties as intrinsically inadequate. A new rights-based

paradigm would inherently redefine the purpose of business. Once we transcend the market, its role must be completely deprived of any pre-eminence and of its untrammelled, undemocratic and unsustainable capitalistic essence. Markets will be strictly limited to becoming vehicles of commerce to provide the material quality of life that can be sustained by new predefined ecological footprints. Today's capitalistic logic of the market—anchored on supply-and-demand and sheer speculation—would end. Financial markets and their amoral casino-like mindset would no longer have a role, for they would cease to exist. The commoditisation and privatisation of every aspect of life, including public goods, would cease to continue, and past privatisation of public goods would be reverted. Instead, the new paradigm would guarantee these public goods as rights. In the sphere of labour, a shift from treatment of workers as commodities to workers as stakeholders would emerge as the established norm. The purpose of business would shift from profit maximisation toward public service. Competition, innovation and efficiency would remain core business attributes, but democratic control and transparency,

horizons, would direct and sharing wealth within a sustainable ecological limits. be striving to compete, efficiencies in their pursuit of welfare for all stakeholders, planet. As a consequence, in workers' financial wage, but a shared

we must realise that a basic income and many other rights will never materialise unless we embark on a tectonic shift to replace the current unsustainable paradigm with a paradigm whose only purpose is to seek the sustainable welfare of the people and the planet.

contribution that guarantees to all employees/workers a life worthy of human dignity in line with the high quality-of-life standard that the community has democratically established as a legally-binding standard. In this way, the basic income would guarantee a minimum standard of living for individuals regardless of whether or not they are involved in an economic activity, and a shared remuneration would compensate individuals for the product of their economic activity, always based in both cases on the predefined quality of life that would guarantee the true sustainability of the system for future generations.

In summary, human rights can be the driving force for the transformative change of societies, but we must realise that a basic income and many other rights will never materialise unless we embark on a tectonic shift to replace the current unsustainable paradigm with a paradigm whose only purpose is to seek the sustainable welfare of the people and the planet.

Useful links:

- <https://www.jussempere.org>
- <https://jussempere.org/Resources/Economic%20Data/Resources/BasicIncomeinHumanRights.pdf>
- <https://jussempere.org/Resources/EconomicData/Resources/KSikkinkAdvancingHumanRights.pdf>

- ❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Living Wages North and South Initiative (TLWNSI) constitutes the sole program of The Jus Semper Global Alliance (TJSGA). TLWNSI is a long-term program developed to contribute to social justice in the world by achieving fair labour endowments for the workers of all the countries immersed in the global market system. It is applied through its program of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and it focuses on gradual wage equalisation, for real democracy, the rule of law and living wages are the three fundamental elements in a community's quest for social justice.
- ❖ **About the author:** Álvaro de Regil Castilla is Executive Director of The Jus Semper Global Alliance, a coalition that supports living wages worldwide as a core element of sustainability, democracy, and business accountability, and a Board Member of Buen Vecino, a citizens-based initiative to support human rights for immigrants in California's Central Coast. He has published extensively on labour and human rights, true democracy and sustainability, corporate social responsibility, degrowth economics and the imaginary of a People and Planet paradigm to replace capitalism. He holds a BBS from Universidad La Salle and an MBA in marketing from the George Washington University.
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