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Next Steps on the Road to Basic Income in Canada

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Canada has had recurring debates about guaranteed or basic income over several decades. This article outlines reasons for implementing basic income in the Canadian context—reducing poverty and inequality, addressing precarious employment, and building an ecologically sustainable economy. Recently there has been a strong renewal of interest in basic income in Canada. Expressions of interest have come from the Liberal federal government elected in 2015, from provincial governments, from political parties not in power, and from municipal governments. Support for basic income also is found in a growing range of prominent individuals and organizations. While basic income advocates are encouraged by recent developments, several large and complex questions remain on how this approach can be implemented in Canada. These questions encompass the specifics of design, delivery, funding, and political support. How can basic income build on existing income security programs and leave Canadians better off in the end? How can we ensure that basic income is not used as an excuse to cut vital services such health care, social housing, early childhood care and development, and social services for those with disabilities and other challenges? How can basic income be set in place in Canada, given its complicated federal-provincial nexus of responsibility for, delivery of, and funding for social programs? The article concludes with principles that might help guide the implementation of authentically universal, adequate, and feasible basic income architecture in Canada.

Key words: *basic income, guaranteed income, economic inequality, public policy, Canada*

The goal of setting in place a system of guaranteed or basic income in Canada has cycled through social policy debates in

this country on a regular basis over the last five decades. This article makes the argument that receptivity to the basic income model is now at an all-time high in Canada, and that with well thought out policy design and sound political strategy it is now possible to make significant progress towards basic income architecture in Canada. This shift may be incremental and step-wise, but it has the potential to reshape Canadian social welfare in a profound way. It can move us away from assumptions of deserving versus undeserving poor and the 'less eligibility' principle built into current income support programs, and towards an economic security paradigm based on the principles of universality and unconditionality.

When tracing the history and status of the basic income debate in Canada, it is useful to recognize peculiarities of nomenclature in Canada. In English the term "guaranteed annual income" and the acronym "GAI" have often been used in discussions of an assured, minimal amount of money available to all that is provided by government. Variations on this term in Canadian parlance have included "guaranteed liveable income" or "guaranteed minimum income." In Canada's other official language of French, the term "revenu garanti" or "revenu de base" are most frequently used. In recent years the English term "basic income" has gained currency in conjunction with advocacy by the Basic Income Canada Network (BICN) for a "basic income guarantee." The French version of BICN's name is "Réseau canadien pour le revenu garanti", but in Québec the advocacy group formed there refers to itself as "Revenu de base Québec."

Arguments for an Adequate, Durable, Pan-Canadian Basic Income in Canada

The Cost of Poverty and Poverty Reduction Argument

The potential for a basic income to function as a key policy lever to reduce poverty forms one of the major arguments for its introduction. For example, Emery, Fleisch, and McIntyre (2013) argue that a basic income could help to achieve low rates of poverty among working age adults as it has among seniors. Effective poverty reduction among Canadian seniors is attributed to Old Age Security, a universal demogrant

(although a special surtax taxes it back from seniors with higher incomes), and to Guaranteed Income Supplement, a negative income tax. (Canada also has a social insurance-based contributory pension, the Canada/Quebec Pension Plan.) Their proposal involves extending Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement to all adults.

In Canada, three central rationales have been expressed in calling for poverty reduction through public policy. The first is moral (Varcoe, Pauly, Webster, & Storch, 2012), and the second relates to poverty reduction as a means to enhance human rights (Porter, 2014). The third rationale calls on a kind of enlightened self-interest, arguing that the indirect benefits of reducing poverty are universal through reducing the societal and public costs generated by poverty.

This cost of poverty argument was featured in the report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology Sub-Committee on Cities (Senate of Canada, 2009) on poverty, housing and homelessness. The sub-committee relied heavily on a study sponsored by the Ontario Association of Food Banks (Laurie, 2008), which was guided by a blue ribbon panel of business economists and policy experts. This study estimated that the social cost of poverty for Canada was between $24.4 billion and $30.5 billion. This was dwarfed by private costs estimated at between $48.1 billion and $55.6 billion. Cost was conceptualized as including remedial costs related to poverty-related disease morbidity and crime, intergenerational costs related to the effects of low educational achievement by children raised in poverty, and opportunity costs related to foregone employment, income, and taxation revenues.

Advocacy for basic income as a poverty reduction measure has arisen in part because of evidence of the limited effectiveness of existing policy measures (Duclos, 2007), using both international and longitudinal comparators. For example, the UNICEF Office of Research (2013) reported that Canada ranked twenty-first among twenty-nine rich countries on relative child poverty rates (living in households with equivalent income below 50% of national median) in 2012. This same report reveals that Canada ranked thirteenth on a measure of the median depth of child poverty. This contributes to an

overall child well-being ranking of seventeenth.

Canada has no official poverty line, but using the relative Low Income Measure (living in families with equivalent after-tax income below 50% of national median), Campaign 2000 (2015) demonstrates that the child poverty rate was higher in 2013 (19.0%) than in 1989 (15.8%). Using this same measure, Statistics Canada (2015) reports that between 2000 and 2013, poverty for all persons has decreased only marginally (1.48 percentage points), from 16.06% to 14.58%.

The Benefits of Equality Argument

Compared to the poverty reduction argument for basic income, there is a much more disputed rationale that a basic income can play an important role in the policy architecture designed to decrease income and wealth inequality. However, this must be understood in the context that a basic income can establish an economic floor central to decreasing the rate of poverty, but cannot establish an economic ceiling, which is a necessary element in decreasing economic inequality (Casassas & De Wispelaere, 2012). Therefore, as Atkinson (2015) has recently argued, transfer payments (even universal and generous ones) are an insufficient policy lever to ameliorate economic inequality. This also requires intervention in the labor market, in the distribution of the benefits of technological change, in the distribution of capital, and in the progressivity of income taxation.

Nevertheless, income inequality is of significant and increasing concern in Canada because of the growth of inequality and its serious consequences. Heisz (2016) has recently demonstrated that after-tax income inequality exhibited a significant increase in the second half of the 1990s because of increasing inequality in market income, coupled with reductions in the equalizing effect of tax and transfer systems. Inequality was stabilized at this higher level in the 2000s.

Rising income inequality has been associated with serious consequences. The Conference Board of Canada (2016) argues that income inequality is a drag on economic growth. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrate that high income inequality at the national level is associated with conflictual social relations, elevated rates of mental health problems,

decreased physical health status, increased rates of obesity, increased incarceration rates, lower educational attainment, less inter-generational mobility, and higher rates of teenage fertility. However, causal mechanisms have been disputed. Osberg (2013) raises concerns for democratic governance, as growing income inequality fosters increasing inequality in political influence.

However, those concerned about income inequality often do not fully support a basic income. Green, Riddell and St.-Hillaire (2016) argue against what they call a pure GAI scheme on the basis of the cost of an adequate guarantee and its work disincentive potential, but in favor of a multi-pronged approach incorporating many GAI features. These include provision of an income floor not conditioned on work status, and use of the personal income taxation system to claw back benefits as incomes rise. Atkinson (2015) favors a benefit conditioned on labor market participation rather than citizenship, because the latter would cover citizens living outside Canada and would exclude non-citizens resident and working in Canada. Corak (2013) also favors a basic income conditioned on work.

Basic Income as a Response to the Relatively Jobless Future

Basic income can set a 'floor' under all working age adults as a safeguard against economic hardship and a potential descent into poverty in a precarious labor market. This is especially important as galloping technological innovation decreases the number of paid jobs in general, including "good" jobs with relatively high remuneration, security, and intrinsic satisfaction. Authors such as Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) and Kaplan (2015) have put forth the general argument about a relatively jobless future in an IT-oriented society; it is worth noting that these writers call for basic income as part of the prescription for managing this fundamental transition. Todd (2015) draws attention to the work of labor economists who point to the reduction of work hours in a more automated economy. He argues for the need for basic income to ease this transition and underwrite future economic security; he also sees opportunities for us to lead more fulfilling lives in an "artisan" culture of voluntary social engagement and connection.

While job loss due to information technology and

automation must be managed, it can also be noted that levels of employment in Canada have always fluctuated due to our heavy economic dependence on resource extraction and the ups and downs of commodity prices on global markets. For instance, in late 2015, low oil prices and falling production in that sector were leading to a shedding of jobs in the Canadian labor market (CBC News, 2016).

Beyond the fossil fuel sector of the economy, there is ample evidence in Canada of the growing precarity of employment across the labor market. Not only is there job loss across the board (CBC News, 2015), but there is also a loss of high-paying jobs (Babad, 2015). McKenna (2016) cites the C. D. Howe Institute warning that "signs of weakness abound, including a growing share of people doing part-time and other 'precarious' work, a near-doubling of long-term unemployment since 2008, and diminishing medium-skilled jobs." (para. 4)

Lewchuk et al. (2013) made several key findings about the increasing tenuousness of employment in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton, including the following:

> Precarious employment is increasing. Only 60% of GTA workers today have stable, secure jobs.
>
> Precarious employment is widely distributed among social and income categories.
>
> People in precarious employment earn less and face more uncertainty.
>
> Precarious employment has harmful effects on individuals, families, and community life.
>
> Precarious employment makes it more difficult to raise children. (p. 16)

The authors of this study point out the need for public policy to support workers in regard to adequacy of wages, union representation, employment standards, education and job training, and community supports for working people as antidotes to the precarity of employment. But their findings beg the question of whether such measures in and of themselves would be enough to address income insecurity due to

precarious employment. Perhaps it is time to set aside any lingering hope for a "full employment economy" as the centerpiece of economic security for most Canadians. What now may be required is for public policy makers (as well as citizens and politicians) to acknowledge the inevitability of a relatively jobless future in which a universal and adequate basic income is a necessary component in building a fair and inclusive political economy in Canada.

The Ecological Sustainability Argument

Much has been written over the years (Birnbaum, 2009, provides a good overview) about the connections between the ecological imperative to lower consumption and decrease our carbon footprint as a prerequisite for environmental sustainability, and the necessity of having a basic income in place to ensure an economically secure and decent life for all. There was discussion in the previous section of the precarity of employment in the fossil fuel sector, tied as it is to global fluctuations in the price of oil, gas and coal. But there is also an absolute and urgent necessity to transition to a zero-carbon, authentically green and ecologically sustainable economy in order to slow global warming (Klein, 2014). Climate change and other ecological disasters (such as human overpopulation, pollution, habitat loss, and species extinction) can only be averted if we embrace and achieve a new paradigm of a steady state economy (including de-growth of ecologically economic destructive activities). The implications of such a paradigmatic shift include lower consumption in the wealthy nations, entirely renewable energy sources, and the primacy of caretaking (in our families, communities, and natural environments) over extraction and production. In such a transformed economy, basic income as a primary means of redistribution will be required to ensure personal and collective economic security (Mulvale, 2007).

Some Historical Background on the Discussion of Basic Income in Canada[1]

One of the earliest manifestations of "basic income" in Canada arose in the depths of the Great Depression. The Social Credit Party, led by William Aberhart, was elected as the

government of the province of Alberta in 1935. That party's proposal to pay a "social credit" or regular dividend to all citizens never came to fruition, in part due to a lack of funds in the provincial treasury, but also because of the federal government's opposition to Aberhart's attempts to intrude into federal jurisdiction over currency and banking (Young & Mulvale, 2009, p. 12).

Broad political and public discussion about "guaranteed annual income" arose again in Canada in the late 1960s. The Economic Council of Canada (1968), a federally-funded crown corporation, noted the presence of poverty in Canada "on a much larger scale than most Canadians probably suspect" (p. 103). The idea of a guaranteed income emerged as one mechanism for addressing this newly acknowledged poverty. In 1967, the Guaranteed Income Supplement was introduced as a piece of the Old Age Security program as a measure to reduce poverty among seniors.

In 1971, the Special Committee on Poverty of the Senate of Canada (1971), chaired by Senator David Croll, recommended a guaranteed annual income financed and administered by the federal government. The Committee wrote that this proposal met three basic requirements: "it provides adequate income, it preserves the incentive to work, and it is fiscally possible" (p. x). The guaranteed annual income was an idea, the Committee wrote, "whose time had come." The proposed guaranteed income would cover all Canadian citizens "who need it" (but excluded those who were single, unattached, and under the age of 40), and was to take the form of a negative income tax. It would provide a guaranteed income of 70 per cent of the poverty lines set by the Committee and would be paired with a 70 percent reduction rate for each dollar of additional income earned. The cost of this proposal was a significant hurdle to its acceptance. As well, critics focused on the issue of inadequate work incentives and the reduction rate. Earnings would have to be well above the benefit level for significant income enhancement to occur through paid work. Despite the considerable interest generated by Croll's plan, it was never implemented (Senate of Canada, 1971, pp. 12-13).

In 1970, the Department of National Health and Welfare wrote that the idea of a guaranteed income as an

anti-poverty measure had potential, but needed further study and investigation. That same year, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established. The Commission recommended, among other things, that a "guaranteed annual income be paid by the federal government to the heads of all one-parent families with dependent children" (Young & Mulvale, 2009, p. 13). While arguing that a guaranteed annual income would benefit all Canadians, the report nonetheless recommended this initial targeting to single parents (specifically sole-support mothers) and delivery through a negative income tax scheme.

In 1973, a minority Liberal government initiated the Social Security Review, marked by the publication of the *Working Paper on Social Security in Canada* (Young & Mulvale, 2009). Known as the Orange Paper, the working paper argued for a two-tiered approach to social assistance, including a guaranteed annual income plan for those who could not work and an income supplement for the working poor. Ultimately, the review came to naught and folded in 1976. At this point, discussion of guaranteed income receded from the government agenda for some time. Two Canadian economists, Derek Hum and Wayne Simpson, argue that the late 1970s were marked by preoccupation with rising inflation, wage and price controls, and growing deficits, and were inhospitable to engagement with the notion of guaranteed income (Young & Mulvale, 2009). Advocacy for a guaranteed income program, however, was continued by a number of organizations inside the mainstream social policy community. For example, in 1976 the National Council of Welfare, an advisory body to the Minister of Health and Welfare, released its Guide to the Guaranteed Income (Young & Mulvale, 2009).

A very important legacy remains from this period. In 1974, a year after the start of the federal review of social security, the governments of Canada and Manitoba signed an agreement to begin a trial run of a basic income experiment. Later that year, the Manitoba Basic Guaranteed Annual Income Experiment (dubbed "Mincome") was launched. While initially envisioned by at least the Manitoba government as a simple and relatively inexpensive trial, Mincome evolved into a complicated experiment, with a focus on the issue of whether or not a guaranteed

income would be a disincentive to recipients engaging in paid labor. The Mincome project involved 1300 Manitoba families from both urban and rural communities. It distributed these families randomly between a number of different guaranteed income plans and a control group over a period of three years.

By 1979, the experiment was closed; there appeared to be little political support at any government level for a guaranteed income program. The project resulted in no official findings, and few results of the experiment were published at that time. Much of the data collected remain archived to this day. Hum and Simpson (2001) attribute this outcome to "mundane factors such as money, timing [and] changing policy preferences."

More recently, there has been academic analysis on that part of the Mincome experiment that was a "saturation" site (where everyone was eligible to receive the benefit, rather than just a sample of the population)—the town of Dauphin, Manitoba. Evelyn Forget has analyzed health and educational data from this community for the period of time when Mincome was providing guaranteed income supplements to those with low incomes. Forget (2011) found that hospitalizations, accidents, injuries, and mental health problems declined, and that the high school completion rate increased during the Mincome experiment in Dauphin. When the experiment ended, these improved health and educational outcomes ceased, and the community returned to pre-experimental levels of hospital contacts and high school dropping out. It appears that Mincome had demonstrably beneficial effects for the community, while at the same time having very little negative impact on labor market participation (Forget, 2011).

By the mid-1980s the idea of a guaranteed income was back on the policy agenda, due primarily to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (Royal Commission, 1985). This report, issued by the "Macdonald Commission" (so called after its chair, former Liberal Finance Minister Donald Macdonald), was marked by general concern about economic efficiency and support for free market forces. Central among the number of reforms to the Canadian welfare system that were recommended was implementation of a Universal Income Security Program (UISP). The UISP was intended to bring about reform in a "badly flawed"

income-security system in a manner that was to be "deep and rapid" (Royal Commission, 1985, p. 783). The Commission (p. 795) pointedly chose not to use the term "guaranteed annual income" to describe this proposal, as the UISP had benefit levels considerably lower than those traditionally associated with guaranteed incomes. Nonetheless, the UISP stands as a guaranteed income proposal.

The Macdonald Commission proposed that the UISP would eventually replace much of the then existing financial safety net, including the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, the Family Allowance, the refundable child tax credit, child and marital tax exemptions, federal social housing programs, federal transfers to the provinces for social assistance, and the income support functions of unemployment insurance. Old Age Security would be left intact at existing levels of support. The UISP benefit itself would be financed by a reallocation of expenditures from the eliminated programs. Key to the Commission's recommendation was their understanding that the reform would thus impose no extra cost and, indeed, might even save a considerable amount of money. The UISP was to have a relatively low guarantee level and a low reduction rate due to earned income. The report recommended a universal demogrant-based delivery system, rather than a strictly tax-based system, although it argued that either would be effective (Young & Mulvale, 2009).

The Macdonald Commission report acknowledged that the income guarantees proposed were not adequate to meet all family needs without additional support, a choice made deliberately to preserve work incentives. The report also assumed that provincial or municipal social assistance top-ups as a second tier of benefits would continue to be available for families with very little income. Benefits for young recipients would be contingent upon an "active job search" and benefits for those between 18 and 35 might be restricted to half of the level for older recipients (Young & Mulvale, p. 15). Thus, the proposal was not a truly universal one. Benefit levels and tax-back rates varied somewhat depending on age and family status. As lead author of the report, Donald Macdonald acknowledged in an interview that UISP is "a way for enabling the working poor ... to work their way out to get something

from a job" (Tanguy, 2001).

Criticism of the UISP came quickly and from a variety of directions. From the left, commentators pointed out that the UISP suffered from the Commission's failure to acknowledge the context of increasing unemployment and poverty, the dismantling of existing social programs, and growing income inequalities of the 1980s (e.g., Kitchen, 1986). Critics were quick to point out that such a scheme would effectively institutionalize poverty, setting income security benefits for many at even lower levels than existing programs. The UISP also met with strong opposition from the Canadian labor movement (Haddow, 1994). While the Mulroney government implemented the Commission's recommendations for free trade between Canada and the United States, the UISP proposals were ignored by the government. For many in Canada with an interest in progressive social policy, the Macdonald Commission proposal for UISP has come to symbolize the dangers of guaranteed income proposals.

In 1994, a discussion paper tabled in the House of Commons by Minister of Human Resources Lloyd Axworthy dismissed the idea of implementation of a formal guaranteed income program. The paper argued somewhat speciously that Canada's mix of social assistance and tax credit programs was a "de facto guaranteed minimum income" (Young & Mulvale, 2009, p. 15).

Guaranteed income seemed to fall off the political radar for several subsequent years in Ottawa, but the political circumstances in the Parliament of 2008–2011 offered new opportunities to the supporters of income security reform. During this Parliament, the Conservatives had a minority of seats in the elected House of Commons and (at the beginning of the Parliamentary sessions) also in the appointed Senate. The minority Conservative Party government, led by Stephen Harper, was opposed by the Liberal Party as the Official Opposition, as well as by the New Democratic Party (with a social-democratic orientation) and the Bloc Québécois (dedicated to the sovereignty of Quebec). This composition of the Parliamentary chambers ensured a majority of Opposition members on Committees of both the House and the Senate. As a result, legislators were able to discuss and make

recommendations on creative ideas, even though the Conservative government was not likely to support them or ensure their passage into legislation.

In this political context, the idea of guaranteed or basic income resurfaced in two significant forums. The Senate Sub-Committee on Cities published a report entitled *In from the Margins* on a wide range of measures to address poverty, housing, and homelessness (Senate of Canada, 2009). The report makes two recommendations specifically on guaranteed income:

> [T]he federal government publish a Green Paper …. to include the costs and benefits of current practices with respect to income supports and of options to reduce and eliminate poverty, including a basic annual income based on a negative income tax, and to include a detailed assessment of completed pilot projects on a basic income in New Brunswick and Manitoba (Recommendation 5)
>
> [T]he federal government develop and implement a basic income guarantee at or above LICO [low income cut-off] for people with severe disabilities (Recommendation 53)

A House of Commons Committee also made a recommendation to the Conservative government that it should "create a federal basic income program for persons with disabilities and support a disability-related supports program to be delivered by the provinces and territories" (House of Commons, 2010, p. 143). On the other hand, this Committee "decided not to make a recommendation regarding a universal GAI, considering it preferable to take one step at a time and begin with a program benefitting only persons with a disability" (p. 194). Although the Commons Committee was less supportive of a GAI than the Senate Committee, the former did not dismiss the goal of a universal guaranteed income out of hand. Rather, the Members of Parliament who sat on the Committee recommended an incremental approach, starting with persons with disabilities.

Significantly, one of the most prominent basic income

advocates during this period was 'red Tory' Senator Hugh Segal (2012) from the Conservative Party. He publicly and repeatedly defended the introduction of a federal GAI, arguing that Canada can afford it and that has the money to ensure that every citizen can live with dignity. In February 2008, Segal introduced a notice of motion in the Senate calling for "a fulsome study on the feasibility of a Guaranteed Annual Income … or Negative Income Tax as a means of reducing poverty and providing a real solution to those currently living below what is considered the Canadian poverty line."[2]

The Canadian debate on basic or guaranteed income has had many twists and turns over the years, and it continues today. Compared to previous decades, the current basic income discourse in Canada indicates more familiarity and comfort with the concept. There is also arguably a more sophisticated understanding of the questions of political strategy and policy design required to build a practical, working model of basic income in Canada.

Importance of Policy Learning, Policy Design, and Effective Delivery Mechanisms for BI

Both the design and implementation process of a basic income scheme are crucial in their own right in order for the policy to accomplish its objectives, and to demonstrate its benefits and practicality. Many design issues are salient, but three are especially important. The first relates to the level of adequacy of the guarantee. As De Wispelaere (2016) has pointed out, disagreement over this issue may decrease the range of political support and expose conflict in a fragile policy coalition. Specifically, progressive supporters may fall by the wayside if the guarantee is too low (Emery et al., 2013) and neoliberal supporters may bolt if it is too high (Hum, 1986).

This adequacy issue is further complicated, because in Canada there is no official poverty line, so that the criterion of adequacy is open to dispute (Frankel & Mulvale, 2013). Statistics Canada publishes three measures of low income, a purely relative measure (Low Income Measure), a semi-relative measure (Low Income Cut-Offs) and an absolute measure (Market Basket Measure); the thresholds are significantly different. Beyond this, the "real freedom" justification for a basic

income requires an adequate benefit paid to each individual (Widerquist, Vanderborght, Noguera, & De Wispelaere, 2013), while poverty thresholds incorporate household economies of scale. A full benefit paid to all household members would place the household above the poverty threshold, and would involve significant increases in cost.

The second design issue involves the extent to which a basic income will replace other welfare state cash benefits and services (Myles & Pierson, 1997). Disagreements in this regard could also split the policy coalition in similar ways to the adequacy issue. The third issue involves the complexities of federal–provincial cooperation in a federated state (Drover, Moscovitch, & Mulvale, 2014). The federal government has much more financial capacity to pay for a basic income, but savings in health, criminal justice and social services costs flowing from a basic income will largely benefit provincial and territorial governments.

Regarding implementation issues, De Wispelaere and Stirton (2013) have demonstrated that considerable care must be taken in designing eligibility standards, structures and procedures to locate and distinguish eligible beneficiaries, and systems to regularly pay benefits to these recipients (some of whom have limited bureaucratic skills) in a great variety of changing circumstances. Delivering a BI benefit to everyone for whom it is intended is especially challenging, given the presence of vulnerable and transient segments of the population such as the homeless, those fleeing violence from intimate partners, and those with recurring psychiatric disabilities (De Wispelaere & Stirton, 2012).

In order to minimize risks of implementation failure, incremental implementation with active policy learning processes should be considered (McLaughlin, 1987). However, this strategy will entail some risks, including offering opportunities for opponents to organize and to exploit implementation problems to their advantage (Frankel & Mulvale, 2013).

The Current Context

The Canadian political landscape changed dramatically in October 2015 with the election of a new Liberal federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Canada

had been governed before that by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who was elected with a minority government in 2006 and 2008, and with a majority government in 2011. The Harper Conservative government had a hard right wing agenda of tax cuts, contraction of social expenditures, and policies favoring corporate interests. The Harper years were not a propitious time to be promoting the basic income principles of a universal and unconditional economic floor for all, regardless of individuals' labor market status.

The election of the Liberal government in 2015 held the promise of renewed commitment to social programs and a positive role for the federal government in pursuing progressive social change. At its last pre-election policy convention in 2014, the Liberal Party of Canada did, in fact, adopt two resolutions in regard to basic income. One called upon a Liberal federal government to "work with the provinces and territories to design and implement a Basic Annual Income in such a way that differences are taken into consideration under the existing Canada Social Transfer System" (Liberal Party of Canada, 2014, p. 17). The other called for "a federal pilot of a basic income supplement in at least one Canadian town or city, in cooperation with the appropriate provincial and municipal government(s)" (Liberal Party of Canada, 2014, p. 28). The party's commitment was reiterated at its subsequent convention (held seven months after it formed the government) when it passed a resolution "that the Liberal Party of Canada, in consultation with the provinces, develop a poverty reduction strategy aimed at providing a minimum guaranteed income" (Liberal Party of Canada, 2016).

In the 2015 federal election campaign leading up to the October 19 vote, only one party voiced support for "guaranteed livable income"—the Green Party of Canada, who elected only one member, its leader Elizabeth May. On a campaign stop in New Brunswick, she "announced the party's commitment to a guaranteed livable income, a measure May said she believes could eliminate poverty in Canada" (Donkin, 2015, p. A5). The Green Party's proposal "would replace federal transfers for social programs like social assistance, the Old Age Supplement, child tax benefits and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for

the elderly with a single cash benefit delivered through the tax system" (Donkin, 2015, p. A5). The benefit would be taxable and in fact taxed back from high income earners.

After the Liberal victory in the 2015 election, Jean-Yves Duclos was appointed to Cabinet as the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. In his previous career as an economist, Duclos wrote extensively about guaranteed minimum income, sometimes more favorably (Duclos, 2007) than other times (Clavet, Duclos, & Lacroix, 2012). But as he assumed his Cabinet post, Duclos expressed his view that "the concept has merit as a policy to consider after the government implements more immediate reforms" (Curry, 2016, p. A1).

Canada's social democratic party, the New Democratic Party (NDP), has had a long running lack of interest in (and even antipathy towards) the basic income model. One factor shaping the NDP's skepticism has no doubt been its close alliance with Canadian labor unions, and the latter's strong orientation to "good jobs" as the bedrock of economic security. The Canadian labor movement also strongly opposed the minimalist model of guaranteed income recommended by the Macdonald Commission in the mid-1980s (Haddow, 1994), and this memory may still strongly influence the older generation of labor leaders (see p. 38).

But a positive step towards acceptance of the basic income model was taken by the NDP at its national convention in April 2016. A resolution was adopted (No. 3-45-16) that "affirm[s] the principle of a Basic Income Guarantee" and that "endorses informed discussion within the party to explore potential options for a basic income guarantee for all in Canada" (New Democratic Party, 2016). This resolution also promised NDP support for "a minimum income pilot program as a step towards eliminating poverty in Canada" and for the party "to promote national discussion and explore options for a basic income for all" as part of the new Liberal government's proposed federal poverty reduction strategy (New Democratic Party, 2016).

There also appears to have been a recent increase in receptivity to the idea of basic income in certain quarters of the Canadian labor movement. Andrew Jackson is a former chief economist of the Canadian Labour Congress. He warns against

a "big-bang" approach to a basic income, but endorses a strategy "to selectively improve refundable income-tax credits and other income-support programs so that all household incomes after taxes and transfers meet a basic level" (Jackson, 2016). In this way, Jackson argues, we can add to existing refundable tax credits for children (the Canada Child Tax Benefit) and for seniors (Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement) "to provide a non-stigmatizing and adequate income to working-age persons who cannot work, usually due to disability, or who receive only low incomes from work due to low wages and limited hours" (Jackson, 2016, p. B2). He strongly criticizes the woeful inadequacy of Canada's social assistance programs, and proposes as an alternative "a well-designed system of income-tested benefits for low-income workers, including disability benefits" that would "set a basic income floor for all Canadians" (Jackson, 2016, p. B2). Jackson even holds out that such "practical reform" could be "an important stepping stone toward more visionary solutions" (Jackson, 2016, p. B2).

In early 2016, the two most populous provinces in Canada indicated their interest in further investigation into the guaranteed income model. The Government of Ontario announced in its 2016 budget that "we will join with researchers and communities to develop a Basic Income pilot project" (Ontario, 2016, p. 22). The Premier of Quebec, Philippe Couillard, is "serious" in his government's intention to undertake a system of guaranteed income for all Quebecers (Boivin, 2016). At the level of municipal government, basic income is endorsed by growing list of Canadian mayors, and in December 2015 "the City of Kingston [Ontario] has become the first municipality in Canada to call for the development of a basic income guarantee for all Canadians" (Benns, 2015, para, 1).

The growth of political support for basic income in Canada in the recent past has no doubt been aided by civil society organizations that advocate for this approach, and that promote and engage in informed discussion and analysis of how to make it a reality in the Canadian social welfare system. Notable among this constituency has been the Basic Income Canada Network (BICN), along with the provincial and local groups with which it is affiliated.[3] A small group of academics, policy experts, and activists launched BICN in 2008 as the officially

recognized national group connected with the Basic Income Earth Network. Since 2009, BICN has been holding annual conferences to discuss basic income, disseminate research, and bring policy advocates and activists together. Starting in 2010, these conferences have been co-organized with the United States Basic Income Guarantee Network, and billed as the North American Basic Income Guarantee (NABIG) Congress.

BICN has recently articulated "The Basic Income We Want"—a BI scheme that is nested within broader social policy architecture that includes "universal public services such as health care, education, child care and pharmacare," "measures that ensure the paid labour market operates fairly," and "fair and progressive taxation." (Basic Income Canada Network, 2016, paras. 9-11). There have been many concerns raised in Canada over the years that uncritical promotion of the BI model could pave the way to a neo-liberal version of a basic income benefit, leading to cuts in other health and social programs and resulting in the economically vulnerable being worse off. This statement of BICN clearly articulates that it supports a BI design that provides better income security in the context of a comprehensive and effective system of health and social provision for all Canadians.

As we move forward to make the case for a universal, unconditional, adequate and sustainable form of basic income in Canada, it is important that we be guided by some key political and strategic principles. We must strive for a version of basic income in Canada that is:

- Holistic in policy terms—establishes a basic income scheme that is the essential economic security component in broad social policy architecture that also incorporates universal health care, affordable and adequate housing, food security, early childhood development and education, and social services and supports
- Politically authentic and inclusive—draws as broadly as possible on progressive political tendencies, organizations, and movements, but is also clear on the justifications or versions of basic income that we cannot support (e.g., right-libertarian arguments for basic income as a substitute for the collective provision of public goods and services)

- Financially feasible—ensures adequate public revenues to fund basic income through a reform of the taxation system that restores equity and progressivity, and that draws upon new revenue sources such as resource royalties and Crown corporation income
- Ecologically sound—opens the door to a stable state, environmentally sustainable economy

In struggles to build a more just and inclusive society, we have no guarantees of success in achieving ambitious social policy goals such as basic income. But the same was true of the struggles of previous generations for social programs that we now take for granted in Canada, such as universal public education and universal public health insurance. Our current political, economic, and social circumstances seem to bring the goal of basic income more within our grasp than ever before. The months and years ahead will be crucial in the quest for a sound and durable basic income scheme for Canada.

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Endnotes:

1. This section draws upon previous work done by Mulvale and Vanderborght (2012) and Young and Mulvale (2009).

2. Quoted from a "Communique" and "Notice of Motion" released by the Office of Senator Hugh Segal, Senate of Canada, 6 February 2008.

3. The first author of this article is a Board member of BICN. Both authors serve on the Steering Committee for Basic Income Manitoba, which was formed in 2015.