

Creating a Network of Dissent

The Heretical Idea of Basic income

Christensen, Erik Christian; Ydesen, Christian

Published in:
Politics of Dissent

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Christensen, E. C., & Ydesen, C. (2015). Creating a Network of Dissent: The Heretical Idea of Basic income . In O. Agustin, & M. B. Jørgensen (Eds.), *Politics of Dissent* (pp. 181-203). Peter Lang Publishing Group.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Creating a Network of Dissent

– The Heretical Idea of Basic income

Erik Christensen & Christian Ydesen

Abstract: Containing appealing elements to both socialists and liberals the idea of basic income is characterized by its ability to transcend the topography of the established political landscape. Thus, the idea of basic income holds a potentiality only very rarely found among political ideas. However, since the breakthrough of neoliberal hegemony the idea of basic income has increasingly been ostracized to live a life in the periphery of the dominating discourse but has at the same time in the last ten years got an ever stronger foothold in the new global social movements. This means that the idea of basic income is not waning or even dying. The global and expanding organization, basic income Earth Network (BIEN) working for the implementation of basic income all over the world, has endeavoured to show how a basic income would mitigate and perhaps even help to overcome the many negative aspects of the current world economic crisis.

Using the Danish discursive political landscape as an empirical case we aim at disclosing the dissenting potential of the basic income idea for cutting across the poles of the contemporary political topography and manifest itself as a viable and forceful political idea. In order to do this we draw on the theoretical framework of the Norwegian philosopher of law Thomas Mathiesen and the Latin-American philosopher Enrique Dussel.

The research question treated in the paper is: What has characterized the discursive struggle about basic income in Denmark since the publication of “Revolt from the Center” in 1978? And how can the idea of basic income be conceived as a phenomenon of dissent in light of this discursive struggle using the Thomas Mathiesen’s concepts of ‘the unfinished’ between inclusion and exclusion and Enrique Dussel’s concept of ‘analogical hegemon’?

Introduction

Basic income is defined as an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.¹ But apart from the various basic income schemes and experiments of Brazil, Iran, India and Alaska the idea of basic income has increasingly been ostracized to live a life in the periphery of political ideas (Christensen & Ydesen 2012). Being mainly a result of neoliberal discursive hegemony this marginalisation of the basic income idea is driven by values of ultimate individual responsibility for one's own life situation, individual freedom and contempt for spending what is held to be essentially other people's money. But that does not mean that the idea of basic income is waning or even dying.

¹ www.basicincome.org

The global and expanding organization, basic income Earth Network (BIEN) working for the implementation of basic income all over the world, has endeavoured to show how a basic income would mitigate and perhaps even help to overcome the many negative aspects of the current world economic crisis (e.g. Standing 2009; Fumagalli 2013). The ambition plays into a situation where an increasing number of people find themselves in a position of labour and life precarity as a result of restrictive social policies, austerity measures and the seemingly logical priority of national and corporate competitiveness over labour interests (Standing 2011; Wacquant 2008, 2009). In other words the material conditions of the contemporary world's economic and social order is changing rapidly creating a new topography in which basic income may be seen as a valuable tool for escaping the precarity trap (Fumagalli 2013: 73ff.).

If we shift to the plane of ideas it is noteworthy that the idea of basic income has been proposed from both liberal and socialist standpoints (Fitzpatrick 1999). Hence, the idea of basic income intrinsically holds a potential appeal to very different groups in the political landscape.

The idea of basic income contains clear liberal elements by not only creating a formal freedom but also provide the basis for a substantive freedom with the possibility of a maximum freedom to shape one's own life. Another liberal element is its potential for creating a new kind of political equality - the creation of a just democratic citizenship (as suggested by Th. Marshall). Finally, basic income increases labour market flexibility. The guaranteed safety net creates greater opportunities for mobility and upgrades the skills of the workforce.

From a socialist perspective basic income carries an appeal because it strengthens labour relative to capital. In a system of basic income workers are no longer forced to sell their labour if basic income covers the subsistence level. It means decommodification of labour, and at the same time basic income will also lead to a strengthening of civil society, because the informal care works for community and family would be upgraded and held in higher esteem (Van Parijs 1995).

From this starting point it is relevant to disclose the dissenting potential of the basic income idea for cutting across the poles of the contemporary political topography and manifest itself as a viable and forceful political idea. To this end we use the Danish discursive political landscape from the 1970s until the 1990s as an empirical case. In a diachronic perspective, the Danish case signals all the contradictions mentioned above: neoliberal tendencies versus universal welfare state elements, increasing levels of social inequality (precarity) and a oscillating life cycle of basic income in the Danish political landscape with mixed roles played by both liberals and socialists.

Since the end of World War II Denmark has been a universal social democratic welfare state model characterised by relatively large universality and financed by general taxes. In this connection, basic income may be regarded as the ultimate universal welfare state model. The institutional structure of the various welfare regimes forms the public view of the welfare

client (the poor and the unemployed). Thus, the logic of universalism tends to suppress the discussion of deservingness criteria (control, need, identity, attitude and reciprocity). 'Instead of defining a line between 'them' and 'us', universal benefits and services actually help define everybody within the nation-state as belonging to one group. The vicious cycle of selective welfare policy is replaced by a positive circle' (Larsen 2007: 153). What this means is that a universal social democratic welfare regime – in theory - tends to move towards a pure basic income system.

Outlining the Danish case

In Denmark basic income has been on the political agenda twice since the idea was introduced with the book *Revolt from the Center* [Oprør fra midten] in 1978. The first time was in the beginning of the 1980s, and the second time was in the beginning of the 1990s.

The book *Revolt from the Center* was a tremendous success (in a few years it was published in more than 100,000 copies in a population of 5 million) and the authors decided to form a new grassroots movement 'The Revolt from the Center Movement' [midteroprørs-bevægelsen] which in the beginning gained some support (about 5,000 subscribers to their periodical). To the surprise of the founders the most popular element in their utopia was the idea of a basic income (Christensen 2008).

However, in the climate of emerging neoliberalism the 'The Revolt from the Center Movement' lost its support in the late 1980s, and the basic income idea disappeared from the political agenda. However, the idea surprisingly returned to the political agenda in the 1990s, particularly in 1992-1994, although with new actors on the scene counting among others people who had been excluded from the labour market.

But the turmoil characteristic of the basic income idea in Denmark since the 1970s testifies to internal struggles between ideological elements within the main political parties. In order to understand the negative stances towards basic income it is necessary to draw attention to the liberals downplaying the principle of state neutrality vis-à-vis life forms; the life form of paid labour takes prior position. And although liberals are in favour of freedom of choice it does not apply on the labour market where the expensive and ineffective labour market policies of monitoring and activating the unemployed work to the detriment of other liberal ideas such as a cheap and efficient public sector and the creation of a flexible labour market.

In the social democratic camp the idea of strengthening the workers and creating labour market security is abandoned to the benefit of the idea of citizen's duties to work no matter the pay or the job.

Thus, the creation of a new workfare policy in the 1990s led to a new consensus on a reduction in transfer payments, an increase in control, and a tightening up of the work obligation. The foundation to a new competition state was laid (Pedersen 2010). The welfare state was essentially a distribution state striving to create community through equality. The

competition state, on the other hand, seeks to create community through work. This means that the welfare state sought to eliminate inequalities and differences, whereas the new competitive state creates rights and duties in a hierarchy based on the level of self-sufficiency. The key is not citizenship, but to be employable, to be in work, being on the labour market. The fundamental class division is between those in employment and those who are outside. Therefore a form of compulsory labour and education with a combination of educational motivation, financial incentives, and administrative penalties is introduced in the competition state.

Using the Danish discursive political landscape as an empirical case we aim at throwing light on the dissenting potential of the basic income idea for cutting across the poles of the contemporary political topography and manifest itself as a viable and forceful political idea. This overall question may be divided into several sub-questions useful as points of orientation when conducting the analysis:

- Why and how was the basic income idea able to re-emerge on the political agenda in Denmark?
- Why and how has the basic income idea been included in/excluded from the political agenda?
- How does a social movement avoid being included (absorbed) in the dominant discourse and how does it avoid being altogether excluded from the political scene?
- In a short-term perspective: How can an independent basic income movement of dissent gain influence in the neoliberal workfare hegemony?
- In a long-term perspective: How can the basic income movement form alliances with other social movements and form an anti-hegemonic bloc?

In order to work with these questions we draw on the theoretical framework of the Norwegian philosopher of law Thomas Mathiesen and the Latin-American philosopher Enrique Dussel. Mathiesen mainly gains relevance in the short-term perspective with his work on inclusion and exclusion of dissenting ideas and movements in relation to the hegemonic political discourse. Besides being an advocate of basic income Dussel is relevant in the long-term perspective with his critical political philosophy where the concept of analogous hegemon plays an important part (Dussel 2008: 118). For a common methodological framework we draw on a discourse-analytical perspective inspired by Norman Fairclough (1992).

A political discourse is defined as a framework of understanding for action for political actors. The main function of a political discourse is to create understanding and support from actors for certain political solutions to the exclusion of other undesired solutions. It is a process of inclusion and exclusion of discourses out of which, in the end, a hegemonic discourse evolves. Hence, political discourses can only be understood in relation to other discourses, and in the same way the basic income discourse in the early 1990s can only be understood in relation to the new activation or workfare discourse at that time.

Society may be seen as a hegemonic community, held together by a hegemonic political discourse. This discourse reproduces and transforms society in an antagonistic interplay with other discourses. In general, politics deals with the articulation of specific interests and the exclusion of rival interests. As a rule, it is only by creating alliances between actors, by establishing a hegemonic project, that social power can be maintained. And a hegemonic project must be supported by a hegemonic discourse.

These musings makes it possible to structure the article with first an introduction of Mathiesen's theoretical framework. Then follows an analysis of the Danish debate on basic income in the 1970s and 1980s using this framework. Next step is to introduce the relevant parts of Dussel's critical political philosophy and subsequently analyse the Danish 1990s debate on basic income using a combination of Mathiesen and Dussel's frameworks. Following the two empirical analyses we will discuss basic income as a case of 'the unfinished' and an analogical hegemon potential with an opportunity for forming a new counter-discourse.

Basic income as a case of 'the unfinished' between exclusion and inclusion

The first part of the analysis covering the Danish debate about basic income in the 1970s and 1980s draws on a range of concepts and an approach developed by Mathiesen (1982, 1992). Mathiesen has explored the way in which a hegemonic discourse is created by means, on the one hand, of marginalising (excluding) alternative discourses and, on the other hand, of socialising (including) potential alliance-opponents within a mode of perception common to the political public. Inclusion means that efforts are made to absorb opponents into the hegemonic alliance by presenting the common features of deviant action as disadvantageous and that the opponent's ideas and actions are essentially already incorporated in the hegemonic alliance. Exclusion means that opponents are expelled through the presentation of their ideas and action as plain and outright wrong-headed and perhaps even dangerous.

Powerlessness is changed, when powerlessness is transformed to counter-power. This can be done through joint action: "Joint action is the basic element of counter-power, one could for brevity's sake say it is counter-power." (1982: 75 our translation).

Mathiesen lists a series of rhetorical techniques for inclusion directed at erasing disagreement with the hegemonic discourse (1982: 84ff.). The aim is to render potential opponents powerless by presenting them as being in essential agreement with that discourse. But he also notes a series of rhetorical techniques for exclusion, which by contrast underline the disagreement with the hegemonic discourse and characterise it as fundamental (1982: 89ff.). This technique involves labelling the disagreement as utopian, abstract and dangerous. The aim here is to render opponents powerless by presenting them as being in basic conflict with the established system.

The hegemonic discourse is thus maintained by persuading the public at large to perceive and define counter-discourses as being either wholly within or wholly outside the system; and by encouraging opponents themselves to be captured by this imagery, to the point of actually behaving as if they indeed were either within or outside the system. In order to establish counter-power, it is therefore essential to avoid precisely such a capture by the imagery of the dominant discourse; and this in turn means demonstrating, in a variety of theoretical and practical ways, that a logic of 'either-or' is spurious and needs to be replaced by a logic of 'both-and' (1982: 96ff.).

The alternative to 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' alike is what Mathiesen calls 'the unfinished'. "That which is on track to become" or "theory of the vibrant and expanding political movement" (Mathiesen 1992:18-36).

This involves adopting a stance that is both opposed to the established system and in competition with it. Mathiesen uses the term 'competing contradiction' to describe such a relationship and he calls it 'unfinished', because it offers only a sketch, an outlined prospect towards solutions, not a definitive answer or a final solution. The competing contradiction is unfinished or incomplete in the sense that it has not been tested and that its consequences remain uncertain. Mathiesen writes: "The unfinished movement - the competing contradiction - is the movement denying to choose when facing the choice between 'moving forward and break the connection' with the people and 'complying with the development and stagnate'. This is a choice orchestrated by the opponents of the movement in order to get the movement in tune. By accepting the choice and making the choice the movement is completed" (1982: 185). Thus, the risk to which 'the unfinished' is exposed is either that it may be made 'complete' through incorporation within the system as just a small positive reform; or that it may be wholly excluded from the system as a remote and utopian fantasy.

In other words, basic income must, to be able to transcend the dualistic view, be both 'realistic' and 'utopian' in the sense that it must show how it could be implemented within a realistic time horizon and with realistic costs, while also being an expression of a new conception of justice which may do away with the injustice that is part of the existing system.

Mathiesen outlines a number of forms of acts in the public to counteract the creation of powerlessness of the hegemonic forces (1982: 95ff.).

First, he recommends a form of act called 'arena outbreak'. This means that the potentials of the counter discourse must show to a wider public that they are both working on the established arena and able to break out of this arena.

The other method is called 'information turn'. It is an answer to the impossible choices, either to work to - either practical within the system or work distant theoretically outside the system. It is about reversing the streams of information disclosing insider information about the system's functionality and behavior to a wider public. This might take the form of whistleblower information putting the system in a defensive position.

The third working is 'power creation' aiming at rejecting the choice to work either for short-term requirements and reforms or long-term perspectives. Again, counter power forces must show that there is no contradiction between these perspectives, but that it is essentially a question of both-and.

A fourth working is called 'case orientation'. It is a response to the choice to obey and let disagreements with the system be silenced or to be positioned in full-scale disagreement with the system risking internal disagreements within the counter power. 'Case orientation' means avoiding vulnerability on all flanks, but instead merely emphasize the disagreement and conflict with the established system in certain cases, without taking the disagreement up in all areas.

The fifth method, aimed at rejecting the choice to either perform a careful, balanced center orientation or be defined as an extreme political sect is termed 'paragraph delivery' which means to deliver clear critical views on the basis of separate, well-crafted paragraphs, which serves as an alternative to the established system.

For Mathiesen the key is to create an alternative public i.e. an arena for the presentation of views, debate and criticism able to compete with the dominant and where the counter power can force representatives from the established system to debate.

The emergence of a new idea of basic income in the 1970s

The interesting feature of the climate of the Danish ideological debate in the 1970s is that, in relative independence of one another, 'outsiders' in four different ideological settings – social-democratic, socio-liberal, Marxist and liberal – advanced parallel notions of introducing new social provision for maintenance of livelihood without traditional wage labour in return.

1. The Swedish economist, Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, then a professor at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark, published a couple of books in the mid-1970s (1976, 1977) which put a social-democratic case for a 'guaranteed minimum income'.

2. As mentioned the idea of a basic income (in Danish called 'borgerløn' [citizen's wage]) aroused widespread public attention through publication of the book *Revolt from the Center*, by the philosopher Villy Sørensen, the natural scientist Niels I. Meyer and the politician Kristen Helveg Petersen, in February 1978. This linked the idea to socio-liberal circles and to new 'green' aspirations for 'a humanely balanced society'.

3. At around the same time the ideas of the French socialist André Gorz about the introduction of a 'social income' came to be known and discussed, in socialist circles especially, through translation of several of his books (Gorz 1979, 1981 and 1983).

4. Finally, a former co-operative society director, Niels Hoff, launched the notion of a 'citizen's stipend' for debate in liberal circles (Hoff 1983).

These very diverse authors were at one and the same time each linked to a particular ideological milieu while yet having an outsider status in relation to it. They figured as typical heretics, conceptual innovators and provocateurs, who 'stood things on their head', broke away from established ideological frameworks and challenged industrial society's conventional growth discourse.

Common to the four strands of thought was an assured awareness that the familiar measures to solve societal problems were inadequate, and that prevailing conceptions of nature and humankind in industrial society were wide open to question. With these authors' shifts of conceptual framework went also shifts in the language and the metaphors they used. New views of problems and solutions will usually find reflection in language. For in the designation of one thing as a problem and another as a solution, problems are often described negatively, solutions positively. If you then switch things around, you will commonly need new words to reflect your new insights.

A new grassroots movement – the 1980s formation of a political basic income discourse

The thoughts of Adler-Karlsson, Gorz and Hoff came to be known only within small circles and were quickly forgotten. It was '*Revolt from the Center*' and its conception of basic income that stirred public debate.

Publication of this book led to the establishment of a new periodical, the formation of a new grassroots movement and publication of a series of further books. A network was set up which served as a political agent to disseminate the new ideas. It came as a surprise to the initiators that the notion of basic income proved to be among those ideas that attracted greatest immediate support. It was this notion, therefore, which the new grassroots movement took up first with a view to translation into concrete policy (Christensen 2000: 264-284).

So an attempt was made in the 1980s to turn the idea into a 'political issue', to set in motion a political discourse about basic income. It followed that the idea had to be linked to the solution of a series of specific political problems, and that efforts had to be made to form a coalition or political alliance around the issue. The means adopted to this end were a number of conferences, publication of discussion books and pamphlets, interviews with leading politicians. The prime objective was to build a political alliance around the issue between the trade union movement, the Social Democratic Party [Socialdemokratiet], the Social Liberal Party [Det Radikale Venstre] and the Socialist People's Party [Socialistisk Folkeparti].

Through the organization of conferences about basic income the movement was able to create what Mathiesen call 'arena outbreak'. It shows that the basic income idea at one time was related to the current system and could not be rejected as a whole utopian thought. It showed that there was no contradiction in working for short-term and long-term reforms.

The new grassroots movement had to engage actively in the game of practical politics and show that it was not just preoccupied with utopian ideas, in order to get into debate and dialogue with the political parties and the union movement. It therefore put forward an alternative national budget and made specific proposals to provide a basic income for young people and for others to have access to 'sabbatical leave'.

By setting up their own calculations of an economy with basic income supported by a recognized economic expert (later professor Jesper Jespersen from Roskilde University) the new movement succeeded through their own 'paragraph delivery', as Mathiesen puts it, to break through in the public arena with a new discourse. It showed that it was able to produce a 'third position', between the traditional economic realism and a utopia.

The basic income idea was embedded in a social movement which sought to place the issue on the political agenda. But this also meant that the 'Revolt from the Centre Movement' (Midteroprørsbevægelsen) had acquired a 'monopoly' on the issue which in turn prevented the formation of a cross-political forum between social democrats, 'greens', liberals and Marxists to take the matter further"

The new movement tried to avoid being excluded by appearing as realistic and pragmatic for entering into debate and dialogue with the political parties and trade unions as possible. However, the movement failed in its endeavours to recruit the old political parties, the targets for its policy of basic income, or to persuade them to incorporate similar proposals in their political programmes. Yet, although its hopes of thus putting the issue directly onto the political agenda failed in the first instance, its ideas about general provision for state-supported sabbatical leave were to prove significant for the subsequent acceptance of schemes of this sort in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Basic income as analogical hegemon

Having created an understanding of the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms at play in the 1970s and 1980s Danish basic income debate it is prudent to move to the ontological level of political philosophy to create the foundation for moving beyond a practice analysis. For this purpose we need to be equipped with theoretical concepts able to capture and comprehend the relevant components and the dynamics of the dissenting potential of the basic income idea. Thus, we also move from the short-term to the long-term perspective. In other words this paragraph takes a look at how basic income can be understood as a political philosophical

phenomenon in general and as an idea with the potential of transcending the traditional political landscape in particular. For this purpose Enrique Dussel (1934-), a key figure in the philosophy of liberation movement founded in 1973, has produced a most stimulating political philosophy centered on the concepts of *potentia*, *potestas* and *analogical hegemon*.

In his '20 theses on politics', described by a leading interpreter as "a politics from the underside of necrophilic globalization" (Mendieta 2008: viii), Dussel sets out with the aim of giving political voice to victims and to reflect upon and describe the very core conditions of democracy. Throughout his work Dussel remains extremely critical towards the established political order of which neoliberalism is a central cog. Concerning basic income Dussel writes: "Intervention in the systems of the economic field is part of the political function – against capitalist and liberal "economism of the market" – once we clearly understand the impossibility of the market producing equilibrium and justice for all, and avoiding the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few and an increase in poverty among the great majority. The possibility of a nonwork income for all families within a State as a right of citizenship should be studied and implemented." (Dussel 2008: 117f.).

In order to understand this statement about basic income it is necessary to introduce the key concept of 'will-to-live'. According to Dussel the 'will-to-live' is the "(...) originary tendency of all human beings" and in essence a will that "(...) drives us to avoid death, to postpone it, and to remain within human life." (Dussel 2008: 13). This fundamental 'will-to-live' is naturally closely connected with the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, drink, heat, knowledge and being able to take hold of and use such goods "(...) to guarantee the means of survival", which Dussel describes as the exertion of power (Dussel 2008: 14). In this light basic income can be described as a scheme for the empowerment of human beings helping them to realize 'will-to-live' via the fulfillment of basic needs and assisting them in developing a capacity for power. But Dussel takes it even further. According to his thinking any policy generating negative consequences, hindrances and obstacles for the people's possibility of realizing their 'wills-to-live' is void of legitimacy: "We must criticise, or reject as unsustainable, all political systems, actions, and institutions whose negative effects are suffered by oppressed or excluded victims." (Dussel 2008: 85).

In Dussel's diagnosis of power political relations there is a strong tendency towards what he calls the 'fetishization of power' (Dussel 2008: 32). Basically, Dussel explains this development by the division between *potentia* (the power prerogative of the people) and *potestas* (the delegated power to politicians), but he adds that *potestas* tend to be seen as self-referential power to be held in its own right not based on the potential of the people (will-to-power). This entails a conception of power as domination, which implies that "(...) popular demands can never be fulfilled, because power functions as a separate, extrinsic, coercive instance "from above" *acting on the people*." (Dussel 2008: 32). According to this analysis this apparently leaves little hope of basic income being put on the political agenda because it most commonly lives a life as a popular demand. Dussel even adds that *potestas* destroys *potentia* because it "(...) divides the community, it impedes the construction of a consensus "from be-

low", and it sows conflict." (Dussel 2008: 33). It is in other words a divide-and-conquer exercise. Being a universal and unconditional scheme basic income might in this light be viewed as a promoter of *potentia* to the benefit of genuine democracy because it contributes to empower the people via its relieving effects on the limitations and shortage of basic needs fulfilment.

Having established the serious challenges for basic income as a popular demand to enter the established political level in philosophical terms and the benevolent effects of basic income on democracy it is time to look at basic income as an anti-hegemonic practice. To this end we draw on Dussel's concept of *analogical hegemon*. Since "(...) institutional power has lost its grounding, (...) this *potestas* can no longer rely on the capacities of the *people* – their enthusiasm and benevolence (...)" (Dussel 2008: 41), new agendas emerge from the ranks of the people. The concept of *analogical hegemon* describes how a broad spectrum of agendas and interests can unite and converge in a hegemonic political project.

Dussel states that every political order is imperfect and bound to produce negative effects. Those suffering the negative effects are termed political victims. Characteristic of political victims is that they are only able to participate asymmetrically in the political system or they are even excluded from it (Dussel 2008: 69). The contemporary political order lacks severely in its capability to distribute benefits to everyone. To that end basic income presents itself as a solution and thus as a unifying idea able to cut across a complex topography of different political victim groups, i.e. it contains an *analogical hegemon* potential. Basic income addresses precisely the *victimness* of the victims because it remedies – at least some of – the distribution problems suffered by the contemporary political order. The appeal of this potential seems to be on the increase in the contemporary situation as a result of advancing marginality processes resulting in precarious life situations.

While diverted by a wide array of political interests and agendas victimized groups such as the unemployed, the refugee, the precarious worker, marginalized people, subdued women, exploited children, beggars, prostitutes, the penniless artist would all benefit from a basic income scheme that would empower them and act as an emancipating force supporting their diversified 'wills-to-live'. Dussel uses the concept of 'plebs' to describe the people in opposition "(...) to the elites, to the oligarchs, to the ruling classes of a political order." (Dussel 2008: 75). His main point in this connection is that the plebs "(...) tends to encompass all of the citizens (*populus*) in a *new* future order in which their present day claims will be satisfied and equality will be achieved thanks to a common struggle by the excluded." (Dussel 2008: 75). Thus, the plebs becomes the *populus*, the people of the future, raising the demand of politics as 'will-to-live' attempting through all means to "(...) allow all members to live, to live well, and to increase the quality of their lives." (Dussel 2008: 85). This demonstrates the essential material nature of politics and the relevance of basic income, which is specifically directed toward the material conditions of the political and societal system.

On the more practical level the rise of an analogous hegemon is dependent on the "Social movements and progressive, critical political parties [devoting] themselves to the task of "translating" the demands of all sectors, their differential identities. Through mutual under-

standing, dialogue, and the inclusion of other demands in their own, this allows them to move forward with the construction of an *analogical hegemon* supported by all, which is transformed into a new proposal as a result of the praxis of popular liberation.” (Dussel 2008: 107).

Following this “visit” to the ontological level of political philosophy we resume the analysis of practice using the Danish case of the basic income debate in the 1990s.

Basic income as a political discourse in the political arena of the 1990s

In the early 1990s – especially in the years 1992-94 – the basic income debate reappeared in a different guise. A new discourse on the theme was created in the form of a counter-discourse to the dominant discourse around the labour market and social policy concerning renewal of the welfare state.

The idea of a basic income took on new shape as a political discourse, because the movement-oriented, the scientific and the political strands of debate about the issue came now, for a short time, to be intertwined. A number of parties took up the question. New cross-political fora were created, and the idea became a subject of social scientific analysis. For a brief period the new basic income discourse thus managed to give voice to sentiments widespread among the population, and to sow the seeds of a new pattern of alliance between groups across a series of political divides (Christensen 2008); what Dussel would call the budding of an analogical hegemon.

Thus, the interesting feature of the 1990s' debate about the issue was that the idea of a basic income was brought onto the political agenda 'from the bottom up'. It was promoted by marginalised people, by 'outsiders' on the fringes of the worlds of business and trade unions, by spinners of ideas and by a few practitioners and controversialists of social science; and a new journal, SALT, strove to join the debates in the party-political arena with the debates in the arenas of social science and social movements. 'From the top down', in turn, the new discourse was met by attempts to delimit, diminish or exclude it: attempts to those ends were made by the leadership of the established political parties, by a number of ministers, and by public commissions of enquiry and civil servants. In Dussel's nomenclature an example of 'will-to-power'.

The fact that the issue of basic income got onto the official agenda of politics in the years 1992-94 can be ascribed to the development of a particular political context and its coincidence with a set of economic, institutional and political circumstances.

The problems of unemployment and transfer payments were attracting growing attention, since joblessness continued to rise until the turn of the year 1994-95. At the beginning of the 1990s the government had set up a series of commissions of enquiry, whose tasks were to devise a more rational system of labour market arrangements and public benefit provision: the targets were simplification and savings. In 1993, moreover, the new social democratic government had enacted a set of measures for reform of the labour market. On the one hand,

these widened employees' opportunities to take periods of paid leave away from work; on the other hand, they gave significantly more scope for 'activation', that is to say enforcement on the jobless of obligations to enter training schemes or find work.

By 1992-93 the hegemonic growth-discourse was in crisis over its legitimacy in popular eyes. The majority of the population had lost faith in the ideology of full employment. Public opinion polls showed widespread attitudes in favour of rethinking labour market policies and experimenting with alternative models for distribution: 'dustmen's deal' models, for instance, along the lines for job-sharing proposed by the dustmen in the city of Aarhus; or measures for reduced working-time, or for a basic income. In that situation, the latter notion indeed came to figure as a serious alternative. Politicians and their parties were forced into taking some stance on the idea of basic income, and to spell out arguments against such new and more radical modes of problem solution.

The fact that the discourse for a basic income vanished again from the official political arena around the turn of the year 1994/95 must be attributed to a change then in the trends of economics and politics, and to associated success for the hegemonic growth discourse in its endeavours to exclude the rival discourse. That exclusion of the basic income discourse took place, at a rhetorical level, in public political debate and within the political parties; and this was matched, at an institutional level, by exclusion of discourse about job sharing, sabbatical leave provision and basic income from the work of the Social Commission, the Welfare Commission and the government's Economic Secretariat. It is the task of a hegemonic discourse to set the official definitions of what is to be recognised as problems, and of how those problems fit within existing institutions. The aim is to maintain a viable common identity and a political coalition. This is often done by way of public commissions of enquiry and civil service reports; and the concrete means to the end are the terms of reference set for commission enquiry, the appointments made to commissions, and the formulation of their professional and technical discourse.

The fact that it proved hard for the idea of a basic income to make headway within the political parties is connected with the point that, to a greater or lesser extent, most of the parties were coloured by and linked into the ideologies and organisational forms of established industrial society, whose hegemonic discourse was challenged by the discourse for a basic income.

The failure of the basic income discourse to gain a foothold was tied up also with the fact that it achieved little support from circles central in social critique of the time. For these the notion either seemed too controversial, was ignored, or it was ridiculed as unrealistic. The leading spirits of the women's movement thus dismissed the idea without explicitly addressing it. And the left-wing think-tank CASA (Centre for Alternative Social Analysis), which served as an expert body for the left in trade union and political affairs, opposed the hegemonic discourse for economic growth yet held back from taking any stance on the idea of a basic income.

The paradigmatic shift in the Danish labour market and social policy

In the last twenty years the Danish labour market has changed from being the most liberal to being among the strictest in Europe (Goul Andersen & Pedersen 2007). It has been called a development from welfare to workfare or from a Welfare State to a Competition State.

The Danish labour market and social policy in the 1970s and in the beginning of the '80s had a strong emphasis on social rights and social security. To a great extent the Danish welfare state reflected the ideals and principles of equal democratic citizenship in the sense of Marshall (Loftager 1998).

The unemployment benefit system, as it was organised up to 1994/95, showed significant similarities to a basic income system (Christensen & Loftager 2000: 258). Firstly, it was easy to access. Secondly, the period of support was relatively long. Thirdly, because of the high level of unemployment, the obligation to being available to the labour market was rather formal. Fourthly, there was a steady increase in the number of people taking out insurances. Therefore, it would seem as if Denmark in the beginning of the 1990s was developing along a 'basic income path'. Part of the labour market and social reform in 1993/94 pointed in that direction. A 'transitional allowance' for the long term unemployed was extended to the 50-54 year-olds. Parental and educational leaves were improved, and a new sabbatical leave (the one most resembling basic income) was introduced.

On the other hand the active labour market policy reform in 1993/94 also introduced a new activation path. The period of receiving unemployment allowances was reduced to 7 years, and from that time on it was not possible to regain entitlement through activation, and a right and duty to activation for the unemployed and the social client was introduced. Throughout the 1990s the activation path was adjusted with more emphasis on motivation and economic incentives to work, stronger criteria of conditionality and shorter duration of benefits.

This policy change was already prepared by a change in economic paradigms and elite discourses (Goul Andersen & Larsen 2008). In 1988/89 a new interpretation of unemployment – as 'structural unemployment' – first appeared in government papers. It was a part of an international movement with the view that the high level of unemployment was not a matter of insufficient demand for labour power but of structural problems in the labour market. It created the frame and the diagnostic background for using the new instruments of the activation policy. Simultaneously, the unemployment rate dropped, and one of the elements in the basic income path, the leave arrangement, was phased out. As Peter Hall (1993) has shown in the British context, 'ideas matter', and in Denmark the new economic idea about structural unemployment got a foothold among experts and politicians and exerted an effect on policy change along the activation path in the 1990s.

Basic income both as a case of 'the unfinished' and an 'analogical hegemon'

The final and concluding step is to take the historical analysis of the Danish basic income de-

bate in order to produce well-established perspectives on the dissenting potential of the basic income idea as an anti-hegemonic bloc and an analogous hegemon.

The retrospective historical analysis aimed at explaining the formation and life of a basic income agenda rooted in a single-agenda movement (the Danish Basic Income Movement, BIEN, Denmark).

Mathiesen provides a useful nomenclature to analyze the problems encountered by such a single-agenda movement setting a new public agenda in a climate with a dominant discourse hostile to an unconditional basic income. Mathiesen's contribution is mainly to understand the pitfalls lurking for a new discourse struggling to avoid being excluded and included and instead break through as what Mathiesen calls 'the unfinished'.

Thus, the idea of basic income can be taken as an example of an 'unfinished' idea, which has maintained recurrent vitality because it has served as a mode of 'competing contradiction' vis-à-vis the existing welfare society. But at the same time the history of this idea has been marked by tendencies towards both inclusion and exclusion. In the debate on the issue during the 1990s, opponents tended to depict suggestions for a basic income as the adoption of an irresponsible line of policy, advocated by theorists remote from real life and hostile to practical short-term measures for improvement. These are typical rhetorical tactics for exclusion.

The danger of the 'unfinished' is that it either be completed by being included as a small positive reform within the system or be excluded as a distant utopia outside the system. Once the basic income idea for short periods has succeeded to break through to a wider public, it is because the idea has served as 'a competing contradiction' in relation to the existing system.

In many cases basic income opponents have succeeded in putting the basic income issue in an either-or or in a first-second order straitjacket. This is visible in the following examples:

1. Is it a short-term, realistic reform - or a long-term utopian reform? 2. First we must solve the unemployment problem - then one can think of a basic income reform. 3. First you have to have a change of attitude, and then you can start thinking about a structural basic income reform. 4. First, we have to reduce working hours so that we can begin to think differently. 5. Let us talk about leave reforms instead, it is realistic, basic income is unrealistic.

But basic income is both a short-term and long-term reform. Basic income is also helping to solve the problem of unemployment and working hours, so it is not a question of either-or but a question of both-and.

In fact proponents of a basic income have always been faced with a dilemma whether to emphasize the proposition as an idea within a wider context, or to put it forward as merely a technical measure. Technical sketches towards practical implementation of basic income have in some circumstances helped to give the idea appeal by way of 'competing contradiction'.

That was the case to some degree in the 1980s and early 1990s. But there is then a large risk that ideas are quickly downgraded to matters of mere technique, and so lose meaningful coherence. It was in just this way that basic income advocates, in the 1980s and the 1990s alike, came to neglect arguments for their cause by reference to the values and concerns with societal context that justified it. There was a shortage of actors who could bring ideas and techniques together and so give the movement that overriding dynamic which the idea of 'the unfinished' implies.

Basic income is fascinating as a subject because, on the whole, it moves away from this dualistic perception. It is linked to a number of practical problems and to great reforms. It represents a continuation of elements in the existing system and a discontinuation of other tendencies. It is concerned with short-term questions while also having long-term perspectives. It concurs with certain elements of the existing welfare system and not with others.

Using Dussel's nomenclature the long-term perspective is about the creation and development of a comprehensive resistance movement formed in an alliance between a number of single-agenda movements against a dominant power. It is the creation of an anti-hegemonic bloc consisting of the oppressed and excluded movements. It is the process of creating an analogous hegemon able to incorporate the individual movements and still retain and respect their idiosyncrasies.

So far the basic income movement has been preoccupied with the problem of creating a single-agenda organization able to break through to the wider public agenda navigating between Scylla (inclusion) and Charybdis (exclusion).

One reaction in the basic income movement to the trouble of winning acceptance in the public with the pure message of basic income is that basic income is a topic 'too small' to set another agenda or to establish contact with groups who want to break away from the dominating agenda. The problem is that no one will be convinced by an isolated basic income reform if that someone is already engaged in a reform of the entire system. A basic income reform even points in different directions. Basic income is only one part of the change. It will first be a convincing reform if it works together with other reforms. In a democratic socialist system it must be connected with other elements in a reform for economic democracy, and in a human ecological system it must be connected with an ecological tax reform and other ecological experiments.

Up until now the basic income movement has chosen not to link the basic income issue with other issues and thus not made alliances with other movements fearing that such a move would divide the movement itself. Making alliances might give rise to disagreement about ecology, EU, immigration policy and the attitude to capitalism with the result that the cross-party character of the movement must be dropped. Thus, the choice has also been made from fear that the movement would be even more excluded and that some liberal and conservative

basic income advocates would feel alienated.

In the future this strategy must be abandoned if one adheres to Dussel's long-term perspective for the creation of an alliance between the social movements willing and able to enter into an anti-hegemonic bloc and subsequently act as an analogous hegemon able to counter the neoliberal hegemony.

This will entail that the basic income movement to a much larger extent is stimulated or even forced to view the basic income issue in a wider context and spend energy integrating the issue with other issues.

But following this alternative strategy raises the question whether this would mean putting priority on working with the movements instead of prioritizing the short-term political work for reforms pointing towards basic income before a sufficiently powerful bloc is created. Will that not entail that the movement will be caught in Mathiesen's dilemma where the long-term utopian perspective is given pride of place over short-term pragmatic struggles?

Since World Social Forum began in 2001 in Porto Alegre in Brazil basic income has been a recurring issue of debate among global grassroots movements. It is also noteworthy that the American Occupy Wall Street movement together with the Spanish *Indignados* movement since 2011 has adopted basic income for its program (Christensen & Ydesen 2013).²

Over the last year the global basic income movement has been strengthened by an intensified cooperation between movements in a number of countries unified by the endeavor to gather signatures for the European Citizens' Initiative for a basic Income. On 14 January 2013, the European citizens' initiative registration was accepted by the EU commission, thus triggering a 12-month-period aiming at collecting more than one million signatures in the European Union. 28 MEPs support the initiative and the cooperation will undoubtedly contribute to basic income being part of the agenda for handling the economic crisis just like the Belgian philosopher and social scientist Philippe van Parijs has suggested with his proposal for a EU dividend.³

Undoubtedly the movement would be strengthened if an established political party would adopt basic income for its policy agenda. Contrary to other countries, like Norway, Sweden and Germany that is not the case in Denmark.

It is highly likely that an increasingly closer world-wide basic income movement will manifest itself, working both top-down from the formal political system, in political parties, national parliaments and the EU, and bottom-up from grassroots movements using World Social Fo-

² <http://binews.org/2011/12/occupy-wall-street-sparks-interest-in-policies-like-big/>

³ <http://www.social-europe.eu/2013/07/the-euro-dividend/>

rum and its regional and national branches in the attempt to create a strong bloc to counter neoliberal globalization.

This would be in accordance with both Mathiesen's and Dussel's analyses of political power and representation.

References

Adler-Karlsson, Gunnar (1976) *Lærebog for 80'erne. Et antikonsumistisk manifest*, København: Fremads Fokusbøger.

Adler-Karlsson, Gunnar (1977) *Nej til fuld beskæftigelse – ja til materiel grundtryghed*, København: Erling Olsens Forlag.

Christensen, Erik (2000) *Borgerløn. Fortællinger om en politisk idé*, Aarhus: Hovedland.

Christensen, Erik (2008) *The Heretical Political Discourse - A Discourse Analysis of the Danish Debate on Basic Income*, Aalborg: Aalborg University Press.

Christensen, Erik and Loftager, Jørn (2000) 'Ups and Downs of Basic Income in Denmark.', in *Basic Income on the Agenda : Policy objectives and political chances*, Robert van der Veen and Loek Groot, (Eds.), Amsterdam, The Netherlands : Amsterdam University Press, pp. 257-268

Christensen, Erik & Ydesen, Christian (2012) *Basic income – A transcultural perspective*. Paper presented at the 14th BIEN Congress 2012, Munich, Germany, Sept. 14 – 16

Dussel, Enrique (2008) *20 theses on politics*. Duke University Press

Fairclough, Norman (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity press.

Fitzpatrick, Tont (1999). *Freedom and security – an Introduction to the Basic Income Debate*. London, MacMillan Press LTD.

Fumagalli, Andrea (2013) *Cognitive Biocapitalism, the Precarity Trap, and Basic Income: Post-Crisis Perspectives*. Agustín, Óscar García & Ydesen, Christian (eds.) *Post-Crisis Perspectives – The Common and its Powers*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, pp. 57-82

Gorz, André. (1979) 'Økologi og frihed', Viborg: *Politisk Revy* [English edition, *Ecology as Politics*, London: Pluto Press 1983].

Gorz, André (1981) 'Farvel til Proletariatet – hinsides socialismen', Viborg: *Politisk Revy* [English edition, *Farewell to Working Class: an Essay on Post-industrial Socialism*, London: Pluto Press 1982].

Gorz, André (1983) 'Paradisets veje – kapitalens døds kamp', Viborg: *Politisk Revy* [English edition, *Path to Paradise: on the Liberation from Work*, London: Pluto Press 1985].

Goul Andersen, Jørgen & Pedersen, Jacob J. (2007) 'Continuity and change in Danish active

labour market policy: 1990-2007. The battlefield between activation and workfare'. CCWS Working Paper no. 2007-54.

Goul Andersen, Jørgen & Christian Albrekt Larsen (2008) 'How ideas can have an independent causal effect on policy change: The case of new economic ideas that changed the Danish welfare state'. Paper prepared for the 4th International Conference on Welfare State Change: Policy Feedback, the Role of Ideas and Incrementalism at St. Restrup Herregaard, Denmark, January 30 – February 1, 2008.

Hall, Peter (1993) 'Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 25(3), pp. 275-96.

Hoff, Niels (1983) *Borgerstipendiet – den liberale velfærdsmodel*. Forlaget i Haarby.

Larsen, Christian Albrekt (2008) 'The Institutional Logic of welfare Attitudes;: How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support'. *Comparative Political Studies*. Vol 41, No. 2, February 2008: 145-168.

Loftager, Jørn (1998) 'Solidarity and Universality in the Danish Welfare State – empirical remarks and theoretical interpretations'. BIEN International Congress 1998. Amsterdam, 10-12. sept. 1998.

Mathiesen, Thomas (1982) *Makt og Motmakt*, Oslo: Pax.

Mathiesen, Thomas (1992), *Det uferdige. Tekster om opprør og undertrykkelse*, Oslo: Pax Forlag.

Meyer, Niels I., Kristen Helveg Petersen, Villy Sørensen (1978), *Oprør fra midten*, København: Gyldendal.

Meyer, Niels I., Kristen Helveg Petersen, Villy Sørensen (1982), *Røret om oprøret. Mere om midten*, København: Gyldendal.

Meyer, Niels I., Kristen Helveg Petersen, Villy Sørensen (1982) *Revolt from the Centre*, London: Maryon Boyars.

Murray, M.C. & Pateman, C. (2012). *Basic Income Worldwide: Horizons of Reform*. International Political Economy Series. Palgrave Macmillan

Pedersen, O. K. (2010) Institutional Competitiveness - When Nations came to Compete. Morgan, Glenn; Campbell, John L.; Crouch, Colin; Pedersen, Ove K. & Whiteley, Richard (eds.) *Oxford Handbook in Institutional Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 625-658.

Standing, G. (2009). Responding to the Crisis: Economic Stabilisation Grants. Paper presented at the Conference of the Social Policy Association, University of Edinburgh, June 30

Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat – the new dangerous class*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic

Van Parijs, P. (1995) *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) can justify capitalism?* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Wacquant, Loïc (2008) *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wacquant, Loïc (2009) *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press