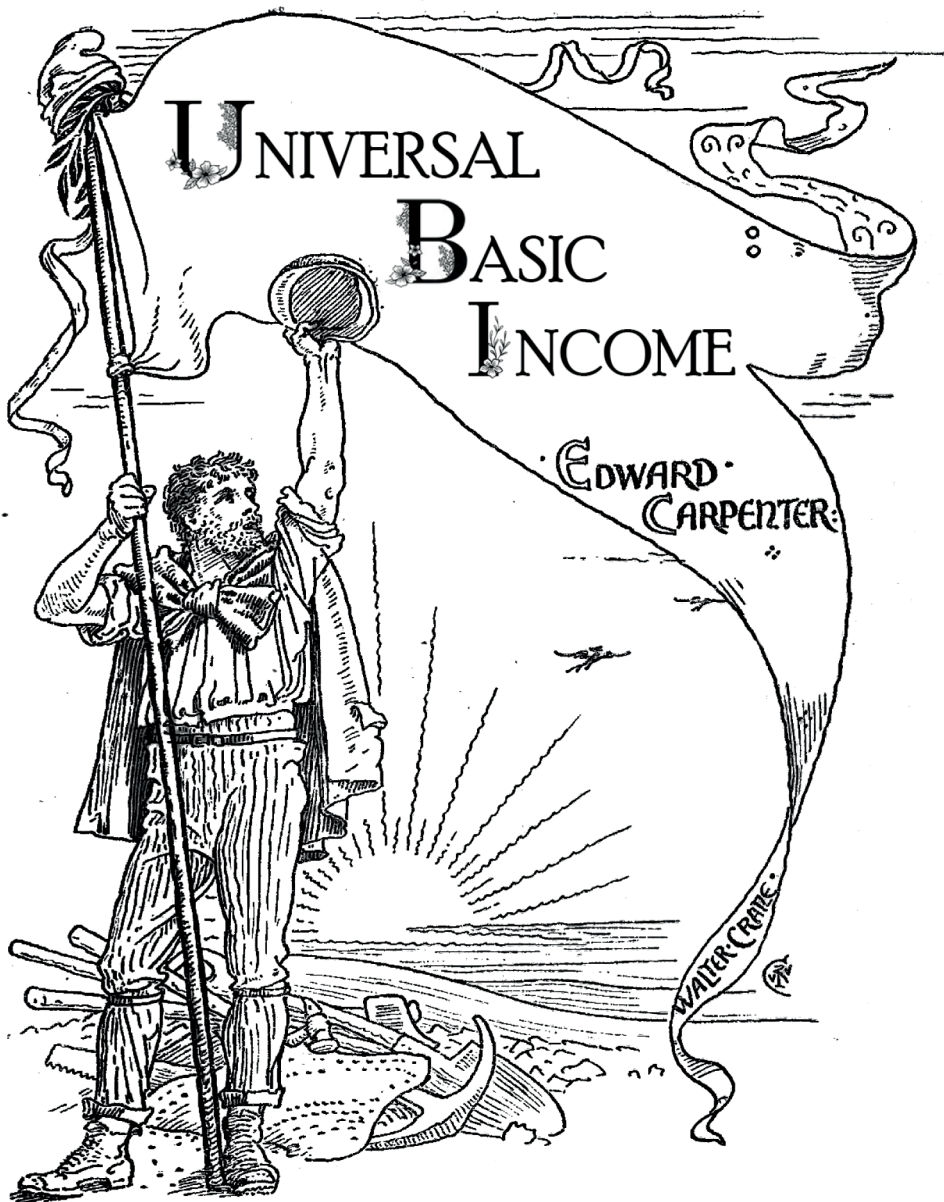


# UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

EDWARD  
CARPENTER

WALTER CRANE



# UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

## by Edward Carpenter

Principle 5 Pamphlet No: 5

Published in 2024 by:  
Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre  
Aizlewood's Mill  
Nursery Street  
Sheffield  
S3 8GG

# Principle P5

## FIVE

The text in this pamphlet was first published as the chapter  
Transitions to Freedom by Edward Carpenter for the 1897 book  
*Forecasts of the Coming Century*, edited by Edward Carpenter for  
The Labour Press Limited, Manchester.



# PREFACE

Universal Basic Income. This is the idea that Edward Carpenter was grappling with as the 19th century drew to a close. In “Transitions to Freedom” an essay he contributed to *Forecasts of the Coming Century* in 1897, Carpenter produced one of his key political texts, in which he sought to question how society might reform itself if people no longer needed to work to maintain their existence.

Neither “Transitions to Freedom” nor its two revisions, titled “Non-Governmental Society” and published in 1905 and 1917, concern themselves with how a Universal Basic Income (UBI) scheme might work. Rather, they describe how society might operate in a post-capitalist world where people do not have to work. In the late 19th century, all socialists believed that society would have to pass through a collectivist stage in which the apparatus of the state and industry would fall under the stewardship of the state. Once it was organised, the state would fall away to reveal a non-governmental society – a shade of anarchism or communism depending on political allegiance - it is this state which concerned Carpenter. In 1897, he believed that the collectivist phase would soon come to pass.

Non-governmental society however, could only come about under certain circumstances. The first of these was an end to privation, the lack of food and the essentials for wellbeing. Only when these things were guaranteed could a free non-governmental society arise. Such a society was desired by most people, but appeared impracticable. The competition for subsistence, arbitrated by government and the national state, appeared to be the ruling force of life. And anyway, without government, would society not dissolve into plunder and laziness?

What would happen therefore, Carpenter wondered if “some good fairy – some transcendental Chancellor of the Exchequer” waved his magic wand and assured all people a decent provision “for all our days of the actual necessities of life, so that for the future no man could feel any serious or grinding anxiety for his own material safety or that of his family.” How would society react to such an occurrence?

The current state of affairs – of low-skilled monotonous work which offered no interest, pleasure, or personal growth, or the energy for a full family life, Carpenter believed, would inevitably melt away. If the necessities of life were covered, yes, a great deal of work would go undone. But only because it was done under “degrading and miserable conditions” and was not necessary. With the need to make a profit vastly reduced, the amount of work required to live a full life would decline, as would the amount of products needing to be made. There would be no need for an abstract surplus of goods to keep prices low. Freed from the treadmill, people would have the time to learn the skills that would help them become more self-reliant.

But what of laziness? Surely those doing undesirable jobs would down tools immediately and never take them up again? Any argument about laziness, Carpenter concluded, could easily be countered by the fact that the rich had proven themselves to be far from idle despite having no compulsion to work.

But if one needed more evidence, Carpenter proposed the following. “...Let us suppose, since a bare living has been assured to us and we are in no danger of actual starvation that we all take a good long holiday – and abstain religiously from doing anything. Suppose that we simply twirl our thumbs in idleness for two, three, four, or six months. Still, is it not obvious that at the end of that time nine-tenths of the population would find sheer idleness appallingly dreary and that they would set themselves to work at some thing or other? – to produce objects of use or beauty, either for themselves, or for their families and neighbours, or even conceivably for society at large.”

Carpenter was not naive enough to believe that a UBI would be without its flaws. With the necessities of life covered and the need to work abolished, individuals would have to work all the harder to ensure that a non-governmental society could come about and be maintained. The collectivist phase would foster new ideas and new habits, useful drilling in the effort to work together for common ends that would be necessary if we ever wished to live in a society that did not need strong government.

Carpenter was no statist. He disliked bureaucracy and believed all individuals should have the freedom to express themselves. These

views strengthened in later life. In 1910, in *The Wreck of Modern Industry and its Reorganisation* he warned “that the only probable danger will be the growth of officialism and red tape...No socialist (that I know of...) is such a fool as to want to make a cast-iron system to regulate every detail of daily labour.” Excessive bureaucracy and red tape were parasites, almost as bad as the dividend-drawing parasites of commercialism who stifle progress.

Collectivism, Carpenter believed, did not give the mass of the people the opportunity to gain full responsibility over their own lives – too few were given the opportunity to develop or seek fulfilment. Through the co-operatives and trade unions, they could gain control. Thus, the only effective way to prevent municipal or national government from having too great a control over the economic and social life of the country. This “double collectivism” was how the worst excesses of state and capital could be kept in balance.

As he became more anarchist in old age, Carpenter emphasised the need for voluntary action – or voluntary collectivism – to act as a counterweight to state collectivism. Voluntarism, he suggested, be it through the co-operative movement or the trade unions, was already creating a society in which enormous wealth was being used for the use of the many, “a voluntary collectivism working within and parallel with the official collectivism of the State. The key battles of the heroes of the future will be individualistic, not against the armed forces of governments, but against the apathetic routine and inertia of the human masses”.

\* \* \*

This pamphlet is a reprinting of the original 1897 version of “Transitions to Freedom”. Whilst not the first writer to propose a UBI, Carpenter might be one of its earliest adherents in the 20th century not only to propose such a reform, but to fully consider its positive and potential negative consequences.

At the time of writing, Britain and Northern Ireland face many acute economic and social problems. With the benefit of hindsight it could be easy to look back at Carpenter’s “forecasts” and his subsequent revisions as utopian. However, “Transitions to Freedom” raises important

questions that need answering – particularly with the attention given to UBI in recent years – but also as a consequence of the rise of artificial intelligence and the need to alleviate the pressure we put on our finite natural resources.

1) Even if artificial intelligence does not “take all the jobs” will the jobs that remain in Britain be of a sufficient skill level to demand a high enough wage and exist in sufficient number to keep track with the rising cost of housing, food, and leisure? Will there be enough demand for those jobs that remain to employ a plurality of the working age population?

2) If a UBI is not implemented in Britain and well-paid jobs become scarcer, how will society and the economy react to the necessary price corrections to ensure that people can continue to live full lives?

3) Nearly 40% of claimants to Universal Credit are in work. There are clear signs that individuals and families are struggling to accumulate enough money to live independently of the state. At the same time, the Government places people under a severe amount of pressure to locate paid work at a sufficient wage to end dependence. Across the country, there are already places where this is not possible.

4) Despite ideological pretensions by successive governments to create a more free and entrepreneurial society, policies since the 1970s have gradually made us less free. Local authorities have been stripped of most of their power. The social housing sector has been crippled, and damp and mouldy properties have left us less healthy. Industries have been privatised and shut down in favour of moving production overseas, which delivers cheaper products, but creates job scarcity for those who are unlikely to obtain a job in the remaining skilled-labour markets. Wages have stagnated, and higher education has been commoditised, meaning many people cannot afford to retrain.

Over one hundred years since “Transitions to Freedom” first appeared we still have a long way to go to achieve true freedom. The freedom to have the choice to develop and grow in the way we see fit, to achieve a comfortable and fulfilling life.

It is true that the social reforms of the 20th century helped to curtail extreme poverty. And no sensible person will deny that working in a call centre is preferable to a job in a factory where your health is compromised on a daily basis. But when that work is no longer required that change will become unavoidable, else the status quo, with huge additions added to the ranks of the insecurely employed will either demand it, or be forced to continue with the scramble for a sufficient wage being directed by the state at bayonet point.

With this in mind, it seems sensible that the routine and inertia of the status quo needs to be overcome, so that the necessary changes to our society, are made in advance of the day when we are forced to make them by a crisis from which we might not recover.

- *Sheffield, February 2024*



Edw. Carpenter



# Universal Basic Income

(Transitions to Freedom)

by Edward Carpenter

After a hundred years since the First French Revolution the problem indicated by the words “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” seems to be shaping up towards something like a possibility of solution. In modern social changes there is a curious new element arising from the fact that political and social science is now so far advanced that though we cannot actually predict we can to some extent (as the foregoing essays show) forecast the future; and it is no longer necessary for us simply to shriek a watchword, and then blunder along helplessly and blindly in some opposite direction. Society can now quite conveniently attend and even assist at its own birth; and we are beginning actually to witness and to aid in the processes by which the free communities of the future are working themselves out.

While the members of the various Socialist bodies differ, as Bernard Shaw says in the preceding chapter, vary widely in their views, it seems to me that they agree – in their general conception of the stages through which modern society is passing. They all agree that we are approaching a Collectivist stage in which industrial arrangements will be largely handled or regulated by governmental agency; and they all agree that beyond that lies a non-governmental (or Anarchist) stage in which authoritative regulation will fall off, leaving such arrangements largely to custom and spontaneous initiative. Only they differ immensely in the importance which they attach to these stages and their sub-stages. Says Kropotkin, “No doubt we shall have to pass through a stage of State Collectivism; but Anarchism is our aim. The former is only a nuisance; let us hurry past it as quickly as we can, holding our noses, so

to speak.” Says Hyndman, “No doubt, good friends, a free Communism is what Society will come to some day, but it is so remote, you know, so remote; Collectivism, the nationalisation of the land and all the instruments of production, is the word of the near future – let us concentrate our efforts on that.” Says Sidney Webb, “What was that I heard about the land and all the instruments of production? Sounds a large order – suppose we begin by organising a Water supply for London.”

Like folk on a journey from Manchester to Paris, one man thinks only about Paris, and the happy time he will have when he gets there; another plans his journey as far as Dover, but leaves his arrangements for crossing the Channel till he sees the sea; and a third simply gets out his Bradshaw and looks up the next train to London. And it still remains doubtful which man will get to Paris first. So the Anarchists, the Social Democrats, Labour parties, Fabians, and Trade Unions are practically today along the same line of march; only they fix their minds on different points on the line; and even Lord Salisbury, who misses no opportunity of pointing out (and who certainly ought to know) the corruption and imbecility of Governments, might – if he were only consistent, which of course he is not – fall into the procession too.

What I propose to do in this paper is to show that the last stage on the line of the march is a possible one to reach, and not after all so remote as some may be inclined to think; and to indicate some of the steps and transitions which are bringing us along a road on which, as I take it, our feet are actually set. The chief difficulty which arises in people’s minds at the thought of a free non-governmental society does not concern its desirability – they are agreed as a rule that it would be desirable – but concerns its practicability. And this difficulty is derived from the society of the present. People see in fact that an internecine competition for subsistence is the ruling force of life today, and the chief incentive to production, and they infer that without government society would dissolve into a mere chaos of plunder on the one hand, and of laziness on the other.<sup>1</sup> It is this difficulty which has first to be removed.

Though it seems a hard thing to say, the outer life of society today is

---

<sup>1</sup> Though it must, to be strictly impartial, be pointed out that this difficulty is chiefly felt by those classes who themselves live on interest and in ornamental idleness.

animated first and foremost by Fear. From the wretched wage-slave who rises before the break of day, hurries through squalid streets to the dismal sound of the “hammer,” engages for nine, ten, or twelve hours, and for a pittance wage, in monotonous work which affords him no interest, no pleasure; who returns home to find his children gone to bed, has his supper and, worn out and weary, soon retires himself, only to rise again in the morning and pursue the same deadly round; and who leads a life thus monotonous, inhuman, and devoid of all dignity and reality, simply because he is hounded to it by the dread of starvation; - to the big commercial man who, knowing that this wealth has come to him through speculation and the turns and twists of the market, fears that it may at any moment take to itself wings by the same means; who feels that the more wealth he has, the more ways there are in which he may lose it, the more cares and anxieties belonging to it; and who to continually make his position secure is, or thinks himself, forced to stoop to all sorts of mean and dirty tricks; - over the great mass of the people the same demon spreads its dusky wings. Feverish anxiety is the keynote of their lives. There is no room for natural gladness or buoyancy of spirits. You may walk the streets of our great cities, but you will hear no one singing - except for coppers; hardly a plough-boy today whistles in the furrow; and in almost every factory (this is a fact) if a workman sang at his work he would be “sacked.” We are like shipwrecked folk clambering up a cliff. The waves are raging below. Each one clings by handhold or foothold where he may, and in the panic if he push his neighbour from a point of vantage, it is to be regretted certainly, but it cannot be helped!

But such a state of affairs is not normal. Allowing that competition in some degree must always exist, history still, except at rare crises, presents us with no such spectacle of widespread anxiety; the study of native races - whom we might consider in a state of destitution-, reveals no such dominion of dread. I want the reader to imagine for a moment this burden of fear lifted off the hearts of a whole people; and the result.

Let us imagine for a moment that some good fairy - some transcendental Chancellor of the Exchequer - with a stroke of his wand, has assured to us all not only an old-age pension, but a decent provision for all our days of the actual necessities of life (to go no farther than that); so that

for the future no man could feel any serious or grinding anxiety for his own material safety or that of his family. What would be the result of our actions?

Perhaps, as many would maintain, nine-tenths of the population would say, "I'm blessed if I'll ever do another stroke of work." Like the organ-grinder who came into a little fortune and who forthwith picked up an axe and fell upon his organ, shouting as he hacked it to pieces, we should feel so sick of our present jobs that we should want to turn our backs on them forever. Very likely, I should say – and rightly enough too; for "work" in the present day is done under such degrading and miserable conditions by the vast majority of the population that the very best and most manly thing we could do would be to refuse to continue doing it.

But let us suppose, since a bare living has been assured to us and we are in no danger of actual starvation that we all take a good long holiday – and abstain religiously from doing anything. Suppose that we simply twirl our thumbs in idleness for two, three, four, or six months. Still, is it not obvious that at the end of that time nine-tenths of the population would find sheer idleness appallingly dreary and that they would set themselves to work at some thing or other? – to produce objects of use or beauty, either for themselves, or for their families and neighbours, or even conceivably for society at large: that in fact a spontaneous and free production of goods would spring up, followed of course by a spontaneous and free exchange – a self-supporting society based not on individual dread and anxiety, but on the common fullness of life and energy?

That people relieved from care do spontaneously set themselves to work is sufficiently shown by the case of the well-to-do classes today. For these people, though having everything provided for them, and not merely the bare necessities which we have supposed, exhibit the most extraordinary and feverish energy in seeking employment. A few decades of years have been quite sufficient to make them feel the utter failure of picnics as an object in life; and now we are flooded with philanthropic and benevolent societies, leagues, charity organisations, art missions to the poor, vigilance crusades, and other activities, which are simply the expression of the natural energies of

the human being seeking an outlet in social usefulness. It is of course to be regretted that owing to the very imperfect education of this class, their ideas and their capacities of social usefulness should be so limited. However, this is a defect which will no doubt be remedied in the future. All that concerns us here is to see that since the rich, though in many ways ill-adapted by training and circumstance, do spontaneously take up a life of this kind, there is nothing extravagant in supposing that the average man, surrounded by so many unfulfilled needs, might do the same.

And if anyone still doubts let him consider the thousands in our large towns today who would give their ears to be able to get out and work on the land – not so much from any prospect of making a fortune that way, as from mere love of the life; or who in their spare time cultivate gardens or plots or allotments as a hobby; or the thousands who when the regular day's work is over start some fresh little occupation of their own – some cabinet making, wood turning, ornamental ironwork or whatnot; the scores of thousands in fact that there are of natural gardeners, cabinet makers, ironworkers, and so forth; and then think how if they were free these folk would sort themselves spontaneously to the work they delighted in.

Thus, it appears to be at least conceivable that a people not hounded on by compulsion nor kept in subjection by sheer authority would set itself spontaneously to produce the things which it prized. It does not of course at once follow that the result would be perfect order and harmony. But there are a few considerations in the positive direction which I may introduce here.

In the first place each person would be guided in the selection of his occupation by his own taste and skill, or at any rate would be guided by these to a greater extent than he is today; and on the whole would be more likely to find the work for which he was fitted than he is now. The increase in effective output and vitality from this cause alone would be great. While the immense variety of taste and skill in human beings would lead to a corresponding variety of spontaneous products.

In the second place the work done would be useful. It is certain that no man would freely set himself to dig a hole, only to fill it up again –

though it is equally certain that a vast amount of work done today is no more useful than that. If a man were a cabinet maker and made a chest of drawers, either for himself or a neighbour, he would make it so that the drawers would open and shut; but nine-tenths of the chests made on commercial principles are such that the draws will neither open or shut. They are not meant to be useful, they are meant to have the semblance of being useful; but they are really made to sell. To sell, and by selling yield a profit. And for that purpose they are better adapted if, appearing, useful, they turn out really useless, for then the buyer must come again and so yield another profit to the manufacturer and the merchant. The waste to the community today arising from causes of this kind is enormous; but it is of no moment as long as there is profit to a certain class.

Work in a free society would be done because it was useful. It is curious, when you come to think of it, that there is no other conceivable reason why work should be done. And of course I here include what is beautiful under the term useful – as there is no reason why one should separate what satisfies one human need, like the art-need, from another human need, like the hunger-need. I say the idea of work implies that it is undertaken because the product itself satisfies some human need. But strangely enough in commerce that is not so. The work is undertaken in order that the product may sell, and so yield a profit; that is all. It is of no moment what the product is; or whether bad or good, as long as it fulfils this one condition. And so the whole spirit of life and industry in the other society would be so utterly different from that of the present, that it is really difficult for us to compare results. But it is not difficult to see that if on the principles of freedom there was not so much produced, in mere quantity, and folk did not (as may indeed be hoped) work so many hours a day as now, still, the goods turned out being sincere and genuine, there would really be far more value shown in a year than on the strictly commercial system.

In the third place it follows – as William Morris points out in his foregoing paper, and elsewhere – that “work” in the new sense would be a pleasure – one of the greatest pleasures undoubtedly of life; and this one fact would transform its whole character. We cannot say that now. How many are there who take real pleasure and satisfaction in their daily labour? Are they, in each township, to be counted on the fingers?

But what is the good of life if its chief element, and that which must always be its chief element, is odious? No, the only true economy is to arrange so that your daily labour shall be itself a job. Then, and then only, are you on the safe side of life. And, your work being such, its product is sure to become beautiful; that painful distinction between the beautiful and the useful dies out, and everything made is an artistic product. Art becomes conterminous with life.

Thus it will be observed that whereas the present society is founded on a system of private property, in which, almost necessarily, the covetous hard type of man becomes the large proprietor, and (supported by law and government) is enabled to prey upon the small one; and whereas the result of this arrangement is a bitter and continuous struggle for possession, in which the motive to activity is mainly fear; we, on the contrary, are disentangling a conception of a society in which private property is supported by no apparatus of armed authority, but as far as it exists is a perfectly spontaneous arrangement, and in which the main motives to activity are neither fear, nor greed of gain, but rather community of life and interest in life – in which in fact you undertake work because you like the work, because you feel that you can do it, and because you know that the product will be useful, either to yourself or someone else!

How Utopian it all sounds! How absurdly simple and simple-minded – to work because you like the work and desire the product! How delightful if it could be realised, but of course how “unpractical” and impossible! Yet is it really impossible? From Solomon to Dr. Watt we have been advised to go to the ant and the bee for instruction – and lo! They are unpractical and Utopian too. Can anything be more foolish than the conduct of these little creatures, any one of whom will at any moment face death in defence of his tribe? While the bee is absolutely so ignorant and senseless that instead of storing up the honey that it has gathered in a little cell of its own, with a nice lock and key, it positively puts it in the common cells and cannot distinguish it from the stores of the others. Foolish little bee, the day will surely come when you will bitterly rue your “unthrifty” conduct, and will find yourself starving while your fellow tribesmen are consuming the fruits of your labour.

And the human body itself, that marvellous epitome and mirror of the



universe – how about that? Is it not Utopian too? It is composed of a myriad cells, members, organs, compacted into a living unity. A healthy body is the most perfect society conceivable. What does the hand say when a piece of work is demanded of it? Does it bargain first for what reward it is to receive, and refuse to move until it has secured satisfactory terms? Or the foot decline to take us on a journey till it knows what special gain is to accrue to it nearby? Not so; but each limb and cell does the work which is before it to do, and (such is the Utopian law) the fact of its doing the work causes the circulation to flow to it, and it is nourished and fed in proportion to its service. And we have to ask whether the same may not be the law of a healthy human society? Whether the fact of a member doing service (however humble) to the community would not be quite sufficient to ensure his provision by the rest with all that he might need? Whether the community would think of allowing such a one to starve any more than a man would think of allowing his least finger to pine away and die? Whether it is not possible that men would cease to feel any anxiety about the “reward of their labour”; that they would think of their work and the pleasure they had in doing it, first, and would not doubt that the reward would follow?

For indeed the instinct to do anything which is obviously before you to do, which is wanted, and which you can do, is very strong in human nature. Even children, those rudimentary savages, are often extremely proud to be “useful” – and it is conceivable that we might be sensible enough, instead of urging them as we do now – to “get on,” to make money, to beat their fellows in the race of life, and by climbing on other folks heads to ultimately reach a position where they would have to work no longer – that we might teach them how when they grew up they would find themselves members of a self-respecting society which, while it provided them gratis with all they might need, would naturally expect them in honour to render some service in return. Even small children could understand that. Is it quite inconceivable that a society of grown men and women might act up to it.

But it is really absurd to argue about the possibility of these things in human society, when we have so many actual examples of them before our eyes. Herman Melville, in that charming book, *Typee*, describes the Marquesas Islanders of the Pacific, among whom he lived for some time during the year 1846. He says, “During the time I lived among



the Typees no one was ever put upon trial for any offence against the public. To all appearances there were no courts of law or equity. There was no municipal police for the purpose of apprehending vagrants of disorderly characters. In short there were no legal provisions whatever for the well-being and conservation of society, the enlightened end of civilised legislation." Nevertheless the whole book is a eulogy of the social arrangements he met with, and with almost a fervour of romance in its tone; and yet, like all his descriptions of the natives of the Pacific Islands, undoubtedly accurate, and well corroborated by the travellers of the period. An easy communism prevailed. When a good haul of fish was made, those who took part in it did not keep the booty to themselves, but parcelled it out and sent it throughout the tribe, retaining only their proportionate share. When one family required a new cabin, the others would come and help to build it. He describes such an occasion, when, "at least a hundred of the natives were bringing materials to the ground, some carrying in their hands one or two of the canes which were to form the sides, others slender rods of hibiscus, strung with palmetto leaves, for the roof. Everyone contributed something to the work; and by the united but easy labours of all, the entire work was completed before sunset."

Similar communistic habits prevail of course through a vast number of tribes, and indeed almost anywhere that the distinctively commercial civilisation has not set its mark. They may be found close at home, as in the little primitive island of St. Kilda in the Hebrides, where exactly the same customs of sharing the hauls of fish or the labours of house-building exist today, which Melville describes in *Typee*; and they may be found all along the edges of our civilisation in the harvesting and house-warming "bees" of the backwoods and outlying farm-populations. And we may fairly ask, not whether such social habits are possible, but whether they are not in the end the only possible form; for surely it is useless and absurd to call these modern hordes of people, struggling with each other for the means of subsistence and jammed down by violent and barbaric penal codes into conditions which enforce the struggle, societies; as it would be absurd to call the wretched folk in the Black Hole of Calcutta a society.

If anyone will only think for a minute of his own inner nature he will see that the only society which would ever really satisfy him would be

one in which he was perfectly free, and yet bound by ties of deepest trust to the other members; and if he will think for another minute he will see that the only condition on which he could be perfectly free (to do as he liked) would be that he should trust and care for his neighbour as well as himself. The conditions are perfectly simple; and since they have been more or less realised by countless primitive tribes of animals and men, it is surely not impossible for civilised men to realise them. If it be argued (which is perfectly true) that modern societies are so much more complex than the primitive ones, we may reply that if modern man, with his science and his school-boards and his brain cultivated through all these centuries, is not competent to solve a more complex problem than the savage, he had better return to savagery.

But it is getting time to be practical. Of the possibility of a free communistic society there can really I take it be no doubt. The question that more definitely presses on us now is one of transition – by what steps shall we, or can we pass to that land of freedom? We have supposed a whole people started on its journey by the lifting off of the burden of fear and anxiety: but in the long slow ascent of evolution no sudden miraculous change can be expected; and for this reason alone it is obvious that we can look for no sudden transformation to the communist form. Peoples that have learnt the lesson of “trade” and competition so thoroughly as the modern nations have – each man fighting for his own hand – must take some time to unlearn it. The sentiment of the common life, so long nipped and blighted, must have leisure to grow and expand again; and we must acknowledge that – in order to foster new ideas and new habits – an intermediate stage of collectivism will be quite necessary. Formulae like the “nationalisation of the land and all the instruments of production,” though they be vague and indeed impossible of vigorous application will serve as centres for the growth of the sentiment. The partial application of these formulae will put folk through a lot of useful drilling in the effort to work together and for common ends.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> When one looks sometimes at the awful residue and dregs which are being left as a legacy to the future by our present commercial system – the hopeless helpless drunken incapable men and women who drift through London and the country districts from workhouse to workhouse, or the equally incapable and more futile idlers in high places, one feels that possibly only a rather systematic industrial organisation will enable the coming society to cope with these burdens.

If I might venture (taking only the agencies which we see already around us at work) to sketch out how possibly the transitions to the free communistic state will be effected it would be somewhat as follows. In the first place the immense growth of the unemployed – which is so marked a feature of the day, and which is due to the monopoly of land and machinery in the hands of the few – is going before long to force the hand of the government (as indicated by A. R. Wallace, and Russell Smart in their respective papers) to the development of big industrial schemes, and to the socialisation (in some degree) of land and machinery. While at the same time the rolling up of companies into huge and huger trusts is going to make all such transfers of industry to public control daily more obviously necessary and more easy to effect.

On the other hand the trade-unions and co-operative societies, by rapid development of productive as well as distributive industries, by the interchange of goods with each other on an ever-growing scale and possibly by the adoption of a currency of their own, will be bringing about a similar result. They will create a society in which enormous wealth will be produced and handled not for the profit of the few but for the use of the many; a voluntary collectivism working within and parallel with the official collectivism of the state.

As this double collectivism grows and spreads, profit-grinding will more and more cease to be a lucrative profession. The spread of employment and the growing security of a good wage, combined with the extraordinary cheapening of production (owing to machinery, etc) which is already taking place, will bring about a kind of general affluence – or at least absence of poverty. The unworthy fear which haunts the hearts of nine-tenths of the population, the anxiety for the beggarly elements of subsistence, will pass away or fade in the background and with it the mad nightmarish competition and bitter struggle of men with each other. Even the sense of property itself will be alleviated. Today the institution of property is like a cast iron railing against which a human being may be crushed, but which still is retained because it saves us from falling into the gulf. But tomorrow when the gulf of poverty is practically gone, the indicating line between one person and another need run no harsher than an elastic band.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> This curious alleviation indeed is already markedly visible. Forty years ago the few

It is this general rise in wellbeing due to the next few years of collectivist development which I believe will play the part of the good fairy in the transformation scene of modern society. With the dying out of fear and grinding anxiety and the undoing of the frightful tension which today characterises all our lives, society will spring back nearer to its normal form of mutual help. People will wake up with surprise, and rub their eyes, to find that they are under no necessity of being other than human.<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously (i.e. with the disappearance of money as an engine of interest and profit-grinding) the huge nightmare which weighs on us today, the monstrous incubus of “business” – with its endless Sisyphean labours, its searchings for markets, its displacement and destruction of rivals, its travellers, its advertisements, its armies of clerks, its banking and broking, its accounts and checking of accounts – will collapse, and roll off like a great burden to the ground. Freed from the great strain and waste which all this system creates, the body politic will recover like a man from a disease, and spring to unexpected powers of health. Meanwhile in the great industrial associations, governmental and voluntary, folk will have been learning the sentiment of the common life – the habit of acting together for common ends, the habit of feeling together for common interests – and once this has been learnt the rest will follow of its own accord.

We need not fear that state-organisation will run to the bitter end so often prophesied – nor is there any danger of poetry and ginger-beer being converted into government monopolies. But it may perhaps be hoped that it will go far enough to form the nucleus of immense growths

---

dressed in broadcloth, the masses in fustian; but now that silk is made out of wood-pulp, and everyone can dress and does dress in the latest fashion, it is no distinction to have fine clothes. Similarly with books, travel, and a hundred other things. What is the good of being a millionaire when the man with three pounds a week can make almost as good a show as you?

4 At the same time it must not be ignored that in the growth of the modern millionaire we are face to face with a serious evil. Now that any man endowed with a little low cunning and tempted by self-conceit and love of power has a good chance of making himself enormously rich, society is in danger of being ruled by as mean a set of scoundrels as ever before in history. And nothing less than a complete transformation of our monetary system will enable us to cope with this danger.

of voluntary socialism, and to give (as government action does) a very distinct direction to the current of public opinion.

If this seems an odd mixture of anarchism and state-socialism, it has to be remembered – and Bernard Shaw has consumed a great many valuable pages of this book in showing it – that there is not the smallest chance of any “ideal,” pure and simple, of society being at any time absolutely realised. Besides an ideal is at best an awkward thing. For while it is obviously either Smith’s ideal or Brown’s ideal, it is pretty certain that Brown’s ideal would not suit Smith, nor Smith’s ideal suit Brown. So that while we can see plainly enough the communistic direction in which society is trending we may both hope and fairly expect that the resulting form will not be the exact “ideal” of any labour party; but will be broad enough and large enough to include an immense diversity of institutions and habits as well as a considerable survival of the social forms of today.<sup>5</sup>

The payment of labour by wages for example is not exactly an ideal of the most advanced party, yet it is probably an arrangement that will continue for a long period. It may perhaps be said that in some ways a generous wage-payment convention (as for instance sketched in the last chapter of Carruther’s *Communal and Commercial Economy*) on a thoroughly democratic basis, gives more freedom than a formless anarchism in which each one takes “according to his needs,” – simply because under the first system, A could work two hours a day and live on the wage of two, and B could work eight and live on the wage of eight, each with perfect moral freedom – whereas if there was no wage system, A (however much he might wish to loaf) would feel that he was cheating the community – and the community would think so too – unless he gave his eight hours like everybody else.<sup>6</sup>

The great point however to bear in mind in all this matter is that though the cash-nexus may and no doubt will linger on for a long time in vari-

---

<sup>5</sup> Also it has to be remembered that the difference between anarchism and socialism is not so much a matter of the form of social organisation as of the degree in which it is voluntary and not forced.

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to see how things like railways and the immense modern industries (if these survive) could be carried on without some system of wage-payment and the definite engagement to fulfil certain work which it carries with it.

ous forms of wages, purchase, sale, and so forth, it must inevitably with the changing sentiment and conditions of life lose its cast-iron stringent character, and gradually be converted into the elastic cord, which while it may indicate a line of social custom – will yield to pressure when the need arises. Private property will thus lose its present virulent character, and subside into a matter of mere use or convenience; monetary reckonings and transfers, as time goes on, will seem little more than formalities – as today between friends.

Finally, custom alone will remain. The subsidence of the property feeling will mean the subsidence of brute force law, for whose existence property is mainly responsible. The peoples accustomed to the varied activities of a complex industrial organism, will still – though relieved from the compulsion either of hunger or of brute authority – continue through custom to carry on those activities – their reason in the main approving.

Custom will remain – slowly changing. And the battles of the heroes of the future will be individualistic, not against the armed forces of governments, but against the apathetic routine and inertia of the human masses.

# Principle FIVE **P5**



## Join Principle 5

An accessible co-operative learning  
and information resource for all:

Lending Library

Co-operative archive and information resource

Talks, study groups, visits and film screenings

Engagement with other co-operatives and libraries

Co-operative News available for members

Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre  
Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield S3 8GG  
Tel: 0114 282 3132 Web: <https://www.principle5.coop>

# UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Principle 5 Pamphlet No: 5

Originally titled “Transitions to Freedom”, Edward Carpenter wrote this essay for *Forecasts for the Coming Century*, a collection published in 1897 which also included contributions from Tom Mann, William Morris, Enid Stacy, Grant Allen, and George Bernard Shaw. Now retitled Universal Basic Income, this essay presents Carpenter at his inquisitive best, asking the simple question, “What would happen to society if people did not need to work in order to live fulfilling lives.” Over a hundred years later, society is no closer to answering this question, even though it feels as if the days of mass employment in well paying jobs are slowly coming to an end. This essay is vital reading for all those people who dream of a better tomorrow.

£5

Principle **P5**  
FIVE