

To : The Standing Committee for the Environment and Sustainable Development.

A brief by Tom Pogson, Victoria British Columbia Resident, Member of Basic Income British Columbia and creator of the independent project "Basic Income Victoria BC".

"We must learn that less is more. We must learn that infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide. It's not carbon that's killing the planet, it's us. If we can get ourselves under control all things are possible."

- Jeff Gibbs, Filmmaker and Director of *The Planet of the Humans*

We need to slow down.

We saw how our forced deceleration had a positive effect on the environment one year ago. At the beginning of the pandemic places like the Northern Indian state of Punjab suddenly were caught by the stark difference of this reduction in pollution, the Himalayas becoming visible for the first time in decades. The challenge with slowing down is that it is in direct opposition with what I have seen around me as a working Canadian for the last three decades. I have seen we have also needed to speed up.

With rising concerns about automation, the gig economy and rising economic inequality more and more Canadians find themselves working more hours to stay afloat at often multiple locations around our cities.

As Dutch historian Rutger Bregman explained in his book "Utopia for Realists" people that struggle financially often can lose notable mental bandwidth on par with a drop of between 13 and 14 IQ points, the equivalent of drinking or a night's sleep, not because they are unintelligent but because they are put in a position that is equivalent of a computer that running so many heavy programs that it begins to malfunction.

This is just one example as to why most green initiatives presented to working Canadians, many of whom are part of the over 3.2 million Canadians living under the poverty line, only end up as sources of frustration. We see it is more expensive to buy gas that you need to get to work. It is more expensive to buy food due to the tax levied on food distributors. It is green movements and new green urban planning, formed from with good intentions and the positive desire to think sustainably such as Victoria's growing bike lane network, that frustrate people who have to work harder than they did before. All these working Canadians see from their angle is more rules and regulations, which don't affect them positively at the end of the day, or when they are stuck in traffic congestion due to city roads becoming pedestrian and bicycle use only.

Then we add to this the fact that due to Covid 19 our ability to automate jobs has risen exponentially with increased artificial intelligence and streamlining so that people need to find more work to stay above water.

"We can have an economy that is focused on making lives better for people or we can focus on just keeping everyone busy, like cancelling a tractor and giving everyone shovels."

- Scott Santens, writer and activist

In 2008 came the emergence of a new branch of environmentalism called “degrowth”. Based on the earlier ideas and work such as the 1968 Club of Rome Reports and the writings of such names as Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau and William Morris. Degrowth takes a critical look at the fact that one of the challenges of unfettered capitalism and four decades of neoliberalism is the commodification and privatization of everything in sight and relentless growth, inevitably not sustainable. According to a recent work on degrowth, Simon Kuznets, the creator of the famous Gross Domestic Product said never to use the GDP as a measure for how well a country is doing because it will see wars and other negative events as positive due to its reaction to sheer productive activity.

(Source : Degrowth : Vocabulary for a New Era (2015) D’Alisa, Demoria and Kallis)

From the above cited source it is also mentioned that the longer degrowth is delayed the steeper the gradient of its introduction will have to be.

One common suggestion from the compiled work is the necessary implementation of a Basic Income. It is my belief that this will be the catalyst to begin degrowth at a natural grassroots level.

As explained by economist and professor Guy Standing of the Basic Income Earth Network a carbon tax could be made part of the funding for a Basic Income, making both entities more appealing to Canadians. It would allow for Canadians to choose how to employ their time with a greater sense of autonomy. As writer Scott Santens also explained it would give people better choices in terms of spending, not only in making, for example, better food choices but in being able to purchase more expensive items that are built to last over cheap items that invariably end up in our landfills. Suddenly more cutting edge green ideas like stores that offer refillable containers to reduce packaging and other such innovations suddenly are not out of reach of people who feel like every minute of the day has to count.

People could choose how much work they would like to do, finding the more important work over the feeling that they must overextend themselves. Decades ago, John Maynard Keynes said one day we would only work fifteen hours a week. Indeed, that day may come, but the idea of the four day work week with current wages and costs would naturally work best with a second income stream that gives the employer the ability to hire the right people, the employee freedom to work where they feel most suited and the customer the ability to enjoy the benefits of this truly equal win-win situation.

Workers could pick work closer to home, not feel the need to drive to the big box store but actually do what even our Prime Minister suggested back in Thanksgiving, to shop local. With the stabilization of a basic income the ability to leave the car at home more often increases. It would present the possibilities and mental bandwidth to consider ideas such as investing in electric vehicles or becoming involved in local community initiatives such as the Solar Settlement in place since 2017 in Freiburg Germany that was the first solar rooftop project to have a positive energy balance of \$5600/year.

Basic Income would make use of innovation while fostering innovation. Our young entrepreneurs, researchers and scientists is where our potential and future derives its creative force. Surely it is better to have such determined young people working at what they are the most passionate about over keeping them perpetually busy with jobs that waste their talents and often add to the overall congestion by ever increasing production for production’s sake.

In this way Basic Income is not a panacea but, like with so many other issues such as poverty and health, it makes problems become easier to solve. Economists such as the recent report by the Canadian Center for Economic Analysis in cooperation with UBIWorks have shown that not only is it economically possible but that it can grow our economy. And pilots worldwide such as one of the most referenced that happened in Dauphin Manitoba show that not only do people keep working but that hospital visits reduce at much as 8.5 percent (Basic Income for Canadians, 2018 Forget).

I see Basic Income as potentially a shift in how we see ourselves. Like in Dr. Suzanne Simon's work in "Finding the Mother Tree" (2021) in which she discovered that our forests are made up of not competitors but a supportive community, we can learn that we are stronger when our resources are shared by all.

I therefore implore the committee to look closer at the need for a basic income as the missing spoke in the wheel of environmentalism and sustainability and I thank all members for this consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Pogson