

CRITICAL STUDY

Philippe Van Parijs. *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?*. Oxford University Press. 1995. xii + 330 pp. ISBN 0-19-8293577

JOCELYNE COUTURE

*Département de Philosophie,
Université du Québec à Montréal,
Case Postale 8888,
Succursale Centre – Ville,
Montréal (Québec) H3C3P8
CANADA*

couture.j@uqam.ca

In the Preface of *Real Freedom for All What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?*, Philippe Van Parijs characterizes his book as the result of three “intellectual developments”. A critical survey of old and new economic indictments of capitalism first led him to ask “[w]hat exactly is fundamentally wrong with the capitalist societies we live in?” and, more particularly, with libertarian defences of capitalism? What motivates the latter, and certainly more speculative question, is made clear: it is, he claims, “only by taking ... the libertarian defence of capitalism as seriously as it deserves that the Left could ever hope to regain the ideological nerve which is so badly needed in order to reach beyond purely defensive struggles.” (vii). The second development led him from his work on universal basic income, as a radical strategy for fighting unemployment in Western Europe, to the discovery of its crucial relevance to the question

of the legitimacy of capitalism. Again, the idea is clear, as should now be the answer to the question which appears in the subtitle of his book: namely that if anything can justify capitalism, it is the possibility it offers of working out, from within, the institutional devices which can counter the social plague it generates. A third development led Van Parijs to articulate and to spell out a conception of justice to which he gradually came to think he could subscribe. So in the end, we have an alternative to libertarian defences of capitalism.

This, one commentator claims (Michael W. Howard (1996), pp. 52-55), is a book written by a leftist for a leftist audience. Written by a leftist, indeed. But for a leftist audience only? I don't think so. First, the core of the book is a proposal about how to counter massive unemployment, a problem that ultraliberals are more and more aware of as a serious obstacle to economic growth, and that has already led them to wonder about "what have got wrong with capitalism". Second, the book contains sophisticated arguments intended to show how basic income is, and indeed should be, feasible within the sacrosanct capitalist requirement of economic efficiency. This is also the line of argument which leads the author to conclude that, as a socio-economic system, capitalism is more promising than socialism. And finally, Van Parijs's conception of justice – real-freedom-for-all – includes a defence of formal freedom that a libertarian would not at all despise, but that might take some nerve indeed for a leftist to swallow.

There is no room for me to carry out the extended critical probing that Van Parijs's book deserves, a book which is a model of patient, carefully articulated and stimulating analysis and which develops, moreover, a comprehensive approach to questions of social justice diversely addressed by philosophers, political scientists, economists and policy makers. I shall dis-

cuss, though, each of the three pillars of Van Parijs's book: basic income, real-freedom for all and finally, his defence of capitalism.

I - UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

In 1776, Thomas Paine, the intellectual leader of the American revolutionaries, was proposing that, out of a rational fund to be created "there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance ... [a]nd also the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age." (Paine (1987), pp. 477-8) Nearly two centuries later, the idea of a guaranteed income was restated by the winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize for economics, Milton Friedman. In its new clothes, and under conservative auspices, Paine's idea, took the form of a negative income tax scheme guaranteeing a supplementary income for economically weak households. In more recent years, the Basic Income European Network (BIEN), of which Philippe Van Parijs was one of the founders in 1980, has given it a radical twist, more congenial in some ways to Paine's proposal.

First, universal basic income (UBI), for Van Parijs, is universal in a strong sense: it is paid by the government, (1) to each full member of the society (to be an adult, and a sufficient length of legal residence are the key criteria), (2) even if she is not willing to work, (3) irrespective of her being rich or poor, (4) whoever she lives with, and (5) no matter which part of the country she lives in (35). Second, UBI comes in addition to, and is not intended to replace, existing conditional transfers such as state-funded social insurance and disability compensa-

tion schemes. Moreover, “there is nothing in the definition of UBI ... to connect it to some notion of basic needs.” (35).

Two additional features make UBI look more like a (guaranteed) salary. First, UBI is paid periodically (Van Parijs suggests, once a month) to a person through her adult life, instead of being given, as Paine saw it, as a global amount in one time or as an allocation over certain periods of one’s life. Second, it is given in cash rather than in services or means of production, or bundles of goods. There are three categories of exception to that rule: in the first category fall “services that can legitimately be provided to each member of society, irrespective of whether or not she expresses her willingness to pay for them.” (42), such as the police and the courts and effective military or civil defence. In the second category fall items, such as education, which “would foster productivity to such an extent that the net effect on the highest level of UBI the society could durably afford would be positive” (positive externalities) (43). In the third category fall items, like clean air, the building, maintenance and cleaning of streets, things “that no one in her right mind might not want to buy” (43) and whose provision in kind is mainly justified by the cost of selling them. UBI – that portion of it which does not fall in any of the above categories – should be maximized at a level where it is sustainable; obviously it will be foolish to “give away society’s wealth now ... at the expense of economic collapse tomorrow” (38).

According to Van Parijs, UBI need not – and indeed should not – translate in an extravagant income tax burden for the better-off. Sustainability of UBI depends on the level of taxation that can be feasibly sustained and that, in turn, requires that one should pay attention to incentives and demography. Defending UBI on the ground of economic efficiency, Van Parijs develops a negative and a positive line of argument.

The negative one is that the implementation of universal UBI will greatly contribute to the reduction of the costs involved in the management of existing programs of security of income, as well as in the expensive and intrusive systems of control over people's circumstances. To these factors of increased productivity, Van Parijs wants to add the reduction of work conflicts (117). His positive and more central line is that UBI would allow people to escape from both insecurity and the wage relation and will create an incentive for self-employment; the result will be an increasing of the supply of labor, a diversification of economies and a functioning of the labor market far better suited to current technological conditions (117).

The arguments from efficiency that we find in the literature on basic income usually turn out to heavily depend on the hypothesis of a significant growth of self-employment. But such a growth of self-employment would arguably depend on the fact that UBI will reach a level high enough to overcome risk aversion among people who already enjoy a reasonable income. It should still reach a higher level for everyone if we also count as potentially self-employed people whose income from a different source is low or non-existent. Van Parijs's proposal includes no such proviso on "the highest sustainable income", and, understandably enough, can offer no guarantees that, in a modern society, it could reach a sufficient level. This is a problem that Van Parijs deals with by developing, in the last chapter of *Real Freedom for All*, an argument for the economic efficiency of socio-economic systems where UBI could be advantageously implemented. I shall return later to that argument.

Still, the arguments from efficiency are unconvincing in another way that concerns Van Parijs's proposal. Suppose for one moment that UBI comes to reach a level which enables enough people to become self-employed. The case still has to

be made that that is what most people will choose to do. Since UBI is unconditional, they can instead choose to have more leisure, to work just enough, say a few months a year, to supplement their UBI. It might very well be the case that, in such circumstances, more jobs become available for people who, in spite of UBI, still need (or choose) to rely on wages. But that result, a result that UBI is likely to induce, just means that the actual supply of labor will have been *shared* instead of being *increased* as predicted by the arguments from efficiency.

In previous writings, Van Parijs has shown little confidence that economic efficiency could provide more than strong evidence in favour of UBI (Van Parijs (1992)). Instead, his position was that arguments from efficiency need to be supplemented by an argument from justice. *Real Freedom* contains no indication of a *volte-face* on that point.

II - A JUST SOCIETY: REAL-FREEDOM-FOR-ALL

How does UBI connect with justice? A just society, Van Parijs writes, is a free society that is, a society where “each person has the greatest possible opportunity to do whatever she might want to do”. That condition translates, says Van Parijs, into a leximin criterion according to which “the person with least opportunities has opportunities that are not smaller than those enjoyed by the person with least opportunities under any other feasible arrangement” (25). Together with a well enforced structure of basic rights, including self-ownership, the leximin condition constitutes what Van Parijs calls real-freedom-for-all and, according to him, this “is all there is to social justice” (5). The highest sustainable unconditional UBI is the “institutional device” of real-freedom-for-all and it is in-

tended to provide one with “the means, not just the right, to do whatever one might want to do ” (32-33).

Van Parijs's sentences quoted above might give the impression that, since “the greatest opportunities” should be at least as extensive so as to cover “whatever one might want to do”, then the highest sustainable unconditional UBI would have to be very high indeed. To so understand Van Parijs position would be a big mistake. ‘Real-freedom-for-all’, Van Parijs confess, “is in a way a misnomer ... It is not really the size or extent of their real freedom that real-freedom-for-all requires just institutions to maximize for the worst off. It is rather the endowment of means resources that form the substratum of this real freedom.” (32). In other words, real-freedom-for-all is concerned with the maximization of the opportunity-set characteristic of the range of options feasible, but not necessarily realized, in a society and not with the maximization of the utility one can derive from the elements of the opportunity set. This provides a quite different way of understanding the primary role of UBI in a just society. UBI multiplies opportunities in the sense that, being unconditional, it removes some of the social, institutional and cultural bans on what people might want to do with their lives. To this extent, it is a *means* to provide a society with the greatest possible opportunity-set. If this is all that is meant by UBI “providing means” then, Van Parijs would in reality be more of a libertarian (as opposed to a ‘real-libertarian’) than he wants to be. Van Parijs claims, that his concern for the enlargement of the opportunity-set creates a significant difference between real-freedom-for-all and conceptions of negative (formal) liberty. But if this is to be the only difference, as he also seems to claim, then, real freedom just turns out to give people “the right” to choose among a greater diversity of options without actually enabling them to seize these options.

And if real-freedom-for-all “is all there is to social justice”, where are we going to find arguments for the *highest* sustainable UBI?

The beginning of what might be an answer to that question is to be found in the section where Van Parijs, discussing the unconditionality of UBI, introduces a contrast which parallels his distinction between “the size or extent of real freedom” and real-freedom-for-all: “What a real libertarian is concerned to leximin [...] is not the real freedom to get what a person happens to want or what she needs in order to maintain her way of life. It is the real freedom to do what she *might* want to do ” (38, italics mine). That distinction between actual wants and potential wants first appears to be motivated, in the first chapter of the book, by the fear that “any characterization of a person’s freedom that makes essential reference to her wants” would give rise to the problems of adaptive preferences and wants manipulation (17-18). When we come to chapter 3, the rationale evolves, not unsurprisingly, into a critique of welfare theories of justice and with the claim that, as far as justice is concerned, people should be held responsible for their preferences.

Now, is Van Parijs suggesting that his conception, whatever it is, of what people might *want* to do makes no “essential reference” to people’s preferences? Could it be that, for Van Parijs, what a person *might* want is, not only what she does not actually want now but what she will never want? And what is real-freedom-for-all about if it consists in providing opportunities to do what people might want, but do not and will never actually want? Is that the price to pay for avoiding welfarism? I suspect that this does not make sense for Van Parijs either and I take it that what he meant is not that the options open by real-freedom-for-all will never be actually wanted and, therefore,

taken by anybody, but instead, the standard point that the subjective, and potentially distorted, preferences of people is not the basis on which the options a just society should afford its members should be grounded. This makes room for the maximization of UBI now seen as a means to seize the opportunities open by real-freedom-for-all. On the other hand, Van Parijs's stress on "whatever people might want" suggests that, for him, no substantive moral standard either is going to determine which options are legitimate in a just society. Indeed, according to formal liberty (basic rights and self-ownership) it is the number and the diversity, not the nature of the options, that really matters. If I am right in so reconstructing his argument, then Van Parijs successfully escapes both the problems related to subjective preferences and the embarrassments of perfectionism. On that interpretation, however, one still has to explain the moral significance of the maximization of the opportunity-set. Van Parijs seems committed to the dubious assumption that people invariably have the capacity to derive utility from any of its elements, so that the bigger the opportunity-set, the bigger the real freedom enjoyed by each person. It should also be notice that, on that interpretation, what Van Parijs actually rejects is not welfarism (and real freedom) *sans phrase*, but only welfarism (and real freedom) of a *subjective* sort.

Such considerations indeed make for a significant difference between real-freedom-for-all and conceptions of negative (formal) liberty. But they do not explain why Van Parijs, arguing for the highest UBI from the point of view of real-freedom-for-all, could feel so unconcerned with the size and extent of real freedom. To see why it is so, just imagine how Van Parijs will answer the question: "given what"? when he talks of "what people *might* want to do". What are the circumstances which could bring a person, who does not presently want to do x , to

want to do x ? Or, conversely, what is it that could prevent a person from actually wanting what she might want? An answer to these questions which fits Van Parijs's ideas on the responsibility for preferences is that a *rational* person does not want to do what she does not have the means to achieve. If we apply here the same dubious rationale that apparently led him to normatively defend the maximization of the opportunity-set, then we obtain the additional premise that a person does want to achieve what she has the means to achieve. This provides the ground for arguing normatively for the *highest* sustainable UBI: the higher it is, the more can people achieve. But it also makes irrelevant any question of how high UBI has to be; UBI will always be high enough to enable people to achieve what they actually have the means to achieve.

I now want to turn to the more general claim made by Van Parijs according to which UBI is an appropriate institutional device for real-freedom-for-all. One way of understanding that claim is that the philosophical underpinning UBI receives from this or the other component of real-freedom-for-all, can be consistently argued for from the point of view of his whole conception of justice. For instance, the unconditionality of UBI, as we have seen, is argued for from the maximization of the opportunity-set required by real-freedom for all. Maximization of UBI, on the other hand, could be argued for on the view that real-freedom-for-all is committed to provide more than empty opportunities. Rather, it is committed to providing substantive means of seizing them. Putting the two arguments together, one can then expect that real-freedom-for-all recommends the maximization of UBI in view of affording people, among other options, the very options opened by UBI itself given the fact that it is unconditional, such as working or not, living in the countryside or in a city, living alone or in a

commune. It seems therefore plausible to think that, when people actually take these options, and do so each in conformity with the other requirements of real-freedom-for-all, that is to say, without violating basic rights, then the aggregate result of their choices should be compatible with social justice as real-freedom-for-all. If this is so, then one can conclude that Van Parijs is right in thinking that his conception of social justice consistently gives support to UBI and, conversely, that UBI is an appropriate institutional device for real-freedom-for-all. If not, then we would have to conclude that, to be consistently argued for, real-freedom-for-all as a conception of social justice, should give up some aspects of the unconditionality of UBI. It is, I think interesting to note, that the problem I foresee here is not unrelated to the one I discussed above, for if it turns out that UBI is not an adequate device in that sense, real-freedom-for-all would impose another hidden constraint on “what people might want to do” or, to put it differently, it would introduce a new gap, this time between people reasonably *wanting* to do x and people doing x that they reasonably want. But let’s just look now at how UBI fits in with basic rights, and especially with self-ownership in the ideal case where, being high enough, it affords people the various opportunities it opens by virtue of being unconditional.

Van Parijs sometimes argues that UBI will contribute to freeing people from jobs, which, without being exploitative, are neither very challenging, or socially praised, or well paid. This is a plausible conjecture, at least as far as it concerns people who have a sense of being underused in such jobs and who can see UBI as a chance to reorient their life. It is not unreasonable to suppose, however, that the same jobs will be seen differently by different people. People, let’s say, with lesser capacities or talents, could find them rewarding, gratifying and give them a

sense of doing something that is useful. Let's further suppose these are the only jobs that such people are, in fact, capable of doing and we have the portrait of people who praise their job and would choose to hold on to it even if UBI enabled them to take the only other option they have, that is, not to work at all.

Van Parijs further argues that, as a consequence of a shortage of workers, resulting from the very fact of UBI, likely to accept such jobs, the wages attached to them will raise and, therefore, the social significance linked to them will improve. But let's enlarge (a bit) picture of such a society, by now considering another category of people who praise work for itself, but wish they could escape the heavy responsibilities and the stressful life resulting from their present work. They would willingly choose to give up their career prospects, professional achievements involving long term commitments, or the pursuit of goals requiring sustained and continuous working efforts. Benefiting from unconditional UBI, they decide to work, for the rest of their life, for, let's say, six moths a year, spending the other six moths surfing or bird watching. These part-time leisurers are likely to count exactly, for they are also part-time workers, on these unchallenging, socially unpraised, and not very well paid jobs Van Parijs is saying people are not likely to take. Then, if they are numerous enough, exactly the opposite of what he predicts will happen. The demand for these jobs will increase, wages will go down, and in a work place where there is little opportunity for worker's efficient organisation, work discipline will go the same way leading to more or less pervasive forms of exploitation.

It will not help the case for self-ownership to say that people, as I described them, who praise work for itself or for the gratification they derive from the very fact of having a job, will not resent being asked to work harder even with a very

poor salary and in a poor working environment. The fact that some people will not resent it does not change anything concerning the reality of exploitation for a whole category of people in a society thought of as being a just society. It will not help the case for self-ownership either to say that, in such a situation and with UBI, the only people to be exposed to exploitation are the ones who voluntarily choose to suffer it and that they should be held responsible for their preferences. It might be true that people with the means of doing whatever they might want to do also have the means to avoid being exploited. But first, in the situation I am describing, that will be to say that people should give up what they, in conformity with the standards of real freedom as they constrain their behavior, want to do with their lives. Second, and more importantly, that would be to suggest that UBI, in contradiction with its whole purpose, now has to enable people to adjust to social injustices which are, in addition, a result of UBI itself. It will also be beside the point to argue that such a situation will never occur in a just society since self-ownership prevents anybody, and specially the employers, from taking advantage of other people, for the situation I am describing obtains without anybody in particular playing the role of exploiter. Degradation of the work place, for a whole range a jobs (jobs which will still have to be done by somebody), rampant exploitation and the deprivation of effective means of countering such ills, all of these things are not, in my little story, the result of a conspiracy or of a plan designed for the oppression of the workers. They are, rather, a structural effect of a central change in the work place, itself induced by the fact that people are now given 'the means' of doing whatever they might want to do including to move from one job to another.

I deliberately strengthened the case by considering a lower range of jobs, and two particular categories of people:

those who made use of UBI to hopefully better their situation, and those who do not, and indeed cannot. The case then illustrates dramatically the fact that, even with every person in a given society acting on the standards, and espousing the ideals, of real-freedom-for-all, and not taking advantage of others or coercing them in any way, the situation of those with lesser opportunities can be worsened in relation to self-ownership. Real-freedom-for-all as social justice should, on one hand, put a ban on certain ways, that it endorses, on the other hand, of using UBI.

Another feature of the case I describe here is that, everybody involved in it is hurt by the degradation of working conditions. The relevant consideration, given that feature, is that a similar degradation of working conditions leading to exploitation could happen in any working sector, and especially in the most attractive ones, whenever a large number of people, given the means and the right to do whatever they might want to do, happen to aspire to similar jobs or careers. Again, real-freedom-for-all offers a rationale for UBI which leads to such situations. But it seems obvious to me that self-ownership would require an institutional response which, in such a case, would have to impose some constraints on the use of “unconditional basic income”. And if this is so, in what sense could we still say that UBI contributes to a free society “where each person has the greatest possible opportunities?”

Van Parijs advocates, “as a rough conjecture” (26), a “soft priority” of basic rights over self-ownership over leximin opportunities, but he deliberately and explicitly leaves aside questions related to possible conflicts between the three components of real-freedom-for-all (25). From my point of view this is a mistake, for an important conflict between leximin opportunities and self-ownership could arise when real-freedom-for-all is given a individualistic twist. And that is exactly what happens

in Van Parijs's arguments for the highest UBI. To be consistent with the idea of the highest UBI, the rationale for the maximization of the opportunity-set requires that the opportunities socially created by UBI become accessible to individuals benefiting from it. Then real-freedom-for-all becomes just a matter of each individual respecting basic rights. But that, as we have seen, consistently leads to violation of self-ownership. Freedom can only be individual, argues Van Parijs (15-17). Maybe this is so, but the freedom of individuals within a society needs social guarantees. Basic rights including self-ownership can indeed offer such a guarantee, but, if they do, they will not endorse an institutional device granting everybody in a society a right to unconditional use, as conceived by Van Parijs, of the highest sustainable UBI.

Van Parijs, in his realistic fashion, seems to assume that UBI will never be high enough to lead to conflictual situations such as the one I have just described. But first, it is a requirement of real-freedom-for-all that UBI be the highest income that is sustainable. If the presumption is that, even with that requirement, it will never be high enough to afford the opportunities it is supposed to afford, then what is the relevance of real-freedom-for-all in arguing for UBI? Second, my point does not depend on the size of UBI, although I indeed assume it to be high enough; my point is that in virtue of real-freedom-for-all, people are given the *right* to take any of the opportunities afforded by UBI and that this right, whether it is instantiated or not, is inconsistent with basic rights for all.

Typically in his book, Van Parijs shows more concern for ethical issues related to the application of his proposal for UBI than for questions, such as the ones I have discussed here, which are more related to the theoretical articulation of a conception of justice. The issues that Van Parijs carefully appraises

and discusses in reference to the main trends of the literature on social justice, are: the extent compensation for unequal internal endowments, where Van Parijs is generalizing an idea first formulated by Bruce Ackerman, articulates a “stingy” criterion of “undominated diversity” (ch. 3); the justification of taxation on income, where he develops the idea that jobs are external endowments and work, a scarce resource (ch. 4); and exploitation, understood as the ownership of individuals by the society (ch. 5). His detailed and imaginative discussion of these issues brings much to the specification of Van Parijs’s proposal for UBI. Understandably enough, these discussions are more suited to show the capacity of UBI not to create more injustice, than to show its capacity to resolve the social injustices it is supposed to resolve.

III - THE JUSTIFICATION OF CAPITALISM

In assessing the implications of his conception of a just society for the debate between socialism and capitalism, Van Parijs issues two warnings: first he is not going to compare particular societies but socio-economic regimes, and second, what he compares is “optimal capitalism” and “optimal socialism” where “optimal” is defined by reference to the criterion of UBI maximization subject to the protection of formal freedom. A third – but cryptic – warning is to the effect that economic efficiency becomes here an important parameter, for “[h]ow well a regime performs in terms of our criteria is bound to be strongly affected by its economic efficiency” (186).

There is a historically strong efficiency-based presumption in favour of capitalism but there is also the notorious failures of the market and the wastage, typical of capitalism, of the resources including unemployment. Optimal capitalism can

counter both forms of inefficiency, Van Parijs claims, through the adequate political institutions. He also claims that optimal socialism is less likely to be efficient economically. But, because of its “democratically determined will” (189) it is more likely, Van Parijs believe, to sustainably generate a higher UBI. So should we conclude that in virtue of the criterion of UBI maximization subject to the protection of formal freedom, optimal socialism is superior to optimal capitalism? Not at all. For Van Parijs believes this likelihood of socialism to generate a higher UBI is linked to historical circumstances that do not currently obtain or, so it would at least seem, are not likely to obtain again. “For both capitalist and socialist countries are immersed in the word market and are, therefore, subjected, particularly as far as income distribution is concerned, to the tight constraint of competitiveness.” (190). Disconnection from the world market is not a open option for socialist countries since the lower average standard of living that can be expected from it, together with a higher potential for egalitarian polices, will mean, Van Parijs claims, that the highly skilled could gain from leaving the country. To prevent them from doing so would, of course, be unacceptable in a regime committed to the protection of formal freedom and, therefore, disconnection from the world market will have as a result a weakening of the prospects in a socialist regime, for the maximization of sustainable UBI. So the presumption for a feasible just society remains on the side of optimal capitalism.

I don't think that anybody could feel at ease with these arguments. First, discussions about economic efficiency turn almost exclusively on showing that it can obtain in a capitalist regime with, of course, the adequate political institutions. There is no more than a presumption expressed here, that optimal socialism would fall short of economic efficiency; and in-

deed, the opposite is the whole point of market socialism that Van Parijs does not discuss in that context.

Second, it seems odd to identify the features of *optimal* socialism relative to UBI maximization, on the basis of the actual circumstances of the world market. It seems to me that to so proceed cannot but end in a ‘justification’ of the *status quo*. It also seems totally unfair to compare optimal socialism so characterized and a purely hypothetical optimal capitalism which, given the very same circumstances, might not be about to be seen in the real world. In the same line of thought, one can wonder why it is that Van Parijs seems to be so sure that when “the highly skilled could gain from leaving their country”, they will always leave it. This assumption, which confronts socialist countries with the alternative of either a violation of basic rights or lower prospects for UBI, and which proves to be fatal to optimal socialism, would apply far better, it seems to me, to citizens of a capitalist country than to citizens of a socialist country likely to be committed to its “democratically determined will”. And Van Parijs’s belief that people leave their country when they can gain more elsewhere would probably prove to be entirely true of capitalist countries were the capitalists to discover that they are living under an *optimal* capitalism regime. For optimal capitalism, according to Van Parijs is compatible not only with the transfer system required by UBI but also with “institutional devices such as *corporatist incomes policies centrally decided by trade unions and employers organizations ... turning all firms above a certain size into worker-owned cooperatives*” (188, italics mine); and with “*democratically accepted incomes policy, with the wage and the price controls this involves, in order to prevent a damaging profit squeeze*” (207, italics mine). If capitalists leave their country, as they currently do when they see more gains abroad, what would happen to economic efficiency, leave

aside the prospect for generating the highest sustainable income, in capitalist regimes?

One more reason to be dissatisfied with Van Parijs's arguments is the discovery that what real-freedom-for-all is endorsing at the end of the journey, is the priority of economic efficiency on the side of optimal capitalism over both popular sovereignty and the still very strong prospect of a higher sustainable UBI on the side of optimal socialism. "In the world we live in," he writes, "the constraints that would remain after the hold over the means of production is secured look so strong that the advantage so gained would count for precious little" (226).

All that to the contrary notwithstanding, we should feel here the force of pragmatic considerations. One, and maybe the principal, problem with a policy for UBI "in the world we live in", is that it cannot be applied to a society in isolation and any proposal for it should pay attention to competitiveness in the context of economic globalization. I think that Van Parijs is basically right in thinking that it makes more sense to work from within capitalism in the context of capitalist globalization than to start fighting, in that context, for optimal socialism. But, I also think that, in that pragmatic perspective, Van Parijs should have given an argument to show that *optimal* capitalism, as he characterizes it, is more congenial to "the world we live in" than optimal socialism.

Van Parijs seems to admit that there is a long way to optimal capitalism for his book ends with a vigorous political agenda. First, "we must urgently, and in all sorts of ways, establish and strengthen supranational democratic institutions which determine the rules under which the transnational market operates – including as regards income distribution – instead of being governed by them, as national democracies increasingly are" (190). And, second, we must foster "solidaristic

patriotism [as a way to] preserve and develop institutions that nurture strong feelings of allegiance towards generous distributive institutions at whatever level they exist thereby reduce the pressure against redistribution that stems from opportunistic behavior by the holders of precious factors” (190). Socialists worked on that agenda for years; they never suspected that they were fighting for optimal capitalism. But why should we be deceived by words and refuse to join the “real-libertarians” (an why not the real capitalists?) in struggling for it?

The main challenges to Van Parijs’s book may, I am afraid, come from the Left. In that respect I tend to think that Van Parijs is sometimes giving too much of an extension, to the idea of “working from within”; he might be fighting against the neo-liberal justification of capitalism but by doing that on the very grounds and with the conceptual weapons of neo-liberalism and of capitalist economy, he might leave the impression, perhaps not completely mistaken, that he is importing too much, against his will, of the ideology built into these frameworks. That remains to be seen. But even if this is so, people from the left will be mistaken not to pay considerable attention to Van Parijs’s book. For UBI is not just an imaginative and generous idea that Van Parijs had shown in his book, and sometimes in spite of his arguments, to fit socialist ideals. It is, more than that, a powerful proposal for rethinking the place and the value of work in advanced societies where the growth of the economy depends less and less on labor. It is, in short, a proposal to redefine, in a way which is better adjusted to our actual and relatively new circumstance, our views on labor, exploitation and human dignity, views which have always been at the core of socialist conceptions of society. There could be a challenge for socialists in these proposals. But could also be, and it is my belief that there is, a new and more effective way to

look at 'what should be done'. Better to read the book now, while the neo-liberal economists are still trying to find their own answer to the same question.

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