

# Basic Income in a Green Economy : Why not and Why

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It is not with mellow thinking that we shall build a mellow society. The beauty of our ideals is no excuse for the flaws in our arguments. The purity of our motives is no excuse for the sloppiness of our reasonings. What we need - not quite as much, yet nearly as much, as enthusiasm - is to chase and wipe out fuzzy, wishful thinking and replace it with cold-blooded, tough-minded, uncompromising thought. Dreams and slogans are comfortable. But facts and logic are what we need.

Nothing better, in this light, than lending the arguments of our most ferocious critics a sympathetic ear. And nothing worse than making ourselves deaf to their arguments, using as ear plugs, at worst, the suicidal belief that the Green movement represents the emergence of a new mental paradigm, so radically different from the old ones that anything stemming from the the latter is bound to be irrelevant. However unpleasant the conclusions they want to impress upon us, what the most articulate among social-democrats and conservatives, Marxists and libertarians, Reds, Blues and even Browns have to tell us is well worth listening to. What matters is not the colour of the mouth, but the truth of what comes out of it.

Adopting this attitude is, I believe, mandatory whatever the subject matter, but it is nowhere as essential as in the economic realm. True we have now gone some way beyond vague principles and sketchy blueprints. But the attempt make our proposals more precise has too often yielded the disastrous result of confusing economics with arithmetic. Don't some of us maintain, for example, that in a country with an unemployment rate of 1/4, it is enough to reduce standard working time by 1/4 to be back to full employment, with a more even spread of the unchanged total income generated by an unchanged total employment. This is spotless arithmetic, but pathetic economics. In economics just as much as elsewhere, rigour is not achieved by quoting figures and displaying one's ability to add them up. Rigour is achieved by looking for the most powerful objections around, and taking them seriously.

This is the attitude I shall try to adopt in considering an issue which, in my view, is second to none not just for our conception of what a green economy should look like, but for the very survival of our whole movement: Basic Income.

Whether Astrid and Gunnar are old or young, rich or poor, whether or not they work, whether or not they are able to work, whether or not they are available for work, whether they live on their own or with one another, give them each, out of State funds, an income sufficient to cover their basic needs. This is, in a nutshell, what **basic income** consists in.

In the last few years, this old idea has become, throughout Europe, the focus of sustained attention and intense discussion as it has never been before <sup>(1)</sup>. From the far Left to the far Right, all political groupings have, to various extents, been touched by this revival of interest. But none as much as the greens. In all countries where there is both a debate on basic income and a green party, those who join the former most enthusiastically tend to be members of the the latter or, if not, close to it. Moreover, many European Green parties have made basic income a central component of their socio-economic policy, and those which have not are actively discussing the matter. Finally, some Greens argue that the introduction of a basic income constitutes the very core of a Green conception of the economy, and the only thing that sets it off sharply from both liberal and socialist blueprints <sup>(2)</sup>.

But why is this? Why do Greens tend to be more favourable than others to the idea of a basic income? And why must they be? What is the exact nature of this strong link which seems to exist between wanting the world to be green and wanting people to get a basic income? Indeed, does such a link really exist? Is it not based on sheer confusion? These are the questions I want to address.