

Defending Basic Income: Less Jobs, More Work, and an Assiduous Work Ethic

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In a society with a strong Calvinist work ethic, a universal basic income (UBI) would surely be rejected, for idleness per se is condemned. Attempts to justify “free-riding” behaviours with philosophical arguments would only reinforce the consensus formed around the importance of labour for the nation’s salvation. Twenty-two interviews conducted with Swiss citizens revealed this process happened during the UBI referendum, submitted to Switzerland’s population in 2016.

Acting upon the future of work in capitalism by targeting wage labour – be it through defending the right to idleness, conceptualising a liberal egalitarian notion of justice stating that lazies should be allowed to pursue their conception of the “good life”, or trying to abolish the work ethic overall – is

counterintuitive. An argument for basic income in such an industrious society should rather extend the notion of work largely beyond the accepted notion of “work as employment” to include other forms of participation in both the production and reproduction of society. Once work can be thought of as including wage labour and (self-)employment situations, rather than being limited to it, the future of work would take on a completely different turn too.

While the number of jobs tends to decrease, let us not compete for them. Mothers, volunteers and wage-workers alike ought to be considered in “full-employment” figures. For, sociologically, why would we not remunerate assiduous workers whose mere difference is to work for the community?