

After several weeks of travel, now back trying to concentrate on producing this newsletter.

I was fortunate when in Canberra to meet Professor Claus Offe, of the Humboldt University, Berlin - a visiting professor with the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS), ANU. Claus is one of the founders of the Basic Income European Network (BIEN) and organiser of the BIEN International Congress being held in Berlin this month.

On Monday 11th September he delivered a public lecture entitled "Arguing for a Universal Basic Income". This lecture was based largely on a paper prepared by Phillippe Van Parijs as a background paper for the BIEN international congress. Sections of this paper are now available on our website.

BIEN International Congress, Berlin, 6-7 October.

This congress concluded just as this newsletter was being finalised. Indications were that it would be an outstanding success. All available seats (200) for the plenary sessions were booked. The latest BIEN Newsflash reported:

Not one place is left in the historical room that will host this week in Berlin the plenary sessions of BIEN's 8th Congress. We apologise to those whose registration had to be turned down as a result. But we are delighted at the prospect of meeting so many of you very soon.

As if to prove that the debate on basic income is more alive than ever, the holding of our 8th Congress coincides with the publication of four new major collective volumes on basic income, with the participation of many of the Congress speakers .

** Edited by Loek Groot (Amsterdam) and Robert van der Veen (Warwick), Basic Income on the Agenda (Amsterdam University Press) contains seventeen chapters by contributors from several European countries, including two government ministers currently in power, with a focus on policy objectives and political chances.*

** Edited by Angelika Krebs (Frankfurt), a special issue of the bilingual journal Analyse und Kritik gathers seven critical contributions by young philosophers and economists from several European countries on the possibility of providing an ethical justification of basic income in terms of "real freedom for all" (www.analysekritik.uni-duesseldorf.de).*

** Edited by Manfred Füllsack (Vienna), a special issue of the Zeitschrift für Gemeinwirtschaft gathers new contributions by eleven German and Austrian authors, including some of the best-known participants in the German-language debate so far. (<http://www.voewg.at/zgw/news.html>).*

** Edited by Joshua Cohen (MIT) and Joel Rogers (Wisconsin), the Boston Review devotes the Forum part of its October 2000 issue to Delivering Basic Incomes, with contributions by fifteen prominent authors, most of them North-American, including a Nobel laureate (<http://bostonreview.mit.edu>).*

All four publications.....should all be available at the Congress, which promises to be once more an instructive and heartening opportunity for people from many countries to share their observations and their arguments, their thoughts and their hopes.

The complete program of the congress, together with all available papers, may be seen on the BIEN website: <http://www.etes.ucl.ac.be/BIEN/bien.html>. The program can also be seen on our website, where extracts from some of the papers will also be seen from time to time.

7th National Conference on Unemployment

University of Western Sydney 30th November - 1st December 2000

The theme of the Conference, Unemployment and Labour Market Policies, seeks to address the Australian and

global debates about unemployment in a broad theoretical and policy context.

The conference is being jointly organised by the School of Economics and Finance at the University of Western Sydney and by the Centre for Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, and will be held at the University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown Campus. The conference convenor is Professor P.N (Raja) Junankar, Chair, Department of Economics and Finance, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown Campus. There is an international organising committee including Professor Raja Junankar, Professor Bruce Chapman (ANU), Dr. Karen Mumford (York, UK), Associate Professor Satya Paul (UWS), and Dr. Cezary Kapuscinski (DETYA). Keynote speakers will include: Professor Bob Gregory (Australian National University), Professor John Quiggin (ARC Senior Research Fellow, ANU & QUT), and Associate Professor Jeff Borland (University of Melbourne).

Registration fees:

\$220.00 Early registration for Academics, \$330.00 for non-Academics

\$275.00 Normal registration for Academics \$385.00 for non-Academics

\$121.00 One day registration only \$88.00 per day student/special non-waged rate

There is now a call for papers. All correspondence and inquiries should be marked to the attention of: Sharon Lloyd-Corrie, Department of Economics and Finance, University of Western Sydney, PO Box 555, Campbelltown, NSW 2560, Australia. Ph. 02 4620 3222. e-mail: s.lloyd@uws.edu.au

Round-table Conference on Unemployment

Rights, Obligations, Alternatives, Rewards (**ROAR**)

Brisbane, Tuesday 24 October 2000

Hosted by the Unemployed Persons Advocacy with the assistance of The Brisbane Institute,

Hear from unemployed people from all over the country, and hear about international best-practice involving unemployed people in the debates and solutions that affect their lives.

To be followed by a workshop day to form an Australian National Organisation of the Unemployed on 25 October, and participation in the QCOSS State Conference 26/27 October.

Venue: The Long Room, Customs House, 399 Queen St, Brisbane.

For information:

Tel. 07-3255 1253. Fax. 07-3255 0873. Tel A/H. 07-3879 8620

e.mail: Kebar@bigpond.com

Some interesting statistics

Tim Colebach wrote in an article in The Age, 22 August 2000

AUSTRALIA passed a small landmark last month. For the first time, more Victorians had full-time jobs than in 1990. It has taken us all of 10 years to undo the damage caused in that recession - and others are not there yet.

South Australia still has 19,000 fewer full-time jobs than in 1990. And Tasmania even now has 17,000 or 11 per cent fewer full-time jobs than it had before the recession we really didn't have to have.

In 10 years Australia has added just 481,000 full-time jobs, or 1.2million jobs in total, yet the adult population has grown by almost two million. Over the decade, hours worked grew on average by just 1.1 per cent a year, yet the adult population grew by 1.4 per cent.

When euphoria is running high, it helps to keep our feet on the ground - particularly when commentators and

politicians start waxing lyrical about record levels of this or that, when economists start musing that we may be at the limit of our ability to generate jobs without inflation, and when the Reserve Bank starts observing ominously that Australia is growing faster than its "productive potential".

The Reserve's comment came the same week as the McClure report reviewed a welfare system that at last count was providing income support to 2.7 million Australians of working age. Even if you strip away all the full-time students, sole parents with young children, those genuinely sick or permanently and seriously disabled - and all those who have become "welfare-dependent" - it is safe to say that there are a million or so Australians who are in not in jobs primarily because there are not enough jobs.

The McClure Report

The previous newsletter was almost entirely devoted to a commentary on the final McClure Report. Since then there have been a number of letters or articles commenting on this report, and following are extracts from two of these.

The first is an article entitled "Australia's New Poor Law", by Francis G. Castles, Professor of Political Science, Research School of Social Science, Australian National University. His opening sentence reads as follows:

If Patrick McClure's 'mutual obligation' reforms are adopted, as now appears to be the Howard government's firm intention, I am going to have to give up defending the Australian welfare state as a fundamentally beneficent institution.

He then concludes with the following:

Another welfare innovation in the area of unemployment is 'work for the dole'. This popular policy has got us used to the idea of 'mutual obligation', which the McClure Welfare Review now promises to make the key principle of a new social contract. But what we may concede in the area of unemployment, where ordinary workers are legitimately concerned that others will take advantage of the welfare state to be idle, may be far more objectionable in other areas of social policy.

The key to 'mutual obligation' as it applies to single mothers and, perhaps, to the disabled is to assist beneficiaries back into the workplace. The main agency of that assistance appears to be an emphasis on continuous counselling to inform beneficiaries of work and training opportunities and to find other strategies to get them work ready.

That possibly sounds beneficent. Clearly, the increased resources the Review promises for such purposes is intended to sound that way. The trouble is that it also sounds very much as if we were about to reintroduce something akin to discretion by the backdoor. Every interview and every counselling session is a hurdle, where the single mother needs to demonstrate incapacity of some kind or find herself forced the next step back into the bottom end of the labour market. In a sanitised form, the stigma of the old poor law is introduced by the back door.

One thing that the new prophets of 'mutual obligation' always seem to forget is that the vast majority of the clients of the welfare state already have a monstrously unpleasant time. They are by definition without adequate income or assets to live a decent life without assistance from the state. Policing their compliance (burospeak for what is going on here and in so many areas of the interaction of state and citizen) across a wide range of welfare benefits simply makes them 'less eligible' in a new, and no less morally offensive, way.

The second article by Liz Poeter appeared in The Age, 10 September. Liz makes the following claim:

Our new welfare policy, as framed in the recently released McClure report, has the fingerprints of one US "expert" all over it. He is New York University's Lawrence Mead, whose July visit to Australia was co-funded by the Federal Government.

Professor Mead is best known for having been a major influence on the 1996 US welfare reforms that limit an individual's right to welfare to a lifetime total of five years; and which impose work rules on single parents once their children reach a certain age.

*The conservative academic is also the author of *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*, in which he describes his policies as an effort "to control the lifestyle of the poor" and to favor "order rather than justice".*

Needless to say, Professor Mead, when he was here, praised the McClure report. And he got many column centimeters of newspaper space in which he expressed his arguments for compulsory work in exchange for benefits. A senior Federal Government public servant had previously travelled to New York to visit Mead and bring back the welfare-cutting gospel to the Ministries of Employment Services and Workplace Relations.

Then, with the Mead visit to a Sydney conference, we all got to hear the flinty-hearted American view at firsthand. And that was it for the welfare debate as far as the general public was concerned.

These articles invoke an interesting comparison. While we in Australia are trying our best to regulate and discipline our welfare recipients of labour force age, there is a hall full of speakers and supporters in Berlin trying their best to encourage greater freedom for all.

Discussion Group

Allan Quartzly asks:

Do you know of any discussion board or e-mail list on the Citizens Wage in Australia? If there isn't one do you think there would be a large enough group "out there" to warrant starting one?

Based on the performance of lists in other countries I personally doubt whether we have sufficient interest at this stage. However, the government response to the McClure Report may help to stir things up. I would be only too happy to increase the frequency of the newsletter, or in some way help encourage discussion to create greater community awareness, if the interest is here. I am open to suggestions.

In the meantime, if anyone would like to exchange views with Allan, he can be contacted at:
allanquartz@dingoblue.net.au

Statistical model for a Support Income System for Australia

If we are to extend the debate on the concept of a universal system of income support free of means test then it seems desirable that a statistical model be developed which will demonstrate the financial viability of such a scheme. The thesis "A Support Income System for Australia", reproduced in the book "Unemployment Forever?", contains a broad outline of a scheme which is claimed to be financially viable. However, this is far removed from an acceptable statistical model.

An approach has been made to NATSEM, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, to prepare a preliminary quote, or an early estimate of the order of cost involved, for the production of such a model. The next step will then be to secure the finance.

There is a growing acceptance of the advantages of universal income support free of means test in many nations throughout the world, and especially in Europe as evidenced by the success of the BIEN International Congress. Australia, unfortunately, seems to be suffering from the "Its the economy, stupid" syndrome. Just as private enterprise is subject to criticism for putting the interest of shareholders ahead of the interest of society, so can government be criticised for putting the interest of the economy ahead of the interest of society. The current debate on the petrol excise is one example.

The development of a thoroughly researched statistical model will certainly move the debate along, and will help achieve much wider community acceptance of the economic and social advantages of a support income system for Australia. The challenge will be to ensure that the statistical research can proceed.

[Previous Newsletter](#) [Next Newsletter](#)

[Back to Home Page](#)