THE CRISIS OF WAGED WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE OPTION OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

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ABSTRACT

Waged work is commonly presented as the core basis for meeting basic needs, realising essential social rights and achieving social inclusion. Yet waged work that provides a livable income on reasonably predictable and secure terms is rare in "developing" economies and increasingly scarce in "developed" economies. This trend is particularly acute and long-standing in South Africa, where it is likely to persist, even worsen, as the impact of economic instability, climate change shocks, public health crises and labour market restructuring accumulates.

This dissertation describes and analyses this crisis of waged work briefly at the global level and then in greater detail as it manifests in South Africa, before examining the potential benefits, disadvantages and risks of a universal basic income (UBI). It describes the origins of the concept, reviews the main claims and assumptions associated with it in current discourse, and presents a specific definition of a UBI which could function as a vital supplement to other forms of social wage provisioning.

The text then examines in detail the potential merits and the critiques of such an intervention in the South African context, thereby transporting to a "developing" country context a debate which is occurring mainly in "developed" countries. We assess the likely impact of a UBI on poverty and inequality, as protection against escalating social and economic disruptions, and in relation to the pursuit of social and economic justice as a foundational principle and basis for democracy. In doing so, the text examines the resonant questions a UBI raises about the roles and obligations of the state; the relationship of paid work to the realisation of social rights; systems of income distribution; entitlement and dependency; and wider macroeconomic and other policy frameworks that shape access to income and entitlements. It also examines the financial costs of various UBI variants, considers a variety of financing options and discusses the political dimensions of a UBI with a view to assessing its viability, taking note of lessons from the South African campaign in the early 2000s for a basic income grant. The dissertation concludes with an assessment of the (de)merits of a UBI in the South African context, where it emphasises the need to consider and position a UBI as part of a broader train of progressive policy and governance changes and social mobilisation.

KEYWORDS

Crisis of waged work; South Africa; Social crisis; Universal basic income grant; Unemployment; Wage poverty; Cash transfers; Social policy; Social grants; Poverty; Inequality; Social citizenship; COVID-19 grants; Macroeconomic policy; Transformative potential; Affordability; Basic income financing; Taxes; Corporate dividend; Cost of basic income; Reciprocity; Dependency; Job guarantee; Just transition; Financialised capitalism; Automation

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Liberal Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Heinrich Marais

15th day of July in the year 2021

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Sandile Dikeni.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Access to waged work[1] is generally seen to be a sufficient and preferred basis for avoiding poverty, meeting basic needs, earning social entitlements and achieving social inclusion (Ferguson & Li, 2018). In such views, the overriding challenge is to generate more jobs, ensure that skill sets match job opportunities, and achieve a regulatory environment that assures a livable minimum wage and protects the rights of workers.[2] Ideally, supplementary interventions are used to support those people who are not earning incomes due to unemployment, age or infirmity (Marais, 2020 & 2018).

Yet paid work that provides a livable income on reasonably secure terms is rare in "developing" economies and is becoming increasingly scarce in "developed" economies (ILO, 2018). The intensity and pace of the trend differs between regions and countries, but the secular trend in the most populous regions has been stagnant or downward. The world employment rate has been declining for three decades and stood at about 57.4% in 2019, down from 63% in 1991 (ILO, 2020).

In "developed" countries, low official unemployment rates hide a reshaped "geography of livelihoods" in which unsteady and atypical work—separated from welfare systems, labour market regulation and unionised protection—proliferates, along with growing informal economies (Standing, 2011; Ross, 2009). In many of those countries, real wages have stagnated or fallen in recent decades, especially for low-skilled workers (ILO, 2018). The trend has worsened dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, with lower-paid workers, women especially, the worst affected (ILO, 2021).[3]

Job and income insecurity, poor working conditions and low wages have long typified employment in "developing" economies. In many of them, self-employment and family-based work still eclipse formalised waged work as the chief money-based foundation for livelihoods. Even when formal sector employment is considered, real wage growth in the past decade has been flat (e.g. in the Arab States and in Latin America and the Caribbean)

[1] The text refers interchangeably to "waged work" and "paid work".

[2] See, for example, International Labour Organization. (1999). *Report of the Director-General: Decent work.* International Labour Conference, 87th Session. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

[3] The ILO (2021) estimated that, without wage subsidies, the lowest-paid half of workers in several European countries, for example, would have lost 17% of their wages during 2020.

or negative (Africa). In Asia and the Pacific, considered the most economically dynamic region in the world, real wage growth has averaged at about 1.7% since the turn of the century, if China is excluded (ILO, 2021).[4]

In 2019, at least 630 million workers in employment were surviving on less than US$ 3.20 per day (in purchasing parity terms), i.e. they were living in what the World Bank considers to be "moderate" or "extreme" poverty in “developing” countries. Globally, about 1.4 billion workers were in vulnerable employment—either self-employed or contributing family workers—and they accounted for well over 40% of total employment (ILO, 2020). Access to formal waged work is rare in "developing" countries and it is increasingly rationed in “developed" countries.

A crisis of waged work—with respect to its availability, rewards, terms and conditions—is distressingly evident in a country such as South Africa (SA), which is stricken with extraordinarily high levels of unemployment and inequality. In addition to having a conservatively measured unemployment rate of almost 32% in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020a), close to one third of employed individuals in South Africa do not earn enough to afford basic food and non-food items (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). This state of affairs is rooted both in the specific political economy of SA and in structural trends shaping the capitalist system globally. It has worsened dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These trends are tied to dynamic developments in an increasingly financialised capitalist system[5] that is buffeted by multiple disabling factors which emanate from the central logic of the system. Those factors include the accelerating frequency of financial crises; the combination of hyper-exploitation with the discarding of human surplus populations; political and social instability stemming from the hollowing out of democracy and democratic institutions, and the capture of public decision-making authority by corporate capital; worsening ecological collapse stemming from the extractive relations imposed upon "nature", and associated public health disasters (such as zoonotic pandemics like COVID-19); and more. Seen as a totality encompassing the economic, ecological, social and political domains, the capitalist system is increasingly crisis-prone, with "corrective"

[4] If China is included, real wage growth in Asia and the Pacific, averaged at about 4% since 2000 (ILO, 2020).

[5] Financialisation refers to a shift in the weight of economy activity from production (and, to a lesser extent, the service sector) to finance.

actions at best stalling rather than resolving the underlying problems (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). Global economic growth has slowed and the distribution of income generated by that growth is skewed increasingly towards the wealthiest percentiles (Palma & Stiglitz, 2016; IMF, 2019). The share of income going to the richest 1% of the global population increased in 46 out of 57 countries reporting those data during 1990-2015. The poorest 40% earned less than one quarter of national income in all 92 countries with data (United Nations, 2020). Wealth inequality shows the same trend: across China, Europe and the United States, the share of wealth going to the top 1% increased from 28% to 33% from 1980 to 2018 (and this is probably an underestimate given that financial globalisation makes it difficult to measure wealth at the top) (Zucman, 2019).

Far-reaching risks and instabilities are now endemic—in supply chains, infrastructure and economies; in social orders and political systems; in geopolitical relations; in the governance of international finance and trade; and in ecologies—with the costs of turmoil distributed evermore unequally (Goldin & Mariathasan, 2014). In Nancy Fraser's (2021) schema, these instabilities represent an entanglement of several strands of "crisis tendencies", which trace to the contradictions that arise when the pursuit of capitalism's economic imperatives degrade or deplete the non-economic conditions necessary for its advance. The latter conditions include non-human nature (from which raw materials and energy is extracted, and into which waste is dumped), unwaged activities of social reproduction (which form and sustain potential waged workers), and the state (which manages the legal, regulatory and coercive arrangements and provides the public goods necessary for capitalism's functioning), and the marshaling of consent (or hegemony).

With capital "trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of stagnation and financial explosion" (Foster, 2007, p. 2), the scope and intensity of this turmoil will, in all likelihood, increase—as the dividend-boosting pressures of financialised capitalism persist, digitalised and other job-replacing technologies are deployed more widely, disruption associated with global warming multiplies, public health crises erupt, and social and political disquiet spreads.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how close to the edge the vast majority of humanity lives and just how fragile people's livelihoods are and just how brittle and poorly prepared societies are to protect citizens against distress and penury. Yet these are not sudden nor isolated circumstances. The dynamics fueling the recurrent instabilities are systemic and they operate across national boundaries: global warming caused by two centuries of escalating greenhouse gas emissions; environmental destruction that destabilises ecologies and multiplies the opportunities for zoonotic diseases to cross into and spawn epidemics in human populations; and the tendency of the capitalist system to degrade and destroy the conditions for its continued flourishing.

The upshot is a vortex of crises, not least of which are the social crises that constitute the daily lives of hundreds of millions of people. In this context, the pursuit of more jobs—and more decent jobs—is important and necessary, but it cannot substitute for more encompassing efforts to address these crises, by realising core social and economic rights, assuring social citizenship, and transitioning to sustainable and just developmental paths.

This is even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on movement imposed in a bid to limit the spread of the coronavirus instantly deprived hundreds of millions of workers of wage incomes and further aggravated social crises. People reliant on insecure forms of employment and income generation bore the brunt of the impact, with women especially affected (ILO, 2021). Within a few weeks, the pandemic forced 88-93 million people globally into extreme poverty, an unprecedented increase, according to the World Bank (Lakner, Yonzan, Mahler, Aguilar, Wu, 2021).[6]

The prevailing conditions therefore highlight a double fiction: the idea that paid work is available to those who seek it and that the work assures security and social inclusion. In reality, many hundreds of millions of people across the globe are unable to achieve secure, viable livelihoods through waged work, a predicament that generates hardship and reflects injustice on a massive scale.

Capitalist societies are at junctures where it is neither sufficient nor realistic to reconstitute past arrangements or recover missed opportunities—to seek remedies that treat current trends and outlooks as momentary aberrations (Raine, 2019; Klein, 2015). This is especially so in SA, which lacks any "golden age" to be revisited and re-engineered. It is against this background that the concept of a universal basic income grant (UBI) (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017; Wright, 2003; Murray & Pateman, 2012; Van Parijs, 2004) features increasingly in policy debates, where it has attracted

[6] The World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than US$ 1.90 per person per day (in purchasing parity terms).

proponents—and critics—from across the political spectrum (e.g. Mason, 2015; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Standing, 2017; Murray, 2006).

A retooling and drastic expansion of social policy is necessary, including the possible introduction of a UBI. Proponents claim that such an intervention, in addition to supporting basic means for survival, would reduce poverty and inequality, broaden options and bolster the bargaining leverage of lower-wage earners, spur a rethink of the role and status of waged work in society, support transitions towards ecologically sustainable economic models, and reinvigorate democracy, among other advantages.

Debates about a UBI have tended to occur in and focus on "developed" countries. Although relevant and instructive, those debates do not seamlessly transfer to “developing” country settings, where social policy arrangements are very different, as are the nature, extent and historical trends of paid work (Ferguson, 2015). Engaging with the concept of a UBI encourages a more critical understanding of the distributive order and the normative presumptions that govern access to the means for dignified life in a society like SA. In many "developing" countries, SA included, social protection mechanisms are proliferating and expanding (Ferguson, 2015; World Bank, 2015), and there is strong evidence that these schemes contribute to a range of desirable outcomes (Bastagli, Hagen-Zanker, Harman, Barca, Sturge et al., 2016; Woolard & Leibbrandt, 2010). A highly unequal upper-middle-income country with an embattled, semi-industrialised economy, SA also has a relatively uncomplicated but unusually extensive social protection system. This potentially offers both political and policy momentum for considering more radical, forward-looking forms of provisioning, such as a universal basic income.

Several core concerns therefore motivate this dissertation. The first and most obvious is the ongoing failure to devise an exit from a social crisis in SA which is fundamentally tied to the chronic absence of viable income-earning opportunities for a very large proportion of people. Analysis and policymaking in SA continue to rely on frameworks that assume the feasibility of both full employment and a regulatory environment that can guarantee decent work. But decades of evidence indicate that a perspective which predicates entitlement and well-being on paid work is highly incomplete and probably inappropriate in a setting such as SA, where the paid labour of close to half the working-age population is superfluous to an economy which nevertheless generates vast but maldistributed wealth. This has led to a deep social crisis.

In this respect, SA resembles a real-world precursor to the dystopian forecasts in which waged work becomes a scarce, unpredictable and insufficient basis for survival and well-being. These have fed rich critiques and debates about the changing nature, meaning and functions of paid labour in the context of engrained economic instability, intensifying climate change shocks and technological changes in the decades ahead. Which brings us to the second motivation: the need to cast our analysis of trends and our consideration of responses along longer trajectories and across the disciplinary boundaries that customarily separate economics, political-economy, labour studies, sociology, anthropology, social policy, history, gender studies, and more.

But a UBI is also a slippery concept, attracting advocates and critics from across the political spectrum. This has allowed a potentially disruptive concept to enter mainstream debate. Rather than nourish nuanced engagements, this pliancy tends to channel debate into often-facile "for" and "against" camps. Such polarised discussion distracts from crucial questions that lie beyond verdicts on the desirability and feasibility of a UBI. A UBI implicitly challenges key assumptions about prevailing economic and social orders, the role and duties of the state, policymaking frameworks and distributive systems that tether material security and social citizenship to the performance of paid work. It also challenges the conflation of economic growth with societal well-being and social justice. Serious debate about a UBI has to engage with these implications.

The dissertation does so by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach. The vantage points used are grounded in a range of heterodox theoretical approaches, which are angled towards egalitarian ambitions. In order to enrich our understandings of the basis and prospects for a UBI, I draw on rich traditions of Marxist political-economy (global as well as applied specifically to South Africa), post-Keynesian economic theory, critiques of productivist development theory, feminist critiques of prevailing economic rationalities, the eclectic theorizing of "post-work" scholars, evolving perspectives on the developmental state, and Gramscian understandings of the complex and unstable relationships between the state and society.

This provides a foundation and the theoretical tools for engaging with a UBI debate that straddles a range of academic disciplines and that calls into question interlocking orthodoxies on economic development, the role of the state, and the claims of citizens. Crucially, it enables a coherent probing of the relationship of paid work to the realisation of social rights, guided by a vision of an egalitarian and sustainable society. That scrutiny is directed also at prevailing assumptions about entitlement and dependency, current systems of income distribution and redistribution, the underlying principles of orthodox social policy, and the wider macroeconomic and other policy archetypes that shape relations between the state, the economy and society.

The engagement proceeds from a critical examination of a wide range of up-to-date qualitative and quantitative evidence, analysis and theory pertaining to a UBI and the economic, social and political terrain on which such an intervention would operate. Qualitative evidence is drawn from an extensive review of pertinent literature in the fields of political economy, economics (including development economics), labour studies, social policy, sociology and labour studies, along with other media sources. Quantitative evidence is based on survey and other statistical data and analysis, budgetary and tax-related data (for South Africa), and modelled scenarios and costing estimates for various UBI variants.

The dissertation therefore departs from a tendency to view a UBI strictly as a social policy mechanism that can be deployed in technocratic fashion to advance specified, measurable objectives. It shows that dislodging the universal basic income option from macroeconomic policy, broad social and economic transformation, and movement politics and approaching it as a standalone panacea carries great risk. The discussion positions a a UBI within wider political-economic, social and ideological dynamics, in order to assess how it might advance or hinder strategies for egalitarian change. This allows us to explore and test some of the underlying assumptions about a UBI, including its financial and political feasibility, and to consider its desirability in an "in extremis" setting such as South Africa.

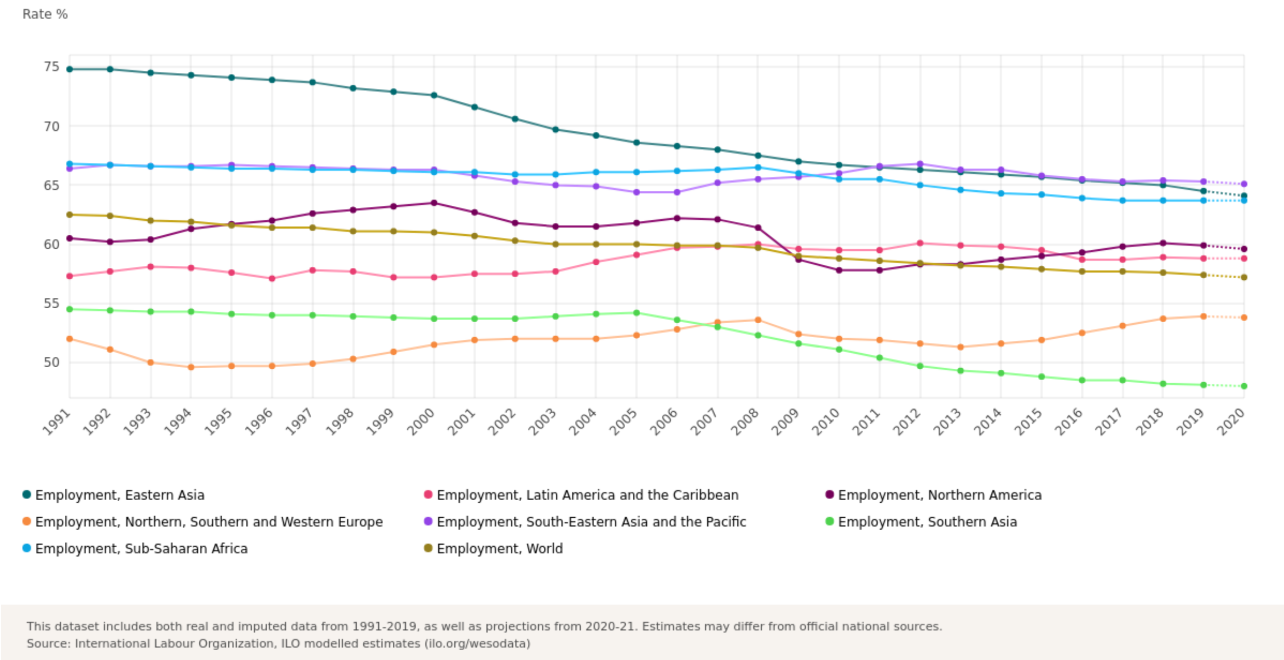
2. THE CRISIS OF WAGED WORK

Chronic high un- and under-employment; new jobs that are mostly irregular and at the low-pay end of the scale and that lack benefits and security; stagnating or declining real incomes for the majority of workers; social protection systems that are either flimsy or humiliatingly policed and rationed; widening income inequality. Those descriptions used to apply almost exclusively to countries on the margins of the global economy; today they are increasingly generic, including in industrialised economies. In Jan Breman's (2013, p. 131) summary:

> With every recession since the 1970s, prolonged episodes of high unemployment, privatisations and public-sector cutbacks have served to weaken the position of labour in North America, Europe and Japan; trade-union movements were hollowed out by the shrinkage of the industrial workforce, through factory re-location or robotisation, and the growth of the non-unionised service and retail sectors; the rise of China, the entry of hundreds of millions of low-paid workers into the world workforce and the globalisation of trade helped to depress wages and working conditions further. Part-time and short-contract work has been on the rise, along with that ambiguous category, self-employment.

The intensity, pace and scale of these changes differ between regions and countries, but the overall trend is relatively homogenous, with employment not expanding rapidly enough to absorb the growing labour force. Thus, the world employment rate continues to fall, to 57.4% in 2019, compared with over 60% three decades earlier (ILO, 2020) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. World and regional employment rates (%), 1991-2020



Source: International Labour Organization (2020). *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Note: The employment rate (also known as the employment-to-population ratio) is defined liberally to include all persons of working age (15+ years) who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit.

Conservative calculations put the global unemployment rate[7] at 5.4% in 2019 (about 188 million people), with youth unemployment (15 to 24-year-olds) more than double that, at 13.6%. The absolute number of people deemed unemployed has risen in East and South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa, a trend that is likely to continue as the demographic "youth bulge" matures. In "developed" countries, declining official unemployment rates hide large shares of discouraged workers and a growing incidence of involuntary part-time employment (ILO, 2020). These trends have worsened considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), workers lost US$ 3.7 trillion in earners during the first 9 months of the epidemic, with almost 9% of global working hours lost (the equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs). Women and younger workers bore the brunt of income losses and reductions in work hours (ILO, 2021).

[7] Persons in unemployment are defined as all those of working age who were not in employment, carried out activities to seek employment during a specified recent period and were currently available to take up employment given a job opportunity.

The weight of workers' organisations in "developed" economies varies considerably (compare the United States of America with France, for example), but its strength and influence overall has weakened considerably over the past 30 years (Breman, 2013). The global rate of trade union membership declined from about 25% in 2000 to 17% in 2017 (ILO, 2020). Growth in the industrial and service sectors has seen workers' organisations proliferate in some "developing" economies.[8] Their impact, though growing, remains limited. Job and income insecurity and poor working conditions therefore continue to typify employment in "developing" economies. In most of them, self-employment and family-based work—along with the distribution of income support across households and families—constitute the central material basis for survival (ILO, 2020). Those workers are less likely to

> be covered by social protection such as pensions and health care or have regular earnings. They tend to be trapped in a vicious circle of low-productivity occupations, poor remuneration and limited ability to invest in their families' health and education. (ILO, 2014, p. 4)

This insecurity occurs on a massive scale. Three decades ago, the World Bank was touting the "informal" sector as an incubator for entrepreneurial activity, economic growth and formal job creation. It was wrong. Informality is pervasive and continues to be associated with low economic growth, low productivity and poverty (ILO, 2020; Benjamin, Beegle, Recanatini, Santini, 2014; Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009). About two billion workers, over 60% of the employed global workforce, were in informal employment in 2019. They earned a fraction of the income of their wage and salaried counterparts and were much more likely to be living in poverty (ILO, 2020). In South Asia and Africa, more than three quarters of employed workers were in what the ILO considers to be vulnerable employment (self- or family-employed). Upwards of 90% of young workers (15-24 years) in Africa were informally employed in 2019 (ILO, 2020).[9]

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), globally in 2019 more than 630 million people with employment were not earning enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty (that is, they were living on less than US$ 3.20 per day in purchasing power parity terms). One in five employed persons was living in "extreme"

[8] ILO nomenclature separates "developing" and "emerging" economies; this text combines the two categories and refers to them collectively as 'developing' economies or countries.

[9] Note that real wage trends are likely to be distorted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since job losses have been heaviest among lower-paid workers, mean wages for 2020 and possibly also 2021 are expected to rise (since the remaining low-paid workers would constitute a smaller share of the wage-earning workforce (ILO, 2021).

(i.e. an income of less than US$ 1.90 per day) or "moderate" (less than US$ 3.20 per day) poverty, prompting the ILO (2020, p. 12) to conclude that

> having a paid job was not a guarantee of decent working conditions or of an adequate income for many of the 3.3 billion employed worldwide in 2019.

In "developed" countries, decently paid, secure work is increasingly atypical, with the jobs created since 2008/2009 disproportionately of the low-skills, low-pay, and low- or no-security variety. But it is in "developing" countries the association of work and precariousness remains strongest: only about 4% of people in "vulnerable employment" reside in the "developed" countries, according to the ILO (2018). As the disruptive impact of climate change intensifies, economic volatility persists and labour market restructuring continues (and possibly intensifies as artificial intelligence and other automating technologies are incorporated), wage employment is predicted to be an insufficient basis for dignified life for a growing proportion of people across the world.

The predicament of workers is reflected also in the declining share of income that reaches them. Globally, the percentage of gross domestic product paid out in wages (the global labour share) has been falling for at least two decades; it declined from 54% in 2004 to 51% in 2017 (ILO, 2020) (Figure 2 shows the trend in four major economies). One may expect that the labour share in "developing" countries will have risen as their economies became more integrated internationally in recent decades. Yet labour's relative income in those countries declined despite rises in overall productivity (Trapp, 2015).[10]

[10] Trapp's analysis (2015) shows a decrease in the labour share of income in all regions between 1990 and 2011, except for South Asia (based on data for only Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka), where it increased slightly.

Figure 2. Labour share of national income in China, Germany, Japan and the USA, 1975-2013.

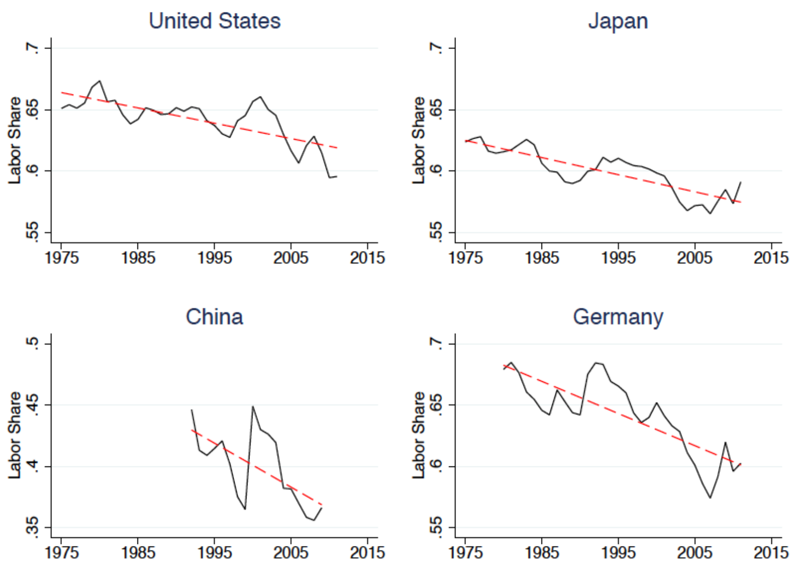


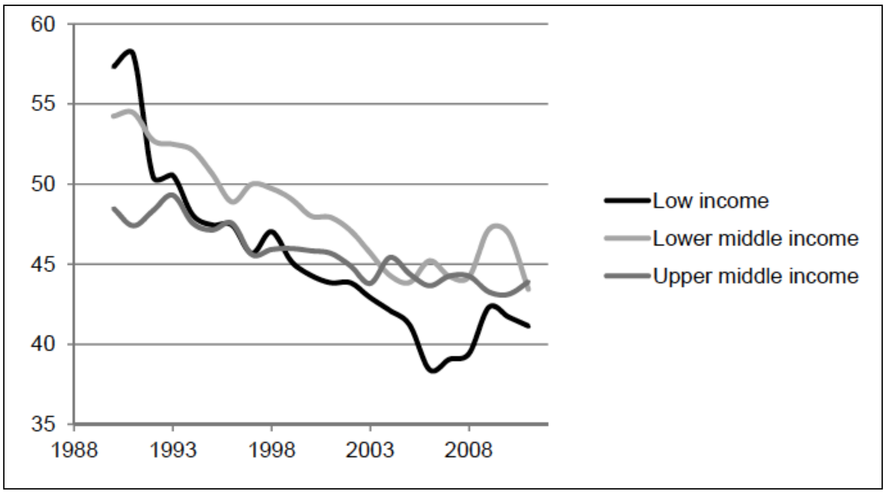
Figure 2: Declining Labor Share for the Largest Countries

Source: Karabarbounis, L. & Neiman, B. (2013). *The global decline of the labor share*. National Bureau of Economic Research Working paper 19136. Washington DC: National Bureau of Economic Research.

In the decades preceding the 1970s, labour's share of national income fluctuated slightly from year to year, but stayed within a stable range overall. Then the trend changed—across dozens of countries. This is a generic trend and it is visible in countries with very different policies and economic institutions, and across all industries. Of the 59 countries with at least 15 years of data between 1975 and 2012, 42 countries showed downward trends in their labour shares—including China, India and Mexico. The fact that the labour share has been shrinking also in major locations of out-sourced production (in Asia especially) indicates that the trend cannot be attributed strictly to offshore production or international trade patterns (Karabarbounis & Neiman, 2013). In "developing" countries, this downward trend has accelerated since the early 1990s, with the labour share dropping most sharply in low-income countries (Figure 3) (Trapp, 2015).[11]

[11] Those findings are supported by other analysis. Using a data set from 1960 to 1997, Anne Harrison (2005) split her sample of over 100 countries (from different income categories) into two groups. Her data showed that, in the group of poorer countries, labour's share in national income fell on average by 0.1% per year from 1960 to 1993, with the drop accelerating after 1993, to an average decline of 0.3% per year. In the richer sub-group, the labour share grew by 0.2% per year prior to 1993, after which it fell by 0.4% per year. See Harrison, A. (2005). *Has globalisation eroded labour's share? Some cross-country evidence*. Washington DC: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/39649/1/MPRA_paper_39649.pdf

Figure 3. Labour share (%) by country income classification, 1990–2011



Source: Trapp, 2015

Not only has the labour share of income declined, the distribution of that income among paid workers is severely skewed. In 2017, according to the latest ILO (2020) data, a worker in the top income decile earned on average US$ 7,475 a month, compared with the average US$ 198 earned by workers in the bottom 50%, and the US$ 22 earned by workers in the bottom decline.

Profound structural changes contribute to these trends. Among them is the incorporation from the 1970s onward of tens of millions of peasants around the world into the labour reserve, mostly in Asia. This coincided with the entry of vast numbers of women into labour markets. The resulting glut of labour supply dramatically depressed the "reservation wage", the lowest wage that workers are willing to accept for any given job. It also removed the constraint of labour scarcity, a factor that tends to boost the bargaining power of workers. Along with sustained attacks on workers' organisations over the past 40 years, those developments have helped push and hold workers on the defensive (Kunkel, 2014; Harvey, 2010; Brenner, 2006).

Shifting production to zones with attractively low labour costs allied with adequate transport and other infrastructure has been another key strategy used by capital to reduce aggregate labour costs and increase profitability. From the 1980s onward, China in particular successfully positioned itself to take advantage. However, its low-wage attractions have now faded, with labour costs (including benefits) rising by 10-14% per year from 2002 to 2009; since then, real wages in China have more than doubled (ILO, 2021). The latest available data (ILO, 2021) show real wages in Asia and the Pacific grew faster than in another region over the 2006-2019 period. Other countries, mostly in South and South-East Asia, have sought to capitalise on the proliferation of global value chains, but to limited overall effect due to scattered geography and transport systems (across archipelagos, for instance), small labour markets and comparatively poor infrastructure. At a global level, therefore, the options for cutting labour costs by reallocating production to new zones have diminished.[12] Africa may beckon with low wages (annual minimum wage growth in 2010-2019 was the lowest in the world, about 1%), but volatile currencies, poor infrastructure and unreliable transport and communications systems dim its attractions for substantial industrial production beyond extractive activities.

A global crisis with deep roots

Thomas Piketty's analysis (2013) suggests that the global growth rates and the income distribution patterns associated with the "golden age" of industrial capitalism in "developed" economies after World War Two were exceptional and are unlikely to be repeated. That period, which ended in the early 1970s, boasted accelerated growth in productivity, output and profitability, along with rising real wages and a rich array of work-related entitlements. Much of the impetus for those improvements came from workers’ movements that were powerful enough to act as sturdy stakeholders in corporatist arrangements. This occurred against the geopolitical background of the Cold War, with capitalist governments anxious to prevent workers’ and other social movements from radicalising to the point where they might challenge the system on fundamental terms.

The grand compromise broke down in the 1970s. Intensified competition at the global level led to excess industrial capacity and overproduction, which depressed profitability. Surplus capital was increasingly routed away from investment in the "real economy" in pursuit of higher returns. In those conditions, and facilitated by deregulatory interventions by states, spearheaded by the USA and Britain, the financial sector grew rapidly and became domineering (Calhoun & Derluguian, 2011; Foster, 2007; Brenner, 2006). Spirited along obtuse circuitries, financial capital now tends to avoid rather than

[12] Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam have tried to capitalise on those trends, but weak supply chains and transport networks, a lack of economies of scale and shortages of skilled workers have held back wholesale shifts of production in their direction.

underwrite longer-term strategies for productive economic activity, and gravitates towards rentier activities (Harvey, 2010).

Finance capital used to function largely in service of industrial growth, by promoting industrial development through the merger of industrial and financial capital (Hilferding, 1981). That bond has been severed. In recent decades, finance capital has been deployed to extract maximum returns in a minimum of time, typically bypassing the real economy or even by dismantling industrial capacity. As the financial sector expanded, so did its need for new avenues and circuits of accumulation—and its political and economic leverage. The prerogatives, markets and institutions of financial capital are increasingly dominant in investment decisions, economic and social policymaking, and regulatory framing (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018; Streeck, 2013; Epstein, 2005). Even in ostensibly nonfinancial corporations, this generates a structural pull away from nurturing productive investments and toward hunting for short-term returns. Corporate structures and management decision-making are adjusted and aligned to service those shifts; shareholder value (or financial worth) dominates, driving decisions that override longer-term economic calculations and social and ecological considerations:

> Institutional investors [demand] that nonfinancial corporations produce rapid earnings growth so they could satisfy their clients, while top nonfinancial corporate managers [need] to generate rapidly rising stock prices or their stock options would be worthless. (Crotty, 2003, p. 3)

These processes also increase the pressure on enterprises to maximize short-term profits, with wages and working conditions typically in the firing line. Worker organisations came under sustained attack and production chains were extended into low-wage, union-free locations as globalisation gained pace. "Excessive" wages and "rigid" labour standards were targeted, work regimes were restructured and workers' organizations were driven increasingly into retreat (Calhoun & Derluguian, 2011; Harvey, 2010).[13]

These "fixes" both prolonged and compounded underlying problems. Productivity and output recovered somewhat, but in several of the largest economies, real wage growth (except for top earners) was attacked, arresting median real income growth and depressing aggregate demand. Although real wages rose and the ranks of wage earners

[13] There are some exceptions to this trend, notably in parts of South America and East Asia (particularly China). But in much of the industrialised world, the former Soviet Union and its satellites, Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean and Central America, workers been fighting rear-guard actions to protect or extend their rights and entitlements.

grew in many other "developing" economies, this was not enough to generate sufficient final demand to absorb excess supply of goods and services at the global level. Easy credit became the stopgap of choice—allowing people to borrow against income they do not have (and may never have) or assets they do not fully own. Equity and real estate bubbles keep these improvisations aloft for a while, but typically culminate in regional and/or global financial crises, which have become increasingly frequent since the 1970s.

There are indications that capitalism's resilience—its ability to renew itself through crisis—is waning and that the system may be entering a phase of prolonged instability and gradual breakdown (Harvey, 2014; Streeck, 2014; Kunkel, 2014) as it destroys the economic, social, political and ecological conditions for its continued growth, with global warming a dramatic aspect of this trajectory (Fraser, 2015; Moore, 2015; Klein, 2015; Foster, 2002). Economic, social and political instability is likely to intensify, amplified by the increasing incidence, intensity and disruptive effects of climate change shocks (IPCC, 2018; Wallace-Stevens, 2016). The upheavals will arrive unpredictably, reducing the impact of reactive policies. The repercussions will hit hardest in the lives and communities of the poor (Klein, 2015).

As climate shocks increase in frequency and scale, and pandemic threats such as COVID-19 (and its zoonotic kin, SARS and MERS)[14] multiply, economic instability is predicted to intensify, with the impact distributed unevenly, and channelled into the lives and communities of the poor. Rates of growth can be expected to stagnate or decline, exacerbating inequality and further fuelling social and political disaffection and tumult, which in turn will precipitate further volatility and choke the prospects of sustained growth. Protracted instability is a very realistic prospect (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018).

In such an outlook, and with technological "fixes" (such as large-scale automation) likely to be deployed at the expense of workers (Harvey, 2014; Frey & Osborne, 2013),[15] waged work would become an increasingly inaccessible and insufficient basis for dignified life (Frase, 2016). Compounding those trends is the diminishing access to livelihood options outside the wage economy as subsistence agricultural and other activities become less

[14] SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, and MERS, or Middle East respiratory syndrome.

[15] In David Harvey's (2014, p. xii) prognosis: "If the current burst of innovation points in any direction at all, it is towards decreasing employment opportunities for labour and the increasing significance of rents extracted from intellectual property rights for capital."

viable and the blurring of informal and formal economies makes it more difficult to avoid dependence on waged work. The encroachments of agribusiness on agrarian livelihoods, the impact of climate change on agrarian production, and the blurring of informal and formal economies make it much more difficult for families to diversify and juggle sources of income and subsistence and thereby avoid complete dependence on waged work (Davis, 2006). Their supplementary options for safeguarding livelihoods are being eroded rapidly: as their reliance on regular waged work increases, access to such work narrows.

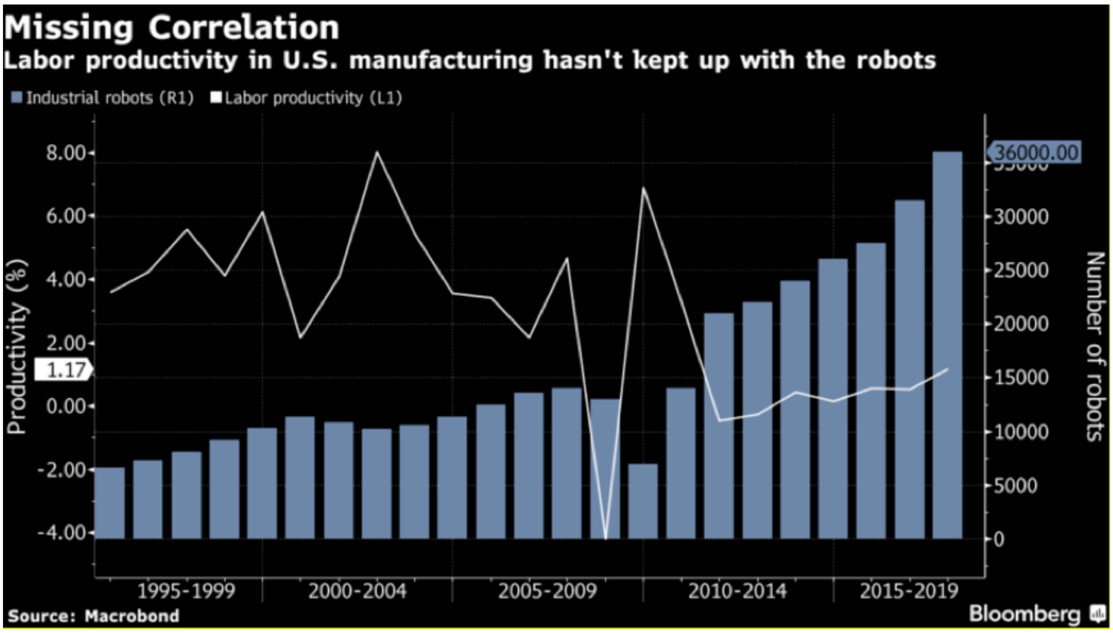
A "fourth industrial revolution"?

There is growing alarm also about an impending mass erasure of jobs as new robot and artificial intelligence technologies are developed and deployed more extensively. A 2013 study by Oxford University's Martin School, for example, caused consternation when it estimated that close to half of existing jobs in the USA were at high risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence and robots within the next few decades (Frey & Osborne, 2017).[16] Neoclassical economics tends to dismiss the threat of automation to jobs. Rather than destroy jobs, automation is said to displace them while stimulating the creation of new, different jobs. The argument is that automation increases productivity while lowering costs, part of which gets passed on to consumers in the shape of price reductions, which in turn boosts demand, thus creating more jobs. But other outlooks are less sanguine and foresee drastic, technology-driven disruptions of labour markets (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2016; Pratt, 2015).

Skeptics remind that similar, alarmist forecasts in the 1990s failed to materialize. Robert Solow's famous 1987 aphorism that "you can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics" may still be appropriate despite the growing use of robots and artificial intelligence in "developed" economies. In US manufacturing, for example, there has been a steep increase in the use of robots since 2010, yet labour productivity has stayed sluggish (as it has across "developed" economies generally) (Figure 4) (Majmumdar, 2017).

[16] Their model predicts that most workers in the transportation and logistics sectors, along with most office and administrative support workers, and workers active in production, are at risk. Jobs in construction, journalism, hospitals and pharmacies are also on the "endangered" list.

Figure 4. Industrial robots in use and labour productivity trends, USA 1995-2019



Source: Lindeberg, R. (2018, April 10). Robots are now everywhere, except in the productivity statistics. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-10/robots-are-now-everywhere-except-in-the-productivity-statistics

It may be too early to detect the impact of automation on productivity, or statisticians may be looking in the wrong places, or measurements of output may be too imprecise in some industrial sectors to capture the impact. Or it may be that the anticipated impact is exaggerated. This is an interesting debate, but it is also somewhat misleading. New productive technologies are not used simply because they exist. Their function is to increase profit by reducing input costs (i.e., over time they become cheaper than the labour inputs they replace) and/or boosting output (i.e., they produce more in less time). Whether a particular system of automation can do that is not only a matter of the technology itself; it depends on the context.

In a period and in settings marked by a surplus of suitable labour and depressed wages—and policy environments that promise to sustain those conditions—widespread and major capital expenditures on new workplace technologies become less attractive. These are the conditions that currently pertain across much of the world. Conversely, if workers successfully organise and campaign for higher wages and improved working conditions and terms of employment, labour input costs will increase—and so will the attraction of labour-substituting technologies.

Vast numbers of workers are cornered between the prospect of having no paid work or accepting work on going terms. The result is a proliferation of precarious and draconian work regimes that rapidly cycle individuals in and out of paid employment, thereby maintaining a constant surplus of labour supply that is big enough to keep wages depressed. Importantly, in such a scenario low unemployment rates need not reflect actual labour scarcity (which usually strengthens workers' bargaining power). If workers successfully press for higher wages and improved working conditions, more extensive use of labour-replacing technologies will become more attractive and viable for capital. We can then expect the stuttering succession of precarious employment and "gigs" to blur steadily into lengthening periods of no work.

More jobs—particularly more decent jobs—will remain a crucial basis for livelihoods. But given current trends and outlooks, it is highly questionable that work-centric interventions can substitute for a more encompassing strategy that recasts the distribution of income and other basic means for life (Srnicek & Williams, 2015; Frase, 2016; Barchiesi, 2012; Wright, 2003).

The structural trajectory of capitalism, particularly in its current, thoroughly financialised phase, inclines towards decreasing employment rates, depressed real wages, and unstable and insecure work regimes for a majority of workers. Sheer necessity will see workers evolve new forms of organising to challenge such outcomes. But the prevailing conditions and dilemmas of capitalism do not favour generalised "win-win" compromises of the kinds associated with the "golden age" experienced in "developed" economies after World War Two.

The past 40 years provide very little basis for sunnier prospects; conditions are likely to become increasingly hostile to the productivist, work-centric models of social transformation that defined the industrial era. It is necessary to consider additional kinds of distributive processes that are more suited to current and impending realities, particularly ones that are not strictly predicated on access to waged work.

South Africa—the future now?

South Africa (SA) presents a grim example of the trends described thus far, with a very large proportion of the working age population surplus to the labour needs of the economy, high levels of poverty (including among wage workers) and severe inequality.

These trends reflect a crisis of waged work that dates back decades and spans periods of modest economic growth and several national development strategies and labour market reforms (Marais, 2011).

SA's employment-to-population ratio (the proportion of the population aged 15 years and older that is in employment) has been exceptionally low for decades and stood at an estimated 40% in 2019; the global average was 57.5% and the average for middle-income countries was 57% (World Bank, 2021a). Among 15-24-year-olds in SA, the employment-to-population ration was 10.9% in 2019, compared with an average 33% for middle-income countries overall (World Bank, 2021b). For perhaps a majority of low- and semi-skilled workers in SA, working life comprises short periods of employment bracketed by unpredictable durations of unemployment (with rare access to unemployment insurance).

The (narrow) unemployment rate has not fallen below 20% since the mid-1990s: at the end of 2020, it was 31.8%, with the expanded rate surpassing 40% (Statistics South Africa, 2020a);[17] the SA Government's 2012 National Development Plan targeted an unemployment rate of 14% for 2020, and 6% for 2030. The unemployment rate among young people (15-24 years) has exceeded 50% for at least the past decade. Analysis of data for 2017 indicates that among unemployed persons of working-age (15-64 years), 63% were "long-term unemployed", i.e. they had been trying to find work for a period of one year or longer, and 31% had been unemployed for at least five years (Statistics South Africa, 2017b).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought further aggravation, sending the employment-to-population ratio in SA tumbling to 36.7% (World Bank, 2021a). A survey done in the early stages of the pandemic lockdown found that 1 in 3 employed people had either lost their job or received no wages during the first month of restrictions in 2020 (Ranchod &

[17] The official statistical agency, Statistics South Africa, calculates two unemployment levels—one according to an "official definition" of unemployment, and another according to an "expanded definition" of unemployment. In order to be considered unemployed based on the official definition, three criteria must be met simultaneously: a person must be completely without work, currently available to work, and taking active steps to find work. The expanded definition excludes the requirement to have taken steps to find work.

The definition of "employment" is lax. Employed persons are those who were engaged in market production activities in the week prior to being surveyed (even if only for one hour) plus those who were temporarily absent from their activities. Market production employment refers to persons who: (a) worked for a wage, salary, commission or payment in kind; (b) managed any kind of business, of whatever size, alone or with partners; (c) assisted without being paid in a business run by another household member.

Daniels, 2020). Women accounted for up to two thirds of job losses in the first month of the lockdown (Casale & Posel, 2020). Approximately 2.2 million people lost their jobs during the first 3 months of the lockdown, with low-skilled workers worst-affected (Statistics South Africa, 2020a). Almost all workers who had lost their jobs in the early months of the lockdown remained unemployed 3-4 months later, after the initial lockdown had been lifted (Jain, Bassier, Budlender, Zizzamia, 2020).

The attrition occurred against the backdrop of chronic job scarcity and insecurity. A very large percentage of working-age adults in SA is superfluous to the labour needs of capital. Weak-to-modest economic growth is being achieved with the paid labour of about 40% of the working age population and by paying a substantial proportion of employed workers' wages so low that their survival requires subsidies from family members and the state (Lilenstein, Woolard, Leibbrandt, 2016). For perhaps a majority of low- and semi-skilled workers, working life comprises short periods of employment bracketed by unpredictable durations of unemployment (with rare access to unemployment insurance). They and their unemployed counterparts assemble livelihoods by juggling makeshift economic activities, qualifying for or sharing social grant payments, and servicing reciprocal arrangements (Ferguson, 2015). The trend is longstanding and there is no current indication of significant change.

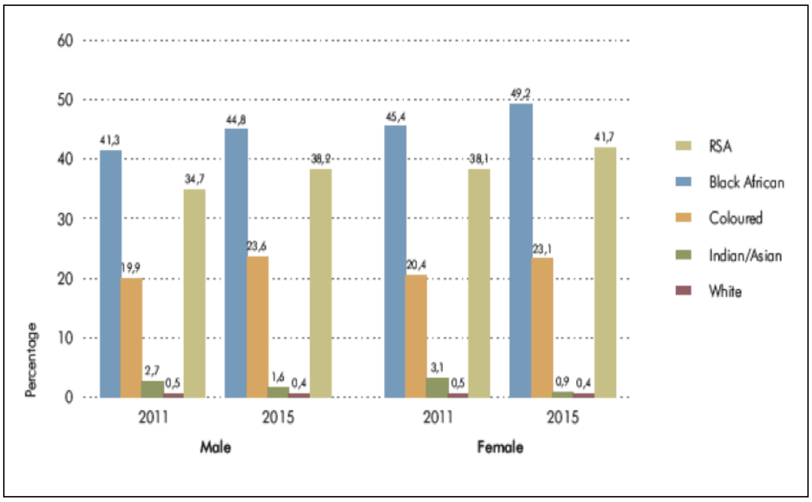
Patterns of poverty and inequality

SA's very high unemployment rates and low wages are reflected in worsening poverty and inequality trends, and in rising earnings and asset inequality (Statistics South Africa, 2017a; Leibbrandt, Finn & Woolard, 2012). The labour share of income is shrinking, with a tiny proportion of working-age adults earning much of it. Small sections of society monopolise the rewards of economic growth, while punishing costs are imposed on the poor (Webster & Francs, 2019).

Modest economic growth, very high unemployment, stagnant incomes for a majority of wage earners, rising energy and food prices, and great household dependency on unsustainable debts continue to pull households and individuals into poverty. More than half of South Africans—30.4 million people—were living in poverty in 2015, the most recent year for which comprehensive national poverty data are available.[18] Of them, almost 14 million were classified as "extremely poor", meaning they could not regularly buy essential food items. Patterns of poverty in SA continue to be skewed glaringly by race and gender (Figure 5). Women are more likely to be living in poverty than men, and black South Africans are much more likely to be living in poverty than other population groups (Statistics South Africa, 2017a).

The SA Government's 2012 National Development Plan called for reducing the percentage of South Africans living below the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) from 39% in 2009 to zero in 2030. Forty percent of South Africans were living below the LBPL and 56% of the population were living at or below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL) in 2015 (Figure 6).[19] The poverty gap had widened: that is, people living in poverty in 2015 tended to be in deeper poverty than in 2006 or 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2017a).

Figure 5. Percentage of South Africa's population living below the lower-bound poverty line, by sex and population group (2011 and 2015)

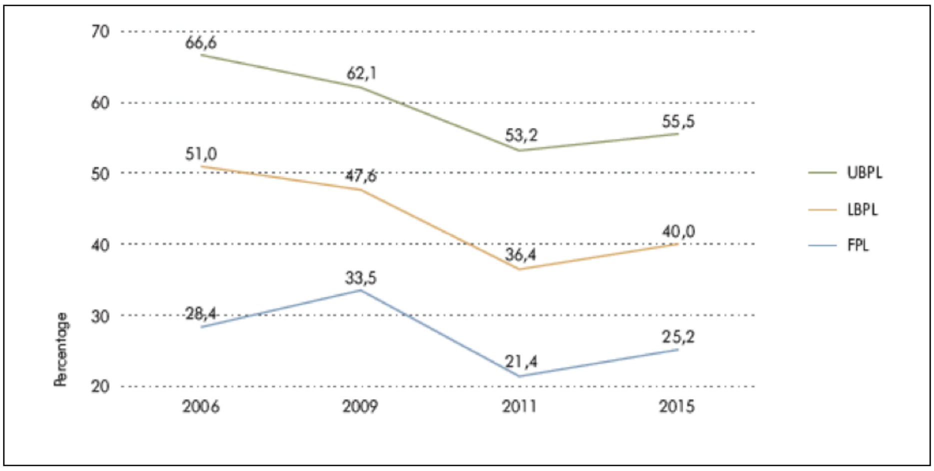


Source: Statistics South Africa. (2017a). *Poverty trends in South Africa: An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2015*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

[18] They lived at or below the upper-bound poverty line; see next page.

[19] The upper-bound poverty line (UBPL) is the income threshold at which individuals have just enough income to purchase basic food and non-food needs. For 2015, the UBPL was set at ZAR 992. The lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) is considered a marker for distress. Individuals at or below the LBPL do not have enough resources to purchase food and essential non-food items; they have to sacrifice food in order to afford basic non-food items. For 2015, the LBPL was set at ZAR 647 (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). Calibrated against the consumer price index, the LBPL rose to ZAR 840 and the UBPL to ZAR 1,268 in 2020 (Statistics SA, 2020c).

Figure 6. Poverty headcounts in South Africa based on the food poverty line, lower-bound poverty line and upper-bound poverty line (2006, 2009, 2011, 2015)



Source: Statistics South Africa. (2017a). *Poverty trends in South Africa: An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2015*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Regular, nutritious meals are beyond the means of a large proportion of SA households. In 2019, it cost approximately ZAR 2,520 per month to provide a family of four with a basic "thrifty", though nutritionally healthy, food basket, according to the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (2020). At the time, 26% of households in SA's major urban centres had total monthly expenditures of less than ZAR 2,500 per month, according to the 2019 General Household Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Conditions worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey data from Statistics SA showed the percentage of South Africans who reported experiencing hunger rose from 4.3% to 7.0% during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020b). This was probably an underestimate, since results from the larger 2019 General Household Survey showed that 11.1% of South Africans had experienced hunger and almost 18% of households had limited access to food in 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

Yet, even when performing listlessly, the SA economy generates great wealth—hence its classification as an "upper-middle-income" country. But the distribution of that wealth is inordinately unequal. The country's highly unequal social structure continues to be reproduced, expressed in many of the same racial and spatial patterns as under apartheid. Income and wealth inequality are among the worst in the world (World Bank 2018). The top 20% of income-earners captured 68% of national income in 2017 (the media is 47% for similar emerging economies) (World Bank, 2020). The poorest 50% received a little over 5% of national income, a share that has changed little for almost three decades and which is among the smallest in the world (Angola, Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti and Namibia are among the few other countries that rival SA's income inequality) (World Bank, 2020). The poorest 50% also have virtually no measurable wealth (Orthofer, 2016): according to tax and survey data, the top 10% of income earners in SA own 90-95% of all assets (World Bank, 2018).[20]

Of the estimated 38 000 "dollar millionaires" in South Africa in 2019, the vast majority were white men (New World Wealth, 2020).[21] However, inequality within groups has worsened dramatically—a process that began during the final decade of the apartheid era and then accelerated. Inequality was highest among black South Africans compared with other population groups, and the contribution of black South Africans to overall inequality increased since the mid-2000s (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

SA's severe income inequalities are mirrored in access to healthcare and to quality education. In the past 25 years, state investment in the social wage has reduced inequality in access to sanitation, potable water, electricity and refuse removal. Generally, though, the affordability of those services remains a major problem for black South African households, especially those in rural areas (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

It is not uncommon for income inequality to increase during periods of robust economic growth. In SA's case, however, already-high income inequality has increased despite sub-par economic growth or stagnation. Driving the trend are three principal factors. Firstly, there has been massive growth and sustained profitability for the financial sector, with gains monopolised by high-income earners. Secondly (and related), a newly-minted economic elite has emerged from state-facilitated black economic empowerment, chiefly through privileged access to state tenders and procurement contracts. And, thirdly, the middle classes have failed to protect their incomes against upward redistribution—an anomalous trend, detected by Gabriel Palma (2012). Generally, income redistribution tends to be fed from the bottom 40% of income earners, since the middle classes usually have the political means to defend their income shares. SA is an exception. The poorest

[20] For income, the South African Gini coefficient is about 0.7 in both datasets, but for wealth it is between 0.9 and 0.95. Both these values are higher than in any other major economy for which such data exist (World Bank, 2018).

[21] "Millionaires" were defined as individuals with net assets of US$ 1 million or more, excluding their primary residence.

40% of South Africans have been so thoroughly expropriated that they are a very minor source of redistribution for the richest 10-20%; there is virtually nothing left to appropriate from them. This is the outcome of 300 years of colonialism, 40 years of apartheid policies and persistent unequal conditions since the formal end of the apartheid system in 1994.

Links between waged work, poverty and inequality

Finding employment in SA is a Herculean undertaking. The (narrow) unemployment rate exceeded 31% in 2020, while the expanded rate topped 40% (Statistics South Africa 2020a). SA is among the ten countries with the worst employment ratios in the world; many of the others are in Middle East and North Africa, where women are largely excluded from the labour market (World Bank, 2021a).

Not having paid employment is an obvious and major cause of poverty. But having a job is not a sure defence against poverty. Unemployment is estimated to be the main cause of about half of poverty; low earnings are a major cause for the other half. Many of the people living in poverty in SA are in wage-earning households.

From 2004 to 2012, the working poor became a significantly bigger segment of SA's large population of working-age poor. In 2012, about one third of workers earned wages that were too low to enable their households to meet basic food and non-food needs. Put differently, the majority of poor South Africans in 2012 (58%, using the upper-bound poverty line) lived in a household with at least one employed person (Rogan & Reynolds, 2015).[22]

The introduction of a national minimum wage was a positive development, though the amount is very low, and stood at a maximum ZAR 3,320 per month in January 2021. If spread across a family of four, that was equivalent to ZAR 830 per person, less than the lower-bound poverty line (ZAR 840) and much lower than the upper-bound poverty line

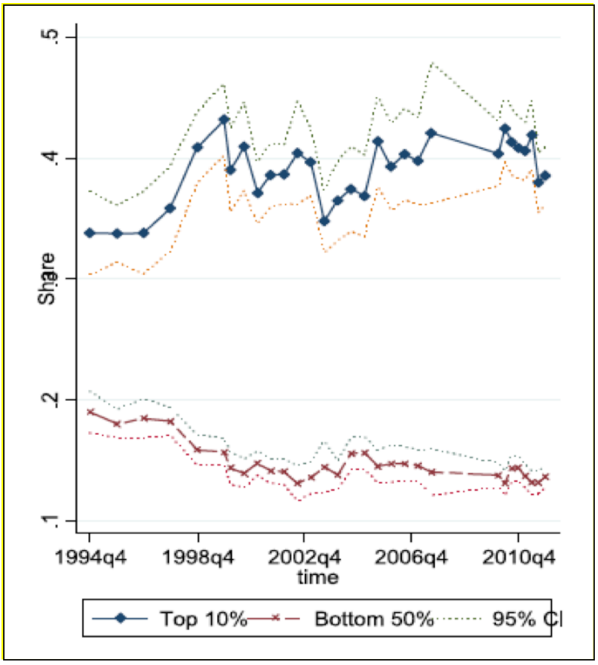
[22] Does this trend apply to both formal and informal sector workers? The inclusion of a question on the formality of employment from 2010 onward in the General Household Surveys carried out by Statistics South Africa provides a limited data set which points in a surprising direction. The informal sector accounts for about one fifth of the total workforce. Informal sector workers were much more likely to be poor: their headcount poverty rate was 46% in 2010 and it decreased to 41% in 2012. Over the same period, the poverty rate for formal workers stayed steady at 17%. So the risk of poverty decreased significantly between 2010 and 2012 for informal workers but there was no change for formal sector workers (Rogan & Reynolds, 2015).

(ZAR 1,268). In total, the monthly minimum wage was a little higher than the average cost of feeding a family of four a basic nutritious diet for a month (ZAR 2,830) (Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group, 2021).

Working poverty has persisted across periods of moderate or low economic growth, persistently high levels of unemployment, a halting recovery from a major financial crisis and the introduction of protective labour market legislation (Rogan & Reynolds, 2015). Driving the trend are at least three key factors: a sustained shift towards the use of casual and subcontracted labour, the related decline in real wages for low-skilled workers, and job losses in sectors that used to have strong trade union representation (such as mining and manufacturing). These patterns reflect companies' attempts to compete in a global market by imposing new paradigms of work. They increasingly rely on a small core of skilled, full-time workers and a larger stock of less-skilled, casual and outsourced labour that is deprived of the wages, benefits and rights enjoyed (for now) by their better-off peers (Webster & Francis, 2019).

Inequality in earnings among employees has also increased in the post-apartheid period. Higher-income earners pocket a bigger share of the total wage bill than they did in 1994, while the bottom 50% of wage earners have lost ground (Figure 7) (Wittenberg, 2017). In other words, the average real wage is propped up by the improved fortunes of small numbers of high-skilled, high-salary workers. Wage differentials, not unemployment, are the largest source of inequality in SA, responsible for about 56% of inequality. Unemployment is responsible for approximately 35% and differences in remittances, while investment income make up the remainder (Leibbrandt, Fin, Woolard, 2012).

Figure 7. Share of the total wage bill in South Africa going to the top 10% and bottom 50% of wage earners, 1994-2011



Source: Wittenberg, M. (2017). Wages and wage inequality in South Africa, 1994-2011: Part 2 – inequality measurement and trends. *South African Journal of Economics*, *85*(2), 298-318.

<u>*Understanding the trends*</u>

These are longstanding trends. They reflect the specific political-economy of SA (Fine & Rustomjee, 1996) and the increasing prominence of rentier capitalism, the impact of key macroeconomic policy decisions (Padayachee, 2018a; Marais, 2011), decisive features of the capitalist system globally (Calhoun & Derluguian, 2011; Harvey, 2010), the terms of SA's integration with the global economy, and the ways in which South African capitalists have responded to these conditions (Mohammed, 2019 & 2016).

Economic growth in SA has been comparatively sluggish for decades. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged at 3.3% per annum in the two decades after 1994, but tumbled below 2.0% during the 2008 global financial crisis. After a brief recovery, annual GDP growth has stayed below 2.0% since 2014, consistently running 2-4% lower than the average for other middle-income countries (World Bank, 2021d). SA's comparatively low rate of economic growth is due largely to the structure of the economy and the terms of its insertion into the global economy. The economy remains centered around minerals, energy and related capital-intensive ventures, but is increasingly also in tow to a voracious financial sector that accounts for about one quarter of SA’s GDP (compared with 6.5% in 1994) (Mohamed, 2019; Ashman, Fine & Newman, 2011). This results in massive misallocation of capital while also blocking structural economic change (Mohammed, 2016; Ashman et al., 2011).

Employment trends, the kinds of jobs that are being created, and the terms and wages attached to them generally follow global trends. Mainstream economists typically attribute SA's low levels of investment and high unemployment primarily to microeconomic factors, such as rigid labour market, shortages of skilled workers, low labour worker productivity, infrastructure constraints and bureaucratic hindrances (World Bank, 2001). Those factors are not irrelevant to SA's predicament, but they provide a highly incomplete and misleading understanding of the situation.

The structure of the economy, the macroeconomic and financial policy choices of the post-apartheid period (some of which built on incipient policy moves from the 1980s), and the terms of SA's integration into the global economy are of fundamental importance (Padayachee, 2018a; Marais, 2011). The policy choices of the 1990s both accelerated processes of financialisation and corporate restructuring, while inhibiting the state's capacity to manage and respond to those processes (Mohamed, 2019).

Economic policy adjustments ensured that corporations' chief requirements were met: they were allowed to diversify abroad, while relaxed capital controls and various investment incentives enabled them to circumvent tax obligations and spirit profits into offshore havens. Unlike the Asian developmental states of yesteryear, the SA state largely relinquished its sway over the banking and financial sector (Mohamed, 2019; Marais, 2011). The macroeconomic policies pursued since the 1990s thus facilitated massive capital flight and misallocation of capital inside SA. Credit, savings and investment have been channeled into sectors which favour the extraction of economic rents, including some services sectors and the mining and minerals processing sectors (Mohamed, 2019).

The SA economy rests on a stagnating industrial base, and is marked by highly concentrated ownership, by excessive dependency on the extractive sector (for export earnings) and other sources of rents, and by heavy reliance on portfolio capital inflows to stabilize the balance of payments. While the financial sector has grown explosively, potentially productive sectors of the economy have shrunk, with the manufacturing sector, including labour-intensive production, atrophying rather than expanding and diversifying. The textbook narrative of economic modernisation seems to be running in reverse in SA. It is effectively an arrested semi-industrial economy with no use for about 40% of the labour force, yet capable of generating vast wealth.[23]

SA's post-apartheid labour regime was designed to promote and protect decent work. But liberalised economic policies increased both the perceived need and opportunities for companies to sidestep the provisions of the new labour regime. Labour-saving technologies were introduced where feasible, though a volatile currency made this option unpredictably expensive. Another option was to resort to casualisation and subcontracting, and to squeeze workers' wages and terms of conditions. Companies adapted "by restructuring production, establishing new patterns of work organisation and/or relocating production units" (Webster & Omar, 2003, p. 195). Those shifts had begun in the 1980s already and gathered momentum subsequently (Webster & Francis, 2019; Pons-Vignon & Anseeuw 2009; Buhlungu, & Webster, 2006).

Trade unions have struggled hard to put decent work on the map, but they are fighting mostly rear-guard battles and memberships are shrinking in important sectors. The labour movement remains committed to centralised bargaining, and some of its affiliates have mounted successful campaigns in defence of sector-wide bargaining (Bezuidenhout & Tshoaedi, 2017). But powerful pressures are pushing in the opposite direction. Research reveals considerable de facto flexibility in a labour market that is highly segmented and increasingly characterised by "shell" wage agreements where labour wins high standards on paper but which apply to fewer and fewer workers in reality (Pons-Vignon & Anseeuw, 2009; Kenny & Webster, 1998). The sectors with the strongest labour market protections (manufacturing and mining) have also been the targets of deep and sustained job cuts. The situation in the public sector is somewhat anomalous, though outsourcing and subcontracting is common. Compounding matters is the labour movement's failure to organize the "new working poor" in meaningful numbers. Organising these workers is notoriously difficult; so, too, is convincing them that the potential benefits of formalised solidarity outweigh the immediate risks of harassment and lay-offs. In addition, their

[23] A great deal of that wealth generation is delinked from productive economic activities, a trend SA shares with many other economies. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that the share value of the 40 largest companies trading on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange rose 18% in 2020, despite a contracting economy, soaring unemployment and debt, and a social crisis severely worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gunnion, 2021).

work status is highly unstable as they rove between employment, self-employment and unemployment (Di Paola & Pons-Vignon, 2013; Webster & Buhlungu, 2004).

Economic, labour and social policies have to respond to these realities. Economic (particularly macroeconomic and industrial) strategies and labour market policies that can both increase access to decent paid work and transition the economy to an ecologically sustainable path are vital. But recent decades do not offer evidence for assuming that waged work can be made a sufficient and viable basis for avoiding poverty and living a dignified life in SA. Global economic instability, accumulating global warming-related upheavals and public health crises (exemplified by the current COVID-19 pandemic) reinforce that skepticism. In such an outlook, strategies that pivot on waged work as a means to realise social and economic rights and achieve social inclusion are inadequate and inappropriate currently and for the foreseeable future (Ferguson, 2015; Barchiesi, 2011).

Social grants in South Africa

In the absence of significant job creation and improvements in real wages, social policy has become a vital stopgap against even greater impoverishment (Statistics SA, 2016b; Leubolt, 2014). The expanded provision of social grants in SA has proved especially important (Button, K. et al., 2017; Woolard & Leibbrandt, 2010; Lund, 2008).

In 20th century welfare states, social policy (particularly social protection) became seen as a powerful instrument for transformation. It was assigned at least five complementary functions: it had to enhance protection, redistribution, production, reproduction and freedom (Mkandawire, 2007). An important component was the redistribution of income in pursuit of greater equity, which also carried social, political and economic relevance:

> Redistributive social expenditures can contribute to political stability by enhancing the legitimacy of the state. Social policy, as an instrument for ensuring a sense of citizenship, is thus an important instrument of conflict management, which is in turn a prerequisite for sustained economic development. (Mkandawire, 2001, p. 22)

Social policy in SA has been less ambitious and more ambivalent. In the post-apartheid era, it has oscillated between functioning as a constitutive part of a development strategy and serving as a safety net against destitution (Plagerson, Patel, Hochfeld, Ulriksen, 2019; Barchiesi, 2007). The social wage, which has been broadened substantially since the early 1990s, is a central component of social policy in SA, and includes public social spending on health, education and housing; subsidised provision of basic services for low-income earners; and various forms of cash or in-kind assistance. The latter—particularly the social grant system—has become a particularly important source of livelihood support. It operates as a proxy for an encompassing anti-poverty strategy, supplementing other elements of the social wage and acting as a flimsy but vital safety net for many millions of people (Leubolt, 2014). The system centres on six major grants: the old-age pension, disability grant, child support grant, foster care grant, grant in aid, and the care dependency grant. The grants are targeted and some are means-tested; none is conditional.[24]

- The old-age pension is available to individuals aged 60 and older. It amounted to ZAR 1860 per month in 2020 (South African Social Security Agency, 2020). In the 1990s already, pensions eclipsed migrant remittances both in terms of size and reliability as a source of economic support for poor rural households (Case & Deaton, 1998).

- The child support grant was worth ZAR 440 per month per child in 2020, as was the "grant in aid"—almost 25% less than the official food poverty line of ZAR 585 (Statistics South Africa, 2020c) and about 40% less than the average monthly cost of feeding a child a nutritious diet (ZAR 720) (Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group, 2021). Approximately 12.8 million caregivers of children and more than 30% of households received a child support grant in 2020 (South African Social Security Agency, 2020). The child support grant was temporarily increased to ZAR 740 per child during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (see below), before being reduced again to the previous amount.

- In 2020, the foster care grant was worth ZAR 1040, 2.5 times more than than the child support grant, while the care dependency grant amounted to ZAR 1,860 (South African Social Security Agency, 2020).

[24] For a summary of the grants and their eligibility requirements, see http://www.actuarialsociety.org.za/Portals/1/Documents/a4fd20be-0196-494f-a655-f01b71dd4bf0.pdf

- Worth ZAR 1,860 per month in 2020, the disability grant is available to "severely physically and mentally disabled persons" (South African Social Security Agency, 2020).

A separate government agency, the South African Social Security Agency, administers the grants. A biometric system of identification is used and payments are made via cash advances that can be collected at automatic bank teller machines. The grants appear to be relatively well targeted towards eligible poor households, with estimates suggesting that, by the early 2010s, about 76% of grant payments were going to the poorest 40% of the population (Bhorat & Cassim, 2014). However, the system does not directly provide assistance to able-bodied adults (18-59 years) who are unemployed.

In 2019/20, approximately 18.3 million South Africans were receiving a social grant (mostly in the shape of an old-age pension or a child support grant) (Anon, 2020a),[25] up from about 3 million in 1994 (Statistics SA, 2017b). These payments have become a vital source of livelihood for close to half of households in South Africa (Statistics SA, 2017a; Statistics SA, 2016b; Leubolt, 2014), including a large number of households with wage earners (Rogan & Reynolds, 2015). In 2018, 44% of households received at least one social grant, and 20% of households nationally depended on these grants as their main source of income (Statistics South Africa, 2019). In the poorest provinces, such as Eastern Cape and Limpopo, grant payments were the main source of income for at least 30% of households (Statistics South Africa, 2020d). Female-headed households are especially reliant on the grants (Wright, Neves, Ntshongwana, Noble, 2015).

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a special Social Relief of Distress grant ("COVID-19 grant") worth ZAR R350 per month was made available to individuals not covered by the existing grants or the Unemployment Insurance Fund. In addition, the other main social grants were increased by ZAR 250 per month for 6 months in 2020. A Caregiver's Allowance worth ZAR 500 per month was also introduced for each caregiver, supplementing the Child Support Grant. These emergency grants were extended in October 2020 and again in February 2021. Despite the interventions, an estimated 8 million people in low-income households still received no form of direct

[25] According to data provided in Parliament by the Minister of Social Development. See Anon (2021, January 10).

income support, a reminder of how "leaky" targeted systems of income transfer can be (Webb & Valli, 2020).

For a majority of working-age adults in SA, waged work is either unavailable or a highly unreliable basis for livelihood security and social citizenship. This longstanding trend is grounded in the structure of the SA economy and the terms of its incorporation in the global economy. The 2008 global financial crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic are among the colliding crises which, in all likelihood, will prolong and deepen this trend and the accompanying social calamities. Current social policy, however, remains predicated on the expectation that waged work is an available and viable source of income for a majority of adults. As a result, the income support provided by the state fails to reach large numbers of impoverished people, especially those who are unemployed—making it inadequate and unsuitable in the prevailing economic and social conditions.

3. BEHIND THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

The UBI is an increasingly vogue, yet highly contested concept, with supporters spread enigmatically across the political spectrum. Proponents are found among the post-capitalist Left (Bastani, 2020; Frase, 2016; Barchiesi, 2016; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Mason, 2015), the progressive Left (Standing, 2017; van Parijs, 2004; Wright, 2003), mainstream liberals (Yang, 2020; Bregman, 2017), as well as on the Right (Murray, 2006). Political parties and governments of diverse ideological provenance have expressed interest in the concept, to the point of commissioning studies and trials.

Discussion of the merits or pitfalls of a UBIG is no longer confined to the fringes of public debate. Switzerland staged a national referendum on the issue in 2016: 23% of voters (and up to 35% in some cantons) supported the proposal to pay every Swiss national a monthly guaranteed universal income of CHF 2,500 (BBC, 2017, Timms, 2014). The Basic Income Initiative, a Europe-wide organisation, has campaigned for a similar plebiscite across Europe. Basic income pilot schemes or studies have been launched in cities and countries in Africa (Arnold, 2018; Haarmann, Haarmann, Jauch, Shindondola-Mote, Nattrass, et al., 2009), Asia (Davala, Jhabvala, Standing, Mehta, 2015), Europe (Anon, 2020b; DIW Berlin, 2020; McFarland, 2017) and North America (Kassam, 2017).

Origins

The basic concept of a guaranteed income, though, is not novel. It made an appearance in English social philosopher Thomas More's 1516 novel *Utopia*, in Johannes Vives' *On Assistance to the Poor* a decade later, and it resembles the concept of “ground rent”, which the American philosopher and activist Thomas Paine (1796, digital edition 1999) described in his pamphlet, *Agrarian Justice*. Paine regarded agricultural land as "natural property" to which every citizen had a claim. However, he also saw an "efficiency case" for private ownership of the land. The compromise was to tax private ownership of agricultural land (the "ground rent") and to distribute that revenue equally to all adults in society—not as charity, but as a right, since they all have a claim to privately owned land.

Drawing on the thinking of the French socialist Charles Fourier (set out in his 1836 text *La Fausse Industrie*), the philosopher John Stuart Mill also argued for a form of guaranteed income in the 1848 edition of his textbook *Principles of Political Economy*. It would require, he wrote, that "a certain minimum is first assigned for the subsistence of every member of the community, whether capable or not of labour" (1848, p. 195). The concept then languished, eclipsed by the rapid expansion of both industrial capitalism and the ranks of waged workers—and with that, the rise of radical political programmes which centred on transforming relations and conditions of production.

At the end of World War One, the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russel (1918) called for an income for all, and the concept featured in a pamphlet which circulated prominently in the British Labour Party and claimed that a basic income would boost economic production. During the Great Depression in the early 1930s, U.S. senator Huey Long championed and annual "homestead allowance" of US$ 5,000 for families in response to the Great Depression.

It was after World War Two that Britain, and many western European and Scandinavian countries introduced variants of a guaranteed minimum income as part of their social welfare systems. However, these schemes were targeted and highly conditional—thus not universal. They included, for example, payments to families with children (often irrespective of income levels) and old-age pensions. Universal provisioning tended to focus on essential services and other public goods (e.g. education, healthcare, sanitation, emergency services, maternal leave, child-care etc.).

Social policy proposals resembling a basic income entered mainstream policy debate in the United States in the 1960s, as economic planners struggled to deal with the re-emergence of structural unemployment: the economy was growing, but job creation lagged. President J.F. Kennedy’s economic advisers floated the idea of a guaranteed income in the form of a negative income tax.[26] Popularised by Chicago School economist Milton Friedman in his 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, a negative income tax entailed an income transfer to recipients earning below a specified income, with the amount varying depending on income. The proposed mechanism was basically a means-tested income transfer (Santens, 2014). Friedman and other advocates saw it as a

[26] The difference between a negative income tax and universal basic income is discussed below.

replacement for what they regarded to be a complex, intrusive and costly mosaic of welfare entitlements, and as a way to eliminate the alleged disincentive effect of conditional welfare programmes on labour market participation.

In 1969, United States President Richard Nixon proposed a Family Assistance Plan, a guaranteed income that resembled the mechanism outlined by Friedman. The intervention would have amounted to an annual payment of US$ 1,600 for low-income households on condition that they sought employment (Lampman, 1969). The idea gained attention amid concern about persistent poverty and findings from social science research suggesting that cash assistance would most rapidly reduce poverty (Beach, 2019). Criticised from both the political Right and Left, however, the proposal languished, but was then revived during the run-up to the 1972 United States presidential election, as more than 1,000 economists called on the federal government to deploy some kind of income guarantee (Neyfakh, 2014). The Family Assistance Plan eventually made it to the floor in the United States Congress, where it failed to pass. The biggest concern seemed to be not the affordability of the scheme, but concerns that it might introduce a disincentive to perform waged work.

In western Europe, an activist network, with footing in academia, began promoting a UBI in the 1980s. The Basic Income Earth Network (formerly the Basic Income European Network), set up in 1986, became an important institutional base for research and advocacy. It was a paper by Philippe van Parijs (1991), in which he made a liberal-egalitarian case for a universal basic income, that seemed to spark resurgent interest in the concept.

In the early 2000s, a campaign for a small basic income grant (BIG) in SA, led initially by trade unions allied with the ruling African National Congress (ANC), attracted enough attention to prompt the Government to appoint a committee of inquiry to examine the option. The Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security for South Africa (known as the Taylor Committee) recommended that a small basic income be phased in nationally. There was support for the proposal inside the SA government, with then Minister of Social Development, Zola Skweyiya, noting that a "basic income grant system is one of the excellent ideas we might consider introducing".[27] Both the

[27] Mbulelo Musi, spokesman for the Social Development Ministry, cited in Seekings & Matisson (2002).

Treasury and the Presidency, however, staunchly opposed a BIG, deeming it unaffordable—and the proposal was rejected.[28]

Internationally, awareness of and support for a UBI simmered during the first decade of the new millennium, but then burst into prominence in the 2010s. By mid-decade, the concept had become a staple of media coverage and public debate, with mainstream political parties adding UBI proposals to their election platforms.

Explaining the newfound appeal

The slipperiness of the concept partly explains its prominence and the growing interest it is attracting. But why now in particular? There are several possible explanations, some self-evident, others less obvious.

The 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent progressive activism (notably the Occupy Movement) sparked greater acknowledgment of widening income, wealth and social inequalities, of a decades-long trend of stagnant or falling real wages (especially for low- and middle-income workers) and of the extraordinary accumulation of income and wealth by the top 1% of earners (forensically analysed in French economist Thomas Piketty's 2013 book, *Capital in the twenty-first century*).

The governance response to the financial crisis in industrialised countries came in the shape of massive infusions of liquidity, much of it channeled into financial markets rather than towards recuperation in the real economy and/or direct income support to households. Massive layoffs and wage depression were followed by a slow, skewed recovery, as relatively secure employment was increasingly displaced by insecure, piecemeal jobs and shiftwork, stripped of regulatory protection and often remunerated well below the living wage. In the United States, the Occupy Movement rallied against economic inequality and social vulnerability (Fadaee & Schindler, 2014). Elsewhere, the "Arab Spring" uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, which erupted in the context of harsh domestic austerity programmes, highlighted the potential for sudden, radical contestation even in places that had seemed solidly barricaded against popular discontent. As countries doubled down on austerity-based "recovery" programmes, those

[28] We discuss the debates surrounding the BIG and the underlying reasons for its rejection by the Government in greater detail below.

trends fed disquiet about the prospects of chronic social and political unrest. The rise of right-wing populist political formations underscored the anxieties.

These events coincided with an upsurge of both optimism and alarm about the potential impact of innovations in artificial intelligence and other forms of digital automation (as discussed in Chapter 2). For the post-capitalist left those changes would steadily transform utopian visions of work and society into tangible prospects. If new technologies massively boost productivity, output could be maintained or increased using less labour input—and, in theory, work time could be reduced and shared without cutting into wages and salaries (Bastani, 2020; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Mason, 2015). But the technological changes also evoked dystopian scenarios in which dozens of job categories would disappear (Frey & Osborne, 2017), leading to massive increases in unemployment and poverty. In the context of sluggish economic recovery and further restructuring of labour markets (mostly at the expense of low-skilled and -wage workers), a rethink of social protection (and social policy in general) gathered pace (McBride, Mahon, Boychuk, 2015). In such a context, a UBI seemed like a reasonable, even advisable option.

But the ostensible respectability of this intervention also occurred in the wake of profound shifts in social policy, which had been penetrated and reshaped by neoliberal economics.

We can discern several broad shifts in social policy in the past 30-40 years, linked to the repositioning of the state in relation to the economy and society. No longer functioning as a driving force in the economy and guardian of social well-being, the state's obligations towards citizens were recast as providing "public support for private responsibility" (Gilbert, 2002, p. 4) and its core roles shifted towards facilitating and sustaining conditions for profit-taking (Harvey, 2005). This did not entail a retreating state; neoliberal capitalism requires active state action to promote and defend the interests of capital (Fraser, 2015). But the priorities for state action shifted towards extending and safeguarding private property rights (including intellectual property rights); removing constraints on the circulation of capital; privatising commons and other collective assets; relying on market forces to determine the allocation of capital and the production, circulation and use of products and services; and replacing social solidarity with individual responsibility (Harvey, 2005; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005).

These changes also affected social policy, which became increasingly penetrated and appropriated by financialised capitalism (e.g. through the privatisation and subcontracting of public services). One effect was the detachment of social policy from overarching economic and development strategies, with discrete instruments (e.g. cash transfers or the discredited microcredit fad of the 1990s) instead paraded as development tools (Fischer, 2018; Fine, 2017; Mkandawire, 2007). The principle of universalism withered and was displaced by the increased use of individualised, targeted and conditional forms of provisioning. Social development became hitched to principles of individual responsibility and risk-taking.

It is in that context that cash transfers were elevated as multipurpose social policy instruments. From the 1990s onward, cash transfer programmes proliferated, initially in Latin America and parts of Asia, and then in Africa, where both bilateral and multilateral donors became ardent enthusiasts (Bastagli, 2009).[29] By the late-2000s, almost every Latin American country was operating some form of cash transfer programme, with Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's Progresa/Oportudinades programmes among the best-known examples (Lavinas, 2017). Within a few years, numerous African countries were doing the same, albeit on smaller scales. Cash transfers were celebrated for being much less expensive and more cost-efficient than universal welfare provision, and for being highly effective at reducing poverty and income inequality, and at improving health and other social outcomes.[30] Usually targeted and conditional (e.g. on school attendance or health-seeking behaviours), these transfers contrast with the universalist principles that had characterised much progressive social policy after World War Two. There is an emphasis on universal *access* to certain services or entitlements (e.g. all children should be able to attend school), but there is less concern about the overall levels of investment in those services, their quality, the terms of access and whether the services are provided through the private or public sector. This has profound implications.

Rather than form part of an overarching redistributive strategy (which would encompass labour policy, industrial strategy, social protection and other forms of social

[29] For a critical analysis of the intellectual "genealogy" of conditional cash transfers, see Lavinas (2013, p. 9-12). She traces it to the emergence of the concept of "human capital" (and its links to the work of Chicago School economist Gary Becker) and shifts towards targeted welfare spending (influenced by the rise of behavioural economics). She pinpoints the *Subsidio Único Familiar*, introduced in Pinochet's Chile in August 1981, as one of the pioneering conditional safety net interventions.

[30] We examine those reputations in greater detail in Chapter 4.

provisioning), cash transfers typically serve as piecemeal proxies. In many instances, the transfers are being deployed in the context of dismantled public provisioning and faltering development strategies, where the financial sector has expanded down the "income ladder" in a process of "financial inclusion"—"commodification all the way down", in Nancy Fraser (2014a, p. 542) words. One aspect of this, highlighted by Lena Lavinas (2017), is the proliferation of credit markets and the incorporation of cash (or credit) transfers into new strategies to extract debt and rent from low-income earners. Facilitating these predacious incursions is the bundling together in global development discourse of cash transfer programmes and "financial inclusion" (Torkelson, 2020).

Access to financial services has been elevated into a developmental principle, with the World Bank (2014) hailing it as a core element for development and the concept featuring prominently in the 2020 Sustainable Development Goals (Gronbach, 2020). Financial corporations are adeptly exploiting this orthodoxy by teaming up with technology firms to secure contracts for managing electronic disbursement systems for cash transfers, thereby gaining direct access to many millions of grant recipients and their income streams. The strategy was on vivid display in the 2015-2017 social grants crisis in SA, when transnational corporations successfully used the grant disbursement system as part of their wider financial predation strategies among low-income earners (Ashman, 2021). Social grants were turned into collateral for credit in arrangements which made the cash transfers "a site of nearly risk-free profit" (Torkelson, 2020, p 1) for the companies (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

In Andrew Fischer's (2018) analysis, cash transfers (conditional or not) mark an abandonment of the egalitarian and equalising ambitions of 20th century social policy, and legitimise segregation and inequality. And they fit with the recasting of the state as "facilitator" rather than "provider". Viewed in that light, the mainstreaming of a potentially transformative intervention such as a UBI seems less perplexing. It reflects an awareness that many traditional sources of material security and well-being are becoming increasingly fragile and inaccessible, and it speaks to concerns about the social and political turmoil this may unleash. A UBI then seems compatible with the prevailing policy and ideological environment, as critics on the Left have charged (Clarke, 2015).

Indeed, some supporters seem attracted precisely to the idea of a UBI as a discrete, technical mechanism that can be deployed to improve specific socioeconomic indicators (e.g. poverty levels) irrespective of the surrounding dynamics that generate precarity and inequality. Yet a UBI potentially also subverts orthodoxy in multiple, profound ways, and progressive proponents invest it with a liberating potential that would exceed such a narrow, instrumentalised function, as we discuss in Chapter 4. For some champions, it could even help unlock a new social order in which the prospect of a fulfilling life is no longer dependent solely on the ritualised sale of one's labour. They see it contributing to the conditions for radically new, egalitarian societies in which labour and production are harnessed to serve social life (rather than the inverse). The concept of a UBI therefore is too rich with possibilities, too problematic, too pliable, and too subversive to settle unambivalently in "pro" or "con" camps.

The concept

Broadly defined, a UBI is a universal and regular (monthly) cash payment to individuals, without conditionalities (such as work requirements), means-testing or targeting.

Proponents differ on the details. Mainstream proponents focus on the more "prosaic" potential of a UBI to provide an indiscriminate safety net that can reduce poverty levels and inequality, and increase aggregate economic demand. Those on the libertarian and neoliberal Right are attracted to a UBI as a mechanism to to purge existing systems of welfare protection and further limit the state's obligations to citizens and to "rationalise" existing. Recipients would use the basic income payment (and any other income or credit they have) to purchase all goods and services as commodities from private providers. Charles Murray (1997, 2006), for example, touted an income guarantee as the next best option to the complete elimination of state-managed redistribution; he proposed ending most state-funded support for individuals and using the funds to finance a guaranteed income.

Progressive proponents support a UBI that functions as a major element of far-reaching social and economic change. Proponents in the "futurist" or "accelerationist" camp (e.g. Bastani, 2020; Frase, 2016; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Barchiesi, 2016; Mason, 2015) see it as an important element of a "post-work" society[31] in which widespread automation and other advances render waged work increasingly superfluous to the production and

[31] "Post-work" refers to scenarios where paid work becomes steadily less available and on deteriorating terms, with increasing numbers of people having long periods of not working at all.

distribution of goods and services (Ford, 2015). Other supporters on the Left (e.g. Standing, 2017; van Parijs, 2003; Wright, 2003) see a UBI operating as part of a system of distribution that protects everyone against deprivation and that grants them the freedom to choose whether or not to perform waged work. For them, the intervention would supplement—not replace—other forms of social provisioning and it would function against a backdrop of regulation, standard-setting and subsidy, and of macroeconomic and labour market policies that are designed to increase access to decent waged work.

The payment would be "universal" not because it replaces other entitlements, but because it is available to everyone (Van Parijs, 2004; Wright, 2003). Ravallion (2019), for example, has proposed positioning a UBI as an element or aspect of a "full income", with income defined expansively. A "full income" would resemble a social wage (or the public provision of essential amenities) and would—in addition to a UBI—encapsulate essential non-cash provisioning by or via the state (e.g. housing, education, healthcare), as well as subsidies that favour low-income households (e.g. food, energy, fuel and water subsidies). This text examines the potential merits and pitfalls of a UBI that is defined in such progressive terms.

A UBI is sometimes confused with a negative income tax (of the kind proposed in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s). Such a tax provides supplemental income to low-income families, with a portion (scaled according to income) "clawed back" through taxation. The actual net income transfer therefore varies, depending on the recipient's income level. All adults would need to file tax returns (including zero and very low income-earners) if this type of income guarantee is to reach the people who need it the most. Substantial variation in people's monthly earnings (an increasingly common phenomenon) also make a negative income tax a less attractive and administratively challenging intervention. In addition, it lacks the stability and predictability of a UBI: people with fluctuating monthly incomes are likely to receive income support that reflects their earnings several months earlier. In sum, a negative income tax fits with a libertarian understanding of distributive justice, while a UBI supports egalitarian principles (Tondani, 2009), making them very different kinds of distributive devices.

Beyond the issue of definition lies the thorny matter of eligibility. In principle, and for proponents such as Van Parijs (2013) and Weeks (2016, 2017), every member of society–

–child or adult—should be eligible for an UBI. Other conceptions would limit the payment to individuals 16 or 18 years and older. Views also differ on whether a UBI would be paid to national citizens only, or also to legal residents, or to everyone who has resided in a given country for a specified period of time (whether legally or not). The precise definition of "universal" (or "everyone") has fiscal implications and for delineating who is included and who is excluded (Davies, 2017; Gough, 2019). At stake here is the nature of an ostensibly inclusive society, the criteria that are used to determine inclusion, and the principles that are used to select those criteria. These are profound matters that tend to be settled on purportedly pragmatic (often fiscal) grounds rather than by considering the implications for the goals of social justice and inclusion, egalitarianism and personal dignity.

Also controversial is the monetary value or amount of a UBI payment. Strictly speaking, a basic income should, by definition, be sufficient for a basic livelihood—a "foundation ... for dignified living" (Lawhon & McCreary, 2020, p. 458); it should be sufficient to cover basic needs and enable a person to participate in social life (Allègre, 2014). However, income supplements that are too small to constitute such a guarantee are typically also presented as "basic incomes". Even fixing a UBI at the level of a livable income, leaves unsettled how such an amount would be determined in a given context. An amount close or equal to the poverty line is one option (it guided the amount proposed in the 2016 Swiss referendum, for example),[32] though the manner in which poverty is defined and the calculation of poverty lines are controversial. Statistics South Africa (2020c), for example, calculates and updates three poverty lines: an upper-bound poverty line, a lower-bound poverty line and a food poverty line.

Many of the desired effects of a UBI could conceivably be achieved with a payment that significantly contributes to, but does not in itself constitute a livable income. The amount of an efficacious UBI would be context-specific, as would the political and fiscal factors that shape the size of a UBI, and the macroeconomic strategies that accompany it. These are contentious aspects which are best examined in specific settings, as we do below (in Chapters 6 and 7).

[32] That amount, CHF 2500, was a little higher than the CHF 2,200 income poverty line in Switzerland at the time.

The idea goes mainstream

UBI pilot schemes or studies have been launched in several places, including Finland (Anon, 2020b),[33] Germany (DIW Berlin, 2020), the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands (McFarland, 2017), the Canadian province of Ontario (Kassam, 2017), India (Davala, Jhabvala, Standing, Mehta, 2015), and Namibia (Haarmann et al., 2009). Some of those projects were halted prematurely by new governments.[34] During 2020, pilot projects were also underway in the United States, including the Stockton California SEED demonstration and the Y-Combinator experiment. A large-scale, 12-year study of a UBI was being conducted among 21 000 adults in Bomet County on the shores of Lake Victoria in western Kenya (Arnold, 2018).

These initiatives encompass different types of income guarantees, however, and most of them retain elements of conditionality and/or are targeted at low-income earners—making them less-than-universal income transfers. During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Spain's governing coalition of the Socialist Party and the left-wing Podemos movement pledged to introduce an income transfer scheme that would target families with no or low income. Recipients who find jobs would keep receiving the payment for the first few months of employment, after which the payment would end (Vidal & Gomez, 2020). The Utrecht pilot involved paying six different groups of participants different stipends, each with slightly different conditions attached (Hamilton, 2016), while the Finnish pilot paid 2,000 unemployed people aged 25-58 years €560 a month for two years (making it a targeted grant) (Sodha, 2017). In contrast, the controlled trial in Germany, due to start in 2021, will pay participants € 1,200 (US$ 1,000) a month regardless of whether they are working or not (DIW Berlin, 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020, support grew markedly for UBI-like interventions. Survey results showed that 71% of Europeans favoured the introduction of a UBI, according to an Oxford University study from March 2020, with support spread evenly across age groups (Ash & Zimmermann, 2020). By May 2020, according to the Swiss bank UBS, almost 39 million people in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the

[33] See the "UBI in the real world" section in Chapter 3 for discussion of the findings from basic income trials and pilot studies.

[34] The Ontario trial involved paying up to Can$ 17 000 per year to 4000 individuals across the province; it was discontinued when the Conservative Party took office in the province. The Finland trial was suspended.

United Kingdom were being paid by governments to work part-time or not at all (Horowitz, 2020). Even the United States offered temporary income support in the shape of cash transfers. The pandemic both heightened and highlighted acute vulnerability that was no longer limited to the proverbial "poor". Across the planet, middle-class households discovered that the barriers separating relatively comfortable lives and secure livelihoods from precarity were much flimsier than previously thought. At the same time, social unrest and the rise of right-wing populism on every continent in the previous decade also focused the minds of political elites. The upshot was a broadening recognition that current distributional systems require a rethink.

A universal basic income in the "real world"

Among the more famous examples of a UBI is the so-called "Mincome Programme", which ran from 1974 to 1979 in Canada and became part of social policy folklore subsequently. The scheme entailed paying a monthly supplemental income of CAN$ 4,800 to about 1,000 low-income families in Dauphin, a small town in Manitoba province. After the Conservative Party won the federal election in 1979, the new government scrapped the experiment before analysing the results. Many years passed before an economist examined the data closely, and found that numerous health and other indicators had improved among recipients of the grant. A larger proportion of children in recipient families had completed Grade 12 compared with similar towns in the province. Hospital visits and admissions had declined, especially for mental health diagnoses, accidents and injuries, while reports of domestic violence had also decreased. Employment rates had stayed steady throughout the five-year trial, except among new mothers (who were able to spend more time with their children) and teenagers (who were able to give up part-time jobs and focus on schoolwork). All those effects disappeared when the experiment ended (Forget, 2011).

More closely resembling a universal income grant is an instrument that the US state of Alaska, introduced in 1999. The Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend annually pays each resident an equal share of the returns from investments in the specially created Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund, which is financed from a portion of the state’s annual oil revenue (Widerquist & Howard 2012). Studies have found that income distribution and poverty alleviation improved significantly after the dividend was introduced, though it has been difficult to determine to what extent the scheme has been responsible for those outcomes (Goldsmith, 2012). Analysis of the macroeconomic effects suggests that the payment does not reduce employment uptake and may increase uptake of part-time work (Jones & Marinescu, 2020).

An "accidental" UBI pilot in North Carolina, USA, also offers instructive insights. It occurred in the 1990s when the construction of a casino on Cherokee land coincided with a longitudinal comparative study of mental health among Cherokee American Indian children (aged 9-16 years). As part of the casino deal, all Cherokee Indian adults received about US$ 4,000 per year. Children in families receiving the payments performed better in school (with test scores 22 points higher, on average, than children in the control group), and displayed significantly better mental and behavioural health than their peers from non-tribal families (which did not receive the payments). Self-reported consumption of alcohol and drug among adults also decreased (Yoshikawa, Aber, Beardslee, 2012).

On a smaller scale, a basic income grant was introduced as a pilot project in 2008 and 2009 in the Namibian town of Otjivero-Omitara, near the capital, Windhoek. The grant payment of 100 Namibian dollars per month was unconditional and went to everyone younger than 60 years. Data were skewed by an influx of family members from elsewhere, which is why per capita income seemed to fall during the project. But substantial social benefits were recorded. The percentage of residents living in poverty fell from 76% to 37%, and among those who did not take in migrating family members, it fell to 17%. School drop out rates fell sharply, with 90% of school fees paid in full, while cases of child malnutrition declined by more than half (from 42% to 17%). Recipients also became more active in income-generating activities (Haarmann et al., 2009).

Several analogous pilot studies have been conducted in India, three of them by the Self-Employed Women's Association, in which thousands of men, women, and children received a small, monthly and unconditional income (Davala, Jhabvala, Standing, Mehta, 2015). The recipients' experiences were then compared with a control group of thousands of people who did not receive the payments. In the first pilot, implemented in Delhi in 2009, food rations were provided to low-income families along with cash transfers that were paid into the bank accounts of the eldest women in households. Both diets and nutrition levels in recipient families improved. In another pilot, in rural Madhya Pradesh, 5500 women and men received a cash payment directly into their bank accounts, while an equal number of people (not receiving payments) served as control group. Nutrition levels and school attendance for children were markedly higher in the recipient households, especially for girls. Women's participation in the labour market was not affected, though the kinds of work they performed did change (more own-account activities, less waged work), which tended to increase household income. Debts were also reduced. There was no observed increase in alcohol or tobacco consumption during the 18-month pilot (Davala et al., 2015).[35] Encouraged in part by these findings, the India Economic Survey in 2017 recommended that UBI be made available to all women in India (Jhabvala, 2019).

As of early 2021, dozens of basic income pilots or trials were underway or planned across the world. However, as noted earlier, very few involve universal incomes and many in fact are cash transfer pilots or demonstration projects that are targeted at unemployed and/or low-income individuals. Some are also conditional. These pilots usually involve small numbers of people and last a few years only, which limits their power and what they can reveal about the societal effects of such grants. The ongoing 12-year study Kenya is an important exception (Arnold, 2018).

Nonetheless, pilot studies thus far have provided encouraging data and insights regarding the short-run positive effects of basic income transfers, and have shown very little evidence of the predicted negative effects. Although most of them reveal little about the impact of large-scale programmes, the available evidence is instructive. It shows that a basic income reduces poverty and hospital admissions; improves diets and nutrition, schooling performances, mental health and psychological well-being; enhances independence and confidence (especially among women); and supports other income-generating activities and community-focused work. None of the studies has vindicated concerns about recipients retreating from the labour market, or spending the income on "temptation goods".[36]

However, the evidence also indicates that a UBI is not a "silver bullet" or panacea. Unless set at a relatively high amount, a basic income will not do away with income poverty,

[35] Jhabvala (2019) notes that "a study conducted five years after the experiment ended found that while a few families had dropped back to their previous conditions, usually due to subsequent health shocks, many of the specific outcomes persisted due to sustained growth of income".

[36] We return to these aspects below in Chapter 4, in the "Advantages over targeted and conditional support" section.

though it can substantially reduce poverty levels (even if set at a modest amount). Neither will it—on its own—shift the dynamics that reproduce poverty and inequality. Its full effect depends on whether and how it functions as part of a broader set of changes (including changes to social, macroeconomic and industrial policies). If deployed as part of a larger transformative project, a UBI can have a profoundly positive impact. The past 150 years have demonstrated that when all people have the security of a reliable income (whatever the sources) and can access other basic support and services, societies thrive as a whole.

4. THE ATTRACTIONS OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

The case for a UBI that functions as an indiscriminate and reliable source of income seems compelling. Much of the attraction is tied to the payment's potential to trigger a range of elemental but vital improvements in people's lives. This includes reduced poverty levels and income inequality, improved diets and health, boosted education attainment for children, and, due to UBI being a dependable source of income, reduced stress and improved mental health.

Proponents see a UBI replacing or supplementing poverty wages and providing an income cushion for people who churn between insecure and low-income jobs. They also argue that the payment would be more effective than most current forms of social protection at reaching people with no or very low incomes, and that it would achieve steeper poverty reduction. Since a UBI would be less intrusive than most conventional welfare instruments, it would spare recipients the stigma and humiliation associated with targeted and means-tested support.

A UBI would remunerate and value unpaid care and volunteer work, supporters claim, and it would underwrite participation in community activities, social networks and income-generating ventures. It would also benefit workers in the labour market (acting on both the supply and demand sides), and act as fillip to local economies (by strengthening aggregate demand). The latter effect could help shift the composition of spending towards local production and labour-intensive sectors.

Some advocates see a UBI as much more than a social policy intervention to alleviate poverty and strengthen the social safety net; they assign it transformative power. If pursued as part of a broader push for social and economic change, say proponents, a UBI could help recast labour relations, support a transition away from fossil fuel-based economic models, and shift gender relations by strengthening women’s financial independence and remunerating their domestic and care work. It would alter the relationship between the state and citizens, and shift the state from operating as a paternalistic dispenser of assistance to "deserving" beneficiaries to acting as an indiscriminate and facilitating source of support to all who need it. In this view, a UBI implies, a different kind of state—one that socialises the means to dignified life. Such a transformative UBI could serve as a springboard towards a social order that no longer condemns parts of society to misery and humiliation, holding them hostage to the edict that, "no matter how it dulls the senses and breaks the spirit, one must work" (Terkel, 1972, p. i). Do these claims hold up?

Reducing income poverty

All else staying equal, a basic income payment can be expected to reduce income poverty and narrow the poverty gap, irrespective of the amount. Supporting that expectation is the documented evidence of the effects of basic income-type programmes discussed earlier (in Chapter 3), It is also supported by evidence from cash transfer and other social grant schemes. According to the World Bank (2018), which has enthusiastically promoted the expansion of cash transfers in low- and middle-income countries for the past two decades, cash transfers reduced the global poverty headcount rate by 8% percent and the poverty gap by 30% in 2015.

In SA, expanded eligibility and greater take-up of social grants (especially the child support grant) was singled out as an important cause of declining poverty levels in the early 2000s (Meth, 2007). Subsequent research made similar findings. Other researchers have credited the social grants with significantly reduced poverty levels (especially in provinces with high poverty rates, such as Eastern Cape and Limpopo) and in female-headed households (Satumba, Bayat, Mohamed, 2017). Analysis of data from the 2010/11 Income and Expenditure Survey data (Statistics South Africa, 2012) showed that receipt of social grants significantly reduced poverty levels in areas with high poverty rates, among the African population, in female-headed households and in rural areas. Although the child support grant was worth only ZAR 260 per month in 2011, it reduced poverty levels in Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces by 11% and 10%, respectively (Satumba et al. 2017). According to a more recent estimate, levels of persistent poverty in SA would have been 8% higher in 2014/2015 in the absence of social grants (Posel, 2016). Gaining access directly or indirectly to state cash transfers is, according to Du Toit and Neves (2014), probably the single-most important component of what they termed the "arts of survival" for people living at the margins of the formal economy in SA.

During first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the SA Government introduced a monthly ZAR 350 Social Relief of Distress grant (also known as the "COVID-19 grant") and a monthly ZAR 500 Caregivers Allowance grant. Although the eligibility criteria were restrictive, the emergency grants reduced the number of people living below the Food Poverty Line (ZAR 585 in 2020) by more than half within less than a year, from an estimated 9.8 million to 4.1 million (Institute for Economic Justice, 2021; Bhorat & Kohler, 2020).

While cautioning against over-attributing direct and linear effects to social grants and reminding that they "cannot single-handedly move people out of poverty", Stefan Granlund and Tessa Hochsfeld have concluded that

> the grants have opened up new possibilities, primarily for women and pensioners, to increase their status and position in households and communities in South Africa. Social grants are indeed key to survival in impoverished rural communities in South Africa and to those who traditionally had less economic power. (2020, p. 1241)

There is controversy elsewhere, however, about the impact of cash transfers on poverty reduction, with some studies in Latin America attributing a much larger impact to job creation and wage increases. Lena Lavinas (2013, p. 32) found that, "it is primarily rising labour earnings that have accounted for the decline in poverty in Brazil, as was the case elsewhere in Latin America." Other analysis of Brazil's Bolsa Familia between 1999 and 2009 also indicates that minimum wage legislation (and possibly also a tightened labour market in the context of a commodity export boom) contributed considerably more to inequality reduction than did cash payments (Soares, Ferreira de Souza, Osório, Silveira, 2010).

That is not surprising, given that labour income accounted for about 70% of total income in Brazil at the time. The impact of the cash payments would have registered mainly among the lowest deciles of income earners, whereas wage increases were felt more broadly across the income distribution. Brazil's unemployment rate was 10% in 1999 and it decreased over the next decade (World Bank, 2021c). But the broader point stands: increased job creation and real wages, particularly at the lower end of the wage spectrum, can have a substantial income-raising effect in settings. For that to happen, large proportions of adults must have access to wage employment and job creation especially has to benefit low-skilled workers. Unfortunately, such an achievement has proved elusive in SA, where more than 40% of the working-age population is unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2020a).

The SA grants have also been credited with slowing the pace at which income inequality has widened. In one estimate, income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, would have been 0.74 without the social grants in the early 2010s, instead of 0.69 (Bhorat & Cassim, 2014). Ultimately, the redistributive effect of a UBI would depend on how it is financed, a matter we discuss in more detail below (in Chapter 6). If financed by taxing income and wealth of recipients above specific income thresholds, a UBI would reduce income inequality (all else equal). But if financed by replacing current social wage provisioning that targets the poorest deciles (the scenario favoured by UBI supporters on the Right), the intervention would redistribute income upward and will have a catastrophic effect on the poor (Reed & Lansley, 2016).

Inequality, of course, also manifests beyond the domains of income and expenditure. It is evident along the axes of subordination and domination, and the uneven liberty available to people for safeguarding their interests and pursuing their goals. It plays out in the respect and trust people are afforded, and in their vulnerability to stigmatisation. And it is palpable in the assigning of rank, status and entitlement. In all these respects, as we discuss below, a UBI can contribute to narrowing inequalities.

Advantages over targeted and conditional support

Crucially, the kind of UBI considered here reaffirms the principle of universalism and thereby satisfies the criterion of fairness. Everyone gets a UBI, a payment for which they do not have to work. Anyone who chooses to work can seek and accept that work—and still receive the payment. Since a UBI is neither targeted nor means-tested, it avoids flaws and undesirable consequences associated with conventional forms of welfare support. It would spare recipients the humiliation of "proving" their impoverishment and need to state officials, and it would reduce the intrusive and overbearing features of welfare support. Instead of judging, rationing, dispensing and policing income support, the state's role shifts towards indiscriminately facilitating people's well-being.

A UBI should also be more effective than targeted and means-tested methods for distributing income to poor households. Means testing and targeting mechanisms are administratively challenging and expensive. They imply particular roles for the state (judging, managing and policing citizens), imageries of citizens (untrustworthy and lacking responsibility), and divisive and moralistic assumptions about entitlement and deservingness. They also tend to miss substantial proportions of intended beneficiaries, and therefore are not very effective for drastically reducing income poverty, as Thandika Mkandawire (2005) has shown. It is often difficult to identify and enrol no- and very low-income beneficiaries (Ravallion, 2018), partly because their lives intersect minimally with the statistical and administrative arms of the state. Poor data collection and management systems compound the problem. High exclusion rates have bedevilled targeted cash transfer programmes in Latin America, for example: those rates reached up to 46% in Brazil's flagship Bolsa Familia programme (despite the country's relatively strong administrative capacity) and were even higher in Mexico's Oportunidades programme (Lavinas, 2013; Kerstenetzky, 2009).[37]

Yet some forms of targeting do seem valid, even necessary, for achieving a generalised desirable outcome. For instance, if the purpose of a subsidised public housing programme is to ensure universal access to affordable housing, it makes sense to target the programme at specific eligible beneficiaries (rather than across-the-board eligibility). But targeting can be a highly incomplete method for pursuing a "universalist" objective. Context matters. In a market-driven context, unless the public housing programme operates as part of an overarching housing strategy (and with it, financing systems, pricing restrictions, zoning regulations etc.) that advances universalist principles, it will reproduce underlying inequalities. In and of itself, targeting tends to not promote universalism: it asserts differences and endorses segmentation. It is also insensitive to the small changes in people's circumstances that can shift them in and out of eligible categories, making it difficult to reliably identify who should receive support at a given point, and causing interruptions and delays in the despatch and receipt of support.

Means-testing and targeting carry the risk of establishing capricious differences between those who deemed eligible for income and those who are not, based on ephemeral and

[37] The Social Relief of Distress grants introduced in SA during the COVID-19 pandemic encountered these and additional problems, according to an Auditor-General report. It found that the administrating structure had been using outdated, limited databases, which allowed for several thousand fraudulent claims of the ZAR 350 (US$ 23) per month grant. Tightened verification processes then led to month-long delays and excessively high rejection rates (of 33%). See Anon (2020a).

very slight differences in income or other circumstances. In societies with pervasive and deep poverty, targeted income support involves cruel, bureaucratic arbitrariness—by administratively separating and then allocating or denying support to individuals and households who, in terms of income and life circumstances, are almost indistinguishable (Ferguson, 2007). Analysing income distribution data from Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia, Frank Ellis (2008) found that very small differences in personal and family circumstances separated people in the bottom 50-60% of per capita consumption. When eligibility is structured around such "tiny variations in circumstance [which] ordinary people do not perceive as real differences", it feeds a sense of unfairness, resentment and social tension (Ellis, 2008, p. 9). More generally, targeted support tends to fuel social stigma against beneficiaries and generate self-stigma among those beneficiaries (Walker, 2014).

For such reasons, Mkandawire (2005) argued that, in places where very large proportions of the population are poor, targeted cash transfers defy common sense, especially if transfers to the "non-poor" can be taxed back. Similarly, Ravallion (2018, p. 22) has suggested that a UBI is preferable to targeted income support and "may well make sense—possibly more sense—in places with poor information, weak capabilities for targeting, and a high poverty rate." However, the pitfalls and perverse effects of targeting and means-testing are not limited to settings of pervasive poverty. Ostensibly reflecting a compassionate concern for the poor, targeted support aligns with the narrowed understandings of the state's obligations towards people, which have shifted from consistently enhancing people's capabilities and supporting their well-being to intervening *in extremis* to manage indigence.

By undermining cross-class solidarities, targeted and means-tested programmes also tends to reduce broad-based support for universal public provisioning and antipoverty interventions (Sen, 1995), and can lead to reduced investment and deteriorating quality of public services. Kerstenetzky (2009) presciently highlighted that risk in the Brazilian context, where political and fiscal attacks (with mobilised support from the middle- and upper-classes) later dismembered the Bolsa Familia programme. Evidence from Europe also suggests that redistribution tends to be weak in welfare systems that rely on targeted assistance to the poor and stronger where universal provision occurs (Huber & Stephens, 2012; Korpi & Palme, 1998).[38]

A UBI also avoids the segmentation and implicit judgements about deservedness that are associated with conditional forms of social assistance. Internationally, most cash grants are tied to certain conditions, often involving school enrolment for children and/or health-seeking behaviours. Brazil's Bolsa Familia[39] and Mexico's Opportunidades scheme[40] are among the best-known examples, though dozens of other countries have introduced similar programmes.

Conditionalities are loaded with paternalism and distrust. They express a working assumption that many recipients will fail to use the public assistance to the benefit of their households unless forced to do so. A particular idea of the state—as a domineering though beneficent authority—is built into conditional social support. Yet there are compelling grounds for questioning a causal relationship between the conditionalities that are attached to cash transfers and the reported positive outcomes (such as school or health facility attendance) (Lavinas, 2013). And there is scant, if any, evidence that unconditional transfers are associated with increased expenditures on so-called "temptation goods" (e.g. alcohol and cigarettes): a recent metareview of 30 studies cash transfers from Africa, Asia and Latin America found the evidence pointed in the opposite direction (Evans & Popova, 2014).

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

Income support provided during the "first wave" of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 provided similar insights into the deficiencies of conditional, targeted or means-tested social protection. The emergency cash grants provided in SA brought vital relief to millions of people, but suffered significant coverage gaps—a reminder of the hazards of using targeting and means-testing methods to reach impoverished households with assistance. Almost half (3.1 million) of the estimated 6.5 million eligible individuals not

[38] For a refinement of Korpi and Palme's proposition, see Jacques & Noel (2018).

[39] A combination of four earlier income transfer schemes (including the *bolsa escola*), this means-tested scheme focused on schooling, nutrition and health. Recipients decided how to use the grants, but they had to abide by several conditions, including school attendance for children up to 15 years, attending antenatal classes for pregnant women, and vaccinations for children younger than seven years.

[40] Conditionality called for school attendance of 85% or more, regular medical check-ups for the children, and "parenting classes" for the parents (Skoufias, 2005).

receiving the "COVID-19 grant" by mid-2020 were in the poorest third of households (Bhorat & Kohler, 2020).

In the United States, as well, pandemic relief underscored the many limitations of that country's social security architecture. As analysists pointed out, work-seeking conditionalities made no sense during "stay-home" lockdowns, the usual 6-month eligibility limit for assistance was unrealistic, and the exclusion of contract and self-employed workers from support was unjust. An eventual US$ 600 per week unemployment insurance payment involved additional unfairness: people deemed "essential workers", many of them working for very low wages, received no supplemental benefits even though they were risking their health and that of their families. In Almaz Zelleke's (2020) opinion,

> had lawmakers approved a universal US$ 600 weekly supplement for all, regardless of work status, essential workers would have received a well-deserved bonus while the unemployed would have received a financial cushion and the prospect of financial gain, not loss, from returning to work.

The scale and nature of need that erupted during the COVID-19 pandemic have also revealed how out-of-date and inappropriate current forms of income support are. Due to its universality, a UBI would avoid the paternalism, arbitrariness, lack of fairness, stigmatisation, inefficiencies and burdensome administrative aspects of conditional, means-tested and/or targeted support.

Promoting health, education and well-being

That is not to dismiss the potential, positive effects of rationed cash transfers and other targeted forms of income support. A large amount of international evidence on the effects of conditional or unconditional cash transfers indicates the kinds of benefits that a UBI, even if set a relatively low amounts, can trigger. They include improvements in maternal and child health, and children's nutritional and education status (Pega, Liu, Walter, Pabayo, Saith et al., 2017; Bastagli, Hagen-Zanker, Harman, Sturge, Barca et al., 2016; Statistics South Africa, 2009; Aguero, Carter, Woolard, 2006); Case, Hosegood, Lund, 2004), reduced psychological distress (Baird & de Hoop, Özler, 2013), as well as enhanced dignity of the elderly and of young mothers (Moore & Seekings, 2019; Wright et al., 2015; Zembe-Mkabile et al., 2015). Cochrane reviews of unconditional cash transfer programmes have also found evidence of improvements in health incomes, nutritional status (e.g. food intake and diverse diets) and school attendance, and increased use of healthcare services (Pega et al., 2017; Lagarde, Haines, Palmer, 2009).

Significantly, a 2009 Cochrane review also highlighted the importance of wider, contextual factors for those outcomes. Although plausibly the result of cash transfer programmes, the reported improvements in health outcomes also depended on access to quality primary healthcare services, for example. This reminds that the effects of cash-based forms of income support are shaped profoundly by the contexts in which they are deployed. If used as substitutes for (rather than components of) other strategies of provisioning, redistribution and development, their benefits are likely to be limited and short-lived.

Unfortunately, cash transfers currently tend to be detached from or poorly coordinated with broader systems of social provisioning. In some cases, they are being introduced while other forms of social provisioning or support (e.g. education, food or fuel subsidies) are restructured or reduced (Fischer, 2018; Fine, 2015). Alert to these patterns of provisioning, Andrew Fischer (2018, p. 234) has argued that the key consideration is not whether a cash transfer nudges people above a designated poverty line, but whether such marginal improvements occur in ways that counter or reinforce wider stratifying and segregating dynamics across society. This again draws attention to the overarching importance of the roles and obligations that the state assumes towards society, and the priorities it pursues.

Implicit in such a perspective is the vital matter of how we discern and measure impact. When assessing cash transfers, for example, the emphasis tends to be on whether access to certain services or entitlements has increased (e.g. are more children attending school or completing their education). That focus is much too narrow. When gauging the impact of a basic income or cash transfer on, for example, people's health or education it is not enough to measure changes in health-seeking behaviour or in school attendance and attainment. We have to consider the overall availability, terms of access to, and quality of basic health and education services—not just the coverage or access of a specific section of society.

In many countries, SA included, health and education systems are deeply segmented and unequal, with investment and resources inordinately concentrated in private facilities that a small minority of the population can use. Overburdened and under-resourced, the public health system struggles to provide quality healthcare services, forcing households (even those with modest incomes) to spend large portions of income on private health insurance and healthcare (Ottersen, Dasgupta, Blouin et al., 2014; Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders, McIntyre, 2009). Education and health outcomes are correspondingly unequal. A cash payment (or other intervention, such as the removal of healthcare user fees) may increase the uptake of poorly resourced and overburdened services, while leaving wider health and other inequalities untouched. In the absence of sufficient investment in public education or health infrastructure and other resources, cash transfers are unlikely to significantly improve education or health outcomes overall—which should be the objective. Thus, the Progressa/Oportudinades programmes in Mexico were credited with increasing consumption levels, school attendance and certain health outcomes at relatively low cost—but the programme actually appeared to have a negligible impact on academic performance and employment prospects (Fischer, 2018). Other large reviews of cash transfers have noted similar shortcomings (Department for International Development, 2011), as did Sánchez-Ancochea and Mattei (2011, p. 313), in their study of Brazi's Bolsa Familia:

> Most of the evidence points to Bolsa Família's positive contribution to the reduction of poverty and inequality in the short run […] Bolsa Família cannot, however, deliver a sustained improvement in health and education outcomes and a reduction of poverty and inequality in the long run. These goals will only be met through an expansion in health and education services and, especially, an improvement in their quality.

The scale and endurance of socioeconomic benefits attributed to cash transfers and predicted for a UBI depend on them being embedded in wider strategies to uphold universalist principles, pursue egalitarian goals and create inclusive societies (Fischer, 2018).

Boosting economies

A UBI can also have an effect on how economies operate, including stabilising aggregate demand and contributing to economic growth. The expectation is that the payment would increase purchasing power and demand among low-income consumers, whose expenditures tend focus on basic, locally-produced and typically labour-intensive commodities and services. In a semi-industrialised setting such as SA, which does not import many basic commodities, this is could further stimulate local production and job creation in some sectors.

Modeling of UBI scenarios in the United States has shown that, irrespective of the financing method (whether through increased debt or raising income taxes), basic income payments would grow the economy (Nikiforos, Steinbaum, Zezza, 2017). The larger the payment, the larger the growth effect (more than 12% growth in gross domestic product over eight years for an annual UBI payment of US$ 1,000 for all adults). In addition to increases in output, the model also predicts rises in employment, labour force participation and wages.[41] Mark Blyth and Eric Lonergan (2014), argue that infusions of cash directly to households via such income transfers could also reduce dependence on the banking system for growth.

On a more immediate and localised level, a UBI would support small-scale, community-based economic activities, including food production (Williams, 2018a), repair work and other services, as well as support community economies of care (Gibson-Graham, 2005). Studies of cash transfer programmes show that the grants are often used for local income-generating or bartering activities, including purchasing agricultural inputs, and for supporting community-focused initiatives, such as cultural groups, food projects and cooperatives (Bastagli, 2016). This is not to romanticise the impact: in an impoverished rural area such as Keiskammahoek, in SA's Eastern Cape province, for example, social grants are a vital source of income, but are too small to release recipients from survivalist livelihoods. Nonetheless, the grants provide reliable and regular means for organising and participating in community economies which otherwise would be inaccessible (Williams, 2018a). It is at local levels that a UBI can also provide vital support as communities struggle with the impact of climate change and the restructuring of industries and jobs as economies shift away from hydrocarbon-based activities.

Supporting a just transition

SA, like every other country on the planet, stands in the path of colliding and escalating crises: the multiple upheavals associated with global warming; zoonotic disease

[41] Even in a deficit-financed policy, the increase in government's liabilities is offset to some degree by the increase in aggregate demand. The model assumed that the payment would not reduce household labour participation (a very reasonable assumption for such a small payment).

epidemics that emerge from the destabilisation of ecologies by unchecked extractive activities; successive financial crises; increasing social precarity; and the faltering legitimacy of political systems. These commotions are arriving regularly, but in unpredictable ways that reduce the impact of piecemeal, reactive policies. More blanketing, long-lasting interventions are needed.

In every foreseeable outlook, economies will have to shift progressively away from fossil-fuel dependency and green house gas-intensive modes of extraction, production and mobility. This will require well-targeted investments and policies for economic diversification and rapid development of new or nascent sectors. Since these changes will especially affect workers and communities whose livelihoods currently depend on the fossil fuel-based activities, it is vital, as noted in the Paris Agreement, to also prepare a "just transition of the workforce" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015). In addition to its many other benefits, a UBI can be an important supplement to that process and to the wider project of a just transition.

As with a UBI, there are competing understandings of a just transition and of a "green economy" (Cock, 2014). While some conceptions are compatible with "green growth" economic models that "perpetuate or exacerbate current patterns of inequity" (Eisenberg, 2019, p. 282), others focus on achieving expansive social and environmental justice. It is important to note, as Stevis and Felli (2016) do, that these different conceptions imply different degrees of concern about social inequality and particularly about the fact that environmental harm—and the responsibility for that harm—is distributed unequally across societies.

In the more limited understandings of a just transition, the scale and/or scope of interventions tends to be narrow (e.g. incentivising renewables and "green jobs",[42] "green consumerism", carbon trading, and "green techno-fixes" such as carbon sequestration), while leaving untouched the political economies that drive ecological crisis and generate social injustice. These conceptions have attracted the description "green capitalism", which seeks to turn "a medium/long-term, system-threatening prospect into a short-term source of commodification, speculation and profit" (Bond, 2011, p. 2).

[42] The compatibility of green jobs with a "next-generation" version of growth-oriented green capitalism has led to the formulation of an alternative formulation of climate jobs, which would be primarily in the public sector.

A deep just transition

The concept of a just transition favoured in this text emphasises the links between ecological catastrophe, economic exploitation and social injustice, and is sometimes referred to as a deep just transition. It recognises the need for structural changes that drastically reduce the harm done to both people and the environment, and that promote a fair distribution of resources and the means for dignified life (Cock, 2014; Farrel, 2012). It rejects the idea "that industrial societies can be made sustainable with modest adjustments and corrections" (Warner, 2010, p. 553) or, to use the cliché favoured by policymakers during the COVID-19 pandemic, by merely "building back better".

The principle of equity is central. A deep just transition involves actions and seeks outcomes that are indiscriminately good for both humans and the ecologies that sustain us (Bookchin, 2007) and that can overcome long-standing inequities and inequalities (Eisenberg, 2019; Climate Justice Alliance, 2018; Heally & Barry, 2017). It therefore slots into a broader emancipatory project. At a minimum, it has to prevent the impact of environmentally destructive human activities, of global warming and of mitigating actions from being deflected onto disadvantaged communities (Stevis & Felli, 2016). And it has to respond to the fact that low-income communities historically are most affected by, yet least responsible for the ecological crisis. That pattern is exemplified in SA, where racism, economic exploitation and expropriation, and environmental destruction overlaps profoundly.

Since a deep just transition calls for a unified pursuit of environmental and social justice, it cannot be entrusted to market forces that are "nudged" along by state incentives and regulation (Cock, 2014). It requires an active and accountable state that manages a set of phased, long-term strategies and establishes the necessary conditions and supportive institutional arrangements. Central elements of a deep just transition include ending investments and subsidies in extractive and carbon-intensive industries; shifting to renewable energy sources and low-carbon modes of production, distribution and transport; repairing environmental damage; and supporting workers and communities affected by the restructuring. While the state is responsible for stewarding these changes, the transition will have to be driven also from the community level, upwards—and it will have to align with the understandings, support and actions of communities and the workers among them.

The environmental justice movement routinely encounters "jobs blackmail" tactics, with companies claiming that tighter environmental regulation or restructuring will destroy jobs and livelihoods. Existing environmental protections in industrialised settings have tended to have minimal negative effects on employment (Cao, Wang, Ying, 2017; Golombek & Raknerud, 1997), and there is evidence that innovative transitions to environmentally sustainable economic activities can lead to increases in employment (Horbach & Rennings, 2013). But expectations of a frictionless transition to an environmentally sustainable and just economic model do seem unrealistic: workers and communities who depend on mining and other extractive industries, fossil fuel-based energy and energy-intensive production will be affected, as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2016) recognises.[43]

It is therefore vital that public policy minimises the disruptive impact of the transition to a low-carbon economy and supports affected workers and their communities (Pollin & Callaci, 2016). Active labour market policies (including education, retraining and subsidised employment) are among the interventions needed to protect affected workers and communities (Piggot, Boyland, Down, Raluca Torre, 2019). But, as Stevis and Felli (2016, p. 38) have warned:

> compensation or retraining may alleviate the distress of laid-off workers but they often do not extend to the community in which these workers are embedded [...] just transitions have to take into account all the affected parties, as well as the unequal power relations amongst them.

Due to its universality, a UBI can be an important element of a phased, equitable transition by contributing predictable income support across entire communities. In doing so, it can help create space for labour environmentalism to move beyond defending jobs in a "green economy" and to pursue broader economic and social emancipation.

Linking a universal basic income to a just transition in South Africa

The SA Government's approach to climate change policy to date has lacked ambition (Cock, 2014; Satgar, 2018; Hallowes & Munnik, 2019). The emphasis has been on "bringing the efficiency of the market to bear on nature and its reproduction" (Cock, 2014, p. 29-30), with both policy and practice reflecting the continued power of

[43] The concept of a just transition originated within the labour movement, and is often traced to United States labour and environmental activist Tony Mazzochi, who emphasised the need to go beyond zero-sum scenarios that pitted environmental demands as threats to workers' interests and livelihoods.

corporations active in the extractive and energy sectors. SA renewable energy policy, for example, relies preponderantly on competitive, private sector provision, encouraged by subsidies and other incentives. The Integrated Resource Plan 2019-2030 sets out an unaspiring route that involves decommissioning coal-fired power stations and increasing the uptake of renewable energy, while also adding new coal-fired power. This hesitant approach reflects, at root, political-economic challenges—including a perceived inability of the state to subject powerful corporate actors[44] to a state-led restructuring process, and the timid commitment of important trade unions to support such a transition.

The mining and utilities sectors in SA are prime targets for shifting away from a carbon-intensive model, with coal mining and electricity generation particular priorities. The country's abundant coal reserves—it is the world's seventh-largest coal producer—favoured the development a carbon-intensive economy that relies heavily on cheap coal, in particular coal-based electricity generation. "Mining grew through its reliance on coal energy and the coal industry grew through mining's ever-growing demands for more energy," as Michelle Williams (2018b, p. 240) has reminded.

SA relies on coal for 90% of its electricity and 25% of liquid fuels. However, it is technically feasible to decarbonise the power sector and transition to a renewable energy system. The decreasing prices of renewables add to the attractiveness of such a strategy, as does the job-creating potential of the renewable energy sector (Hallowes & Munnik, 2019). But those changes will affect the livelihoods of many thousands of workers and their families and communities—at least in the short term. The prospect seems ominous when one considers that the coal mining industry employed approximately 94 000 workers in 2017, mostly in Mpumalanga Province (Minerals Council South Africa, 2019), while Eskom (the national electricity supplier) employed about 47 000 workers (Eskom, 2017) and Sasol (the state-owned petroleum-from-coal enterprise) about 28 000 workers (Eskom, 2018). A shift to renewables that steadily shutters the coal mining industry and coal-fired electricity would seem to be dauntingly costly in terms of jobs (and wages) lost. A modest UBI would compensate only very partially for the lost

[44] Particularly those at the heart of the Minerals-Energy Complex, which, as described by Fine and Rustomjee (1996), has been anchored in a combination of abundant, cheap labour and abundant, cheap energy from coal, with the parastatal power utility Eskom at its centre.

incomes.[45] It will require a transition strategy that is specific to those industries, and that brokered by the state and driven by trade union organising to ensure that workers have viable post-restructuring livelihoods (including severance packages).[46] Such a strategy is both feasible and affordable.

Calculations done by Michelle Cruywagen and colleagues (2019) suggest that if coal mining in SA were to be entirely phased out over 20 years amid "natural" attrition via retirement in the workforce, an average 2,700 workers per year would need to be shifted into other employment and/or receive livelihood support until they can do so.[47] If the transition away from coal halves the labour force over the next two decades, it would entail 600 younger workers annually requiring new employment. The scale of this challenge seems manageable.[48] In Cruywagen's estimates, it would cost about ZAR 16 billion over 20 years to shrink the coal mining workforce by 75%. By way of comparison, according to estimates done by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, coal-based fuels produced by Sasol's Secunda plant in SA received more than ZAR 8 billion in total government support during 2019 alone (Pant, Mostafa, Bridle, 2020).[49] The direct, worker-related transition in this sector therefore seems both feasible and affordable.[50]

But beyond this lies a wider challenge of supporting the communities in which those industries operate. Some of this community-level support can be built into sector transition strategies (for example, via the "rehabilitation" component in the estimates of Cruywagen and her colleagues). And some of it would come via a UBI, functioning in the

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[45] According to the SA Chamber of Mines, the average monthly salary for a coal miner in 2019 was ZAR 25 600 (slightly more than the average ZAR 23 200 monthly salary earned by workers in gold mining) (Minerals Council South Africa, 2019).

[46] Almost 80% of workers in SA's mining sector were members of a trade union in 2017, as were 64% of workers in the utilities sector, making them the sectors with the highest rates of unionisation. In both sectors, union membership levels had risen in the previous five years. See Statistics South Africa (2017b).

[47] That would involve a phased end to the use of coal for electricity generation, and to coal exports as well as the use of industrial and metallurgical coal, and Sasol's coal-to-liquid fuel industry.

[48] The costing includes compensation for 5 years (for the wage differential between coal mining jobs and renewables jobs), retraining, relocation (for workers originally from other provinces) and rehabilitation and other support to the local communities and economies.

[49] That includes ZAR 1.6 billion in direct subsidies through the basic fuel price and a further ZAR 6.5 billion due to exemptions from the Carbon Tax Act 15 of 2019, under which Sasol pays no tax on more than 90% of its emissions.

[50] Similarly, a phased shift away from coal-based to renewable electricity generation, also appears to be feasible and affordable. Coal supplies to Eskom accounted for about 38 000 coal miner jobs in 2017, a little under half of the total workforce in that industry. All else being equal, entirely phasing out Eskom-tied coal mining jobs over 20 years would require new employment and/or livelihood support for 1200-1300 workers per year.

background as a support system to mitigate the "collateral" costs of restructuring and bring livelihood support to workers and communities who indirectly depend on income and other resources linked to the phased-out industries.

A UBI therefore would address the need for interventions that reach beyond job substitution, worker retraining and severance packages. By providing tangible recompense, it would also respond to the historical practices of dumping onto disadvantaged communities many of the "hidden" costs associated with industrial growth and restructuring. By extending predictable, regular income support to the households and wider communities of vulnerable workers, it can help assuage potential resistance to restructuring and help counter the "jobs blackmail" tactics customarily used against the environmental justice movement (Lawhon & McCreary, 2020).

A UBI can also support activities that drive social reproduction and improve well-being and livelihood security at community level (e.g. local food production, mutual aid networks, repair work and local services, artisanal and cultural production etc.). Neighbourhood-level food production and urban agriculture will become increasingly important as climate change disruptions accumulate. In SA, food security is predicted to deteriorate due to rising food prices (as input costs rise, extreme weather phenomena cause crop damage or failure, and arable land is diverted from food production to biofuels) (Cock, 2014). Regulatory and other state interventions will be crucial to counter food price inflation, as will be systematic support for greater food self-sufficiency at community level, which a UBI can help underwrite. In these varied ways, a UBI that supports community livelihoods and sustainability can be a powerful component of a just transition.

Protecting and supporting workers

A common claim among some supporters of a UBI is that such a scheme is needed to protect workers against an anticipated erasure of jobs, as artificial intelligence and other automating technologies displace traditional work performed by humans (Yang, 2020; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Mason, 2015). As discussed in Chapter 2, forecasts about the extent and impact of a "fourth industrial revolution" are vulnerable to charges of exaggeration (Henwood, 2015; Baker, 2015; Autor, 2015) or misreading (Houseman, 2018) of the evidence, and can rely on blunt understandings of how and why new technologies are deployed in capitalist economies (Frase, 2016). New technologies are not used simply because they are available; they are used strategically. Companies tend to try to operate in a "goldilocks zone", where they can employ enough automation to hoist profits and depress labour costs, while avoiding the major capital expenditures of full-scale conversion. This is evident also in a country such as SA, which has to finance technology imports and maintenance with a volatile currency and in a vulnerable balance of payments context. Artificial intelligence and other automating technologies are attractive in some service sectors in SA, e.g. banking, communications and media. However, the incentive to automate low-wage, low-skill work tends to be offset by the abundance of cheap, quickly replaceable labour. In the SA setting, the case for a UBI draws its strength perhaps less from the prospect of a "fourth industrial revolution" than from the other, less literal effects it can have on the world of work.

The transformative potential of a basic income

Supporters on the Left see a UBI also as a forward-looking intervention which, if used as part of wider strategies for social and economic change, holds strong transformative potential (Van Parijs, 2004; Wright, 2003; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Raine, 2019). Unlike policy responses that stay anchored in employment creation, a UBI would be attuned to an unfolding reality in which, in David Harvey's words, "labour is becoming less and less significant to how the economic engine of capitalism functions" (2014, p. 110). Precarity is not a cyclical, but a chronic phenomenon affecting ever-growing proportions of society, including people in paid employment, as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted.

This expulsive tendency of the capitalist system became vivid in 2020, after the first phase of COVID-19 pandemic "lockdowns" had shut production and commerce across much of the planet. Stock prices on the major bourses initially dipped sharply, prompting central banks to flood markets with liquidity (and to signal a willingness and capacity to keep doing so). Amid ever-grimmer data and forecasts on economic growth, unemployment and income inequality, stock prices then soared and kept rising, as if oblivious to underlying realities (Foster, Jonna, Clark, 2021). Wall Street profits in the first 6 months of 2020 were over 80% higher than the year before. At first glance baffling, this reflected the ongoing delinking of financialised capital from the rest of the capitalist economy, with the "mundane" processes of production and consumption in the "real economy" receding in importance, at least from its vantage point (Varoufakis, 2016). Revealed is the fact that increasingly powerful sectors of the economy—particularly those centred on financialised activities—are able to flourish while productive activities crumble and penury increases. This paradoxical process continues amid a host of upheavals triggered by associated economic instability, climate change shocks, and social and political tumult. As they battle to regain or increase profitability, companies meanwhile offload costs onto workers and their communities.

In such conditions it is unrealistic to anchor material security, well-being and social inclusion in the sale and rewards of increasingly obsolete wage labour. And, as the link between waged work and secure livelihoods continues to fray, systems providing temporary, conditional redress and support are no longer suitable. In settings where that link has been effectively severed—such as SA—those systems are plainly deficient.

A universal basic income brings the principle of social justice to the fore, dismisses the notion that personal responsibility determines social outcomes, and defies the linking of state support to judgements about "deservingness" and "just deserts". Implicit in such an intervention is the acknowledgment that factors beyond individual control decide the distribution of capabilities and resources—and that egalitarian outcomes demand systematic redistributive interventions.

A liberating effect

A UBI, if large enough, potentially dilutes the most powerful coercive sanction capital commands: hunger and need. Social policy typically reinforces that power—by affording assistance only to those who are too young, old or frail to perform waged work, or who can demonstrate a consistent willingness to sell their labour. A UBI destabilises that organising principle. In theory, the right to turn down offers of employment is essential for a well-functioning labour market: a free contract requires that both parties have the ability to decline an offer. But absent other sources of livelihood, labour markets are intrinsically coercive—all the more so in job-scarce environments. Capitalist economies drastically skew power relations between employers and workers, and the imbalance is reinforced institutionally, including through labour market regulation and social policy design.

A dependable source of income that is independent of waged work would modulate that power imbalance, by providing workers with the means to hold out for improved offers—in line with Michal Kalecki's argument, in his 1943 essay “Political aspects of full employment", that employers' power would diminish if people could make a living without having to accept whatever job was on offer. Erik Olin Wright saw even greater potential, and argued that a UBI which releases people from the duress of selling their labour at the going rate and terms could destabilise capitalist class relations:

> A generous, unconditional basic income which would allow employees a meaningful exit option from the employment relation that directly transforms the character of power within the class relations of capitalist society. (2003, p. 79)

The expectation seems overwrought at first. A more literal positive effect—on wage levels—seems more plausible. A UBI that enables sufficient numbers of workers to withhold their labour should tighten the labour supply, leading to upward pressure on the reservation wage (or the lowest wage at which a worker is likely to perform a given task). This could have a kick-on effect across other wage bands (in the manner of a minimum wage). By endowing "the weakest with bargaining power" (Van Parijs, 2003, p. 10), a UBI would function like a "permanent strike fund" (Battistoni, 2018), a basis for altering the balance of power between workers and employers:

> Where workers individually have easier exit options, employers may have greater incentives to agree to new forms of collective cooperation with organizations of workers. (Wright, 2003, p. 80)

Similarly, Yanis Varoufakis (2017) sees a UBI not as a mere safety net, but as a foundation for free, enabled action. A UBI would grant people the freedom not to sell their labour and to withdraw, at least temporarily, from a "race to the bottom" that pits low-skilled workers against one another. If the bare necessities of life can be secured elsewhere, exploitative or demeaning wage labour is no longer the only option on the table. In this way, the payment would introduce countervailing power, to the extent that it enables people to turn down or exit work without jeopardising their lives. These expectations remain untested in practice. Even if realised, the extent of such empowering and liberating effects would depend on the size of the UBI; the larger the amount, the stronger the effect. A small UBI, which only finances short breaks between jobs, may subsidise the search for (better-paying) employment without releasing people from the compulsion of waged labour. This could add upward pressure to wages and increase people's scope for choice, but would lack a liberating effect.

Critics dispute the likelihood of positive, work-related outcomes. They argue that if a basic income is too small, people would still be compelled to accept low-wage jobs in order to survive. This, they say, would subsidise low-wage employers, undermine minimum wage demands, weaken worker organisations and boost the coercive power of employers and the market (Zamora, 2017; Clarke, 2018). Those are important concerns. In Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, for example, businesses are adept at using welfare benefits to suppress wages. But those concerns seem less applicable in a setting such as SA—where the alternative for exceptionally large proportions of workers is not between "bad" jobs and "better" jobs, but between any jobs and no jobs. For many millions of people, not having paid work is not a worst-case alternative; it is the default reality. A UBI that augments their ability to survive in that reality is likely also to boost their ability to say "no" to bad work.

Empowering women and shifting gender relations

Financial insecurity compels many women to enter or remain in relationships and households that are abusive and dangerous. A UBI will not eliminate those realities, but it could introduce additional options for women. Unlike many current forms of welfare support, where eligibility for assistance is determined at household level, a UBI would be paid to individuals, which could increase women's financial autonomy and life options. It is possible that a UBI, if designed and deployed appropriately, could make waged work, care work, marriage contracts and childrearing more of a choice than they currently are for women (Weeks, 2019).

Suggestively, SA's child support grant has been credited with empowering women by enabling them to control the spending of the grant payments and acquire a degree of financial autonomy (Patel, Knijn, van Wel, 2015; Wright, Neves, Ntshongwana, Nbole, 2015). Granlund and Hochfeld (2020) found that the effects are especially evident at community level, where the grants enable women to build reciprocal relations and foster solidarity in their communities (e.g. via participation in rotating savings schemes such as "stokvels" and by servicing social networks).

A UBI could contribute to the rearrangement of certain social obligations. Reproductive labour or care work—which is unremunerated and seldom acknowledged—is a prerequisite for the functioning of societies and economies. It is, in Nancy Fraser's

(2014b, p. 61) words, "an indispensable condition for the possibility of capitalist production". Despite its fundamental dependence on this unpaid work, capital treats the work as a free and infinitely available resource (much the same as it treats non-human nature). Unpaid reproductive labour provides core inputs and acts as a subsidy to capital, thereby inflating profits. But the wage economy treats this labour as separate and distinct, and neither rewards, remunerates or compensates for it (Weeks, 2016). This means that neither the wage system nor the family properly functions as a sound basis for social reproduction. The viability of entire societies and economies rests on the routine expropriation of women and girls' labour, time, energies and life prospects (Fraser, 2014b). This process also tends to play out along class and racial lines—glaringly so in the case of SA, where, as Jaclyn Cock (2018, p. 2012) reminds,

> the work of social reproduction is mostly performed by black, working-class women, either in their own homes or in a commodified form in the households of the dominant classes as domestic workers.

This highlights the deficiency of the wage system as the core mechanism for distributing income across society: it is both severely incomplete and iniquitous. Some feminist theorists therefore see in a UBI a potential to present "a more rational and equitable way to sustain the conditions that allow the economy—narrowly conceived as the waged sector—to exist" (Weeks, 2016). By undermining "the primacy of waged labor as the most legitimate form of human behavior" (Withorn, 1990, p. 32), a UBI could help blur the normative distinctions between people with paid work and those who perform unpaid work. If people are able to perform care and social reproductive work with greater economic security, it might also contribute to a fairer distribution of that work across society (Bidadanure, 2019). Such an effect becomes even more important in the context of the climate crisis and especially in settings, like SA, where the impact of that crisis is channeled inordinately into the lives of black working-class women (Cock, 2018; Flatø, Muttarak, Pelser, 2017).

Feminists differ, though, on the desirability of a mechanism such as a UBI. Labour market participation is generally seen as an important source of autonomy for women, so a UBI invites suspicion insofar as it may enable or encourage women to keep working in the domestic sphere (and thus reinforce current divisions of labour) (Gheaus, 2008). At root, this is similar to the concern that a UBI would be a disincentive for waged work—though it seems odd to disapprove of an intervention that increases rather than narrows choices. There is little evidence to suggest that a UBI alone would directly affect the gendered division of household-based reproductive labour. But the payment could increase women's options to decide and act autonomously, even if the choice is to not perform waged labour. Opting out of the formal labour market need not be a bad thing, in Kathi Weeks' view, particularly for the many women who toil simultaneously in paid employment and unpaid work at home: "[S]lavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink" (2011, p. 124).

This is not to overstate the transformative power of an intervention that boosts the choices of individuals. Overlaying those choices are systemic inequalities that have been "baked" into social relations, norms and practices (Orloff, 2013). It is unrealistic to expect that a UBI alone would dislodge those arrangements, but it could help destabilize them if it operates alongside other interventions (e.g. expanded public provision of services, such as childcare facilities). Nonetheless, waged work has an allure for many feminists, who value its financial attractions and its promise to boost self-esteem, connect women to the "sociality" of work and to collegial networks. For them, enabling women to be equal "wage-earners" with men (in the context of supportive structural changes, such as macroeconomic policies that stimulate large numbers of new jobs; social insurance reforms; wage and workplace reforms) would have more durable and far-reaching effects. The Scandinavian countries opted for such an approach, which still emphasizes the employment ethic (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Yet it is precisely the UBI's focus on individuals (as opposed to being paid to households) that makes it potentially important for advancing feminist goals. A household-based basic income would hide the ways in which marriage, the labour market and gender relations determine women's social citizenship (since women would "disappear" within the unit of the family or household). An individual basic income would draw into focus those dynamics and their impact on the lives and prospects of individual women (Pateman, 2004).

While compelling in the abstract, it is also not clear that the feminist critiques translate neatly into SA realities. The critiques assume that paid work is a realistic option for a significant proportion of women, which is not the case for black African women in SA (their narrow unemployment rate was almost 39% at the end of 2020; Statistics South Africa, 2021). In that context, a UBI that is paid alongside other social provisioning will likely be of greater benefit for women than the faint prospect of waged work.

The critiques also conjure images of isolated women, trapped in nuclear family structures and lives of "mandatory domesticity" (Weeks, 2016). The picture may fit with North American suburbs, but it seems less appropriate in many other settings, including SA, where domestic and other care work often occurs in lively social contexts and often is done across different households as part of webs of reciprocal exchange. Large proportions of ostensible "homemaking" women also participate in communal activities, work in informal economies to supplement incomes, and volunteer their labour.[51]

A UBI potentially supports women's capabilities to engage in those and other forms of (re)productive work, including neighbourhood-level food production, participation in community organisations, volunteer work, and income-generating activities (Williams, 2018a). But those effects and their extent will depend on the UBI amount and on the availability of essential services and infrastructure, a concern Shireen Hassim (2008) has raised more generally in relation to the impact of social welfare on women in SA. The empowering effect of a UBI will be greatly reduced in settings that lack access to basic services.

Untethering life from wage labour

A central tenet of industrial capitalism is the idea that human beings realise themselves as social beings through their labour, for which they are remunerated. That claim is broadcast across the political spectrum—from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) highlighting the "equal liability of all to work" among the ten distinguishing features of a communist society, to former US President Richard Nixon's insistence that "labour is good in itself; that a man or woman becomes a better person by virtue of the act of working".[52] It is an outlook which insists that "full citizenship revolves around individual responsibility, labour market activation, and the avoidance of dependence on public spending" (Barchiesi, 2006, p. 3).

It is received wisdom also that not being able to work for a living is demoralising, isolating and unhealthy—for reasons beyond material need. Lacking access to the social intercourse which many jobs facilitate can deprive people of social solidarity, affirmation

[51] In SA, black African women, especially those who are unemployed or "own account workers" are by far most likely to do volunteer work (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

[52] Cited in Terkel (1972).

and other support. Unemployed individuals tend to have significantly worse health and well-being than people in paid work (Herbig, Dragano, Angerer, 2013; Paul & Moster, 2009), and involuntary unemployment is strongly associated with depression and feelings of diminished self worth (Brand, 2015; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, Kinicki, 2005).

Marie Jahoda's (1982) research attributed such negative outcomes to unemployed people lacking access to the positive features of waged work, such as shared experiences, collective purpose and teamwork, structured time, affirmed status and identity, and regular activity. There is evidence that some recipients of unemployment benefits opt to work in "hidden" economies at least partly to restore a sense of pride, status and respect (Fryer & Fagan, 2003). When these positive aspects of waged work are unavailable to people, their health tends to suffer.

Clark and Oswald's research (1994) found high levels of stress, unhappiness and loss of self-esteem among unemployed people. Any combination of those effects can encourage behaviours and other habits that undermine physical and mental health (like isolation, lack of exercise, poor diet, excessive smoking and/or alcohol use, and so on). Unemployment and job insecurity are also linked to a higher risk of suicide, according to analysis of data from 63 countries from 2000 to 2011 (Carlos, Warnke, Seifritz, Kawohl, 2015), although the association between unemployment and suicide appears to be strongest in high-income countries (Noh, 2009; Blakely et al., 2003).[53] Suicide is an extreme reaction, but it seems clear that the general life satisfaction of unemployed individuals diminishes significantly and is not fully restored even after having been unemployed for a long time. For such reasons, Estlund (2019, p. 6), for example, insists that "work should remain a central organising feature of people’s economic and social lives, and should be one goal of public policy even in a future in which there is less work to go around".

Yet the effects attributed to being unemployed are not necessarily inherent in the fact of joblessness (Frase, 2016). They are magnified by the knowledge (and reality) that not having paid work can render one indigent. Generous unemployment benefits have been

[53] "Linked" or "associated" because the causality is not clearly established. Studies in New Zealand, for example, have found that being unemployed was associated with a twofold to threefold increased relative risk of death by suicide, compared with being employed. However, at least half of this association might have been attributable to confounding factors such as mental illness. See Blakely et al. (2003).

found to offset the impact of unemployment on suicide rates, for example (Cylus Glymer, Avendano, 2014). Other research (Hetschko, Knabe, Schöb, 2014, p. 156), from Germany, indicates that life satisfaction among the long-term unemployed increases significantly when they officially retire from the labour market and the social expectation of wage labour is lifted. This suggests that much of the psychological damage associated with unemployment stems from the social and self-stigma that clings to joblessness. Daniel Sage's (2019, 2018) analysis of the European Values Study supports that view. He has found that people who are less aligned with prevailing employment norms tend to have better well-being than those who subscribe to strong work ethics. Other analysis of the same data sets has also concluded that the well-being of unemployed men tends to be lower in countries that are marked by a strong social norm to work for wages (Roex & Rozer, 2018). One way to reduce the harmful effects of unemployment would be to challenge the centrality of paid work in our lives.

Context matters in other ways, as well. Jobless women in societies with high rates of female participation in the labour market appear to have more deleterious experiences of unemployment than jobless women elsewhere (Strandh, Hammarström, Nilsson, Nordenmark, Russel, 2013). That hints at another, overlooked aspect: the stigma attached to unemployment is laden with patriarchal notions of what constitutes work and what kinds of work are valued. Relieving women of some of the work burdens of child- and home-care (for example, through the introduction of washing machines or piped water or hired care) is not frequently seen to involve a risk of low self esteem and depression, and is very seldom presented as cause for disquiet. In SA, for example, waged work is intimately bound up with patriarchal norms of masculinity and gender roles, with unemployment closely associated with feeling of "emasculation", self-disdain, anger and anxiety (Morrell, Jewkes, Lindegger, 2012; Walker, 2008; Richter & Morrell, 2006).

There is good reason to question assumptions that equate paid employment with a normal, healthy state of being and that ascribe to paid work automatic moral value. Paid work's association with happiness and well-being derives as much from subjective experience as from social norms that valorise waged work and stigmatise unemployment. A UBI that delinks subsistence from the wage invites us to think beyond the standard notions of what constitutes work and the hierarchies of value and reward that are embedded in those assumptions.

One may also ask: if not having paid work is unhealthy, does the inverse hold—i.e. does paid employment make or keep one healthy? For very many workers, such a claim is untrue and untenable, as the prevalence of workplace-related physical injuries and mental health complaints attest. According to the ILO, approximately 2.8 million workers died due to occupational accidents in 2017 and there were at least 374 million non-fatal work-related injuries (ILO, 2019). Not only does the valorisation of waged work seem entangled in the coerced reliance on wages for survival, for very many workers it does not correlate with their lived experiences of work—as Studs Terkel reminded readers in the opening passages to his book *Working*, which,

> being about work, is by its very nature about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us. (Terkel, 1972, p. xiii)

Nonetheless, productivist ideology and the exultation of waged work remains dominant—despite the scarcity of paid work in many settings and the fact that much of the work on offer can be demeaning, exploitative and life-sapping.

A longstanding reality outside industrialised economies, and particularly in the "informal" sector, the dividing line between "private" life and "work" life is being erased steadily also in "developed" economies as 24/7, on-call labour becomes more pervasive and salaries are delinked from working hours (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Bunting, 2005). These experiences have intensified during the COVID-19 lockdowns and are likely to be come even more generalised in the future. The effects are especially egregious for waged workers. Employers are stripping waged work of security while commanding control over ever-growing parts of workers' lives. Alongside this is an even more "pervasive process of enclosure" (Barchiesi, 2012, p. 236), in which people are required not only to sell their time, skills and labour, but their civility, emotions and dignity. Increasingly, it is life itself that is put to work.[54] The challenge is not simply to find work that can finance the means to life, but to reclaim life from the insatiable demands of such work.

[54] This harks back to origins of the word "job", which in 14th century English referred to a lump or piece of some object which people would carry around with themselves. See Sennett (1998).

A UBI that enables people to meet their basic needs without have routinely having to sell their labour would delink subsistence from waged work. It would open the possibility to think beyond the hierarchies of entitlement and worth that are built into current definitions of work, making it more than a means for individual enablement. By untethering of social citizenship from waged work, a UBI could be a liberating intervention that helps destabilize power relations across society (Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Barchiesi, 2011; Wright, 2003).

Some proponents see that liberating potential evolving into an eventual repudiation of waged work as the organising framework for much of human life. This would go beyond the ability to reject specific job offers: it would facilitate a rebellion against the entire system of coerced "economic cooperation" on which capital accumulation rests. That refusal would not be an individual stance, but an aspect of collective political action, the goal of which "is to transform the institutions and ideologies that tether us to the existing world of work, waged and unwaged", as Kathi Weeks (2017) put it.

Such a transgressive potential has attracted "futurist" or "accelerationist" theorists (such as Bastani, Srnicek & Williams, and Mason) to a UBI as an important element for transitioning to a "post-work" (and possibly post-capitalist) society. They envisage scenarios in which labour-replacing automation and other technologies become ubiquitous, generating wealth and prosperity but rendering paid human employment increasingly superfluous. Instead of leading to grotesque dystopias, technology could be used to create economies that abolish scarcity and share prosperity. This would make it possible to redistribute paid working hours more equitably across populations, with a UBI redistributing income.

The "post-work" vision has a rich intellectual pedigree that encompasses thinkers like Paul Lafargue[55] in the 19th century to Bertrand Russell and André Gorz in the 20th century, and Aaron Bastani in the 21st century. At risk of over-simplification, they have all pictured scenarios in which wage relations steadily lose their pre-eminence in securing

[55] A Marxist in more ways than one (he was the son-in-law of Karl Marx), Lafargue founded the first French socialist party and authored numerous texts, the most famous of which was *The right to be lazy*, In it, he lamented that: "Instead of taking advantage of periods of crisis, for a general distribution of their products and a universal holiday, the laborers, perishing with hunger, go and beat their heads against the doors of the workshops." See Lafargue (1883, online version 2000).

the means for life, in organising societies and fueling economies, and in conferring fulfillment and worth. "Post-work", though, does not mean "no work". An idealised "post-work" scenario would restructure the (im)balance between waged work and human life. Waged work would not disappear entirely, but it would shed its economic, social and moral authority as the central axis for structuring human life and society. People would be able to reclaim their time and liberty, as well as the opportunities for socially and personally productive activities, and for reorganising society (Frase, 2016). "Accelerationists" like Paul Mason anticipate a chain reaction of effects that incline towards utopian outcomes. As the hours of human labour required to produce what humanity needs decrease to a minimum, wages themselves would eventually transform into collectively provided services or disappear, as would a basic income, since it would no longer be needed (Mason, 2015, p. 284).

Such scenarios titillate, but they seem overwrought. More likely are more "everyday" outcomes where a basic income, instead of replacing the wage system, loosens that system's grip by providing a reliable alternative or supplementary income. It would help people meet basic needs and make it easier for them to reject exploitative employment and, at least temporarily, to devote their energies and time to other activities—should they they wish to do so. That liberating effect is key.

But it is also possible that a UBI could be appropriated as temporary support for a capitalist wage system and family model which is "inadequate to the task of distributing income and organising productive cooperation", thereby materially and ideologically helping prop up that system, as Kathi Weeks (2017) has warned. On its own, a UBI is unlikely to harbour the propulsive, radical powers some champions on the Left assign to it. The transformative potential of a UBI will depend on whether and how the intervention is linked with other interventions that expand or wither the content of citizenship (Van Parijs, 2003). The proviso is crucial. In Andre Gorz's (1985, p. 54) view, the reduction of obligatory waged work could open opportunities for what he termed "socially determined" work: activities that generally contribute to people's usefulness to society and enable them to exist as fully social individuals. But he saw risks as well:

> The guarantee of an income independent of a job will be emancipatory or repressive, from the Left or the Right, according to whether it opens up new spaces for individual and social activity or whether, on the contrary, it is only the social wage for compulsory passivity. (Gorz 1985, p. 40)

Gorz's concern was that a universal income could also be used to ensure social control and passivity by paying very low "placating" amounts to people who have effectively been reduced to supernumeraries within the capitalist order (Little, 1996). The progressively transformative effects of a UBI are by no means automatic: the functions and impact of a universal basic income will depend on to the social, economic and political processes it operates in.

The available evidence indicates that a UBI can have a range of desirable effects, including reductions in the depth and extent of poverty, and improvements in people's physical and mental health and their educational status. Crucially, the extent of those effects would depend on the size of the basic income payment and how a UBI synchronises with other forms of state provisioning. Those same factors would also shape the likelihood of the emancipatory effects which proponents of a UBI also predict, including shifting social power relations, supporting a just transition, and recasting the terms on which social citizenship and entitlement are decided. Crucially, a UBI would reflect an understanding that dynamics beyond individual control determine the unjust distribution of means and opportunities and that this calls for systematic redistributive actions.

5. TESTING THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST

Given the potential advantages of a UBI—and the manifest need for reliable income support that is not linked to participation in the labour market—one may ask why a universal basic income does not yet exist on a large scale? The unsuccessful campaign to introduce a basic income grant in SA in the early 2000s offers some important insights.

Why did the BIG campaign in South Africa fail?

South African trade unions, church organisations and NGOs (and, intermittently, the former Social Development Minister)[56] began championing a basic income grant in the late 1990s. Formally proposed during bilateral discussions between Government and trade unions ahead of the 1998 Presidential Jobs Summit, the envisaged grant was small, ZAR 100 per month, an amount that trade union activists believed was politically "winnable".

The Government convened the Committee of Inquiry into Comprehensive Social Security (the Taylor Committee) in 2000 to investigate a proposed BIG in the context of SA's overall social security system. Three years later, the Taylor Committee recommended that an income grant worth ZAR 100, payable to all South Africans without a means test, be introduced. The Committee accepted that administrative and fiscal considerations meant that a BIG could not be implemented immediately, and therefore proposed that it be phased in over time. The first step would entail extending the existing child support grant to children up to the age of 18 years. In a second phase, scheduled for between 2005 and 2015, the child support grant would be extended into a BIG covering all adults to retirement age (Seekings & Matisson, 2010).

The anticipated socioeconomic benefits were plentiful. Financial simulations suggested that a grant of ZAR 100 per month for all South Africans could close the poverty gap by 74% (Liebenberg, 2002),[57] and lift about 6 million people above a poverty line of ZAR 400 (US$ 50 at the time) per month (Gumede, 2005). The grant would be spread

[56] Former Minister of Social Development, Zola Skweyiya, supported the introduction of a universal income grant, but was unable to win over enough of his colleagues in government and the ANC to that position. See, for example, Ensor (2006).

[57] The poverty gap refers to the total income shortfall of households living below the poverty line. A narrower poverty gap means more households would edge closer to, or above the poverty line.

thinner than current social transfers, but the benefits would extend far wider. The Congress of SA Trade Unions (2000) saw the grant as a way to reduce poverty and lay "the foundation for more productive and skilled communities". It would form part of a broader strategy to build livelihood security that could help people cope with labour market failures and personal catastrophes (such illness, death or sudden loss of income etc.). Supporters also saw it as a basis for pursuing additional sources of income, as an "investment" in "human capital" and as a "springboard" for mini-entrepreneurs (Taylor Committee, 2002, p. 61).[58] As Ferguson (2007) noted, proponents tended to blend social-welfarist and contemporary neoliberal reasoning.

Opponents of a BIG objected that it was unaffordable, too small to have significant positive effects, and claimed it would distort labour supplies, depress wages, foster dependency and offend the principle of "social reciprocity". SA President Thabo Mbeki, for instance, reportedly dismissed the grant with the claim: "If you give everybody ZAR 100 a month, it will not make a difference […] To introduce a system which indiscriminately gives ZAR 100 to a millionaire and a pensioner does not work."[59] Charles Meth responded that no-one

> who has observed the efforts of the poor to scratch a living out of some enterprise that requires endless hours of toil will believe that R 100 per month will put an end to the aspirations of most of them for self-improvement. What cannot be called into question is the welfare improvement in, for example, workerless households, among whom the slightest risk (e.g. borrowing or spending money for a job search) threatens an already precarious existence. Their menu of choices could be considerably expanded by the existence of a secure income source, be it ever so small. (Meth, 2004, p. 22)

If set at ZAR 100 (US$ 15) per month per person, the BIG would have cost approximately ZAR 54 billion (US$ 8-9 billion) per year, according to Le Roux's (2003) calculations. That estimate assumed, though, that current recipients of social grants would receive downward-adjusted BIG payments (i.e. the BIG would "top up" existing cash grants). Van der Berg (2002) and Bhorat (2002) calculated the overall cost at about ZAR 60 billion per year (equivalent to about 4% of GDP at the time, or roughly equal to the national education budget). Around the same time, Anna McCord (2003) calculated that a

[58] The Committee (2002, p. 61) speculated, for example, that the grant might empower recipients "to take the risks needed to break out of the poverty cycle. Rather than serving as a disincentive to engage in higher return activities [the grant] could encourage risk-taking and self-reliance. Such an income could thus become a springboard for development."

[59] Cited in Meth (2004).

public works programme providing 3.2 million jobs, or 845 million workdays, at ZAR 35 (US$ 5) per day, would have cost between ZAR 37 billion and ZAR 61 billion per year, depending on administrative costs. Such a scheme would have absorbed about 40% of the potential workdays of the unemployed in SA.

Various financing options for the BIG were put forward. Le Roux (2003, p. 99) proposed a value-added tax (VAT) increase of 7.3% (in addition to the 14% rate at the time) and a 50% increase in excise and fuel taxes. He claimed this would have entailed a significant increase in taxes for higher-spending individuals, while being much less burdensome for low-income individuals, who spend little. However, using VAT increases to finance the BIG would have reduced the net payment to individuals far below the face-value ZAR 100 amount by up to one third for low-income, non-tax-paying recipients. Other financing options included increases in the marginal income tax rate, which would have increased the net benefit to low-income earners.

Ultimately, the SA Government rejected the BIG proposal as "unaffordable". The preferred route was to pursue livelihood protection through economic growth and by reforming the current social assistance system. Operating in the background was an ongoing assumption that a combination of waged work and entrepreneurial zest eventually would do away with a need for social transfers to manage indigence. Thus, the Finance Minister, in his 2004 budget speech, stated that the Government's approach was

> to extend social security and income support through targeted measures, and to contribute also to creating work opportunities and investing further in education, training and health services. This is the more balanced strategy for social progress and sustainable development. (Ministry of Finance, 2004)

However, the core objection to a BIG, former Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin later remarked, appeared to be "not the money but the idea".[60] Speaking in 2002, Land Affairs Minister Thoko Didiza, who headed the ANC's Social Transformation Department, had highlighted the ruling party's concerns "about the values underpinning such a grant" (Anon, 2002). The ANC was committed to the principle that "grants must not create dependency and thus must be linked to economic activity" (ANC, 2007, p. 13-14). Yet the Government continued to expand the social grant system, prompting David Everatt (2008, p. 303) to remark that

[60] Quoted in Hart (2006, p. 26).

> The dominant voice within the ANC after Mandela was one that chided the poor for remaining poor, rejected [a basic income grant] but was unable to resist pressure for major cash transfers to the poor in the form of social grants.

The SA Government seemed to recognise both the felt need for social grants and their political value for shoring up popular consent. Yet it would remain resistant to the principle of state grants as an entitlement or right for poor households. Although defeated, the BIG campaign did make an impression. Prior to the general election in 2008, media reports claimed that the ANC had been costing various configurations of expanded social assistance, among them a BIG, though the results were not made public (Musgrave & Brown, 2008). In 2010, the trade union federation COSATU again called for a BIG, along with other social and economic reforms, though to no avail (Congress of South African Trade Unions, 2010).

Economic and labour market distortions

Condensed in the reactions to the BIG campaign in SA (including from Government officials, academics, economists and civil society entities) were many of the themes that typify current skepticism or outright opposition to an UBI. Central among the objections are claims that a UBI is too costly and that it will distort the larbour market and wider macroeconomy.

Unaffordability

Most common is the complaint that a UBI is unaffordable and that it would expose governments to populist demands for increasing the payment amount. This would cause costs to spin out of control, creating what economists call "open-ended fiscal exposure". Critics also claim that financing a UBI through taxation in "developing" countries is unrealistic, since relatively small proportions of adults pay income taxes and value-added tax already disproportionately burdens low-income households.[61] A relatively generous UBI payment—e.g. an amount that corresponds to the poverty line—would seem highly unfeasible in such circumstances, if financed from personal income taxes.

Ultimately, the affordability of a UBI has to be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the proposed amount, eligibility decisions, feasible financing options,

[61] In India, for example, less than 5% of the population files tax returns and less than 2% pay taxes (Ghatak, 2017).

and how the basic income aligns with social wage and other pro-poor interventions. Pre-emptive judgments about affordability are unsound and misleading (see the "Financing a universal basic income" section, in Chapter 6).

Economic disruption and inefficiency

Economic disruption and inefficiency are other common concerns cited by UBI critics. They warn that the mechanism would distort the labour market, cause drops in labour supply and productivity (due to a putative loss of work incentives), encourage fiscal profligacy, reduce competitiveness (due to higher taxation), and fuel price inflation.

The "inefficiency" argument may seem persuasive theoretically, but it weakens in real-world settings. Chronic un- and underemployment, and depressed real wages sap aggregate demand, which further dampens employment and adds macroeconomic inefficiencies. By contrast, "paying cash benefits will enhance macroeconomic efficiency if it upholds aggregate demand and raises employment", as William Jackson (1999) has noted. A universal payment would also avoid standard economic inefficiencies associated with current targeted and/or conditional transfers, including distorted resource allocation and administrative costs.

The alleged inflationary effect is tied to an assumption, rooted in neoclassical economics, that distributing large amounts of "free money" to nonworking people would boost demand without generating corresponding increases in output or productivity (Santens, 2014). The resultant relative scarcity would cause prices to rise. The objection suffers several flaws. The inflation fear assumes that human labour is the only source of large-scale increases in output and productivity, ignoring the potential contributions of automation, restructured production chains and more. The trepidation also discounts the ongoing persistence of excess capacity in the global economy—especially since the 2008 financial crisis and massively amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic—which tends to absorb the inflationary effect of increased demand. And it is undermined by the fact that massive infusions of liquidity since the 2008 global financial crisis have not sparked untrammeled inflation. After the United States Federal Reserve's quantitative easing programme pumped over US$ 4 trillion into the money supply after the 2008 crisis, there was no indication of rising inflation. In fact, the Federal Reserve's concern was the opposite: there was not enough inflation (Irwin, 2014).

There is solid evidence from "developing" countries that cash transfers do not have an inflationary impact, as shown in a review of programmes in Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia which found no evidence of price inflation or distortion attributable to the transfers (Handa, Daidone, Peterman, Davis, Pereira et al., 2018). In Kenya, a large study across 653 rural villages found minimal price inflation associated with one-time cash transfers of USD 1,000 to poor households, while documenting major positive effects on household consumption and assets (Egger, Haushofer, Miguel, Niehaus, Walker, 2019). Careful analysis of Mexico's Programa de Apoyo Alimentario (or Food Aid Programme) also concluded that inflation concerns about distributing "free money" to poor households were misplaced (Cunha, De Giorgi, Jayachandran, 2019). The rollout of that food programme was preceded by a randomised experiment in 200 rural villages, some of which got US$ 20 per month cash grants, while others received food parcels worth the same amount. A third group served as a control group. In villages receiving the cash transfer, food prices barely changed (they rose by 0.2%), suggesting that even in a contained setting a UBI need not spur inflation.

A disincentive for work

Basic income proposals routinely trigger dismay about their anticipated effect on people's desire to seek and take up waged work. For critics of unconditional income support it is almost axiomatic that the intervention would distort labour markets. That stance has been highly influential in the restructuring of welfare systems in "developed" countries over the past three decades, most obviously in the promotion of "workfare" (or employment-oriented welfare) (Peck, 2001). These approaches place great emphasis on linking income support to constant job searching.

The contention bristles with moral censure. Paid work is venerated as the desirable norm, and it is assumed to be attainable even in the face of contrary evidence. As South African parliamentarian Michael Masutha put it in 2000, when commenting on calls for a small basic income grant: "If you have all these nice social benefits, where is the incentive to want to go back to work?".[62] At the time, about 35% of the SA's adult population had no

[62] Transcripts of the Committee of Inquiry, 6 October 2000 meeting, p. 17, cited in Barchiesi (2006, p. 14).

reasonable prospect of finding paid work. Nevertheless, the notion that income support discourages people from seeking employment endures, in SA and beyond.

There is very little empirical evidence to support the "work disincentive" objection. Neither basic income-type projects (Davala et al., 2015; Forget, 2011; Haarmann et al., 2009), nor cash transfer programmes, nor SA's social grant system offers evidence that income transfers discourage people from working (Noble & Ntshongwana, 2008). An analysis of 16 historical UBI trials found no significant impact on the likelihood of participants performing paid work (Gilbert, Murphy, Stepka, 2018). Studies of cash transfers in impoverished settings have found no significant effect on labour supply either, including in Asia and Latin America (Banerjee et al., 2017; Alzua, Cruces, Ripani, 2013) and in Africa (Prifit, Daidone, Davis, 2019).

Jones and Marinescu's (2020) analysis of study evidence from the United States (including the Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund) found a tiny, close-to-zero effect on labour supply. Many of the reviewed studies had found no impact on labour supply, and where an impact was detected, it was small. Among the latter studies, a 10% increase in income from unconditional cash transfers resulted in an average 1% drop in labour supply (Skoufias & Di Maro, 2008).

Banerjee and colleagues (2017) re-analysed the results of seven randomised controlled trials of government-run cash transfer programmes from six countries[63] and found no systematic evidence that the programmes discouraged work for either women or men. Similarly, Skoufias and Di Maro's (2008) analysis of Mexico's Progresa programme found that it had no significant effect on adult labour force participation. Similar findings have been made in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay (Maurizio & Vázquez, 2014; Mideros, O'Donoghue, 2015), Bangladesh and Ethiopia (Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2010) and Cambodia (Mideros, Gassmann, & Mohnen, 2013).

There is evidence of a contrary effect, of *increased* employment. Foguel and de Barros (2010) found that a conditional cash transfer programme in Brazil increased male labour participation, while Vera-Cossio's research in Bolivia (2021) found increased self-employment, including in family businesses. Similarly, some studies of the impact of cash transfers on farm labour in Africa (Fisher, Attah, Barca, O'Brien, Brook et al., 2017)

[63] Honduras, Indonesia, Morocco, Mexico, Nicaragua and Philippines.

have found decreased participation in casual waged labour accompanied by increases in own-account farming:

> [T]he results do not indicate a reduction in work effort—rather, they show that beneficiary households have increased their autonomy over productive activities and have more flexibility in how they allocate their time—often choosing to work on their own farms instead of agricultural wage labor. (Handa et al., 2018, p. 277)

More generally, cross-country evidence points in a similar direction: increased social policy expenditure and levels of public investment improve people's labour market prospects, as Braunstein and Seguino (2018) found when they reviewed data from 18 Latin America countries for the period 1990-2010.

The claim that a cash transfer would undermine work incentives seems grotesquely misplaced in a society like SA, where the social grants target people who, due to age, frailty or disability, are not expected to fend for themselves by engaging in waged employment. Strictly speaking, those grants cannot discourage beneficiaries from employment. However, since the grants are frequently also distributed among other household and/or family members, might they discourage job-seeking among those secondary beneficiaries?

When Statistics SA (2009, p. 31) analysed data from the 2003 and 2007 General Household Surveys, it concluded that low-income households receiving grants were not less economically active than nonrecipient households. A review of SA and international evidence found that the effect was ambiguous and depended on the context. In some cases, grant payments increased labour market participation "by covering costs or credit associated with working" (e.g. for women in the case of child support grants) (Leibbrandt, Lelenstein, Shenker, Woolard, 2013). That aligns with earlier findings by Posel and her co-authors (2006), who reported that rural South African women living in households where someone was receiving the state old-age pension were (3%) more likely to be working than their peers in nonrecipient households. In other instances, the grants may temporarily relax the pressures for seeking waged work (a not-unreasonable reaction in the context of hyper-unemployment) (Leibbrandt et al., 2013). In the background is the fact that the bulk of social grant recipients in SA are adults (mostly black African women) who are raising or fostering children, or tending the frail: they are working, but are not remunerated for their labour.

Overall, the evidence supports an expectation that even with a subsistence-level cash payment, at least some people with marketable skills can be expected to seek paid work, take up self-employment, or strive to improve their skills in search of better, more decent work. "'I get $ 10 000 a year; that's enough for me'—said nobody, ever", as Max Sawicky (2018) remarked in response to the claim that a UBI in the United States would encourage indolence and idleness.

Ethical objections—"something for nothing"

A range of ethical objections are levelled at UBI proposals. Critics find the lack of targeting and conditionality to be particularly disturbing. Some object, for example, that it is ethically problematic to apply a universalist principle in a "literal" or "mechanistic" way by providing income support to everybody, including people who do not need the support. A targeted approach that focuses support on the least privileged sections of society is seen as a preferable way to ensure that no-one goes lacking (i.e. to achieve a universal "good"). However, most proposals for a UBI rely on complementary arrangements to offset at least part of the cost through progressive changes to the tax system, such that only low-income earners would receive a net income gain from a UBI. The ethical objection seems addressed in such arrangements.

There is also a claim that a UBI would be divisive, by separating society into "productive" and "non-productive" sections (rather than regarding every adult as a current or potential worker). The concern is strange, given the prevailing normative and administrative separation between adults with employment and those without employment, and the stigmatising and punitive discourse associated with that framework. An income which *everyone* receives—which is universal—cannot easily be construed as divisive.

A UBI destabilises deeply-held ideas about the role and status of paid work as a basis for having legitimate claims on one another and on the state. As seen during SA's BIG debate in the early 2000s, waged work is laden with notions of deservedness, merit, earned social membership and the promise of recognition. Waged work, no matter the actual job, is seen to bestow value and worthiness. In a patriarchal society such as SA, where men are typically deemed "breadwinners", waged work is also tied to masculinity and functions as a source of "manhood" (Morrell, Jewkes, Lindegger, 2012). A UBI distorts those social-moral landscapes, and unbalances the ways in which social obligations and entitlements are assessed and assigned. Thus, universalist welfare is frequently opposed as a reward for passivity and encouragement of idle entitlement. "Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next-door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits?", as former United Kingdom Chancellor George Osborne put it to the 2012 Conservative Party congress.[64] The moralising contrast of hardworking citizen and idling freeloader remains a staple of fiscal sermonising. It also carries strong, intuitive appeal. Work seems to occupy an "unassailable position in politics, policy and popular discourse" (Granter, 2009, p. 182).

Waged work is a morally freighted phenomenon. When a claim to entitlement is not in some way attached to work,[65] it is commonly treated as a moral offense: a basic principle, that of social reciprocity, seems violated. This feeds a deeply and widely felt affront, even when the reaction seems irrational—for example when waged work is unavailable to large proportions of working-age individuals. There is an insistence that it is chiefly through waged work that we contribute to society and "earn" our claims to social citizenship.[66]

Social policy in SA typifies such perspectives. The prevailing outlook among policymakers there resembles the "give-a-man-a-fish" trope of development orthodoxy—the "principle that people should be recognised as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services" (Fischer, 2018, p. 239). SA's social grant system targets recipients as individuals, with little regard for the interdependencies—the social and other obligations and claims—that shape their lives. And it does so in an ideological environment which denounces dependency, disparages social assistance as "handouts", and exults waged work as the prescribed norm even though the expectation of "working for a living" is unrealistic for more than one third of

[64] Quoted in Jowitt (2013).

[65] Either through performing paid work or performatively searching for it, or when age, frailty or illness exempt individuals from the injunction to "work for a living".

[66] It seems fitting that the discipline of economics initially emerged out of moral philosophy, which in turn, as David Graeber (2018) reminds, originally developed as a branch of theology.

the adult population. Favoured instead is the attachment of conditionalities to cash payments and other welfare support (especially conditionalities related to labour market "activation").

Rewarding the "undeserving"

The logic of means testing, targeting and conditionality feeds the evergreen notions of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, a framework that divides society into "saints" and "sinners" (Standing, 2007, p. 25). At least for the past 150 years, that line has been drawn on the basis of a person's capacity to work for a wage:

> Traditional 20th century conceptions of social welfare took for granted an economic world within which waged labour was socially generalised, and the domain we have come to know as "the social" was constructed on the foundation of the able-bodied male worker. Indeed, the list of those requiring "social" interventions (the elderly, the infirm, the child, the disabled, the dependent reproductive woman) traces a kind of photographic negative of the figure of the wage-earning man. (Ferguson, 2015, p. 233)

In those frameworks, the state (or another designated entity) provides support to people who are insured against contingency risks, or it gives "charitably" to those it deems incapable of performing labour. A principle of reciprocity may seem to be the hinge in this relationship between citizen and state, but the act of "charity" is laden with power and authority, and functions as a disciplinary tool that ultimately services the interests of employers.

The deserving/undeserving yardstick for social assistance retains powerful traction. In SA, the proposed BIG in the early 2000s promised to address the material needs of citizens, but did not speak to their social and moral needs; it offered little by way of meaningful personhood or social belonging (Ferguson, 2013). Seekings and Mattison (2010) believe that those were among the central reasons why the campaign failed to stir popular mobilisation, despite being backed by trade unions and an impressive coalition of civil society organisations.

State assistance and the attitudes of potential recipients are laden with moral judgment. Data from a 2009 survey among 3,000 young people in Cape Town prompted Seekings (2019, p. 617) to conclude that the respondents "tend to favour both public and private support for deserving people and to oppose both for undeserving people". Their responses indicated little support for automatic claims or universal provision, whether public or private. The preference was for training, job creation and free tertiary education—even though their own lived experiences showed that neither education nor training qualifications guaranteed jobs, let alone "decent" jobs. The elderly and the disabled were generally seen to be most "deserving" of state support, with young able-bodied adults the least "deserving" (Seekings, 2019).

Dawson and Fouksman (2020) have made similar observations, noting that even individuals who are effectively excluded from the labour market insist on a link between labour and income. Their research among unemployed young people in Zandspruit, north of Johannesburg, encountered heartfelt opposition to the idea of extending eligibility for the child support grant to 23 years (from the current 18 years). There is ample other evidence that the provision of welfare benefits tends to elicit stigma and disapproving tropes, often politically inflamed, about the recipients—with women, especially single mothers, especially attractive targets (Kelly, 2010; Gordon, 1994). Other criteria for "deservingness" are also invoked. Depending on the assistance and circumstances, a claim for support might be regarded as stronger for kin than non-kin, or for people who are in dire straits compared with those with potential access to other means of support. In the Cape Town survey, though, need was not the only criterion for determining "deservingness"; the social conduct of individuals also featured:

> Deservingness with respect to both public and private support is affected dramatically by the attitude and reciprocity of the claimant, with the important exceptions of mothers who should be supported unconditionally. (Seekings, 2019, p. 599)

Similarly, Dawson and Fouksman's research (2020) revealed disagreement not only about the state's role income support, but about who deserves the support. Respondents were concerned that "lazy people" would abuse the system, that recipients would choose not to work, or that they would squander the grant money. Christine Jeske (2016) has suggested that the laziness trope is a substitute for an adequate explanation for the causes of unemployment and poverty. Dawson and Fouksman (2020) also noted that resentment was especially strong among male interlocutors (SA's child support grant is paid to caregivers, who are almost exclusive female). These kinds of findings are in tune with the dominant tenor of social policy during the neoliberal era, which assigns to

> wage labour powerful disciplinary and pedagogical meanings, educating the poorest sections of the population to the idea that full citizenship revolves around individual responsibility, labour market

> activation, and the avoidance of "dependency" on public spending. Conversely, the government regards with suspicion policies of generalised access to social provisions funded via redistributive transfers. (Barchiesi, 2006, p. 3)

In post-apartheid SA, as David Everatt (2008) has suggested, an element of shame possibly helps to explain the ongoing attachment to such cleaving, moralising discourses. Even though none of the interlocutors in Dawson and Fouksman's (2020) study counted themselves among "the lazy", the implied self-loathing was striking, not least in its mirroring of racist stereotypes calumny image of the "feckless native", which may also explain the aversion among many politicians and state officials towards unconditional, universal assistance:

> [T]he combination of the scars of apartheid experience, and [people's] own success in surmounting the monumental obstacles that characterized this system of oppression, has caused them to elevate "self-reliance" and an abhorrence of "dependence" to mythical status. (Meth, 2008, p. 27)

It is possible that the parlous circumstances of low-income households, rooted in extremely high rates of un- and under-employment and aggravated by the "long-tail" impact of the AIDS and tuberculosis epidemics, increases a perceived need to ration support and to justify such rationing with exacting "judgments of deserts". Rather than reflecting enduring principles, the attitudes encountered by Seekings (2010) and by Dawson and Foukes (2020) may be more circumstantial and variable than they seem.

Recipients of child support grants seemed to view the assistance with gratitude rather than a sense of entitlement, according to Hochfeld and Plagerson's (2011) research in Soweto. The grant was not seen as fulfilling a right, but meeting a necessity—a stance that speaks to the paradoxical social and political discourses that circulate in SA, an interweaving of principles of communal solidarity, assertions of individual responsibility, and claims on state support. This seems in harmony with findings from a much-publicised 2009 Afrobarometer survey in which a significant majority of respondents agreed with the statement that "people are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent". Another tantalising finding in the Soweto research (2011), was the importance many grant recipients attached to their ability to control the use of grant payments. As the researchers noted, this echoed Amartya Sen's emphasis (1999) on choice and control for enabling lives of dignity. The child support grant was not received with passive entitlement but was seen rather as a means for seeking greater autonomy and self-sufficiency—which contradicts the conflation of entitlement with "dependency".

Encouraging dependency

Even as the SA Government expanded its social grant system, leaders spoke with moralising disdain about the cash grants, fretting that the "hand-outs" would encourage "dependency". Former President, Jacob Zuma, for example, called for linking "the social grants to jobs or economic activity in order to encourage self-reliance among the able-bodied" (Anon, 2009), and highlighted as a priority the need to change the "culture" of "laziness", especially among youth (Molatlhwa, 2015). At the time, 2 in 3 South Africans aged 15-34 years were jobless (Statistics South Africa, 2016a). Those were not new sentiments. Zuma's predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, had sermonised on the need "to cultivate the spirit of self-reliance among our people" (Anon, 2008), and to "reduce the dependence of people on grants", including promoting small enterprise,

> so that people don't think it is sufficient merely to hold out their hands and receive a handout, but to understand that all of us, as South Africans, have a shared responsibility to attend to the development of the country.

The SA Government was so sunk in this view that the Presidency in 2005 tasked the Department of Social Development to work with the Finance Ministry to address "issues of dependency, perverse incentives and sustainability of the social grant system" and to ensure that the grants were linked to "reducing poverty and unemployment". The process included a survey of 14 000 households aimed at assessing "potential perverse incentives and dependency" (Presidency of South Africa, 2005).[67] Even the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the development strategy crafted by the African National Congress and its allies in the early 1990s, had emphasised that

> although a much stronger welfare system is needed to support all the vulnerable, the old, the disabled and the sick who currently live in poverty, a system of "handouts" for the unemployed should be avoided. All South Africans should have the opportunity to participate in the economic life of the country. (Government of South Africa, 1994)

These perspectives seem blind to the realities of income distribution among low-income households in SA—and the many ways in which people manage shifting dependencies to build and service networks of reciprocity. Incomes (waged or not) and other forms of support constantly circulate across kin and other social networks. Historically in southern Africa there has been a powerful dynamic of interdependence between wage earners and

[67] Presidency of South Africa (2005). Government's Programme of Action: 2005 (Social Cluster), Government of South Africa, Pretoria; cited in Di Lollo (2006, p. 19-20).

their dependents (with individuals constantly shifting between those two roles). People establish and maintain claims on that support in a variety of ways, ranging from reciprocity and indebtedness to supplication or dominance. The currency of these interdependencies is not limited to money but extends to various forms of labour (child care work, nursing or handiwork for instance) and bartering. Rather than view dependency as a lack of freedom (as Amartya Sen [1999], for example, seemed to do), James Ferguson (2013, p. 223) sees it as a basis for making distributional claims, with social dependency in particular serving "as the very foundation of polities and persons alike". Dependency can be strategic and it can position a person for participation in distributive systems.

The authority of waged work in the public imagination of South Africans is closely tied to the country's history of capitalist development and accumulation, its dismantling of agrarian livelihoods, and the corralling of African men into wage labour in mining and other industries and on white-owned farms (Hull & James, 2012). For men in particular, personhood, social status and "manhood" became increasingly—though not entirely—tied to waged work, all the more so in settings where bridewealth-based marriage required wage-earning capacity (Hunter, 2007). But this did not entirely displace the importance of other relations of (inter)dependency, given the unstable nature of waged employment. South African capitalism, as Ferguson (2013, p. 228) has reminded, "did not do away with personalistic and dependent relations between employer and employee". To a large extent, those relationships of dependency have been woven into networks that are oiled by reciprocity and recompense. Social reality in SA does not bear out the image of dependency as passive entitlement (though outright claims-staking, especially by men on women, does occur).

As rising unemployment accompanies listless economic growth, many of the jobless are pushed aside more or less permanently. In that context, new relations of dependency have emerged, increasingly revolving around social assistance (in the shape of social grants and other cash transfers), much of it paid to women. These cash transfers, in Ferguson's view,

> enable less malevolent sorts of dependence to take root and a circuit of reciprocities to unfold within which one-sided relations of dependence can become more egalitarian forms of interdependence. (2015, p.138)

This also points to a more accurate understanding of the so-called informal economy in SA, which seems less entrepreneurial (in the sense of being "micro start-ups") and more a means for servicing participation in networks of (inter)dependence—or "distributive labour", as Ferguson (2015) puts it. Du Toit and Neves (2009) have shown how social grants and informal enterprise activities are enmeshed with the reciprocities that nourish social networks. "For poor South Africans," Ferguson notes, "it is not dependence but its absence that is really terrifying—the severing of the thread, and the fall into the social void" (2013, p. 232).

These can be messy, disruptive processes. The structures of households and of kin relations in SA have changed significantly in recent decades, with both marriage rates and the prevalence of male-headed households declining markedly (Hunter, 2007). By the early 2000s already, women headed almost as many households in SA as did men (Posel & Rogan, 2009), and a majority of adult women have never been married (Pauli & van Dijk, 2016). In the context of very high unemployment and poverty, men find themselves dislodged from traditional roles, lacking the means to fulfil their perceived duties, and with their sense of self and their place in society destabilised. At least some of the violence inflicted on women and children in SA can be traced to this mismatch between the idea of what "makes a man" and the means for living up to those norms of masculinity (Morrell, Jewkes, Lindegger, 2012; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, Ratele, 2009).

As access to wage incomes narrows, distributive claims on kin are focused more tightly on smaller groups of relatives—increasingly women (who receive child support or foster care grants) and the elderly (who receive pensions). The “non-productive” are themselves becoming key sources of income. Consequently, the current social grants system in SA fuels tension, resentment and division within households and kinship circles (Mokoene & Khunou, 2019; Wright et al., 2015), and it is loaded with opportunities for moralising judgment. Social grant recipients (mostly women, in the case of SA) become the sources of income for others; they acquire a redistributive role, which exposes them to harassment and danger, while affording them a degree of social power. This upends a simplistic understanding of "dependency". Rather than referring to a relationship of passivity—a sort of social stasis—"dependency" is a dynamic process, a form of actual or pending exchange which implies reciprocity (current or deferred into the future).

Ferguson (2013, p. 171) is correct in his remark that "it is really only via relations of 'dependence' that most of the population survives at all."

The challenge then is not so much to erase dependency "but to construct desirable forms of it" (Ferguson (2015, p. 163). Wage labour offers a suggestive analogy. In capitalist society, it very clearly constitutes a form of dependency, especially in the context of high unemployment and weak social protection. But, for those very reasons, it is also a basis for contestation and for altering social relations. The imbalances built into the relationship between workers and employers can generate powerful reactions that reshape those relations.

Legitimising passive citizenship

The sense that it is unfair for an able-bodied person to live off the labour of others resonates deeply. The perceived lack of reciprocity is an intuitively powerful concern, including among proponents of a UBI. Philip Van Parijs (1991) has referred to this as the "Malibu surfer" conundrum: should tax-paying workers subsidise the lifestyle of a person who chooses an "unproductive" life—such as a "surf bum"?

It is widely felt that any such obligation is unfair, and that facilitating such a lifestyle is socially undesirable. Thus, the American philosopher John Rawls claimed that someone who wished to surf all day can do so using her own income, but cannot expect society to develop institutions and mechanisms to subsidise her life (2001). The Rawlsian liberal tradition therefore sees a UBI as unjustified since it violates the principle of reciprocity. A person receiving a cash grant that is financed through a tax on working people should either be unable to work for a living or should demonstrate a willingness to work (in line with the conventional normative framing of social protection).

Van Parijs (1991, 1998) has argued, somewhat intricately, that the obligation to subsidise idleness need not be unfair. Even in a well-functioning modern economy, some unemployment continues to exist. This is partly because some workers choose to hold out for higher wages than those on offer, which adds buoyancy to wage levels. Workers who do have employment benefit from that buoyant effect on wages—which makes it ethically justifiable, according to van Parijs, to tax part of that "surplus income" and distribute it to people who are not employed.

The Rawlsian position suffers a less technical weakness, in that it equates (social) worthiness with paid work and risks neglecting other forms of socially valuable and/or personally enrichening work. The conflation of worth with waged work troubled Hanah Arendt (1958), for example, who preferred to draw distinctions between labour, work and action. Feminist historians and theorists have critiqued the Rawlsian position along similar lines—for imagining the rights-bearing adult fundamentally as male and as an autonomous individual who is neither dependent nor responsible for dependents. On what grounds, they have asked, should a cash grant not be paid to female adults, who preponderantly perform essential but unpaid care and reproductive work (with some perhaps also managing to maintain a surfer lifestyle)?[68] In Juliana Bidadanure's view (2019, p. 489), it "seems difficult to claim that any formal job is a more adequate form of reciprocation than activities outside the labor market that are sometimes more useful or productive".[69]

Andre Gorz approached the issue of reciprocity from a similar angle. He shared the concern about income support that is detached from any reciprocal obligation—but for social rather than moralistic reasons:

> [E]xcusing people from working by securing them an income anyway is not a way of giving them full membership of their society. You cannot become a member of any community if you have no obligation whatsoever to it … There can be no inclusion without reciprocal obligations. (1992, p. 184)

Gorz worried that a guaranteed minimum income would compensate people for their economic exclusion while leaving untouched the reality of an unequal and exclusionary society. Crucially, he released the concept of reciprocity from the fiction that it can only be expressed through the mechanism of waged work. But a guaranteed income would have to facilitate arrangements that promote full participation in society, and which involve some form of positive obligation that would expand

[68] Carole Pateman (2004) has highlighted this blind spot in the "free rider" debate, which rarely takes in the more prevalent reality of men, in or out of jobs, free-riding on women's domestic and other unpaid care work. She sees a basic income as one way to help counteract such forms of gendered free riding.

[69] It is reasonable to ask in which, if any, circumstances would a principle of reciprocity not apply? Does a person have to make some kind of contribution in order to qualify for any form of social benefit or provisioning? Answering yes invites absurd scenarios; surely no-one would impose a requirement of reciprocity on an infant, for example. But what about a child: would it have to fulfil this requirement in order to be entitled to various forms of provisioning? And if so, from what age, and on what basis? At the very least, greater clarity is needed about what "reciprocity" refers to when it is invoked in debates about a basic income.

> those activities which create nothing that can be bought, sold, exchanged – and hence nothing that has value (in the economic sense)—but only non-marketable wealth with an intrinsic value of its own. (Gorz, 2010, p. 28)

For Gorz, as for Arendt, the chief concern was not only material security, but a person's ability to live a socially rooted and socially meaningful life. A UBI therefore needs to do more than release people from the compulsion of waged work; it also has to open opportunities for activities that allow one to exist in a socially useful manner (Gorz, 1985, p. 54). In additional to individual enablement, a UBI must have a social function: it has to facilitate socially engaged citizenship. Not merely a source for financing the basic necessities of life (through consumption), it should also provide a basis for engaging in forms of meaningful activity (other than wage labour), for enrichening social life and for political engagement—all of which, in Arendt's (1958) view, nourishes societies and helps build and deepen democracy beyond the routine of voting. Ideally, a UBI would nurture all three aspects of what Arendt termed the "vita activa": labour, work and action (Jansson, 2020).

Proceeding along similar lines, Anthony Atkinson (2015; 1996) has sought to reframe a basic income as a "participation income" and to build the principle of social reciprocity or productivity into the concept. There is a conundrum, though, in whether and how to formalise such expectations in a UBI mechanism. Various forms of "participation" (e.g. reproductive and other unpaid care work) could constitute a basis for entitlement. This, the argument goes, would remove the "surfer problem" and shield the mechanism against the "free-rider" objection. Some feminists warn, though, that this could reinforce women's subordinate role in the household, with men continuing to "free ride" on their female partners' (now somewhat "remunerated") labour (Pateman, 2004).

Framing a basic income as a "participation income" transforms it into a transaction and turns "reciprocity" into a something of a contractual relationship (Pateman, 2004), in which a party receives a monetary reward in return for performing some action or role. This is quite different from the idea of a basic income as an entitlement or a just dividend. But Pateman seems correct to insist that a preoccupation with specific kinds of "free riding" should make way for "an examination of how to reinforce reciprocity in the sense of mutual aid across the social order" (2004, p. 102). The "something-for-nothing" objection is widespread. The sense that a UBI offends, even violates a basic "moral bargain" carries considerable reflexive power and should not be underestimated. A viable case for a UBI has to address this objection (a matter we return to in Chapters 7 and 8).

Undermining workers' struggles

Another perceived threat troubles progressive critics of a UBI, especially those in the labour movement. They fear that a UBI might undermine collective bargaining rights, partly because the UBI demand would absorb attention, resources and organizing energies at the expense of workplace and other struggles for workers' rights. Even if successful, a UBI at best would offer individuals an opportunity to temporarily opt out of wage labour relations, while leaving those relations structurally intact.

For critics like Gourevitch and Stanczyk (2018), the social power of poor and working people is still best mobilised through labour organising. They may be correct in contending that an effective movement for progressive change cannot be built around a social policy demand. But that criticism hitches the cart before the horse. In our view, a UBI acquires much of its transformative power from the extent to which it links with and boosts *other* projects of progressive change. Set against current economic and social realities, Gourevitch and Stanczyk's binary seems anachronistic and misplaced.

The ongoing importance of labour organising is indisputable, but it is has long ceased to be the sole or most decisive setting for mobilising and organising movements for progressive change. In fact, one can argue the converse to Gourevitch and Stanczyk's claim: that better jobs are possible only if jobs are freely chosen (rather than being compelled by the demands of life in a capitalist economy) (Sculos, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 3, a UBI that enables low-wage workers to hold out for improved jobs offers can strengthen their bargaining power and that of their employed counterparts. To the extent that a UBI strengthens people's ability to refuse unfair or exploitative wages and terms of employment, it boosts the collective power of workers.

By definition, trade unions are organisations of people who exchange their labour for wages and benefits. To the extent that a UBI destabilises the relationship between paid work and society, it fits awkwardly with the logic and rationale of trade unionism. In addition, the very fact an intervention like a UBI is necessary contradicts the notion that the victories of trade unionism cascade automatically across wider society. This has been a challenge for trade unions everywhere as they have struggled to adjust to the radical restructuring of work in capitalist economies in the past 40 years (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). Indeed, the Congress of SA Trade Unions' support for the BIG campaign in the early 2000s was partly an attempt to link, in tangibly relevant ways, employed workers' struggles with the interests and needs of unemployed people.

Surrendering life to the market

Since a UBI involves the receipt of money that is exchanged for goods and services in the market, charge critics on the Left, it would further commodify human life and reinforce, as Ana Cecilia Dinerstein (2014) put it, both the myth of the "free citizen" and the social power of money, making it what she termed a "bad utopia". The complaint, though, implies an incomplete understanding of current reality.

Almost the entirety of society, including impoverished people, engage in capitalist market relations as consumers, commonly by taking on and recycling debt (Williams, 2018a). Cash money—or the lack of it—is central to the lives of low-income households, especially so when the option of subsistence agriculture is unavailable or unviable. In SA, low-income households spend about 35% of monthly income on food (Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity project, 2020; Webb & Vally, 2020). In addition, spending prioritises transport, electricity and energy, education (school materials, uniforms), burial insurance, repayment of debts, and telecommunications (a "typical" low-income household spends about ZAR 300 per month on mobile phone air time), according to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity project (2020).[70] While some of those expenditures are (or could be) subsidised and some could be communally produced (e.g. food, and renewable electricity and energy), all currently involve some engagement in market relations and require payment in money. It is worth recalling, too, that wage labour (which is the preferred alternative for UBI critics across the ideological spectrum) is profoundly commodified. While some labour contracts may include free or subsidised access to healthcare or transport, a demand that wages should not be paid in money is not frequently heard.

[70] The total cost of typical monthly household expenses which households living on low incomes say they reasonably expect amounted ZAR 7,624 in July 2019, according to the household affordability index compiled by the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity project (2020).

But concerns about the commodifying effect of a UBI are highly relevant for versions of a UBI that convert other forms of social provisioning into a single cash payment. This conception of a UBI is favoured on the Right and among some mainstream advocates. in the United States, for example, Andrew Yang (contender for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 2020) proposed a "Freedom Dividend" of US$ 1,000 per month, to be financed by consolidating some welfare programmes and implementing a 10% value-added tax (Yang, 2020). In that formulation, current welfare and social programme beneficiaries would have a choice between their current benefits or the basic income payment. Similarly, Andy Stern, former head of the United States Service Employees International Union, proposed funding a UBI by cashing out several major welfare programmes (food stamps, housing assistance, the earned income tax credit and more) and imposing a value-added tax on consumer goods (Stern, 2016). Such a UBI would lay even greater emphasis on individual risk and responsibility, a central tenet of neoliberal ideology. It would commodify the lives of impoverished people more thoroughly, leaving them more exposed to the vagaries of the market and adding to their insecurity. The UBI considered in this text does *not* replace but complements free or subsidised healthcare and education and other provisioning of public goods.

The commodification complaint matters in another respect, though: when financial corporations are able to exploit grant disbursement systems as entry points for profit-taking strategies. Even though large proportions of adults in SA are surplus to the labour needs of capital, they continue to be subjected to "secondary exploitation" which typically is achieved through debts and rents (Ashman, 2021). Under the mantle of "financial inclusion", financial corporations are using cash transfer systems to draw low-income beneficiaries into credit markets. Shifts to electronic payments of cash transfers have provided finance and technology firms with opportunities to draw recipients into predatory credit markets (Gronbach, 2020; Torkelson, 2020).

This happened in SA in 2015-2017 in a telling example of financial capitalism's pursuit of “commodification all the way down” (Fraser, 2014a). The contract for disbursing social grants nationally was held by Cash Paymaster Services, a subsidiary of the transnational corporation Net1, which partnered with another transnational corporation, Grindrod Bank (owned by the Remgro multinational), to administer the bank accounts of grant beneficiaries. Many of the bank accounts in which beneficiaries received their social grants were linked to payment channels for pre-paid electricity, water and mobile phone credit. Recipients were also targeted with offers of loans and advances against their cash transfers. The linkages made it possible to directly debit beneficiaries' accounts to settle debts, some of which were owed to subsidiaries of Net1. From the companies' point of view, the arrangement seemed near-perfect: grant recipients had "no ability to default, as Net1 exerted near total control over social grant payments", as Erin Torkelson (2020:9) noted. The corporation also used its access to the millions of grant beneficiaries as a marketing and advertising resource (Torkelson, 2021 & 2020).

Such predatory strategies can be avoided or undone, at least partially. In the SA case, community activists joined with the Black Sash, a campaigning nongovernmental organization, to launch successful lawsuits against Net1. That led to the company losing its disbursement contract, and distribution of cash transfers was brought back under public control via the national Post Office. However, by creating a new financial services platform for low-income earners, Net1 went on to capitalize on its access to grant recipients and was able, in Samantha Ashman's (2021) description, to "build a customer base which is now independent of the state contract for social grants […] and [to turn] social grants into collateral to receive loans and to acquire debt". Nonetheless, more than 70% of grant recipients now receive their payments in ways that do not allow for automatic deductions (Torkelson, 2021).

Ferguson (2015) questions another assumption implicit in the "commodification" objection, specifically the notion that money contaminates a "moneyless solidarity" which is said to typify relations in poor communities. In reality—and this is evident in SA and elsewhere—that solidarity takes diverse forms, including cash-based distributional networks (such as "stokvels" or informal loan schemes, and burial societies etc.) that help sustain livelihoods and prop up social personhood. This is borne out also in Williams' (2018a) research among social grant recipients in the SA's Eastern Cape province, with the cash payments circulating promiscuously within local communities.

The allegedly "commodifying" effect of a UBI can operate in another direction if the payment enables people to engage in activities that are decommodified—volunteering, care work, studies, hobbies, food cultivation, home repairs and improvement, artisanal production, recycling, energy generation etc. There is a potential, rich interplay between a UBI and the community economy strategies promoted by Gibson-Graham (2006) and others. Highlighting the affinities between a UBI and community economies, Lawhon and McCreary (2020, p. 466), suggest that:

> the economic security provided by a UBI enables experimentation with alternative economies and an income that might supplement the higher production costs of some locally produced goods.

This is especially relevant in the context of climate change shocks, economic instability and ongoing social crisis. A UBI, even though paid in the form of money, has the potential to serve as more than sheer "income". It can offer a platform for creating and participating in socially relevant work and productive activities, including food producing and other cooperatives, and it can serve localised actions in pursuit of social and political change. Those potentials should not be exaggerated, especially if the payment amount is small. But even a modest UBI could provide a basis for local and democratised production and exchange outside the dominant circuitries of the capitalist economy, and for anchoring and broadening people's repertoire of social, economic and other activities.

Is a job guarantee preferable?

The option of a job guarantee is frequently presented as a more desirable alternative to a basic income, not least because it aligns with prevailing waged work-centred frameworks.[71] A job guarantee scheme is a direct public employment policy, managed by the state, which offers a guaranteed job to all people who are willing and able to work. It maintains the link between employment and income, with the state acting as "employer of last resort", by creating a buffer stock of jobs that fluctuate in line with private-sector employment trends (Tcherneva, 2009).

Proponents claim a job guarantee would be at least as effective for achieving many of the stated objectives of a UBI, while being more affordable, productive, socially desirable and morally supportable. They predict a slew of advantages. In Pavlina Tcherneva's view,

> a well-structured guaranteed employment that offers opportunities for meaningful work at a living wage, counters the precariousness of the labour market by eliminating unemployment, drastically reducing poverty and enhancing the individual freedom to say "no" to bad jobs. (2009, p. 184)

[71] In the USA, Martin Luther King in 1967 famously called for an "Economic Bill of Rights [which] would guarantee a job to all people who want to work and are able to work". A guaranteed income proposal also appeared in the Black Panther Party's ten-point manifesto in October 1966 (Myers-Lipton, 2015).

According to the United States Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities, a national job guarantee would eliminate working poverty, revive the tax base, support the provision of socially desirable goods and services, and have a stabilising macroeconomic effect (since it would expand and contract in inverse relation to the private sector labour market) (Paul, Darity, Hamilton, 2018). Even though a job guarantee may be administratively costly (Noguchi, 2012), it would be considerably cheaper than a UBI (Tcherneva, 2007). Supporters also claim it would be "self-targeting". Since well-off individuals are unlikely to take up job guarantee employment, the scheme should be efficient for reaching and benefiting very poor people (who would "self-select" as job guarantee beneficiaries). In satisfying the demand for a "right to work", it is predicted, a job guarantee would combine the material benefits of cash income with the intangible, affective rewards of enhanced self-worth, social status and inclusion (Estlund, 2019). By substituting wages for welfare, it would neutralise the "something-for-nothing" sidestep that is levelled against UBI proposals.

A job guarantee is also expected to push up the minimum wage. In a competitive labour market, a job guarantee that assures any eligible person a job with a prescribed wage and benefit package would establish the floor for wages and benefits in the private sector. Since workers would be able to reject work offers at lower wages, private employers would have to raise their employment offers accordingly (Ravallion, 2019). Advocates believe these schemes could have a stabilising economic effect by guaranteeing incomes during downturns, and they could bring supply-side benefits by maintaining skills levels and keeping unemployed workers connected to the labour market. In more visionary scenarios, a a job guarantee and/or a job-share programme could be linked with a shorter work week, so everyone who wants to work can do so (Sculos, 2019). In this manner, a job guarantee can invert the conventional approach to job creation in capitalist economies: instead of hinging access to work on market-driven demand for labour, it would manipulate the demand for labour to the needs of workers (Jackson, 1999).

A job guarantee programme can be synchronised with forward-looking development strategies, e.g. with a low-carbon industrial strategy, environmental protection programmes, and more equitable labour market inclusion (favouring women and excluded minorities). Whereas the "greening" impact of a UBI is unlikely to be direct and will depend more on tax and other financing mechanisms (e.g. a carbon tax), a job guarantee could achieve a more direct impact if the jobs are designed explicitly to advance environmental objectives. Godin (2012) modelled a "green" job guarantee in the United States (including retrofitting insulation in public buildings and other "eco-friendly" tasks) and found it to be cost-effective for the public purse.

An important criticism is that the jobs on offer are likely to be makeshift and "artificial", though that risk can be reduced if the scheme is embedded in democratic decision-making in communities. This would hold especially for "green" jobs components of such a programme. A job guarantee can service and democratise local development—if it is aligned with democratic local institutions and processes that decide development strategies at local levels. A job guarantee would not introduce those conditions, but it could support and deepen their impact.

Critiques of a job guarantee

A job guarantee conforms with the view of waged work as a central basis for social merit, belonging and dignity, and that paid work is a morally necessary condition for cash transfers to poor people (a view which also underpins the concept of workfare). Mitchel & Fazi (2017, pp. 230-231), for example, prefer a job guarantee to a UBI on the basis that it offers "dignity" in addition to cash and is not vulnerable to objections about "freeriding", while Tcherneva (2009) has argued that a job guarantee would offer empowerment and validation which welfare programmes lack.[72] Embedded in such claims is the assumption that the act of working itself fulfils basic rights (rather than potentially enabling one to realise those rights).

Although a job guarantee is sometimes characterised as a "right to work", advocates prefer framing in terms of a "duty to work"—a duty which, they argue, carries potential social and economic benefits, and promotes social solidarity. Nonetheless, given that job guarantee schemes are likely to involve low-productivity and low-wage state-sponsored jobs (ideally but not necessarily with social utility), it is not clear how they will, in essence, differ from workfare (where people are required to work for welfare benefits). Matt Bruenig (2018a, 2018b) has warned that a job guarantee would, by design, function like a workfare programme. He argues that the kinds of jobs appropriate for a programme

[72] This objection is seldom aired in relation to the tax breaks and subsidies that are available to higher-income earners.

that serves an "employer of last resort" are not likely to be "good" or desirable ones, and will be suitable only for low-skilled workers. It is likely that business employers would prefer to limit the remit of a job guarantee scheme to only those jobs which the private sector cannot or will not provide. They would also prefer that wages are set at levels that do not generate competition with low-wage private sector jobs. Schemes of that sort are unlikely to yield the potential benefits that attract supporters to the concept. Martin Ravallion's review of existing schemes lends weight to those concerns, prompting his observation that

> having a good and worthwhile job no doubt adds to one's satisfaction with life, but that is not as a rule the type of work provided in workfare schemes in poor countries. That work is typically, and deliberately, unpleasant. (2019, p. 10)

In Bruenig's (2018a) view, the job guarantee is essentially a revival of the ideal of full-time, full employment—an elusive goal which was at the centre of the New Deal in depression-era United States, and which shaped labour market policies in many other countries in subsequent decades. It gained renewed attention in 2020 when it was included as a plank in the presidential candidacy of Bernie Sanders (Sanders, 2020). These kinds of proposals are grounded in the assumption that people "deserve" a livable income insofar as they are willing to perform waged work. That value-claim is built into a job guarantee, even versions that focus on care work, community-building and "green" jobs. It ties subsistence to wage labour and deepens the stigmatising gap between "productive" and "unproductive" individuals. Unlike a UBI which, as Gillian Hart (2006, p. 26) has noted, "lacks points of leverage for instilling in its recipients the 'correct' attitudes and aspirations", a job guarantee is invested with strong disciplinary overtones. Referring to public works programmes in SA, Shireen Hassim (2005, p. 13) has highlighted:

> an in-built normative choice in the emphasis on public works programmes as opposed to expansion of the scale of welfare benefits that sets up a two-tier system of benefits with people on work-related programmes treated as "deserving poor" and those on welfare (and particularly mothers drawing the child support grant) as either passive dependent subjects or cunning exploiters of the system.

A job guarantee poses significant practical questions and concerns, too. Experience shows that the programmes are administratively burdensome, unexpectedly expensive, potentially wasteful and difficult to target accurately at households who are most in need. They are also prone to capture by local elites and potentially can be reconfigured in ways that depart from the original visions of their proponents. A job guarantee can be used to tie access to social provisioning to work requirements. If private sector companies (including companies contracted by the state) are able to draw on job guarantee-funded labour, the scheme could function as a disguised state subsidy to capital—though Tcherneva (2007) believes this can be avoided by targeting job guarantee activities at social provisioning ("production for use" rather than "production for profit").

What happens in the "real world"?

Real-world examples of job guarantee programmes have received uneven reviews. Argentina's *Plan Jefes*, for example, has been evaluated favourably, while India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has earned less-glowing assessments. The Argentinian scheme was aimed at heads of households (mainly men), offering them 4 hours of work per day. It employed about 13% of the country's labour force (approximately 2 million workers) and was rolled back as the national economy improved. Evaluations have shown the programme had a positive impact, especially for women, that extended beyond increased incomes. People were able to identify unmet needs in their communities and help develop suitable jobs (including day care, public libraries, after-school activities, artisanal production, and environmental clean up and recycling) (Tcherneva, 2012).

In India, the intervention took the shape of Employment Guarantee Schemes, the first of which began in Maharashtra state in 1973. That scheme was scaled up nationally in 2005, via the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act guarantees, which (in theory) guarantees at least 100 days of waged work to each household per year and enshrines the right to work in law. The work is typically unskilled manual labour that is performed in labour-intensive public works projects (Ravallion, 2019).

According to Tcherneva (2018), the Indian programme has reduced the pay gap between men and women among the poor and has helped raise wages for low-income private sector workers. However, Ravallion (2019) has noted the high administrative and management costs associated with the programme, its capture by local leaders (who can then ration and deploy access to jobs for political and personal gain), as well as corruption. In addition, the overall impact on poverty appeared to be small when set against the administrative and other costs (which tend to be very high in decentralised programmes). The Indian programme reduced rural poverty in Bihar state by 1% (Murgai, Ravallion, van de Walle, 2016), much lower than the 14% predicted reduction (Dutta, Murgai, Ravallion, van de Walle, 2014). Overall, the evidence suggests, according to Ravallion (2019, p. 218), that India's

> Employment Guarantee Schemes have been less cost effective in reducing current poverty through the earnings gains to workers than one would expect from even untargeted transfers, as in a UBI. This calculation could switch in favor of workfare schemes if they can produce assets of value (directly or indirectly) to poor people, though the evidence is mixed on this aspect of the schemes so far in India.

In addition, the programme failed to provide work to everyone who needed it, failed to pay them on time, and was costly to implement. There is some evidence that the scheme has worked better in other states (including Andhra Pradesh) where it has been associated with some wage gains (Imbert & Papp, 2015).

In SA, a job guarantee has not yet been attempted, though a national public works programme has passed through several iterations. Anna McCord's research against exaggerated expectations. She has noted that SA and international evidence suggests that public works programmes tend to provide respite from poverty for participants and reduce the depth of poverty *during* employment. They require complementary social development interventions to have a lasting impact (McCord, 2008).

Analysing recent data from the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in SA, Christl van der Westhuizen has highlighted the small proportion of unemployed South Africans who have benefitted, and the evidence that the EPWP may be undermining the provision of decent jobs, replacing them with precarious, underpaid EPWP opportunities (van der Westhuizen, 2016). Other researchers have concluded that SA's wage-subsidy and public work programmes have failed to make an impact on either unemployment rates or inequality (Ranchod & Finn, 2015). Those findings matched earlier concerns about the SA state's capacity to effectively target the public works programmes towards the poorest sections of society and to efficiently administer them on the scale needed (Seekings, 2006). After reviewing the early phases of the EPWP, Charles Meth (2011) described as “hollow” the claim that the EPWP was functioning as an “employer of last resort”. Close to 80% of the jobs on offer under EPWP schemes have been "low-skilled" (Statistics South Africa, 2017b).

Combining a job guarantee and basic income

The respective attractions and drawbacks of a job guarantee and a UBI tempt the question whether the two schemes can be combined. Estlund (2019) believes they are fundamentally incompatible—due to excessive cost and because they embody and advance conflicting norms (the non-stigmatising right not-to-work versus the conditionality of paid work). The normative objection seems weak, though. The value-laden authority assigned to waged work will not disappear overnight, even when paid work is demonstrably unavailable—as is evident in SA. Those two norms will, perforce, coexist for some time. And they may be more compatible than is commonly assumed. For example, the demand for radically reduced but well-remunerated working hours simultaneously expresses both the right "not to work" and the right "to work", by challenging the subjugation of human life to waged work.

Tcherneva (2006, 2007) believes the two mechanisms need not be mutually exclusive and could be brought together, and looks to the *Jefes* programme in Argentina as an example of this potential. That programme had begun as a quasi-basic income scheme. Once registered, unemployed heads of household immediately began receiving income payments (until the jobs programme was up and running, at which point they took up their public sector jobs). In combination with a range of other income guarantees (e.g. child grants, old-age pensions, disability allowances etc.), the job guarantee programme would guarantee an income to all, but require able-bodied persons to perform community work.

An approach proposed for SA by Adelzadeh, Malumisa and Benecke (2021) goes much further. Its social policy elements hinge on an interplay between a series of guaranteed income grants (the existing social grants plus a new caregiver grant and an unemployment grant), and continued expansion of the EPWP until the latter becomes an employer of last resort by 2030. The difference between the unemployment grant (about ZAR 1,000 per month initially) and the public works wage (about ZAR 3,500 per month) would counter any disincentivising effect the grant may on job seeking. Crucially, these interventions would occur alongside an ambitious set of macroeconomic, trade and industrial policy changes, as well as a major public-private investment initiative targeting selected, mainly manufacturing, sectors. The modelled outcome for this scenario foresees uptake of the unemployment steadily declining as job creation increases. As a poverty reducing mechanism, the combination seems promising, though it stays anchored in waged work and would seem to lack the liberating potential of a UBI.

A more innovative way of blending the two options would be a participation-based income guarantee, which Tony Atkinson (1996) has proposed. Eligibility for the basic income would be based not on citizenship or residence, but on “participation”—a conditional basic income, in other words. “Participation” would be defined liberally as a verifiable commitment (a "contribution contract" with the local community, for instance) to support and contribute to one's community (e.g. through volunteering, care work, teaching, mentoring, cooperative activities, etc.) or to perform other socially useful activities (e.g. studying or undergoing training) (Painter and Thoung, 2015). This has the advantage of being decentred and of linking a basic income to local community dynamics and needs, and to a sense of localised belonging and mutual obligation. The approach would be compatible with collaborative and participatory "civic economy" approaches where people together identify local needs and conceive and implement socially useful projects.[73] As such, according to Carolyn Kagan (2017, p. 10), it would challenge “conventional thinking about work, social protection and participation”.

As discussed earlier, such outcomes are highly desirable, though such an approach introduces a temptation to monitor and enforce participation, thus retaining the coercive characteristics of workfare and conventional welfare programmes (and at considerable administrative cost). Even if the supervision is ceded to local, community organisations, a coercive potential and opportunities for corruption remain. Democratised and vibrant civic life and governance could avert or resist capture by local economic and political elites, though this can be difficult to achieve in settings of extreme inequality and dire need. It would be less risky to part with the participation requirement—which effectively would convert the scheme to a UBI.

[73] Similar to the Organisation Workshop, developed in Brazil and implemented in Latin America and Africa (Carmen & Sobrado, 2000).

6. FINANCING A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

For many critics and observers, a UBI scheme is self-evidently unaffordable, given the scope and likely cost of such a universal payment. But blanket assertions about the affordability of a UBI are invalid. The cost of a scheme will depend on many variables, including the payment amount, decisions about eligibility, whether a UBI is phased in gradually, whether it is indexed to inflation or another indicator, the administrative burden it entails, and more. In addition to the design of a UBI, the context in which it operates is decisively important. That context is shaped by fiscal considerations and choices, macroeconomic options, and political calculations—which differ from country to country.

What would a basic income cost?

A growing list of UBI costing calculations have been attempted in recent years, mostly in industrialised countries and often arriving at exceedingly expensive estimates. These costings should be assessed carefully, though, due to the different assumptions that are built into them. They do not constitute "the last word" on affordability.

In the context of the United States, for example, Robert Greenstein (2019) of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities calculated that paying a UBI of US$ 10 000 per year to each of the over 300 million Americans would have cost US$ 3.3 trillion in 2016. That came to approximately three quarters of the entire federal budget and almost equalled the total annual federal tax revenue. Making the UBI taxable would reduce the annual cost by roughly one third, to about US$ 2.4 trillion. Halving it (to US$ 5,000 per year) would reduce the cost further, but would put the payment well below the poverty line for individuals (US$ 12 700 in 2016) (Greenstein, 2019). Paying the income only to adults would reduce costs even further, while also reducing its impact. Other, more sanguine estimates have also appeared. A household-based negative income tax that is set at the poverty line in the United States (to lift all families' incomes above that line) would cost about US$ 219 billion per year, according to calculations done by Jessica Wiederspan and her colleagues (2015). A negative income tax is not necessarily the best way to achieve a basic income grant, but the broader point remains: the claim that a UBI is unaffordable is not axiomatic (Tondani, 2009).

In Canada, the UBI Works campaign has proposed a combination of a Can$ 500 per month non-taxable payment to every adult (effectively a basic income) and a variable guaranteed income to ensure that each adult has a minimum income of Can$ 2,000 per month. It calculated the total cost at Can$ 199 billion per year (UBI Works, 2020),[74] a little more than the Can$ 180 billion in federals bonds which the Bank of Canada purchased in 2020 as part of its Quantitative Easing programme (Peaudry, 2020). Groups in the United Kingdom are campaigning for a similar, "recovery" UBI, which would phase into a permanent UBI. One such proposal, from Compass, is to use a UBI to introduce a solid income floor for everyone (Lansley, 2020). The design is complex and includes topping up an existing child benefit—in effect a basic income for children. The "recovery" basic income would then be pared back to a smaller but permanent basic income, to provide a floor beneath the current social security system (while additional unemployment, housing and disability benefits are maintained). Compass claims the scheme would be highly affordable.[75]

Variables affecting the cost in South Africa

SA has a much less complicated and less extensive welfare system that most "developed" countries, which simplifies the ways in which a UBI would interact with other forms of social assistance. Many of the remaining considerations, though, resemble those shaping the examples cited above: who is eligible, what payment amount is chosen, is the UBI phased in, at what rate does the amount change, is the UBI paid in addition to (which) existing social grant payments or as a supplement, and more. The first two variables have the biggest in effect on the cost of a UBI scheme.

Consider, for example, setting a monthly UBI payment at an amount equivalent to the Food Poverty Line (ZAR 585 in 2020), or the Lower-Bound Poverty Line (ZAR 840 in 2020) or the Upper-Bound Poverty Line (ZAR 1,268 in 2020), and paying it to adults

[74] It proposes a combination of financing options, including: (i) a land value tax of 2.91% on the value of land (potential revenue of Can$ 130 billion); (ii) reducing federal corporate subsidies, removing tax loopholes and raising the carbon tax revenue to Can$ 75 (Can$ 43 billion); (iii) taxes on environmental degradation and use of commons (Can$ 27 billion); (iv) financial transactions tax (Can$ 7 billion), among other options.

[75] In one Compass proposal, an eventual UBI would be small (totalling about £ 10 400 per year for a family of four) but eminently affordable at £ 20 billion (equal to about half of the aggregate cuts made to benefits in the United Kingdom since 2010, and equal to the cost of the Government's 2020 wage subsidy scheme—effectively a corporate subsidy—over 3 months). Larger payments would of course involve higher net cost. To finance the intervention, Compass proposes a small rise in tax rates and adjustments to some personal income tax allowances (that are of no benefit to low-income earners and people who are out of work).

aged 18-59 years. In 2020, there were approximately 34.1 million South African citizens and residents in that age group.

If paid to each adult aged 18-59 years, a UBI equivalent to the Food Poverty Line would have cost approximately R239 billion per year in 2020. The corresponding annual amounts for a UBI pegged to the Lower-Bound Poverty Line and the Upper-Bound Poverty Line would have been ZAR 343 billion and ZAR 519 billion, respectively. By way of comparison, the SA Government estimated that the current social grants would have cost approximately ZAR 200 billion in 2020 (South African Government News Agency, 2019).

The cost would also be influenced by how a UBI links with existing forms of income support. It could represent the floor or basis for certain other cash grants. For example, a UBI of ZAR 840 per month which is paid to adults aged 18-59 years could constitute the first ZAR 840 of the Disability Grant (ZAR 1,860 in 2020) or the Foster Care Grant (ZAR 1,040) that is due to people eligible for those grants. Or it could be paid in addition to those grants.

Similarly, the UBI could subsume the child support grant (ZAR 440 in 2020), or be paid in addition to it (since, strictly speaking, that grant is intended for children younger than 18 years even though the grant money is transferred to an adult caregiver). A truly universal UBI would be paid to both adults and children, which is especially important in societies with high rates of child poverty and where single parenthood is common. If children are eligible, it requires deciding whether they receive the same amount as adults or a smaller amount. If children are not deemed eligible, the cut-off age (15 years or 18 years, for example) becomes relevant and has cost implications; in SA, 29% of the population is younger than 15 years of age and 34% is younger than 18 years (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Whether a UBI is paid only to citizens or to all documented residents or to all residents also has cost (not to mention social and political) implications.

The UBI amount need not stay the same either. A UBI can be phased in, both in terms of the amount (starting with a small amount which increases along a schedule or as specified criteria are met) or eligible recipients (starting with adults, or out-of-work adults, for instance, and then expanding eligibility). Ideally, a UBI payment would have to be indexed, to prevent it from being devalued by inflation over time. A UBI therefore can be configured along different lines, each of which leads to different cost estimates.

Some costing estimates for South Africa

The debate around a basic income grant in SA revived in the late 2010s and the option of a UBI became increasingly attractive as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020. Thus, the African National Congress's Social Transformation Committee in August 2020 proposed a phased approach, starting with a ZAR 500 per month grant for all unemployed (but economically active) adults from 2024 and culminating in a UBI of the same amount for all adults. Operating alongside this would be job programmes that train and channel young people into employment. The grants would be funded through the tax contributions of employed individuals and other tax mechanisms. Estimates suggested that paying such a UBI to an estimated 33 million eligible recipients would cost would cost about ZAR 198 billion annually (African National Congress Social Transformation Committee, 2020; Institute for Economist Justice, 2020).

Following a similar approach but sensitive to the Treasury's fiscal anxieties, the national Department of Social Development has proposed offering a basic income payment first to the most-at-risk age groups (18-24 or 18-35-year-olds and the 50-59-year age group) and then gradually expanding coverage over 3-5 years. It emphasised combining an income grant with job training and other support to ease people's access to the labour market. Using 2019 data, the Department estimated that paying a UBI to everyone aged 18-59 years would cost about ZAR 197 billion annually (if set at the 2019 Food Poverty Line of ZAR 560 per month), ZAR 285 billion (at a Lower-Bound Poverty Line of ZAR 810 per month), and ZAR 422 billion (at an Upper-Bound Poverty Line of ZAR 1,200 per month) (Institute for Economist Justice, 2020). Phased-in approaches would involve targeting, which will be administratively daunting, costly and very possibly inefficient. The Department's proposal was also vague on financing options, some of which involved potentially regressive changes to taxation.

The Institute for Economic Justice (2020) has presented a number of options, also based on a phased approach. These would begin with scaled-up versions of the emergency grants that were temporarily introduced in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, with those grants providing a "bridge" to an eventual UBI.

Such an approach seems doubly appealing. Despite its low amount of ZAR 350 per person, the "COVID-19 grant" reduced food poverty (though hunger and food insecurity remained at distressingly high levels) (Bridgman, van der Berg, Patel, 2020). If paid to 7.3 million recipients for an entire year, the grant would cost ZAR 20 billion. Even with the constrained uptake seen in 2020, the grant, if increased to ZAR 585 per month (equivalent to the Food Poverty Line in 2020), could prevent approximately 6.8 million people from going hungry. Paying it for a year would cost ZAR 34 billion at 2020 values. Paying the Caregivers' Allowance to 7.1 million recipients and increasing it to ZAR 585 per month (from ZAR 500) would cost ZAR 50 billion over 12 months (compared with ZAR 43 million if set ZAR 500 per month) (Institute for Economic Justice, 2020). These are affordable amounts.

The idea is that the increased emergency grants would then evolve into a UBI. The Institute for Economic Justice (2020) calculated scenarios for monthly payments pegged to the Food Poverty, Lower-Bound Poverty and Upper-Bound Poverty values in 2020 (ZAR 585, ZAR 840 and ZAR 1,268, respectively) (Statistics South Africa, 2020c), amounts it believes are affordable in the short-term. For illustrative purposes, it also calculated the cost of monthly ZAR 2,500 and ZAR 3,500 grants (both well under the national minimum wage of ZAR 4,045 in 2020). Recipients (people aged 18-59 years) were grouped into several eligibility categories (Table 1).

Table 1. Total estimated annual cost of a universal basic income at different levels of eligibility, uptake and value (ZAR billions) in South Africa, 2020

		Monthly UBI payment				
Eligibility (18-59 years)	**Number of recipients (million)**	**ZAR 585 (Food Poverty Line)**	**ZAR 840 (Lower-Bound Poverty Line)**	**ZAR 1,268 (Upper-Bound Poverty Line**	**ZAR 2,500**	**ZAR3,500**
All	34.1m	239	343	519	1023	1432
All (80% uptake)	27.3m	192	275	415	818	1146
All (60% uptake)	20.5m	144	206	311	614	859
Informal workers[76]	2.5m	18	25	38	76	106

[76] This refers to informal sector workers only (not domestic workers, precariously employed persons etc.)

Unemployed	11m	78	111	168	332	464
Not economically active	13.4m	94	135	203	401	561
Not formally employed	22.4m	157	226	341	672	940

Source: Adapted from Institute for Economic Justice (2020).

Note: Numbers of eligible recipients were calculated using Statistics South Africa data. The costings assume 100% uptake in each of the categories.

The targeted options shown in Table 1 reflect an awareness that, "in the context of finite resources, there is a trade-off between increasing the pool of recipients and the amount which they receive" (Institute for Economic Justice, 2020, p. 18). However, those options are also administratively costly and are likely not to be efficient for reaching the designated beneficiaries. They can also be unfair, if they miss individuals who churn in and out of piecemeal or informal employment. In addition, some forms of targeting would be very difficult to administer (e.g. if the grant targets individuals who are unemployed and/or who work in the informal sector). Targeting obviously also renders the grants less than "universal". A UBI that is paid to everyone aged 18-59 years (while an old-age pension continues to be paid to those 60 years and older) is much preferable:

> It allows for the closing of a major gap in South Africa’s social assistance net, as well as recognises the assistance as a fundamental human right. The positive welfare and economic effects of an untargeted, universal UBIG are likely to be larger too as more people are given additional spending power. (*ibid*)

A UBI paid to everyone aged 18-59 years—i.e. 34.1 million people in 2020 is also more expensive. It would annually cost:

- ZAR 239 billion for a UBI payment equal to the Food Poverty Line (ZAR 585 per month in 2020);
- ZAR 343 billion for a UBI payment equal to the Lower-Bound Poverty Line (ZAR 840 per month);
- ZAR 519 billion for a UBI payment equal to the Upper-Bound Poverty Line (ZAR 1,268 per month);
- ZAR 1,012 billion for a UBI payment worth ZAR 2,500 per month.

The beneficial effects, though, would be formidable. Preliminary results from modelling done by Development Research Solutions (Adelzadeh, 2021) indicate that, even if set at a low amount (equal to the Food Poverty Line,) a UBI that is paid to adults aged 18-59 years would reduce the poverty gap in SA by almost half within 5 years (Table 2). If raised to the level of the Upper-Bound Poverty Line, the payment would reduce the poverty gap by almost 60% over 5 years and by over 40% within the first year. A UBI that is pegged to the Upper-Bound Poverty Line and paid to residents of all ages (i.e. adults and children) would entirely eliminate the poverty gap within a year.

Table 2. Estimated annual cost of a different types of universal basic income at different amounts (ZAR billions) and modeled impact on poverty in South Africa, 2020-2025

Grant type	Grant eligibility*	No. of recipients (2021)	Monthly grant amount 2021	Monthly grant amount 2025	Direct annual cost (billions) 2021	Poverty rate*** change 2020-2025	Poverty gap*** change 2020-2025
Unemployment grant**	Unemployed, 15-64 years, not receiving any other grants	9.1 million	ZAR 1268 (UBPL)	ZAR 1618 (UBPL)	ZAR 145.6	–41%	13.3% to 6.5%
Adult basic income A**	Adults, 18-59 years	35.3 million	ZAR 585 (FPL)	ZAR 747 (FPL)	ZAR 259.9	–33%	13.3% to 7.6%
Adult basic income B**	Adults, 18-59 years	35.3 million	ZAR 1268 (UBPL)	ZAR 1618 (UBPL)	ZAR 563.4	–47%	13.3% to 5.7%
Universal basic income A**	All ages	59.5 million	ZAR 585 (FPL)	ZAR 747 (FPL)	ZAR 438.7	–57%	13.3% to 3.6%
Universal basic income B**	All ages	59.5 million	ZAR 1268 (UBPL)	ZAR 1618 (UBPL)	ZAR 950.9	–100%	13.3% to 0.0%

Source: Adapted from Adelzadeh, A. (2021). Preliminary modelling results of a basic income grant in South Africa. Presentation to #UBIG Workshop, 29 January 2021. Development Research Solutions, California USA.

* As defined by Statistics South Africa, whether in school or not, regardless of labour market status.

** Current state grants (e.g. Child Support Grant, Care Dependency, Old-Age Pension and Disability Grants) continue to be paid.

*** Both the poverty rate and poverty gap were calculated using the Upper-Bound Poverty Line, and are annually adjusted upward by 5%.

Paying for a universal basic income

For a middle-income country such as SA, a debt-financed UBI would be an unattractive route over the medium- to long-term. However, there may be scope in the short-term for some debt-based financing of a UBI, while other financing options are introduced. (Some of the tax-related mechanisms, for example, could require several years of legislative and other preparation.) In some economies, a social dividend fund financed from the exploitation of natural resources (such as the Alaska Permanent Divided Fund) has been proposed. However, relying on natural resource rents is not compatible with an ecologically responsible growth path, nor are options that require high rates of carbon-intensive economic growth to increase the tax base.

Income and other taxes

Most attractive to UBI proponents is a combination of existing tax instruments, such as increased value-added tax (VAT) or general sales tax, excise tax (for example on luxury items or capital goods), personal income tax and wealth tax, as well as "sin" taxes on tobacco and alcohol.

During the BIG campaign in SA, Pieter le Roux (2003) argued that the net impact of a VAT increase would be progressive and that the mechanism would distort the economy less than increases in income taxes or corporate taxes. Similarly, Seekings & Matthison (2010, p. 24) have claimed that VAT increases would "spread the burden across a wider range of quintiles, although the top quintiles continue to pay the lion’s share". While increased excise taxes (particularly on luxury goods) could be a redistributive source of financing, increasing VAT would be regressive (all else equal), since VAT represents a much larger share of spending for low-income households compared with those in higher income brackets. Relying on increased indirect taxes would significantly reduce the net gain to low-income recipients. In the SA scenario, for example, Le Roux (2003) calculated that a 50% increase in indirect taxes would reduce a nominal ZAR 100 monthly UBI payment to approximately ZAR 66 per month for people in the bottom five income deciles. But the basic contention of the SA BIG Financing Reference Group's (2004, p. 24) remains valid:

> The structure of taxation must ultimately be overhauled, both to make the tax system more progressive (i.e., to shift a larger proportion of the total tax burden onto higher income earners) and to increase total revenue collection.

Among the most detailed tax-based calculations currently available for SA are the estimates prepared by the Institute for Economic Justice (2020). They suggest that a combination of 12 financing sources (9 of them tax-related) could yield at least ZAR 154 billion annually.

The largest financing sources would be a social security tax (contributing about 40% of the total), eliminating retirement fund contributions and medical tax credits for high-income earners (about 20%), introducing a 25% of value-added tax on luxury items (about 7%), and reducing or recovering a minor proportion of wasteful or irregular state expenditure (about 8%). In addition, a wealth tax could contribute between ZAR 34 billion and ZAR 189 billion annually, depending on the configuration (see below).

The biggest single financing source in the Institute's scenarios is a social security tax on income, levied against annual incomes higher than ZAR 80 000 and rising from 2% to 3%, depending on the income bracket. Having such an earmarked funding source could help safeguard a UBI against cutbacks or removal, especially if it is ring-fenced.[77] Alaska's guaranteed income, for example, is explicitly tied to Alaska Permanent Fund (Widerquist & Howard, 2012). Ultimately, though, a strong defence will require a supportive constituency that wields political influence.

The risk of relying predominantly on a personal income tax, especially if levied against relatively modest incomes, is that it may stoke resentment and undermine public support for a UBI, a concern which Varoufakis (2016) has highlighted. Given that upward income redistribution towards the top 10% of earners in SA appears to occur also at the expense of earners in the middle-income deciles (Palma, 2012), it may be advisable to consider targeting a social security tax at higher income brackets, e.g. ZAR 200 000 and up.

The other financing mechanisms proposed by the Institute are:

- a luxury item VAT (25%);
- abolishing medical tax credits and retirement fund contributions for high-income earners;
- increasing the dividend tax by 5% (to 25%);
- replace estate duty with a progressive inheritance tax;
- cancelling the employment tax incentive;
- raising the carbon tax to one quarter the European Union standard;
- reducing wasteful state expenditure (by 30%); and
- reducing profit-shifting by multinational corporations.

In a country as unequal as SA, a wealth tax, which the Institute also proposes, holds strong appeal. According to the Institute's calculations, such a tax could raise ZAR 34

[77] Fiscal policy in SA currently does not favour ring-fencing specific tax revenues for specific sectors or purposes. There is no insurmountable reason why this policy cannot be suspended in the case of a social security tax or a carbon tax.

billion annually if set at 1% and levied only against the top 0.1% of income earners, while the amount would almost double (to ZAR 63 billion) if the tax is levied against the top 1% of earners and it could reach ZAR 189 billion if a 3% tax is levied against the top 1% of earners.

Several of these options are necessary irrespective of whether a UBI is introduced. A wealth tax holds both fiscal and moral appeal, despite some concerns about the administrative costs it may entail. It is estimated the the wealthiest 10% of South Africans own more than 90% of total private wealth (Davis Tax Committee, 2018). Similarly, medical tax credits for high-income earners deepen inequality and function as mechanisms for transferring income upwards. The same can be said of the current lack of a progressive inheritance tax. The surfeit of corporate subsidies and tax breaks or exemptions also requires rigorous review.

The Institute for Economic Justice (2020) also sees VAT (currently at 15%) as a way to recoup part of the UBI cost. The net effect, though, would be to "tax back" a portion of UBI payments from the individuals who need them the most (the lower half of income earners spend approximately 80% of income on items or services subject to VAT). To boost the impact of a UBI, it would be preferable to broaden current VAT exemptions to include more of the goods and services which low-income households are most likely to purchase regularly. As the Davis Tax Committee (2018) also highlighted, the efficiency of VAT as a revenue source is undercut by unfairness in the absence of pro-poor exemptions and if significant revenue is not "recycled" in the form of social grants.

Carbon tax

A carbon tax is an attractive financing source, as well as a potentially effective way to discourage and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Greenstein, 2019). An increasing number of countries are introducing such a tax. It can be levied in a number of ways, for example against carbon emissions as well as against the consumption of carbon-intensive goods and services. The tax can be calculated at a set rate, which can be increased annually to function as a steadily growing disincentive for carbon-emitting economic activities. The revenue can be fashioned into a "climate dividend" to be paid to citizens as a UBI or in some other form. Canada, for example, is considering an option which would recycle about 90% of carbon tax revenue to citizens (Carattini, 2019). A carbon tax will not, in the long term, be a sustainable source of financing for a UBI if it successfully spurs shifts away from carbon-based economic activities. Over time, its contribution would need to be supplemented increasingly from other sources.[78]

SA introduced a carbon tax in 2019 on entities that operate emissions generation facilities at a combined installed capacity equal to or above a specified carbon tax threshold (South African Government, 2019). In the first phase, a tax rate of ZAR 120 (approximately US$ 8.30) per tonne of $C0_2$ was imposed, with the rate increasing annually by inflation plus 2% until 2022, and then by inflation thereafter. This is an exceedingly light touch. Extensive tax-free emissions allowances have also been built into the policy (ranging from 60% to 95%), so that the actual carbon tax rate will be between ZAR 6 and ZAR 48 per tonne of $C0_2$, which is negligible and which barely pays lip-service to the stated goal of achieving rapid reductions in carbon emissions. The rates amount to a mere 1-8% of the US$ 40 cost per tonne which the World Bank sees as the lowest level of carbon tax that would be compatible with the objectives of the Paris Agreement (High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices, 2017). Eskom, the national energy supplier which produces about 90% of the country's electricity, will not have to pay the tax until 2023 (South African Revenue Service, 2020). There clearly is considerable room to increase a carbon tax in SA.

The very low, current rate reflects the SA Treasury's concerns with minimising possible trade-offs between economic growth, job creation and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. The received wisdom holds that a carbon tax would tend to reduce economic growth (by up to 5% in a country with SA's energy profile according to some estimates) (Carattini, 2019). But more detailed economic modelling in SA has found that a carbon tax with broad sector coverage, if coupled with efficient recycling of the revenue, would have a marginal negative impact on GDP growth in the short term, while significantly contributing to greenhouse-gas emission reductions. Over the long term, the tax would support a transition to a low-carbon economy (Van Heerden, Blignaut, Bohlmann, Cartwright, Diederichs et al., 2016).

[78] A carbon tax would need to be accompanied by mechanisms that protect low-income households against possible electricity and other price increases.

Financial transactions tax

A tax on financial transactions (an FTT, sometimes called a "Robin Hood Tax" and occasionally also likened to the "Tobin Tax" which made headlines in the late 1990s) is frequently proposed as a financing option.[79] Such a tax would be levied on the transfer of ownership of designated financial assets (e.g. stocks and equities, bonds, international currencies, and derivatives and securities such as futures, options and credit default swaps). In Bivens and Blair's (2016) view, FTTs are most effective when applied to a broad base rather than to particular classes of assets or financial marketplaces, an approach which reduces the space for tax avoidance and increases the efficiency of collection.

The tax has two major potential benefits: it can discourage financial market speculation by raising the costs for speculators, and it can be a substantial source of additional government revenues. Proponents claim it would help reduce asset price volatility and bubbles, and encourage longer-term investment (Bivens & Blair, 2016). Hardly a novel tool, FTTs are being used effectively, though conservatively, in different market conditions. The United Kingdom, for example, raises about US$ 6.5 billion per year from a 0.5% tax on stock trading (via a stamp duty). At least 15 other countries operate some kind of FTT or have done so in the recent past (Bivens & Blair, 2016).[80] Several European Union countries have adopted FTTs in some form, as have Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa, among others. United States Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in 2019 proposed an FTT as part of his free college tuition plan (Baker, 2019).

By way of example, the French Financial Transactions Tax is set at 0.3% on French equity trades and 0.01% on high frequency trading. Belgium imposes a sliding-scale stock exchange tax on transactions of stocks and bonds, while Switzerland taxes the transfer of equities and bonds at 0.15% for Swiss securities and 0.3% for foreign

[79] The tax which James Tobin proposed in 1972 was intended to penalise short-term currency speculation; it later came to be understood as a tax on any short-term financial transactions. It is not a particularly "modern" intervention: the "stamp duty", which dates to 1694 in England, is a kind of tax on financial transactions.

[80] As to the tax rate, Pollin (2012) has proposed a rate of 0.5% of the sale price of stocks (the current rate in the United Kingdom stock market), with a sliding scale for bonds, futures, options and other derivative instruments. For bonds, for example, the rate could be 0.01% for every year to maturity (i.e. 0.1% for a 10-year bond). The impact of the tax would be greatest on short-term speculation, which accounts for a majority of financial market activity. If set too low, however, an FTT would neither raise large amounts of revenue, nor discourage excessive speculative trading.

securities. Brazil's version targets a range of financial operations, including currency transactions and transfers of bonds and securities, while India imposes a securities transaction tax on share purchases and sales at designated stock exchanges. South Africa implemented a securities transfer tax in 2008, which levies a 0.25% tax on the purchase and transfer of securities. These arrangements commonly include numerous exemptions (BNY Mellon, 2019).

Part of the attraction of such a tax is that the base is so large that a very low tax rate can yield impressive revenues, in addition to potentially reducing incentives for rent-seeking and speculation. In Varoufakis' (2016) view, a tax on financial capital is valuable not only for financing public goods but also for helping stabilise financial markets and mitigate harmful macroeconomic effects. This is particularly important in a period when financial capital is increasingly detached from the real economy,[81] while exerting great influence on the design of macroeconomic policy, the allocation of investment across economies, and the distribution of income across societies. The tax can be seen also as a form of reparations for the economic costs and damage associated with the activities of the financial sector in recent decades.

An FTT tends to draw two main criticisms: that it would encourage tax avoidance (through offshoring and other ruses) and that it would distort productive financial trading (which, by reducing liquidity, will raise the cost of capital and discourage investment). The potential for tax avoidance highlights the need for efficient regulatory institutions and the effective enforcement of those laws and regulations. SA, for example, possesses the regulatory and technical means for minimising such avoidance, but has chosen a macroeconomic strategy which relies heavily on large flows of portfolio capital;[82] the obstacles to prudent regulatory enforcement in this case are less technical than political. The second objection is anachronistic, given the surfeit of liquidity since the 2008 global financial crisis, a glut which has been augmented again during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

[81] Since 2000 in the United States, for example, the 500 largest companies on Standard & Poor's 500 stock index spent approximately US$ 8.3 trillion buying their own stock to hoist the price—over half their profits over the period, and equal to almost 20% of total business investment in that period, as Doug Henwood (2021, January 21) has detailed.

[82] Discussed in greater detail in the "What kind of macroeconomic strategy is needed?" section, below.

Leonard Burman and his colleagues (2016) have counselled caution with regards to the amounts of revenue which an FTT can realistically raise. They calculated that a putative FTT in the United States context would raise a maximum of 0.4% of GDP (equivalent to US$ 75 billion in 2017), with a base tax rate set at 0.34%. They also warned that higher rates would have a discouraging effect on all trading, not only speculative and rent-seeking activities, and could contribute to market volatility. In addition, they argue, as a tax on gross rather than net activity, a broad FTT would be poorly targeted at the most harmful financial sector activities. A more recent study arrived at a similar estimate for the United States and an estimate of € 119 billion (0.69% of GDP) for United States European Union as a whole (Pekanov & Schratzenstaller, 2019). Focusing on the United States economy, Bivens and Blair (2016) regard such estimates as "excessively pessimistic". Depending on how financial transactions volumes are affected by an FTT (their "elasticity"), they envisage potential gross revenues of US$ 110-403 billion annually, in line with several other estimates which predict a net revenue potential in the United States of about US$ 220 billion per year (equal to about 1.2% of GDP).[83]

Whereas wealth taxes are readily avoidable through tax avoidance manoeuvres, a wide-angled FTT would narrow such escape routes. The only way to avoid it would be by reducing trading, that is to say less demand for goods and services in the financial sector. Robert Pollin and his collaborators (Pollin, Heintz, Herndon 2017) believe that if an FTT is designed to apply across stock, bond and derivative markets (and with minimal tax exemptions), it can be expected to lower trading elasticity, all else equal. Empirical evidence leaves it unclear whether such reductions would be mainly in unproductive trading or also in transactions that provide liquidity (Burman, Gale, Gault, Kim, Nunns et al., 2016). But the converse has not been true: increased financial transactions have not been associated with rising productive investment. In the United States, for example, an 18-fold increase from 1970s to 2015 in the ratio of stock market trading to productive investment spending by nonfinancial corporations was not associated with any growth in productive investments. Other empirical evidence suggests that a reduction in stock

[83] According to Bivens & Blair (2016, p. 3), "current elasticity estimates are based on FTTs that are not particularly well-designed to discourage arbitrage among asset classes or among national trading exchanges".

market trading need not have a significant, negative effect on productive investments by nonfinancial corporations (Pollin et al., 2017).[84]

Land-value tax

This revenue option is oddly neglected. Not to be confused with a property tax (which taxes the value of the built structures on an area of land), a land-value tax would be applied against the value of real estate minus the structures built on it. Given the very high levels of wealth and asset inequality in many countries (SA being an egregious example), some of it tied to the skewed distribution of real estate ownership, a land-value tax would be highly progressive. It would make the fiscal system both broader and fairer, especially in places where land ownership is skewed very strongly by income. Implicit in such a tax is recognition that the value of individual assets derives from and is dependent on larger collectives; the value of a piece of land is fundamentally dependent on its surroundings.

A strong case exists for a land-value tax. It is difficult to evade (since the tax base is literally immovable and can be verified relatively easily by assessors) and it is considered to be the least distortive of taxes.[85] Because the tax is levied irrespective of whether and how the land is used (i.e. whether or not "economic rent" is extracted), it may promote more efficient use of land. It is also likely to discourage land price bubbles (Davis Tax Committee, 2018). Land value taxes have a potential to become significant sources of government revenue. Research in New Zealand has indicated that a 1% per annum tax on all nongovernment-owned land would have raised the equivalent of 20% of all income tax revenue in 2010 (Coleman & Grimes, 2010). More recent research from Indonesia, Nicaragua, Peru and Rwanda suggest that taxing one half of land rents could increase government budgets by up to 15% (Kalkuhl, Milan, Schwerhoff, Jakob, Hahnen et al., 2019).

In SA, a recurrent land value tax could gradually replace the existing "transfer duty" (Davis Tax Committee, 2018). To safeguard the redistributive effect of a land value tax, it would be necessary to use a tax threshold that exempts subsistence farmers and low-

[84] According to Pollin and his co-authors (2017, p. 38), "stock market trading rose from being about 1.2 times greater than productive investments in the 1970s to averaging about 22 times greater than productive investments from the late 1990s until the present."

[85] Since the supply of land is fixed, a land tax would not affect economic efficiency.

income households from the tax. Other practical considerations include liquidity and the ability to pay the tax (for example, retired persons with limited income); such concerns can be addressed through exemptions.

There is a perception that implementing a land tax would be expensive and administratively challenging "developing" countries. SA, though, has fairly robust municipal property registers (though the valuation methods vary across municipalities) and it commands the technical tools for assessing land values (Davis Tax Committee, 2018). Until the early 2000s, the taxation of urban land values in fact was a significant source of revenue for many local governments in SA. However, legal changes then eliminated the option of a "split-rate tax" in favour of a single property tax (Kalkuhl et al., 2018).[86]

A corporate dividend

There are extra-fiscal concerns about relying on personal income tax increases as a primary source of UBI financing. Yanis Varoufakis (2016), for example, emphasises that it is not only a matter of finding the money for a UBI, it matters also where one finds it. His concern is that relying mainly on personal income taxes to finance a UBI could have a corrosive effect—by generating resentment and heightening a sense of unfairness, especially among the middle classes, which ultimately could doom a UBI politically.

It therefore may be more advisable to fund a UBI from returns on capital. Notably, many of the financing options circulating currently tend to neglect or play down taxes on the business sector, and focus instead on individuals. This is not surprising. Implicit in a tax on capital returns is a response to the ways in which wealth is produced and appropriated in capitalist societies. Such a tax would acknowledge the reality that wealth is created collectively, but is then "privatised" and appropriated as the ostensible product of individual risk, enterprise and toil.[87]

[86] In addition to municipal property rates, immovable property in SA is potentially also taxed through a capital gains tax (in reality a tax on deferred income), and a transfer duty or VAT payable by the purchaser of immovable property.

[87] Corporate taxes do not address that reality. They effectively remunerate the state (very partially, in most instances) for the infrastructure and services it provides (including education, security, healthcare, transport, research and development, and more).

Capital accumulation is underpinned by the extraction of value from soil, air and water, and it is bankrolled by public money and social labour: care and reproductive work, publicly funded education and healthcare, research and development, infrastructure, corporate subsidies, tax breaks and more. At this fundamental level, wealth is socially produced (by people's labour, paid or not, and by the state) and is reliant on commons (most obviously, non-human nature). The wealth is then privately appropriated. This reality is edited out of the standard narrative which claims that wealth is privately generated and then socially appropriated (through taxation).

Given the unacknowledged and largely unrecompensed collective contributions to corporate wealth, argues Varoufakis (2016), "the commons have a right to a share of the capital stock and associated dividends". That share can be used to finance a UBI (and other other public goods). Varoufakis proposes that a portion of the returns to capital be channeled into a social wealth fund from which everyone is paid a dividend. The Alaska Permanent Fund operates along similar lines; it is capitalised from oil revenues. An increasing number of social wealth funds have been established since 2000, though most are not deployed primarily or at all for social purposes (Bruenig, 2019).

There are various ways to bring capital into such a fund. Legislation can be passed requiring, for example, that a percentage of capital stock (shares) from initial public offerings (an "IPO tax") be channelled into the fund. Or it can be financed through a one-off tax on the market capitalisation of publicly-traded companies or a lower ongoing tax (the total market capitalisation of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, for example, was approximately US$ 1 trillion in 2020) (Anon, 2018). A mergers and acquisitions tax is an additional option. It can be set at 2-3% of the transaction value (with a minimum threshold to exclude small businesses). An FTT (see above) and an elevated inheritance tax are other options to bring capital into the fund (Bruenig, 2019). If used to finance a UBI (or "universal basic dividend", as Varoufakis prefers), such a corporate dividend would represent a small but significant step towards socialising the wealth produced in a country like SA and towards reducing inequality.

The financial feasibility of a UBI is highly contextual. It depends on the amount of the payment, how eligibility is decided, and how those two variables change over time (e.g. by phasing in a UBI scheme). Viable scenarios exist for SA. A wide range of fiscal options also exist for financing a UBI programme, almost all of which can have a progressive redistributive impact, irrespective of whether they are used to finance a UBI.

7. THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Debates about a UBI quickly circle to the issue of affordability. The working assumption tends to be that a UBI would bankrupt countries. Yet the infusions of liquidity into financial markets during and after the 2008 global financial crisis and again during the COVID-19 pandemic show that the limits of "affordable" state spending are considerably more elastic than is commonly acknowledged. In addition, as shown in the previous chapter, a range of feasible UBI financing options exists.

The question of affordability, it seems, should be reshaped: is a UBI seen to be important and desirable enough to be made affordable? And that is eminently political question. Thandika Mkandawire's (2001, p.28) observation about social policy decision-making applies also to a UBI:

> No amount of evidence of the instrumental efficacy or of the intrinsic value of particular social policies will lead to their adoption if they are not deemed politically feasible.

Building political support

The World Bank (2020) and UBI skeptics such as Robert Greenstein (2019) have emphasised the need for support that cuts across partisan lines. Achieving that, they warn, will likely entail compromises that shift the design of a UBI in more conservative and potentially regressive directions, including perhaps turning it into a stalking horse to replace current welfare provisioning. In settings with poorly developed and patchy forms of social welfare, as in many "developing" countries, concern about the erosion of existing social assistance seems less pertinent than in "developed" counterparts with established, often complicated welfare systems. But other forms of pro-poor support (e.g. fuel, food and transport subsidies) may well be vulnerable if fiscal policy is tightened. In SA's case, the current social grant system and social wage provisioning would have to be explicitly defended.

Of central importance, turning to SA specifically, are the National Treasury and the Reserve Bank. For the past quarter century, they have overseen a development path marked by extremely high unemployment rates, high poverty levels and widening wealth and income inequality, but which services key prerogatives of corporate capital. That authority was cemented after the sidelining, in 1996, of a "super-ministry" which had been tasked with managing implementation of the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme. Subsequent attempts to curb the Treasury's power (e.g. by creating countervailing ministerial powers responsible for industrial policy or by assigning substantive authority to a Ministry of Economic Development) have failed. As a result, the Treasury, along with the Reserve Bank, wield excessive power within the SA government and state (Mohamed, 2019; Padayachee, 2019; Marais, 2011).

Yet, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and a deepening social and economic crisis, it is not certain that the policy paths chosen by those institutions will remain unassailable. Citing fiscal concerns, the SA Treasury in the early 2000s resisted a national rollout of free antiretroviral therapy for people living with HIV, but its opposition was overridden politically (Lawson, 2008). During the same period, it successfully held off demands for a national basic income, but soon relented to a steady expansion of the social grant system.

Similar shifts have been occurring elsewhere in Africa. In Uganda, for example, the government agreed to introduce a social pension despite strong resistance from its Finance Ministry (which had opposed the move on the grounds of affordability and social dependency). That opposition, however, relented to a transnational coalition that brought together international donors, other Government departments, and civil society organisations. The coalition succeeded in presenting the pension proposal both as a necessary welfare intervention and as a pragmatic step to undercut burgeoning social and political disquiet (Hickey & Bukenya, 2019).[88]

These are reminders also that, in addition to the prevailing national political dynamics, the potential for major social policy shifts is shaped also by background ideological conditions. The Ugandan decision was facilitated, perhaps even coaxed, by the current penchant among multilateral and other major donors for cash transfer programmes.

Alert to the destabilising impact of neoliberal economic adjustments, the World Bank in the 1990s had begun broadcasting the advantages of social "safety nets" in developing countries. In the 2000s, it and the United Kingdom's Department for International

[88] The achievement should not be exaggerated. The pension payment is very small, reaches a tiny proportion of Uganda's poor, and appears to have been used as part of a clientelist strategy to shore up political power.

Development were showing special enthusiasm for conditional cash transfer schemes (Department for International Development, 2005; World Bank, 2010). The 2008 global financial crisis concentrated minds further on the need for mitigating interventions. The expansion of SA social grant system since the mid-2000s occurred against this background, as well. By 2012, even the International Monetary Fund was signaling support for expanded social protection as part of "inclusive development", a theme which soon featured strongly in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (2015). Some observers saw the expansion of social protection programmes as evidence of a trend away from neoliberal orthodoxy, led by "emergent" powers in the South (Brazil, India and South Africa were often cited as examples) (Hanlon, Barientos, Hulme, 2010). Instead, the enthusiasm for and design of cash transfer programmes—particularly in Africa—appears to be driven primarily by Northern donors and multilateral organisations (notably the World Bank and DfID) (Hickey, Lavers, Seekings, 2020).

Similarly, the decision to fund a national HIV treatment programme in SA was in step with international policy guidance and sentiment regarding the AIDS epidemic (Marais, 2011). Crucially, though, the decision was also forced home by the most successful social movement of the post-apartheid era, the Treatment Action Campaign. It combined charismatic leadership, dramatic social protest, legal challenges and extensive transnational networking to legitimise progressive demands that centred on the rights of people living with HIV to receive free, life-saving treatment (Friedman & Mottiar, 2006). SA today has the largest HIV treatment programme in the world, the bulk of it funded domestically (a rarity among low- and middle-income countries). Healthcare (and specifically the response to AIDS) became the only arena in which the state's monopoly on policymaking authority—and, even more impressively, the Treasury's authority—has been successfully and demonstrably challenged since 1994.

Mobilising popular support

The Treatment Action Campaign's experience also reminds that success in one domain and in a particular set of conditions is not easily replicated. The Campaign has struggled subsequently (to very modest effect) to refashion itself into a broader social justice movement, despite the validity of its demands. It may be that the ambient factors that enabled its success around HIV policies have been absent subsequently. Or it may be that the current demands are not as amenable to "clear-cut" solutions as the demand for HIV treatment may have been.

Might it be more feasible to mobilise social solidarity around a UBI and into a politically influential force? To date there is no example from a "developing" country to support that expectation. The BIG campaign in SA in the early 2000s gained traction in policy circles and the institutions of some social movements (trade unions, for example), but it was not driven by a groundswell of popular support. This holds lessons for UBI campaigning and for how the demand for a UBI is framed and positioned.

While the need for an intervention like a UBI may seem self-evident, a generalised desire for a UBI cannot be assumed. Whereas the demand for free HIV treatment carried obvious, indisputable moral force, a UBI can be, for many people, a jarring, disorientating concept. Referring to survey data from Cape Town, for example, Seekings and Matisson (2010, p. 18) claimed that "not even poor voters are unambiguously supportive of a BIG [...] public opinion clearly favours the extension of social assistance, but not unconditionally".

Such apparent reticence seems to have weakened, especially during the aggravated hardship of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the COVID-19 Democracy Survey (conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Johannesburg in 2020), 61% of respondents favoured the introduction of a basic income grant during the pandemic crisis. Support for a UBI was highest among lower-income respondents (75%). There was also strong public support for increasing the value of social grants and for continued provision of the (ZAR 350 per month) Social Relief of Distress Grant (or "COVID grant") (69% in favour of both options). Sixty-one percent of respondents favoured the introduction of a basic income grant during the COVID-19 crisis (Alexander & Bohler-Muller, 2020). This was in line with findings from an earlier survey, which in 2016 had found 63% of respondents supported a basic income grant (Human Sciences Research Council, 2016).[89]

Other survey findings have suggested more ambivalent attitudes, however. An Afrobarometer survey done in 2018, found that most South Africans (76%) favoured the

[89] The level of support was comparable with that found in Belgium, Hungary, Israel, Russian Federation and Slovenia in the European Social Survey Round 8 (European Social Survey, 2018).

state supporting low-income households through cash transfers, and two thirds (67%) believed it was the state's responsibility to support poor households. But more than half of respondents (53%) also said that abled-bodied adults should work for their social grants. A similar proportion (59%) of respondents "agreed" that social grant recipients "become lazy when they rely on" social grants (Moosa & Patel, 2020). The latter attitude is not supported by empirical evidence (Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen, Koep C, 2015), but the fact that it endures is a reminder of the extent to which non-wage income for the poor remains stigmatised. Amid the findings from the COVID-19 Democracy Survey, as well, were worrying signs of fraying social solidarity: in the three months between the first and second Survey rounds, the proportion of respondents who felt "more united and supportive of each other" decreased from 48% to 34% (Alexander & Bohler-Muller, 2020).

Demanding a UBI requires much more than successfully "selling" the intervention to policymakers. That campaign necessarily involves a struggle to reshape the assumptions and "common sense" people draw on when considering the obligations and entitlements they have on one another, on the state and on other institutions (Hall, 1996). A UBI is freighted with challenging propositions regarding the obligations, entitlements and debts that connect people in society. It calls into question commonplace understandings of waged work, its authority in our social order, and the hierarchies of worth and value we attach to different kinds of work. A UBI campaign has to entail a process of critique and revelation—not least about the injustice of using paid work as the principal basis for allocating and distributing income in a society such as SA. This makes a UBI demand potentially important also for building a broad-based counter-hegemony in the context of deepening crisis.

Framing the demand

It is mistaken to approach a UBI as a stand-in for far-reaching transformation: it is not a cure-all. But it can be positioned as a necessary, empowering and desirable component of progressive change. At a minimum, a UBI would constitute an entitlement that is grounded in the state's obligation to safeguard the well-being citizens or residents, harking back to Maximilien Robespierre's remarks:

> What is the primary aim of society? It is to maintain the inalienable rights of man. What is the foremost of these rights? The right to exist. Therefore, the first social law is that which guarantees all members of society the means of existence; all others are subordinate to that.[90]

A more radical perspective would position a UBI as a dividend of the collectively produced wealth in society, recognition that the entirety of society is entitled to a rightful share of the total social product. For Varoufakis (2017), this approach steers the debate beyond the deserving/undeserving binary: "[S]ociety stakes a claim to aggregate capital and that claim becomes a dividend, an income stream that goes to everyone". The divided would be paid to people as members of a society, in recognition that society collectively produces wealth—a proposition that is tune with important political traditions in SA. The concept of a such dividend seems especially appealing in a country where the economy has been built on systemic expropriation and exploitation spanning the colonial and apartheid eras, and continuing subsequently.[91] Reinforcing that appeal is the fact that the bulk of the environmental costs of SA's development path has also been imposed on poor communities. Their environments and health were degraded, while they benefited the least from developmental "progress" (Gibson, Ismail, Kilian, Matshikiza, 2008; Cock, 2006). Similarly, a UBI can be posed as a form of "just deserts" for current and future unpaid work perform by women.

Framing a UBI as a dividend also highlights the dimension of justice and links to the socioeconomic rights enshrined in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Government of South Africa, 1996) which assigns to the SA state a constitutional obligation to progressively realise the right to social security and social assistance for all. The Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to social security, including appropriate social assistance for those who are unable to support themselves and their dependents. It also states that "everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food" and that every child has the right to basic nutrition, basic health care services and social services. The State is obligated to take reasonable legislative and other measures, within

[90] Quoted in Labica, G. (1990). *Robespierre - une politique de la philosophie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 53-54.

[91] Framing a UBI as a kind of reparation also holds appeal, though it can be problematic. If the UBI demand is framed in the context of colonial (and, in SA, apartheid) history as a form of redress, it becomes difficult to assign the claim to everybody. The universalist and democratic character of a UBI demand suffers. A significant proportion of SA's population historically has seized much more than any "rightful share"—and it continues to do so. Income tax policy can be used to tax back the UBI from non-poor recipients—but, discursively, that would also involve withdrawing an ostensible "reparation" from historically disadvantaged citizens who now are better off.

its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of these rights (Government of South Africa, 1996).

Measures introduced to date do not fulfil those obligations, which are underscored by international law. When SA's progress towards fulfilment of its obligations within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was reviewed in 2018, it was found wanting. The South African Human Rights Commission concluded that "South Africa has failed to discharge its international and national obligations regarding the provision of social assistance to those most in need" (SA Human Rights Commission, 2018). The limited scope of social security protection was among the weaknesses highlighted, along with the inadequate value of social grant payments and the fact that large numbers of people living in poverty are excluded from the current grant system (Institute for Economic Justice, 2020). It was against that background that the Human Rights Commission requested the National Treasury and the Department of Social Development to examine the viability of a basic income grant and to prepare a roadmap for a pilot study (SA Human Rights Commission, 2018).

A UBI need not be implemented immediately in its desired form of an unconditional, universal and livable income. There is a fiscal and political case for phasing in a basic income, by progressively extending eligibility and/or increasing the amount. Such a UBI would be designed with flexibility and long-term viability in mind. The design has to obligate and allow for steady expansion, while being able to "adjust and optimize[it] through ongoing funding method decisions" (Santens, 2017). A design also has to protect the intervention against counter-attack and capture.

There are in SA immediate, very obvious needs for support and protection in the face of chronic lack, insecurity, stress and suffering, not least during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several UBI proposals in SA therefore call for prolonging the emergency relief grants that were introduced in 2020—and then graduating those grants towards a basic income payment, with steadily widening eligibility. Such a phased, maturing strategy would respond to the ongoing need for non-wage livelihood support to protect against future shocks and privation.

But such an evolving UBI also poses tough political questions. The social fact of "presence" or the administrative fact of "residence" are potential, less restrictive criteria for eligibility. But in addition to increasing the cost of a UBI (compared with restricting eligibility only to citizens, for example), such ostensibly inclusive criteria might also reinforce insider/outsider divisions, and fuel jingoism, particularly if it means fixing a UBI at a smaller amount to accommodate larger numbers of beneficiaries that include migrant workers, for example.[92] What are the shared moral grounds justifying the payment of the same UBI to a newly arrived temporary resident and to a citizen, or to an impoverished black South African and a well-off white compatriot? Conversely, limiting eligibility only to citizens might carry exclusionary, nativist overtones. These are dilemmas which a UBI campaign has to confront.

A phased-in UBI involves a tactical compromise. There is no guarantee that the intervention will evolve as desired. Whether the payment is arrested in a nascent and incomplete form, or expands in size and scape will depend on the forces driving the initiative (Battistoni, 2018). Separated from a strong political and social movement of change, a UBI would be a risky endeavour and it could end up being repurposed for agendas that are anathema to progressive visions of change. For Kathi Weeks (2019),

> whether this "foot in the door" incremental approach to political change is worth the risk is an important question, perhaps the critical question.

What kind of state will it take?

The technical task of implementing a UBI, i.e. compiling and maintaining a register of every eligible person and paying those individuals an income every month, lies within the capacity of the SA state. Though somewhat tarnished by scandal, the existing social grant system shows that much of the technical infrastructure for such an undertaking is either available or can be introduced.

It is less clear that the SA state currently is capable of introducing and managing the kinds of macroeconomic policy changes and institutional arrangements that will be needed for a UBI to function as part of a broad strategy of transformation. Doing so will require an active state which, rather than mainly facilitating capital accumulation and mitigating the social costs, steers society along a much more egalitarian path. The

[92] In the 2016 Swiss referendum debates, for example, politicians from the right-wing Swiss People's Party were willing to countenance a UBI, but only if it applied strictly to Swiss citizens, thereby excluding between 30-40% of legal residents in Switzerland.

ambition, commitment and capacities required for such a feat are often associated with "developmental states". In the post-apartheid era, the SA government has regularly claimed to be building such a state, though that claim that has been convincingly disputed (Fine, 2010; Freund, 2007, 2015).

In broad outline, the developmental state refers to a model of economic growth and social redistribution in which the state acts formatively to promote growth, determine the broad pattern of that growth, and ensure social development. In Chalmers Johnson's (1982) account of the "Japanese miracle" after World War Two, the state stewarded economic development, leading long-term macroeconomic planning and industrial development, and channeling investment flows towards targeted sectors and regions, as well as subsidising labour costs. Several other variants of development states have been studied and described (Mkandawire, 2001; Woo-Cuming, 1999; Evans, 1995), and they typically shared certain attributes, including: dense ties between political and business elites, the ability to leverage sources of finance, and a robust state bureaucracy that was insulated against the narrow interests of powerful economic and social forces and capable of functioning reliably, predictably and efficiently. "Embedded autonomy" (Evans, 1995) was seen as a particular important attribute. Partially embedded with key social classes, the developmental state acquired the mix of autonomy and connectedness it needed to foster alliances or accommodations that allowed it to deploy its resources in service of ostensible national interests and strategic development goals (Evans, 1995; Mkandawire, 2001).[93]

Such attributes would seem essential for achieving the macroeconomic and related policy changes that would facilitate the implementation of a UBI and that are indispensable for restructuring the economy to create more and better jobs, and to service the general needs of society. But the current challenges and grim outlooks also require a state that is democratised, particularly at local levels, and that can steward society away from ecological and social catastrophe.

[93] A range of other factors and conditions have also been relevant: the geopolitical context, the diminished the political power of landed elites which made possible agrarian reforms (Hart, 2002), a capacity to repress labour (Mkandawire, 2007), limited penetration of national economies by multinational (especially financial) capital (Evans, 2007), and a strong emphasis on basic education (especially in the applied sciences) (Freund, 2007).

The creation of a development state has been a consistent, stated ambition of the ANC Government in SA.[94] While it legitimately claims credit for expanding the social wage and building a wide (though thin) social protection system, it has left intact many of the underlying conditions and relations of power that reproduce inequality and generate impoverishment. Its economic policy choices have failed to mobilise productive investments and make inroads against some of the highest unemployment rates in the world. Those choices have serviced the prerogatives of SA conglomerates, whose operations are now threaded into global networks of accumulation. The choices have also facilitated the emergence of a powerful financial sector, and have badly undercut the state's leverage with domestic capital. SA seems no different from the many other countries where

> deeply established reliance on local private economic elites, the growing centrality of transnational capital to local accumulation and the proliferation of alliances between local and transnational capital have transformed the political landscape. (Evans, 2007, p. 24)

It is moot whether the current SA state is capable of steering and managing redistributive, democratic and ecologically sustainable development path. There is considerable evidence of dysfunction and corruption at all levels of the state (Olver, 2017; Southall, 2014, 2016). Great damage has been done to state institutions during the past 10-15 years, and the revenue service and statistical agency have not escaped the harm done. Large sections of the South African public service underperform, with the parlous state of the public health system and large sections of the public education system undermining any developmentalist credentials (von Holdt, 2010). But those institutions are recuperable. In addition, key institutions and public assets remain, for now, under the (nominal) control of the SA state. They include the Industrial Development Corporation, the SA Development Bank, a great deal of the rail and harbour system and infrastructure, a large portfolio of TV and radio stations, and the sole electricity supplier, ESKOM, mismanaged and indebted though it is. The revenue service remains well-organised, and a sophisticated and independent judicial system exists. Civil society organisations are numerous and of wide variety, and are capable of imposing a degree of accountability on the state.

[94] The 2012 National Development Plan, for example, was described as an instrument for creating a "capable and developmental state able to intervene to correct our historical inequities", according the the foreword (written by Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel). See Government of South Africa (2012).

Contemporary priorities require that the economy and economic policies serve social justice, advance ecological sustainability, and safeguard the livelihoods and well-being of citizens. But it is highly doubtful whether the archetypal development states of the 20th century are suitable blueprints for steering and stewarding viable societal progress in the 21st century. Many of the geopolitical and political-economic factors that underpinned the developmental state successes of the 20th century no longer seem available. The emphasis on economic growth and the focus on industrial manufacturing as the wellspring of job creation and social development also seem anachronistic. A manifest need remains for a state that is capable of acting in the national interest and that commands institutions that function professionally, predictably and reliably. But, as Peter Evans (2010) has emphasised, it also requires much greater focus on building and nurturing human capabilities, for example through ensuring reliable access to quality education, health care and livelihood support. This perspective rearranges the building blocks of "development" and the relationships between them. It differs from an approach that conflates development with economic output, and in which human and social development are treated as functions of economic growth, driven by industrial production. Instead it reframes development as the equitable enhancement of human and social capabilities, with economic and social policies serving those objectives (Evans & Heller, 2013). For Peter Evans (2010, p. 90), "[p]olicies that expand capabilities may look like 'social policy' or 'welfare policy' but they are essential to growth policy".

If development is understood as the expansion of capabilities, the state becomes even more important than in earlier conceptions of developmental states. The capabilities emphasised by Evans and Heller (2013) are not only relevant insofar as they serve enterprise-based output, nor are they important strictly "in their own right". They are a means also for a decentered recuperation and flourishing of social and economic life at community level. The necessary capabilities are tied in with access to quality education and healthcare, transport, and telecommunications and information technologies. Similarly, if a UBI is to be more than a poverty-reducing tool—if it is to function as a liberating and transformative factor in people's lives—it has to operate in a context where capability-enhancing services and support are available. This requires an active, provisioning state that is capable of dependably providing the support, services and infrastructure that people need to build fulfilling lives. Providing those services in reliable and equitable ways requires complex state capacity and new kinds of "embeddedness" (Evans, 2010).

In earlier conceptions of the developmental state, this "embeddedness" involved ties between various state apparatuses and particular elite formations (especially those involved in industrial activities). To meet contemporary challenges, however, state apparatuses have to command enough autonomy to proactively design and implement policies that serve collective needs and goals rather than reactively align with the immediate prerogatives of elites. That flexible autonomy requires deepened democracy, especially at local levels, with citizens able to participate in meaningful processes of decision-making and accountability. This democratising aspect is important in other respects, too. As Evans and Heller (2013) have emphasised, successful capability-building both requires and leads to the enhancement of freedom—which tends to generate friction and resistance from elites, especially the political, religious and traditional elites who police social relations and norms. Overcoming those kinds of hurdles requires "interactive ties that connect the apparatus of the state administratively and politically to civil society" (Evans & Heller, 2013, p. 10).

It is in such democratised and enabling contexts that a UBI is most likely to fulfil its potential to facilitate and underwrite the kinds of "organic", local social and economic activities that are essential amid upheaval and turmoil. This implies overhauling the state to some degree—in terms of its overall administrative capacity, its probity, the ways in which it relates to civil society, and its relationship with capital.

What kind of macroeconomic strategy is needed?

Economic policy in SA has failed to shape an economy that creates sufficient decent jobs, supports livelihoods and builds the capabilities of people and their communities. The manufacturing sector remains poorly diversified and weak, and there has been scant progress towards expanding labour-absorbing activities outside the service and construction sectors. The financial sector, which has grown to inordinate proportions, is neither geared for nor inclined towards a developmental role. The upshot is an economy

> characterised by low growth, rising unemployment and increasing inequality, which together with rampant corruption and governance failures combine to threaten the very core of the country's stability and democracy. (Padayachee, 2019, p. 3)

Still, vast wealth is generated—though most of it is siphoned towards a small minority. This entrenched state of affairs is morally untenable, and it is socially and politically unsustainable. The same can be said of the environmentally destructive ways in which the wealth is generated and consumed.

Drastic restructuring is needed. In addition to servicing the material needs of all, economic policies have to steer and enable decisive moves away from extractive, fossil fuel-based activities to "green" and labour-intensive, value-adding activities. A "green" industrial strategy that profoundly reduces the ecological impact of economic activity and that prioritises the needs of ordinary people over the interests of conglomerate and financial capital is crucial. Increased and targeted public investment will be crucial, particularly to transition rapidly from a hydrocarbon-based economic model and to introduce and support social and productive infrastructure in deprived communities.[95] Fiscal and monetary policies will have to support those investments (Saad-Filho, 2020; Fournier 2016). Such an overhaul, including through social policy interventions like a UBI, requires a supportive macroeconomic framework, without which "other economic and social policy interventions for addressing growth, employment and inequality will likely fail to gain much traction for budgetary and related reasons" (Padayachee, 2019, p. 4).

Current macroeconomic policy in SA stands in the way of such drastic change. It codifies a neoliberal framework[96] that was haltingly pursued in the 1980s amid waves of anti-apartheid uprisings and associated economic difficulties. In the mid-1990s, that shift was resumed with greater resolve, overseen by the country's new democratic government. Marketed as a pathway towards economic stability and growth, the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan prioritised tight monetary policy (including high interest rates and inflation targeting) and fiscal restraint, along with the dismantling

[95] This would include renewable electricity generation and overhauling transmission lines, retrofitting building stock, subsidising building insulation, public transport and more.

[96] The definition of "neoliberal" is richly debated. Here we are content with the description offered by Stephen Gelb (1991), a member of the team which authored the Growth, Economic and Redistribution strategy. Neoliberal policies, for Gelb (1991, p. 29-30), "involve the state limiting its own economic activity in relation to the provision of goods and services, for example by a process of privatisation. Secondly, state intervention in the activities of other economic agents is limited to defining the broad parameters of market processes—that is, the general cost levels of productive factors (labor and capital especially) and other incentives (such as tax allowances and subsidies)".

of tariff barriers and capital controls, while counseling increased privatisation (Marais, 2011).

The GEAR plan enabled SA's largest corporations to restructure and overhaul their operations, and to re-engage with a rapidly financialising global capitalist economy. It facilitated profit-seeking strategies that would rely increasingly on rent-seeking and speculative ventures,[97] outward investment, offshoring and capital flight, while depriving the SA economy of investment in productive sectors (Mohamed, 2019; Ansari, 2017). It allowed for massive misallocation of capital, shifting the allotment of "capital, infrastructure and skills towards speculation, consumption and unproductive services [which] led to deindustrialisation" (Mohamed, 2019, p. 203).

The current ground rules

Those ground rules have proved very difficult to dislodge (Padayachee, 2019; Mohamed, 2019).[98] SA's macroeconomic policy continues to hinge on restrictive counter-cyclical fiscal policy (though allowing for some spending on economic infrastructure and for stimulating economic demand), monetary policy that focuses on inflation targeting, and the promotion of an open capital account (Isaacs & Kaltenbrunner, 2018).

As in other middle-income countries like Argentina and Brazil, the deregulation of financial markets (particularly the liberalisation of the capital account) in SA fuelled destabilising processes of domestic financialisation.[99] This is evident in the emergence of a disproportionately large and powerful financial sector. The financial sector's share of GDP grew from 6.5% in 1994 to 22% in 2015 (Mohamed, 2019). Intensified financial integration is reflected also in the increased volume of capital flows in and out of SA, and in the international trading of SA assets. By 2015, South African assets held by non-residents amounted to 137% of GDP, compared with less than 40% in the late 1990s.

[97] In SA's case, long-term investment capital tends to be sourced from retained earnings or the securities markets – not from banks and other financial institutions. The latter specialise in extending short-term credit, home mortgages and vehicle lease arrangements (Mohamed, 2010).

[98] Minor adjustments have been made, for example in the 2006 Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (AsgiSA), the 2011 New Growth Path Framework and the 2012 National Development Plan, but none has shifted the key principles and trajectory of macroeconomic policy (Mohammed, 2016).

[99] By financialisation, we refer to the increasing influence of financial market imperatives over economic policy and investment decisions.

Portfolio investments comprised the largest (and growing) share of those foreign liabilities (more than 40% in 2015) (Isaacs & Kaltenbrunner, 2018).

Financialisation tends to generate a structural pull away from productive investments and toward the pursuit of short-term returns (Epstein, 2005; Crotty, 2003). In SA's case, capital has been funnelled increasingly into rent-seeking and speculative ventures, while potentially productive sectors of the economy shrunk. The manufacturing sector, especially labour-intensive firms, has atrophied, rather than growing and diversifying (Hart & Padayachee, 2013). SA's nonfinancial corporations now earn increasingly large shares of corporate revenues from financial activities that do not directly link to their core operations. Flow of funds data from the SA Reserve Bank show that forays into financial markets, and other financial investments, outstrip these corporations' fixed investments. In addition, financial liberalisation has allowed for massive capital flight, which represents foregone private and, via tax revenue, public investment (Mohamed, 2019, p. 207).

Allied with a weak industrial structure and ongoing reliance on extractive industry exports, these processes aggravate financial risk and instability. They also stoke balance of payments risks. SA uses monetary policy to manage its balance of payments, including by keeping interest rates high enough and exit routes flexible enough to consistently attract portfolio capital investments. The main beneficiaries are local and international finance capital. Macroeconomic policy therefore privileges "the interests of international investors and (internationalised) domestic finance capital, chiefly by ensuring market liquidity and guaranteeing immediate rand-dollar convertibility and preserving ease of exit" (Isaacs & Kaltenbrunner, 2018, p. 457). By exposing the economy to financial risk and transnational market "discipline", the heavy reliance on short-term capital flows stands in the way of structural economic changes and functions as a powerful "disciplinary" device in relation to economic policymaking (Ashman et al., 2011; Mohamed, 2016; Isaacs & Kaltenbrunner, 2018).

Bowing to the market

A major effect of four decades of neoliberalism globally has been the weakening of national sovereignty that is needed for discretionary macroeconomic policy. This is especially apparent in economies, such as SA, which are both reliant on and exposed to the vagaries of financial capital. The effect on the real, productive economy in SA is disheartening. As Isaacs and Kaltenbrunner (2018) have shown, since the early 2000s shifts in capital flows in and out of SA have been largely disconnected from specific economic conditions in SA, with the changes prompted mainly by international monetary and liquidity factors. No matter the catastrophic social outcomes, the fear among policymakers of unforgiving reactions from the markets acts as a powerful deterrent against necessary policy corrections. Consequently, the central macroeconomic policy choices have endured (Mohammed 2019; Hart 2014; Marais 2011). But attributing such "path dependence" strictly to external factors seems incomplete; macroeconomic policy is closely aligned also with the interests of financial capital in SA (Alami, 2017; Hart & Padayachee, 2013).

The continuing adherence in SA to the macroeconomic policy choices of the 1990s can be traced to several overlapping factors. They include: the ideological acceptance among top policy makers in the Treasury and Reserve Bank of key precepts of neoliberal economics (Ashman & Fine, 2013); the growing size, sway and entanglement of SA-based financial capital with global circuitries of financial capital, which heightens the exposure of the economy to the "discipline" of global financial markets; and the perceived vulnerability of the economy to such capital flow volatility (especially for financing the balance of payments and sustaining public spending).

Additional factors are also at work. Macroeconomic policy—in particular the focus on attracting portfolio capital inflows—also facilitated the emergence of a small black economic elite, which is sunken in alliance with incumbent capitalist elites, both in SA and abroad (Freund, 2007, 2015). Bill Freund likened this new elite to Peter Evans' concept of "an embedded elite, which transcends the private-public divide" and whose political-economic location enables it to pursue both personal financial enrichment and advance larger political projects. In Freund's view:

> For the political leadership of the ANC, relying on and integrating with such an elite is very preferable to the distanced if inevitable relationship the ANC enjoys with the previously existing white business elite. (2015, p. 64-65)

This has created a powerful political lobby inside and around the ANC against radical economic change. A "convergence of interests" between the incumbent and emergent economic elites has been achieved (Ansari, 2017). In addition, the governing ANC has grown increasingly intertwined with those economic networks—through the business operations and ties of individual party luminaries and via its business wing, the Progressive Business Forum, which connects business operations with the ANC in government.[100]

Thus, the macroeconomic framework chosen in the 1990s, and its underlying assumptions, remain bolted in place—which speaks also to the balance of forces within the SA state. For almost a quarter of a century, the Treasury, along with the Reserve Bank, have successfully resisted macroeconomic and other policy shifts that are needed for a redistributive development path. While the Trade and Industry and Economic Development departments intermittently have tried to promote an industrial strategy that has longer-term planning horizons, the Treasury and Reserve Bank have insisted on policies that guarantee short term access to liquidity, a stance that favours both economic and political elites (Ansari, 2017; Alami, 2017). These powerful state institutions have stayed firmly committed to a path of tight money, balanced budgets, low inflation and capital mobility.

A macroeconomic framework that serves society

Not only is the current macroeconomic framework incompatible with a viable exit route from the social and ecological crises that beset SA, it has failed demonstrably to achieve its own advertised objectives: stimulate sufficient job creation, redistribution and economic growth. A progressive macroeconomic framework is urgently needed. It will have to underpin and facilitate industrial, labour and social policies that service a much more equitable distribution of incomes, the enhancement of capabilities, and an ecologically sustainable development path. Public investments have to be channeled away from carbon- and capital-intensive ventures and towards sustainable, livelihood-supporting and employment-generating activities, including at community levels and scales. SA's has mature development finance institutions that are capable of supporting such shifts (Swilling, 2019). Such change poses, in addition, a significant political challenge for the SA state, which will have to shift from its current facilitating role in

[100] Among other activities, the Forum sells a range of "memberships" that grant subscribers access to ministers and key policymakers, along with opportunities to “give input” into policymaking discussions.

relation to capital and adopt a more directive role as "a driver of growth, effective demand, employment and equality" (Padayachee, 2019, p. 11).

A macroeconomic framework along such lines was, in fact, on the table in the early 1990s, having been proposed by the ANC-convened Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG) (Padayachee, 2018a; Padayachee & Sender, 2018; Freund, 2013; MERG, 1993). Convened by the ANC before it took office in 1994, the MERG proposed a two-phase, "crowding-in" approach for economic recovery and inclusive development. The MERG proposals were dismissed by the ANC leadership in favour of the GEAR plan. But its overall approach and several of its proposals remain relevant to a quest for viable alternatives.

In summary, the MERG envisaged a phased recovery, with an initial stage of strong, public investment in social and physical infrastructure (prioritising housing, education, health and physical infrastructure). This would draw in greater volumes of private capital as economic growth accelerated—a "crowding in" effect. An active fiscal policy was proposed, along with financial regulation (to temper potentially destabilising capital in- and outflows) and trade protection (through a tariff structure that could nurture domestic industrial development). Rather than ritually enforcing macroeconomic targets throughout the cycle, the MERG favoured assessing, maintaining or restoring macroeconomic balances across set periods (a ten-year reconstruction cycle, for example) and against key social and economic indicators (MERG, 1993). Many of those policy elements remain apposite.

Fiscal policy can be a powerful lever for economic and social change, which the state can deploy "to shift the allocation of resources towards specific sectoral priorities" (Saad-Filho, 2020). It can be used to reduce poverty, distribute income, wealth and power, and improve the welfare of the majority. An activist fiscal policy is vitally needed in SA to align (public) investment with societal priorities; it is therefore also a prerequisite for interventions such as a UBI.

However, in SA, as in other economies that opted for neoliberal policies, fiscal policy has been relegated to a minor, conservative role, with "fiscal discipline" an overriding norm and anxiety about public debt a key motivation. The preference is to use monetary and financial policies "for the manipulation of interest rates, bank reserves and capital flows to stabilise inflation, business expectations and asset prices" (Saad-Filho, 2020). This approach typified the "Washington Consensus", which was popularised in World Bank policy advice in the early 1990s (Williamson, 1990). It has continued to shape macroeconomic policy in SA, long after the "Consensus" was sidelined in Washington (Williamson, 2000). The dominant approach in SA is still to cede monetary policy entirely to the Reserve Bank, insist on parsimonious fiscal policy, and raise alarm about the public debt (Mohamed, 2021; Padayachee, 2019 & 2018b). That approach is becoming outmoded, however. The "New view" of fiscal policy recognizes the effectiveness of discretionary fiscal stimulus, its usefulness for "crowding in" private investment, and its potential to "pay for itself" by stimulating economic growth (Pekanov, 2018; Furman, 2016). This understanding is hardly heterodox. International Monetary Fund research shows that a sustained increase in government investment equal to 1% of gross domestic product fuels economic growth through boosted investment and consumption, and widens future fiscal space through increased government revenue and by reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio (Gaspar, Obstfeld, Sahay, 2016). And there is strong evidence, including from the Fund and the United States Congress, that the customary policy reflex of fiscal "consolidation" tends to depress economic growth (not to mention its negative socioeconomic effects) (Gravelle & Marples, 2021; Gechert, Horn, Paetz, 2018; Blanchard & Leigh, 2013).

Declining tax revenues and rising state expenditures (particularly social grant payments, public sector wages and debt service obligations) are commonly used to justify calls for fiscal restraint (Sachs, 2021). The alternative, it is claimed, is to risk plunging off a "fiscal cliff" (Mbeki, Roussouw, Joubert, Breytenbach, 2018). While concerns about reckless spending are merited, SA's social grants payments cannot reasonably be seen as "profligate". Nor does it seem fair-minded to single out the public service wage bill as culprit, without also taking account of the distribution of wage and salary expenses in the public sector—an approach that would reveal the extravagent salaries and perks paid to the upper-tiers of the civil service, as Vishnu Padayachee (2018b) has pointed out.

As for public debt, SA's debt-to-GDP ratio was modest until the 2008 global financial crisis, but rose steadily subsequently, reaching 62% in 2019 and exceeding 80% during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2021). By way of comparison, the debt-to-GDP ratio in the United States was 79% at the end of fiscal year

2019 and was projected to rise to over 100% in 2021 (US Congressional Office, 2020a & 2020b). It remains controversial at what levels and in which conditions public debt constitutes a threat to economic stability and growth. In recent years, economists subscribing to Modern Monetary Theory have counselled a much more tolerant approach to public debt (Kelton, 2020; Nersisyan & Wray, 2016). There is strong evidence that public debt/GDP ratios can safely range considerably higher than mainstream economists have customarily claimed (Herndon, Ash, Pollin, 2014).

There are also practical ways to avoid profligacy while creating the space for progressive fiscal policy that accommodates substantial public investment that prioritises livelihoods, creates employment, builds social and capital infrastructure, and puts the economy on a more sustainable footing. Padayachee, for example, has proposed separating the budget into a "current" and "capital" budget, with the former balanced annually and the latter managed against a benchmark indicator over a longer period. The separation would allow "for growth-enhancing capital expenditure in areas such as infrastructure, and non-wage expenditure on education and health, among others, to grow even at the short-term risk of running deficits" (2018b, p. 36).

An array of fiscal tools is available for pursuing redistributive policies, yet many are either misused or shunned. SA has a modern, relatively sophisticated tax infrastructure, but there is substantial, unused scope for interventions to prevent offshoring of wealth and incomes, for the enforcement of stricter tax laws, and for reducing or eliminating the deductions, exemptions and loopholes that privilege large corporations and the wealthy. The redistributive impact of fiscal policy can be boosted through tax policies that help finance social policy interventions such a UBI. As discussed in Chapter 6, this can be achieved with expanded and/or new taxes, including a wealth tax, taxes on unearned income, a land-value tax, a carbon tax and a financial transactions tax.

Fresh approaches are needed to deal with balance of payments constraints and to prevent and/or manage balance of payment volatility. On the current account (trade) side, industrial and other policies have to promote value-added exports with a bias towards "greened" goods and services (which requires active state involvement in picking and supporting "winners") and they have to reduce luxury imports (Saad-Filho, 2020; Amsden, 1997).

On the capital and financial account side, sage regulation can be introduced to temper volatile cross-border flows, and to route domestic capital towards local productive investment (Carmody, 2002). The changes need not be drastic, and the latitude for making them has grown considerably in the past two decades. According to Ilene Grabel (2018), for example, a "productive incoherence" prevails currently in global financial governance and developmental finance, which creates space for financial policy and institutional experimenting.[101] She argues that controls on capital in- and outflows have "been normalized as a legitimate tool of prudential financial management, even within the corridors of the IMF" (Polychroniou, 2020).

Padayachee (2019, p. 17) believes that a number of capital controls could be reintroduced in SA for a limited period (of five years, for example), with the Reserve Bank empowered and tasked to regulate capital flows more closely. Disruptive inflows can be better managed also by imposing a nominal tax on short-term transactions or using non-interest-bearing "quarantines" on investment flows, and by requiring investors to place a share of their capital in long-term holdings, for example (Padayachee, 2019; Saad-Filho, 2020).[102] Such controls would have to be applied in ways or in a context that can prevent unmanaged currency depreciation which, among other perils, would force even greater reliance on extractive commodity exports (sabotaging the economic restructuring that is needed for a just transition). The controls will be burdensome for SA monetary authorities, but they are unlikely to exceed their administrative capacity.

Additional changes would expedite and bolster these attempts to refashion macroeconomic policy so that it serves societal needs rather than bends to corporate prerogatives. There exists a strong case for a Reserve Bank which, while operationally autonomous, is publicly accountable and which is tasked with a mandate that extends beyond price stability to include broader growth and development priorities (Padayachee, 2019). Although the SA Reserve Bank, the prime monetary authority in the country, is

[101] Several "developing" economies have applied substantive controls on capital flows since the 2008 global financial crisis, and a number of hybrid national and regional financial institutions have been created (e.g. in Brazil and Asia). This creates a more "complex, decentralized, multi-tiered, pluripolar global financial system" and "widens policy space for development", according to Grabel (Polychroniou, 2018, p 4).

[102] Other mechanisms proposed by Saad-Filho (2020, p. 16) include, "restrictions on foreign currency bank accounts and currency transfers [...] restrictions on foreign payments for 'technical assistance' between connected firms; controls on foreign borrowing [and] multiple exchange rates determined by the priority of the investment".

wholly owned by private shareholders, it derives its mandate from the SA Constitution.[103] Nationalisation is therefore not required to improve accountability and broaden its mandate (Rossouw, Mondi, Padayachee, 2019).[104]

Significant changes to the status and lines of accountability of the Reserve Bank are likely to provoke displeased reactions from the financial markets, which will have to be managed politically. However, a loosening of the "narrow inflation targeting mandate" of the Bank is both necessary and feasible, and it can be achieved in a democratically accountable and developmentally effective manner. For example, instead of the (current) inflation target, an investment target (with price stability constraints), or employment target, or poverty gap target would seem more appropriate in a country facing the predicaments that burden SA (Padayachee, 2019). The Reserve Bank has to adopt a more muscular stance that shifts the private banking sector away from predominantly rent-seeking and speculative activities to raising capital that can underwrite a sustainable development path.

The SA state will have to assume a much more directive role in designing and implementing macroeconomic, industrial, labour and social policies that service the redistribution of income and the enhancement of capabilities, and that are ecologically sustainable. To do so, it will have to distinguish and play off the divergent interests that exist within the SA corporate sector, while at the same time defusing resistance. The corporate sector in SA is not monolithic and is not equally beholden to the country's current economic structure and path; sections stand to gain from a pro-renewables strategy, for example. The appetite for risk may still be limited, but for some corporations it is likely bigger than at any point since the end of the apartheid system. The havoc which the COVID-19 pandemic has added to already desperate social and economic conditions makes it increasingly difficult to promote confidence in business-as-usual approaches.

A more active and directive state also assumes that a bloc of support can be built within the ANC and the state for such a programme of restructuring. While not routine,

[103] Former SA Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, provided an insightful and less rigid interpretation of that mandate in an important 2010 letter (Anon, 2019).

[104] In 2017, the ANC resolved to nationalise the Reserve Bank, a decision which seemed to stem from intra-party political manoeuvrings rather than economic policy ambitions. A related motion was tabled in Parliament the following year, but was withdrawn without debate (Rossouw, Mondi, Padayachee, 2019).

assertions about the need for radical economic change are not uncommon in ANC discourse. However, in the past decade especially, these pronouncements have been deployed also—and perhaps increasingly—as rhetorical devices in political struggles inside the ruling party. In Mark Swilling's (2019, p. 25) assessment, "radical economic transformation is [being] used to give ideological legitimacy to what is essentially a political project to repurpose state institutions for the benefit of a power elite". It is unclear which factions in a fractious ANC can reliably consolidate and act on a commitment to a redistributive and just development path. In addition, and especially in the wake of the governance failures and corruption scandals that characterised the 2010s, corporations are likely to be remain reluctant to invest greater regulatory and interventionist authority in the SA state. Much clearer is the fact that the status quo is both untenable and unconscionable.

8. IN CONCLUSION

In the midst of colliding, disabling crises, access to waged work continues to be held up as the central and sufficient basis for meeting basic needs, avoiding poverty, earning social entitlements and achieving social inclusion. Yet long before the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2008 global financial crisis, waged work that provides a livable income on reasonably secure terms was very rare in "developing" economies and it was becoming increasingly scarce in many "developed" economies (ILO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the need for reliable, egalitarian livelihood support centre-stage again. The pandemic is one of a host of upheavals which, in all probability, will continue to arrive in quickening succession. Scientists expect that, even when (or if) COVID-19 is eventually controlled, similar zoonotic epidemics will follow in the near-future (Daszak, das Neves, Amuasi, Hayman, Kuiken et al., 2020). In addition to public health emergencies, countries in all regions are contending with overlapping turmoil: economic instability, environmental disasters, and social and political turbulence.

These are not mere cyclical adversities, to be subdued through adaptation and innovation. They stem from the driving dynamics of a capitalist system which degrades and depletes, at increasing pace, the very conditions—the natural resources, social assets and activities, and political capacities—that enable it to flourish. The result is an entanglement of crises (Fraser, 2021). Mid- to long-term social and economic planning has to anticipate a "new normal" that is characterised by intersecting instabilities and compounded insecurities. As John Harris noted in mid-2020, "We live, in short, in an age of ongoing shocks, and it is time we began to prepare ... unprecedented times demand drastic answers." Current systems for allotting the means for life are not only inadequate and unjust, they are misguided.

Ahead of the curve

SA exemplifies this predicament. Economic policies have serviced the accumulation of great wealth, but at the expense of prolonging and deepening a social crisis. The unemployment rate exceeds 40%. Poverty remains widespread and is visited disproportionately upon the black African majority. Massive income and wealth inequalities inherited from SA's colonial and apartheid past persist. With economic policies designed for growing and partially deracialising the economy—but much less for redistributing the wealth generated in it—inequalities have widened. The environmental costs of these economic choices, stretching back more than a century, continue to be borne primarily by poor communities, who are also most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

At the same time, SA battles three coinciding epidemics. The overlapping HIV and tuberculosis epidemics have taken an exceptionally heavy toll, especially in low-income households and communities. Together these epidemics have killed at least 3.7 million people since 2000, most of them in what should have been the prime of their lives.[105] The COVID-19 pandemic—and the social and economic restrictions imposed to control it—has caused additional privation, decimating the livelihoods of millions of people.

Economic and social policy frameworks in SA continue to embody the idea that waged work is a viable and sufficiently available basis for avoiding poverty and pursuing fulfilling lives (Ferguson & Li, 2018). When, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SA Government introduced additional emergency grants, the initial relief package centred on expanding the Unemployment Insurance Fund, even though almost half of workers were not eligible for support from that fund (Webb & Vally, 2020). This left at least 6 million South Africans without any direct income support during the first COVID-19 lockdown in early 2020 (Seekings, 2020; Institute for Economic Justice, 2020). Despite the evident scale of need, the policy reflex was still to link crisis relief to waged work.

Many millions of South Africans are trapped between an economic and social order that insists they sell their labour to "earn" a chance of a dignified life, and an economy that is structured in ways that render them superfluous to its needs. There is no prospect of mass unemployment disappearing in SA for the foreseeable future. This is not a sudden revelation. The Taylor Committee, in considering the BIG proposal almost two decades ago, noted that "in developing countries, where stable full-time waged formal sector

[105] There were an estimated 3.4 million AIDS-related deaths in SA in 2000-2019, and approximately one million TB deaths in the same period (about two thirds of which had HIV infection as an underlying cause). See https://aidsinfo.unaids.org for official estimates of annual AIDS mortality in SA. TB death estimates are based on data from Loveday et al. (2019).

labour was never the norm, it is increasingly unlikely that it will become the norm" (Department of Social Development, 2002, p. 38).

Strategies that tether livelihoods and the realisation of social rights to job-creating economic growth are glaringly insufficient in such conditions (Ferguson, 2015). But treating waged work as the fount of livelihood security and well-being also undermines the broader pursuit of social and economic justice—by filtering those demands through a quixotic quest for "full employment" (Barchiesi, 2011). Creating more "decent jobs" are vital, but that aspiration does not encompass and should not substitute for building a just society. This does not discount the need for more, better-paid and socially useful jobs. However, SA offers no reasonable basis for expecting that job creation can provide a viable basis for wide-ranging livelihood security and social inclusion. Much more realistic is a framework which recognises that waged work is one of several components of social citizenship and inclusion.

Conflicting views about a universal basic income

It is in this context that the option of a UBI is attracting widening interest and support, including in SA. Much of this support, particularly on the Left, reflects an awareness that epochal changes are underway and that they demand new economic and social arrangements. In modest, yet potentially important ways, a UBI is relevant to each of the main dimensions of crisis (economic, ecological and social).

The mainstreaming of the UBI idea is not an entirely "innocent" and straightforward phenomenon, though: it speaks also to other underlying trends, including the reshaping of social policy in the shadow of financialised capitalism during the past 20-30 years. Consequently, profoundly different ideas circulate about the definition, design and functions of a UBI, and how it would relate to other elements of social and economic restructuring.

Left and progressive proponents support a universal income that is incorporated into an extensive social policy system, and that functions as part of systemic changes aimed at creating a more viable, just and democratic society. Those on the Right, especially the libertarian Right, see it as an opportunity to further limit the remit of the state and to expand the authority of the market by replacing—and commodifying—other forms of social provisioning and protection with a single cash payment. This conceptual slipperiness partially explains why a potentially radical intervention has become a staple of mainstream debates.

The UBI considered in this text is defined as a regular (monthly) income that is paid unconditionally to all individuals without means testing or work requirement. It would supplement existing forms of income support (such as the child support grant, old-age pension and disability grants in SA) and other forms of social provisioning for low-income earners (such as free health-care and school education; free water and sanitation services; subsidised energy, transport and housing; etc.). And it would function as part of overhauled social and economic policies that are geared at reducing poverty and inequality, and at improving people's capabilities and well-being.

A great deal of evidence supports the expectation that a UBI can contribute substantively to improving people's livelihoods and prospects. Data from UBI projects and pilot studies and from analogous cash grant schemes indicate that, even if set at a low amount, a UBI would improve the financial, health and education status of low-income households, and reduce poverty (Standing, 2017; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017; Bastagli et al, 2016; Davala et al., 2015; Haarmann et al., 2009).

If linked to other transformative projects, a UBI can promote and support forward-looking, adaptive change. It can function as a safety net for communities hard-hit by the effects of global warming and can provide multifaceted support as SA embarks on a just transition to a low-carbon economic model. The extent of those effects would be shaped by the size of the UBI and the availability of other forms of social wage provisioning. Increased income for the poorest deciles can also boost aggregate demand for basic goods and services, since low-income recipients are likely to spend rather than save income (Lowrey, 2018; Blyth & Lonergan, 2014).

Since it is neither conditional (in the manner of a job guarantee, for instance) nor targeted (like SA's social grants), a UBI would be less complicated and less costly to administer, and it would achieve more complete coverage. Core logistical requirements are a centralised database (updated with birth and death registration, and immigration and emigration data) and a disbursement facility (electronic transfers to individual savings accounts). By drastically reducing administrative mediation, a UBI also offers fewer opportunities for patronage and corruption, pitfalls which blight the SA state at all levels. The entanglement of the ANC (and state officials) with profit-seeking ventures invites corruption, wastage and governance failure. This is evident at local (Ndletyana, 2020; Olver, 2017) and national government levels in SA (Lodge, 2014), including in "spending irregularities" during the COVID-19 pandemic (Heywood, 2021; Transparency International, 2020). A UBI would sidestep such pitfalls.

Emancipatory potentials

A UBI holds deeper, transformative promise, as well. By strengthening workers' abilities to quit a job without falling into distress or to turn down work that is exploitative or dangerous, a UBI could empower (especially low-wage) workers individually and collectively. The ability to decline waged work can help reset the balance of power between workers and employers, which would benefit workplace organising and other efforts to improve labour practices at the low-income end of the labour market.

Those sorts of potential effects speak to the distinctiveness of a UBI. Not merely an adjustment or expansion of the existing social welfare order, it can be a qualitatively different intervention that breaks with the waged work-centric model of the old order, its paternalist frame and its patriarchal slant. It would present people with the opportunity to sidestep, at least temporarily, a fate where, as Andre Gorz (1999, p. 56) put it, we are forever

> … prepared to make any and every concession, to suffer humiliation or subjugation, to face competition and betrayal to get or keep a job, since "those who lose their jobs lose everything".

This liberating effect can extend wider, by providing people with income security that enables them to devote their labour and time to purposes other than waged work—for example care and other socially productive work; community projects such as food gardens and repair and recycling work; doing volunteer work; and studying or acquiring new skills. Those kinds of activities are especially relevant for building sustainable and viable local communities and economies. Gorz referred to them as "socially determined" work: activities that allow one "to feel useful to society in a general sense, rather than in a particular way subject to particular relationships, and thus to exist as a fully social individual" (1985, p. 54).

A UBI also implies challenging the conflation of well-being and "progress" with indicators of economic output. The demand for such a payment flows from the insistence that

> everyone has a right to a decent life whether or not they have a job, that human dignity does not depend on paid employment, that perpetual growth is not the way to prosperity, and that everyone should benefit from shared wealth and our shared planet. (Battistoni, 2018)

In such ways, a UBI that challenges the status of paid work as the decisive basis for social citizenship and entitlement serves as more than a means for individual "enablement": it could, in Erik Olin Wright's view (2005, p. 6), "underwrite social and institutional changes" and help shift power relations and hierarchies (Barchiesi, 2016; Srnicek & Williams, 2015; Wright, 2003). A UBI on its own would not achieve those objectives, but it could support a broad suite of efforts to achieve them.

A common criticism is that a basic income would encourage people to withdraw from the labour market on a scale that would disrupt economies. In the context of extremely high unemployment, concerns about a disincentive effect among low-skilled workers are misdirected. Even in general, UBI projects and cash transfer schemes offer scant basis for such unease (Jones & Marinescu, 2020; Banerjee et al., 2017; Standing, 2017; Skoufias & Di Maro, 2008). Might a basic income, if too small, end up subsidising low-wage employers, thereby undermining minimum wage demands and weakening worker organisations (Zamora, 2017; Clarke, 2018)? Again, the worry seems less pertinent to a highly distressed setting such as SA, where hyper-unemployment pushes the reservation wage far below a survival-level income.

Another concern on the Left is that a basic income, by fusing social welfare principles with neoliberal logic, would lubricate individuals' deeper integration into the market as consumers. It is an odd objection, which tends not to surface in the context of waged work (which, of course, is remunerated with cash). It also ignores the reality that certain essential goods and services are currently not accessible outside the market (e.g. food, toiletries, clothing, telecommunications), even though some conceivably could be converted into public goods at some future point (e.g. free internet access or community food production).

A more troubling possibility is that a UBI could be used as a lever for removing existing entitlements. In the Indian context, for example, Jean Drèze (2017, p. 2) has warned of "a real danger of a UBI becoming a Trojan horse for dismantling hard-worn entitlements of the underprivileged". That concern dwindles when directed at a UBI that supplements other forms of social provisioning. However, there remains a danger that a basic income could be traded-off against other entitlements if fiscal conditions deteriorate. Which brings us to the most common objection to the UBI demand: that it is unaffordable.

Wider implications

A UBI would be expensive; how expensive would depend on the amount of the payment, how eligibility is defined, whether and how the payment is phased in and ramped up, and how it links with existing forms of income support. Blanket claims about (un)affordability are unjustified and misleading. Detailed costing estimates for different scenarios are being developed in SA. Their fiscal feasibility depends on the financing options, a host of which are available (as discussed in Chapter 6) and many of which are desirable irrespective of whether a UBI is introduced.

The fiscal choices draw into focus the linked need for supportive macroeconomic policy changes. Macroeconomic policy has to facilitate industrial, labour and social policies that create more and better jobs, equitably build capabilities, are ecologically sustainable, redistribute incomes, and foster both social and productive capacities (especially in low-income communities). Fiscal and monetary policy has to simultaneously privilege societal needs and enable a shift towards a low-carbon economic model (Saad-Filho, 2020; Fournier, 2016). The latitude for such innovation is considerably greater than is acknowledged in orthodox economic circles (Mohamed, 2021; Financial Times, 2020; Padayachee, 2019, 2018a, 2018b; Grabel, 2018; Furman, 2016).

This underscores the need to approach a UBI not as a stand-alone, technocratic intervention or tool, but as an element of a broader, long-term project of transformation and emancipation. Its impact and fate will depend on how it synchronises with other economic, social and political strategies, which forces drive those strategies, and whether those forces are capable of defending the desired changes. Even when achieved, a UBI will remain a contested and politically unstable intervention. De Wispelaere and Morales (2016, p. 539-540) are correct to warn of a danger that

> the interaction between basic income and residual layers of traditional welfare programmes implies continuous competition over tight budgets and scarce organisational resources [...] gradually converting

> the existing scheme from the ground up into something that only formally resembles what the enacting coalition set out to achieve.

Yet this social and political context tends to be overlooked in much of the current debate about a basic income. If detached from movement politics and strong institutional support, a UBI will be vulnerable to distortion, capture or ruin. Policy interventions do not automatically or indefinitely do the bidding of their creators.

A key variable is the state—and whether and how it can be transformed from functioning as facilitator of private accumulation to creating the conditions, fostering the capabilities and furnishing the means for a just and sustainable society. Achieving and defending a UBI will require an active state which, in alliance with and accountable to progressive social forces, privileges the needs and entitlements of ordinary people. Turning the state in that direction presents a massive challenge in a country where powerful sections of the state (notably the National Treasury and Reserve Bank) remain steeped in neoliberal orthodoxy and tend to conflate the interests of financialised capitalism with societal well-being. Nevertheless, SA's Constitution mandates a shift towards a state that resets the relationship between the economy and society.

Hearts and minds

There is in SA both a manifest need and potential for a model of income distribution that does not hinge on exchanging labour for wages or on qualifying for conditional "charity". James Ferguson (2015, p. 205) has suggested that the SA social grant system will gradually evolve into a de facto form of universal, citizenship-based entitlement, a kind of UBI "through the back door". Indeed, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, campaigners were calling on the SA Government to turn two emergency grants (the Distress Relief grant and Caregivers Allowance) into bridging income grants which would steadily evolve into a full-fledged UBI (#UBIGNOW, 2021; Institute for Inequality Studies, 2020).

While the need for an intervention like a UBI may seem increasingly self-evident, a generalised desire for a UBI cannot be assumed. The BIG campaign in the early 2000s did not ignite popular enthusiasm, nor did it defuse conservative reticence. In Jeremy Seekings' view (2020, p. 253), "basic income activism in South Africa has remained a largely intellectual project sustained by a small network of individuals without strong organisational or popular bases". This may be changing. Recent surveys and opinion polls suggest a majority of South Africans now support a basic income (Moosa & Patel, 2020; Alexander & Bohler-Muller, 2020). That stance could solidify as the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects drag on.

Yet, even as opportunities for waged work diminish, its intrinsic value continues to be glorified. In addition to being portrayed as the core legitimate source of income for able-bodied adults, waged work is seen to bestow virtue, earn respect, nourish pride and assign legitimacy. Invested with moral, psychological, social and political currency, its allure endures (Estlund, 2019). Merit, social status and entitlement continue to be tied to waged work, and politicians persist in framing reality and policies in those terms. Thus, "job creation" still operates as a radiant substitute for the task of creating a just society (Barchiesi, 2012). In reality, pervasive and relatively secure access to decent work was realised only partially in a few industrialised countries, and those conditions survived for about two generations in the mid-20th century. In SA's case, that idyllic arrangement was available only to white workers. And yet a kind of "melancholia" lingers, a hankering after illusory pasts that traps inventiveness inside the boundaries of contemporary capitalism and policy options that seem oblivious to the underlying dynamics shaping the availability and nature of waged work today.

A UBI destabilises the cherished doctrines about the role and status of waged work in human life. How a UBI is framed and promoted is therefore vitally important—not only to build durable social and political support, but because the eventual form and function of such an intervention will be subject to constant contestation (Calnitsky, 2019). Achieving and defending a UBI will entail a struggle to reshape the "common sense" people use when considering the obligations and claims they have on one another, on the state and on other institutions (Hall, 1996). The stigma attached to unemployment—and to non-waged income—has to be challenged, along with notions that paid work is the only authentic form of productive activity, the only legitimate way to contribute to society, and the only rightful basis for entitlement and reciprocity. As Kathi Weeks (2016) has emphasised, the arguments and tactics used to marshal support for a UBI will be important in their own right:

> [A] demand is not just a thing, but something that must be explained, justified, argued for and debated. The practice of demanding is itself productive of critical awareness and new political desires.

It will be important to also pursue social and economic policy reforms "that change people’s relationship with work: including the value we attach to work, the time we devote to work, and how work frames our judgements of other people" (Sage, 2018). That means valuing and validating other forms of work (volunteering, care and other forms of social reproductive labour) and other forms of contributing to the public good—both rhetorically and practically. The gendered constructions of "work" (which devalue care work and other forms of social reproduction) are obvious candidates for change. If the social and administrative category of "the unemployed" is made more porous and less damning, the stigma attached to unemployment and the reflexive discomfort with non-wage income will weaken.

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The demand for a progressive UBI arises from a recognition that tectonic shifts are underway and that they demand actions that go far beyond attempts at recuperation and repair, or the short-sighted notion of "building back better". There are risks, unanswered questions and major challenges attached to a UBI. But as a formative intervention, the potential benefits of a UBI are so extensive and urgent that it demands scrupulous and earnest consideration as part of a project to transform SA into a viable and just society.

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