Guaranted income as an inheritance

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Abstract :

The recent, unprecedented and tremendous shift, in all technologies of production, makes us coheirs of huge means. This inheritance gives to our generation the task to manage the possible abundance, that is to replace the present economic frame that has become obsolete. The basis of the adaptated frame lies both on guaranteed incomesfor all andonsharing of workbetween all, as the two complementary aspects of rights and duties that are linked to the legacy we receive.

When everything becomes possible, it is too dangerous to let profits be the motor of economy. That is why we people have to acquire the control of money in managing a DISTRIBUTIVE MONEY.

The basic income as a REdistribution of money within market economy is but a concession to buy the silence of a growing part of peoplewhen determining decisions are to be taken.

Huge possibilities and ignominious failures

Our time is that of incoherences. If you had to describe our present world, would you speak about the exploits in agricultural productions, about the huge factories producing more than thousand cars every day, about the spectacular developments of computers and communications, about the speed reached by supersonic planes, about the destroying capabilities of our modern weapons... or would you describe the despair of unemployed people who can do nothing to maintain their families, the growth of giant cities surrounded by millions of starving people? Would you say that our time is that of the discovery of the art to create new molecules, and thus to create new plants and new materials or would you say that this century is that of billions of human beings, two thirds of whom are sub-fed?

Our world has, indeed, these two aspects. Never has man been so mighty, never has earth borne so many starving people. That is why our duty is first to understand why we are confronted with such

incongruities, and, secondly, to invent the necessary means to bring human capabilities at thedisposal of all human beings.

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A quick review over our economic past

To explain, if possible, the lag between the display of such a revolutionary inventiveness and the growing number of people that are left aside, one has to understand that mankind is living a real burst, an unprecedented explosion. That is why we will make a rapid review of our economic past. We will understand that this burst, first experienced in the so-called developed countries, spreads around the world with various velocities, following no moral law, in a way that obeys only to ancient and obsolete habits. The consequences of such confusions and maladjustments are those economic incoherences that have been first called *Â«the economic crisisÂ»*.

As soon as man appeared on earth, his prime concern was naturally, to find food and to protect himself. During the hundred thousand years that the paleolithic age lasted, this concern absorbed all his abilities and all his time : he knew how to fight against animals only by throwing stones at them ! The discovery of the use of the most rudimentary tools, the chipped stone, dates back some eighty thousand years : in the mid paleolithic, men lived in caves, ate wild fruits or plants and the animals they managed to kill. It is only on the verge of the third millenary... before our era, that man began to domesticate animals, to cultivate cereals, to produce the first potteries, the first clothes, and that the first villages appeared.

Millenaries had been necessary for him to produce these first technical successes !

It is not easy to be conscious of the role played by the time factor in man's history, because we don't have the experience of what represents only one century. To understand the overwhelming acceleration of man's capabilities and become conscious that we are living a unique major upheaval in our history, an image can be useful. So, let us change the time scale and represent all our history by a length of time that we all know : a year, the year 1985 for instance. Let us take into consideration these twelve months in order to represent the entire life of our ancestors since the age of the chipped stone till today, hence leaving aside prehistoric times, which, on this scale, would be represented by nearly thirty years.

So, history began on the first of January, when man discovered the art of polishing the bones of reindeers he had killed. He began to polish stones. And during that month, during February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, and even October, about no definite invention changed his living : he was a hunter, he became a shepherd. As the copper age appeared about two thousand years before our era, it started, on our image, ... on the beginning of November ! Slowly, imperceptibly, each generation adding its contribution to the efforts of the preceding ones, to diminish man's physical effort necessary to his safe-guard, progress accelerated its advance.

A step was taken, thanks to the invention of the horse-collar, that allowed man to domesticate the horse. But living conditions were hard, survival was the salary of a constant fight, and, naturally, the instinct of property appeared as soon as waste lands had been ploughed. The stronger dominated the weaker, so that the latter became his slave. But a slave can only give the strength of his muscles... until the invention of the wheel which helped him a little to transport his goods. We must wait until the 5 th of December to see a Greek man building the first water-wheel.

As a matter of fact, during these hundred thousand years, I mean during the first eleven months of our year, man had only at his disposal an amount of power that can be estimated about 75 watts, that is his own physical power. This represents, if we assume that he works without any intermission, during ten hours, each of the 365 days of the year, an energy of 270 kwh. That is, in the today commonly used unit, the equivalent of 23 kg of fuel : at such a rate, he had to work three years to produce the energy that is contained in his own weight of petrol ! Thus, during the greater part of his history, man had no mechanical help. He had time to persuade himself that he was born to live by the sweat of his brow. So, don't be surprised if this idea is today so strongly anchored !

Just think that, in our image, the first wind-mill was constructed about noon, on the 17 th of December. That when Louis XVI was crowned king of France, on December 29, he could not use more mechanical means than the Pharaos of old Egypt. Not until the invention of the steam engine, on December 29 at 6 p.m. did man have a machine which allowed him to convert thermic energy accumulated in coal into mechanical energy and so set others machines in motion.

The era of great discoveries began three days before the end of the year. The acceleration of progress in technology became then more perceptible. On the same day, Lebon invented gas-lighting, Fulton devised the first steam boat and Dallery invented the propeller. The next morning, the first trains started operating, and so did the telegraph and the first under-sea cable was laid between Calais and Dover. Gramme built his first electrical engine in the morning of the 30 th of December and Edison invented the first light bulb in the evening of the same day. People thought he was insane when he pretended to produce light in a bottle!

Yesterday's utopia, today's reality !

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Overwheming acceleration

With the discovery of electricity, technical progress accelerated in a way till then unthinkable. The world has been transformed since man learnt to transport electric energy over long distances. The telephone, the lighting of cities, heating, the discovery of petroleum, the invention of the explosion engine, radically changed life. When ClÃ©ment Ader succeeded in achieving a first 50-meter jump on board a motor plane, the last day of the year was just beginning.

At 2 a.m. BlÃ©riot succeeded in crossing the Channel with his aeroplane, at 7 a.m. Lindberg linked New-York to Paris at the same time that Goddard launched the first propellant rocket : it reached an altitude of 30 meters! At lunch time, their radio announces the first supersonic flight, then, at 3 p.m. it announced the first transport by jet planes. At 4 p.m. a piece of news struck the whole world : the Russians had succeeded in launching the first artificial satellite ! One hour later, a man was in space ! And on this 31st of December, about 4 hours before the end of the year, a man stepped on the moon...

Man needed about the WHOLE YEAR to succeed in operating a first mechanical slave : the power available for each human beeing doubled just in the last hours of the 29th of December. It doubled again about ONE DAY later ... and doubled again only ONE HOUR later. It was multiplied by 80 at noon on the 31 at of December and ten hours later, each Canadian used a team of 380 mechanical slaves. Now, that is about 300 billions of these slaves that the world is using !

Are we not indeed living an explosion?

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A mutation

But this is only one aspect of the burst. The other one lies in the nature of the transformation : this striking multiplication of our power has recently been accompanied with the sudden opening of a new area of possibilities, the effects of which we cannot foresee.

It began with a much more lashing acceleration of the number of our intellectual slaves, and this with the development first of ourcomputing machines, then with that of our telecommunication means. The acceleration in the development of computer science has been even more spectacular than that of our technical means : while the speed of trains was multiplied by a factor of three in a century, the speed of computers has been multiplied by a factor of 25.000 in a quarter of a century. This increase in speed is accompanied by two other important and very rapid evolutions : the reduction in size and the spectacular cut in the amount of energy that is needed.

A now classical way to show this acceleration is to make the comparison with a Rolls Royce or a Boeing 747 : if progress had been the same, a Boeing 747 would fly all around the earth in twenty minutes, its size would have become that of a thimble and in energy, it would need only 20 liters of kerosene.

Then again a new area of possibilities is opened with the discovery of the codes of nature, beginning only some years ago, that is also in the evening of this famous 31 st of December in our image. With the developments of genetics and atomic sciences, we know now how to make materials that nature had not created and agriculture is transforming from picking what nature can produce in cultivating tailor-made plants ! Here lies the deepest break with our past, an UNPRECEDENTED break.

The consequences are still hardly noticeable. For example one fifth of the copper in the United-States is yet produced by bacteria. But manufacturers must know that the upheaval that biotechnologies are bringing about is not a new industry that will run besides to-day's ones, it is a complete transformation of the whole industry corresponding to new ways of thinking and new ways of making.

Their emergence in agriculture are expected in Europe for 1988 or 1989 : the problem, for instance, of the actual billion of liters of milk that the Common Market cannot sell, is nothing compared with the problems of *Â«overproductionÂ»* that can soon appear.

In industry, the design of a part has also become a computer's task since artificial memories are able to place up-to-date human knowledge quasi instantaneously at one's disposal. Their realization is also computer's and robot's jobs and the result is not only best suited and more perfectly carried out, it is also less energy-consuming. The industrial production is completely changing : huge manufactories are disappearing, giving place to middle and low-scale firms, that need only few workers in charge of necessary commands of computers and robots.

Work becomes an intelligence's affair in the whole production of consumer goods.

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The era of intelligence

How could such revolutionary transformations of our means have no consequences on our economic and social relations?

During several thousand years, men live of agriculture. Nature ordered. To survive, man had to devote all his time, all his life, to work. Then a transfer was carried out towards industry. Man's work was transformed, organization and methods were invented to produce more and better. And during about two centuries (the last three days in our image), industrial productiondominated economy, and hence, society. From this organization was born the notion of wages, as an equivalence was possible : money in exchange for work.

The era we are entering into is that in which this type of equivalence is no longer possible.

In such conditions, how could we still speak of salary, of productivity ? What is man's productivity when a robot, made by other robots, creates goods, in repeated process, following indications put into practice by one worker, using the vast sum of knowledge now available?

Goods now produced by robots are our inheritance
as they result of scientific progress made,
generation after generation, by men who preceded us on this earth.
The task of our generation
is to adapt the human society to the means we have inherited.

We are leaving an era in which the major problem for humanity was : Â«How can we produce what we need to survive?Â». This problem nowaday is solved : we know HOW. We are entering an era in which the major problem is to decide : Â«WHAT (and in what quantities) will we produce?Â»

The preceding era has been called the era of scarcity; in contrast the new one is the era of abundance. It could be also called the era of intelligence, or the era of freedom, as hard work is no more a condition of survival.

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Conservative attempts

Man's customs and mentalities advance much slower than inventions. This is probably why the basic social adaptation implied by the technical transformations, that is a guaranteed income to all human beings, is generally first thought of in the economic frame of the past era. This desire to maintain the financial habits we acquired in the industrial age, is the source of difficulties encountered to finance the basic income.

Clearly, the economic frame of the scarcity era dictates a REDISTRIBUTION of incomes, implying that there are prosperous workers and firms that have to be taxed to finance the basic income, as if the total means were still, a-priori, limited by an external force.

This is probably the reason why people think that it is necessary to maintain the system based on profits : the competitivity that prevailed in this system has been effectively the best mover of the industrial era, and one is not yet conscious that the size of the cake to share can be determined by us, now that we are in the intelligence era.

Beyond the difficulties encountered to finance the basic income in the old frame, there are other signs showing anyhow that the capitalist system is as obsolete as the industrial society which invented it. We cann't here review all these, but let us consider, for example, two of them : in agriculture, the first sector where man's work was displaced by machines, the laws of market must have long had to be superseded by specific laws to help the farmers to sell their productions ; without those new rules, the about 7 or 8 % of the population whose work is still necessary to feed us would no longer earn their living.

In the second sector of production a new problem is also posed by the burst of technologies : the problem of investments. Such are the accelerations that to invest in a new factory is a bet -a rather expensive one- and without the certainty that the projected plant will not be obsolete before it is completed. In such a context, loan rates cannot be stable; and it becomes more an more fruitfull, for the one who wants to make profit with his money, to speculate on rates, for example, than to invest in new productions. Thus, the capitalist system of profits generates the brakes that make it obsolete!

The human aspect is even more crucial : what in effect could be expected from a society whose best hope of profitability lies in the arm race and who finds interest in neglecting its environment?

The basic income, in the context of the profit system,
is, alas, not a safeguard against profitable nuisances.

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Outline of an adapted solution

As mankind is now in possession of the mastery of production, we, collectively, have therefore to invent the ways to insure that no human being is cheated and that our planet will have a future. This is a duty of the heirs we are, as we enter the intelligence era in which exchange is no longer possible for men who have only their potential working force to offer.

To reach these aims, and conscious of how dangerous it is when everything becomes possible to

let profit be the nerve of economy, Jacques Duboin proposed a way that he called the Â«DISTRIBUTIVE ECONOMYÂ».

It is based on the following principle :

WHEN SOMETHING IS NECESSARY AND WHEN THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS EXIST TO MAKE IT,
NO ARTIFICIAL (financial for example) IMPEDIMENT OUGHT TO PREVENT ITS REALIZATION.

This implies that the capitalist money (created by banks in relation to anticipated profit (1)) has to be replaced by a distributive money, the role of which is simply to adjust the total income of the consumers to the amount of goods that has been produced for them. It is a consumption money, canceled when it has been used by a consumer. It cannot be hoarded or lent at an interest.

As shown in more details in *Â«L'Ã©conomie libÃ©rÃ©eÂ»*, the evolution of money all along history reveals a tendency towards immateriality; the development of data processing offers the means to establish such a "management" money, which allows simply to periodically supply everybody's current account, and thus to finance the guaranteed income, which we call the Â«social incomeÂ» and which is for us the basic aim of economy.

The importance of this new money for the basic income is not only the simplicity to finance it but also the fact that it actually fits our new means of life. It is the way to manage production cleverly in our era of possible plenty. It has been said that in such conditions goods might be completely free of charge. But this implies a very long and difficulteducation in order to prevent excess damaging of our planet...

Money is necessary as a guide for production : by his choice of what he purchases the consumer expresses his vote about the forthcoming production. Since everybody regularly receives his social income, everybody participates in the evolution of society. In other words, the distributive money, although without profit, maintains the favourable aspect of the market.

In such a financial system, the amount of social income evolves automatically with the production. But a constant increase is no longer necessary to survive, as in the capitalist society of competition. It can be replaced by a constant improvement.

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Competition is superseded by cooperation

For a firm, utility takes the place of profitability. What matters most is no longer to sell more goods, or even to make them in such a way that the consumer will soon be obliged to buy new ones. The most important is now to produce useful things to fit the needs of the purchasers. An example among a thousand : medicine can betransformed from beingcurative, as it is, with a plethora of chemicals and pharmaceuticals, to being preventive with developed information : with a distributive money, there would not be any financial interest against it (2).

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The importance of work sharing

Let us now briefly consider the new life in this society of managed abundance.As we have seen handwork is relieved by robots, now in the intelligence era. The era of taylorism is dead, as is work sold for getting wages. But robots cannot do everything. Men have to decide, to imagine, to invent, to give commands, to cure, etc...

THE HUMAN WORK THAT REMAINS, AS IT IS STILL NECESSARY
TO REALIZE THE NEEDED PRODUCTION OF GOODS,
OUGHT ABSOLUTELY TO BE SHARED BETWEEN ALL
as a task we call Â«the social serviceÂ».

This work sharing is of great importance. If it is not compulsory, as it would be if the basic income were a REdistribution in the market system, there would be automatically a split in the society. On the one hand, a stable Â«eliteÂ» of full-time workers, well informed, well organized, well protected, who controls the economy (commanding production, investments, management,...). On the other hand, a floating, increasing mass of temporary or unemployed workers, who feel dependent.

Such a REdistribution of incomes appears as a conservative measure that we can sum up by :

Â« BE FED AND SHUT UP Â».

The social service has to be considered as a duty as well as a right. Since it is the counterpart of the social income, we have the duty to participate in the work that the society needs. But our membership of the society has a complementary aspect : as coheirs, we all share the duty to make sure that the legacy we receive is properly used and will be transmitted, preferably improved, to the next generations. This, in turn, gives us the right to have an active participation in the economy, just as the other members of our human society, whatever our field and our talent,

THUS, SOCIAL SERVICE IS THE EXPRESSION OF
THE RIGHT TO BE A FULL CITIZEN.

But human needs are of two kinds. The first is TO HAVE vital goods.Those needs are the field of economy, as managed by guaranteed incomes and social work. The other is TO BE. In the intelligence era, those needs become the most important affair, and, at the same time, they go out of the field of economy, as the duration of social service decreases for all, thanks to work-sharing and development of new robots, the spare time will increase, this spare time being the time during which each of us will have the possibility to choose his or her activities, WITHOUT ANY ECONOMIC CONSTRAINT.

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CONCLUSIONS

WE PEOPLE ARE ALL COHEIRS OF FANTASTIC NEW MEANS OF PRODUCTION. THIS GIVES US THE TASK TO FIT OUR WAY OF LIFE TO THIS INHERITANCE, IN MANAGING THE POSSIBLEABUNDANCE. BUT IF WE HAVE NO CONTROL OVER MONEY, WE WILL NEVER CONTROL THE ECONOMY. THUS, A DISTRIBUTIVE MONEY IS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTING GUARANTEED INCOMES AND WORK-SHARING.

THE MINIMUM INCOME THAT WE COULD OBTAIN AS A REDISTRIBUTION, IN THE PRESENT OBSOLETE ECONOMIC FRAME, IS BUT A CONCESSION TO BUY OUR SILENCE IN THE DETERMINING DECISIONS OF OUR TIME.

RÃ©fÃ©rences

(1) - see *Â«Les yeux ouvertsÂ»*, by J. Duboin (back to the text)

(2) - see for details *Â«Les affranchis de l'an 2000Â»*, by M-L Duboin, Syros Ã©d., 1984. (back)

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