

Guaranteed Living Income Toronto Newsbreeze December 18, 2016

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Put food in the budget sent us this about Sudbury consult

Emergency resolution to raise the rates passes at Sudbury consultation on Basic Income as Minister Helena Jaczek apologizes for inaccessible location.

Eight raise the rates campaign supporters disrupted the opening of the consultation on the Basic Income pilot in Sudbury last night.

Phil Marsh of CUPW and Raise the Rates introduced Gary Kinsman. Gary began with an acknowledgement that people were gathered on Indigenous land. Gary then challenged the Minister on the location of the meeting pointing out the space was very inaccessible for people without cars, and for poor and homeless people and especially for people with disabilities. It is on a highway and the only way you can walk to it is by running across the highway.

Kinsman's most powerful statement was his indictment of the Liberal government's record of inaction - an endless cycle of 'consultations' with no improvement for people living in poverty.

Cate Burns who receives ODSP read the Emergency Resolution (see here). The resolution was supported by the majority of people in the room by a show of hands. Members of Raise the Rates then drew the audience into a discussion on the need to raise the rates and a number of issues got raised including how the provincial government has shifted mandated benefits into discretionary benefits to deny people what they need.

The group left the room chanting "Raise the Rates Now!"

You can see the disruption here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGyVh1Qggsk>

While Minister Jaczek apologized for the inaccessibility of the location for the Basic Income consultation she did not apologize for her government's failure to raise the rates and the deep and persistent poverty people that people in Ontario who receive social assistance must endure.

Put Food in the Budget
<http://www.putfoodinthebudget.ca/>

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More audio on Consults

Demonstrators urge province to take immediate action on basic income

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/sudbury-basic-income-meeting-interruption-1.3893757>

CBC radio interview about consultations

http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/831918659937?utm_source=ISAC+Media+%26+Policy+News&utm_campaign=91442fc533-Media+and+Policy+News+emails&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_342c280cba-91442fc533-140445945

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December 13 consultation on a Basic Income Pilot. Notes.

I was finally able to make it out to one of these “consultations” on the Basic Income “pilot”. The first criticism of these events is that they are held in inaccessible places. I had to get all the way out to Etobicoke, to an industrial area near the airport, and hike three blocks over poorly maintained sidewalks after a snowstorm. Mush!

I got there. Things were just starting.. The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) crowd was already doing its thing. The Put Food In the Budget (PFIT) people seem to have been pushed to the back as is usual when OCAP gets involved. But the idea someone had of attaching a banner to some balloons was a hit.

The PFIB emergency statement was read. On this occasion only about half the people raised their hands to it. The speaker was not so confidence inspiring; more of a whiney tone. Then OCAP chief John Clarke added his bit. He seems a bit dispirited in his public appearances these days. I have heard he would rally like to retire if someone gave him a pension.

The thing with OCAP is it was always set up as a kind of orthodox communist, “third international” kind of group, intended to keep testing the reactions of the police and search for issues to get people riled up about. It takes over other people’s issues and rides them for its own object, which is to try to get a riot going and see if they can accelerate it into a serious uprising.

People these days are smart enough not to be led into becoming cannon fodder for professional revolutionaries. The old OCAP people are somewhat eclipsed these days by the “No One is Illegal” bunch. But they are persistent.

My question

It would be great if those people who are fully opposed to the Pilot would stay and challenge the “moderators” at each table instead of just dropping their shit and taking off before the security beefs show up. It leaves people like me who want to stick around and argue in detail at a great disadvantage.

Still I did what I really came there to do. I had two questions. I stood up in front of the head moderator and hollered the first; since a pilot project normally means a testing out of

procedures for something before ramping it up to a full program, and does not mean a mere experiment, does the province plan to establish a full Basic Income at the end of this pilot?

The answer was a flat “no”. I thought that made my second question redundant, which was; how does the province plan to implement a Basic Income when only the federal government has the legal and financial ability to do so? I would need a different sort of venue to get into details of what the point really is to this “pilot”.

The workbook

But most of the people present, except for one table it seemed, were of a skeptical frame of mind. Most were social activists or social workers but not of the apparatchik or cadre variety. In other words, not asking how their “agency” could get some money out of this. They asked some pretty good questions and defied the “Delphi technique” so commonly used these days of dividing people into small groups in order to frame the discussion.

A few people kept shouting out questions and observations to the whole room. One asked who would be administering the pilot. The answer was “social workers”, which did not go over well with many people.

Despite the isolated venue, a few of the crowd were on ODSP. Unsurprisingly, no one present could say they were receiving Ontario Works. They had some real world problems to pose. One had a tale of moving money from her civil service pension to help her kids. This made it impossible for her to apply for any kind of special benefits. So, the master of ceremonies had to answer about how people with RSVPs would fare under the provincial BI pilot. What was the “financial inclusion strategy?” She did not have any answer.

Generally, they understood the real needs better than most so called BI activists. They piped up about the need for a housing program along with a Basic Income. The BI should not become a wage top up. However, some were shaky about this concept and thought a BI could augment low wages.

We answered questions out of a “workbook”. Some of the language in the workbook, such as “work behaviour” and “life choices” was found to be “negative language”. One question about “behavioral change” was considered unworthy of any answer.

Other comments showed how relatively well informed this group generally was. Some talked about the need to lift people out of “generational poverty”, not throwing people back into poverty as soon as the pilot was done. They were adamant that there must be no clawbacks, or there would not be a successful pilot. Also, there must be a plan to transition the pilot to a full Basic Income.

One very pertinent question was asked; will people have the right to refuse participation or to drop out of this Pilot. The answer to that was “no” and that bothered some people. I know that since the pilot is going to be run through the tax system, it is going to result in huge inconvenience and invasion of privacy for the people chosen to be lab rats.

Jo Grey was there. She started on her special theme about all the international treaties and covenants Canada has signed which are supposed to be part of our law. Canadian judges have been uninterested in them and this assembly did not find this topic promising either.

Several people noted that here is no way we can have a stable society in future without a Basic Income. Someone worked the “climate change” trope into it. Again, they rang no bells in the room; too cold outside.

For my part, at my own table, I hammered on the theme of “no income clawbacks”. Some of these folks agreed with that, but thought a “negative Income Tax” was a good idea. I managed to get it across that a NIT required a clawback of wages. You did not want anything run through the tax system; that would mean people having to fill out forms every month proving their income. In the Dauphin project, half of the participants quit because they did not want to keep doing that every month.

But this got into the question of how you justify giving the BI to people who are well off. This is one of the big controversies in Basic Income-dom; the “banker’s wife” problem. It is really the “withdrawal” problem; where do you withdraw the income without it becoming tax on employment? There was no time to really explain this issue let alone discuss it, although I stated my solution for it; a high income cutoff at a point where people stop taking and start giving, and removing the BI will no longer effect their living standard seriously.

Upshot

Altogether, this was a feisty coup. They would not be led around by the nose by moderators. Over and over they made the statement; “raise the rates”. Have your pilot but get people’s incomes up now!

Basic Income groups must support this or discredit the whole concept of an Income Guarantee.

The video of this consultation is here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0a2Zbxja-4&feature=youtu.be>

You can download the consultation guide here https://files.ontario.ca/bi_pilot_consultationguide_nov02.pdf

I also came away with a couple of hard copies for anyone who wants one.

For a somewhat different view of the proceedings, here is the text of a letter sent to OCAP the next day, which PFIB ran.

“I know the room did not look very receptive to what you folks were saying, but I really think that the action made a big impact! The people at my table were saying that your message really reminded them what is important and what to keep in mind. There were a lot of conversations about how stupidly inaccessible these consultations are, purposely leaving out the voices who should be at the table were flagged.”

In the go-around for each table reporting back and ending comments from the crowd, I would say 90% of the comments said that this project is fine and well, but what needs to happen is for the government to raise the rates right now (with a lot of folks pointing at your floating banner – which was brilliant btw!). Almost everyone echoed what you folks were saying and brought urgency to raising the rates as the priority that needs to happen before anything else.

I thought you should know that, as always, your team’s work is so appreciated and important.”

La Luce Continua, as they say.

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Basic Income among other things at City Council

Here is a very long Youtube about the city council meeting of December 14. The interesting stuff starts at 10 hours in. Watch live - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRN-tjB2wZE>

It is fairly educational about why our city government is so hopeless. There is a desperate need for comprehensive reform. They try to run a city bigger than most provinces like a “one hoss town”. Why does council only meet every couple of months and then go at it day and night for three days? It needs to get on a parliamentary system, meeting every day.

The TTC riders group did some pretty good work this year in getting a commitment to roll back transit costs for low income and disabled people. That is how you get anything useful out of the city. You have to have a presence on the ground, the ability to bring people out in large numbers. A sad thing is that the bastards did succeed with some dividing tactics; cancelling the seniors fares to benefit low income people. But low income seniors can now apply for the low income pass.

I do not want to get into an essay here about the deficiencies of this city government, but Toronto is one of the last cities in Canada without some kind of low income fare.

Also note that they are starting to talk about the province’s Basic Income and poverty reduction plans; what the city’s response should be. Here the deficiency of the BI movement in Toronto is shown. Right now we are just chasing after an endorsement of the concept of BI, and some have the idea of also endorsing the pilot.

At the least the city should be endorsing the principle of a BI, but not the pilot until it is clear it will not interfere with other poverty reduction measures. Otherwise, the whole BI concept is discredited.

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Basic Income Toronto Organization

The next meeting of this group is due Tuesday, December 20 at 7PM at metro hall. Tim Ellis and Sasha McNicholl are the new convenors of the group. But Matt Talsma still has the

contact information to book the room at Metro hall. Neither of them have heard anything from Matt.

This is a continuing problem with this group. As well, it seems that some work is going on to lobby the city council for an endorsement of Basic Income. But we hear nothing about it. What needs to be done here?

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HSAP had a nice little Christmas get together on December 15th.

Attendance was small because of the weather. We got some ice cream and nice food, and a radio to play some Christmas music, and chatted about what we had done in the last year and what to do in the next.

Sue Kwong was ill with the flu but the Social Planning Council sent Ravi instead. He talked a bit about the importance of keeping pressure on government. He does not share Sue's enthusiasm for short courses in doing deputations. He thought we should all sign up for a full day course in presenting to city council; preparing a written submission as well. He probably has the right idea.

Someone felt a more forceful approach is required in dealing with city hall. The reasonable approach does not seem to get through. It needs to be impressed upon these people that things are getting to a crisis point. Especially, this practise of there minute deputations looks a lot like the peasants appealing to the lords on high for help. These assholes are supposed to be working for us.

HSAG has a few things going on. Most importantly, we are planning training for a speaker's bureau in the new year. It is not sure where we will hold it yet. We are developing a response to the Maytree foundation's paper saying that a BI should not be supported until we have more details.

We think the approach must be to agree with him and provide details about what a real BI, worthy of the original principles of the Guaranteed Income movement, would look like. However, this means that the project keeps expanding and links with the speaker's bureau project.

We might even have some decent looking buttons by next year.

Next year. Next HSAG meeting is January 5th, Riverdale Community Health Centre, 955 Queens street east, at 1:30 PM.

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More on the Maytree Paper on Basic Income

I happened to encounter the head of the Maytree foundation, Alan Broadbent, at an event celebrating five years of the "good ideas" forums. I mentioned that we, meaning some

associates and I, were slowly putting together a response to his group's policy brief on BI. Read it here. <http://maytree.com/policy-and-insights/publications/policy-brief-basic-income.html>

It was hard to have a conversation with him, he kept interrupting and shifting the topic. I said we thought the main point of the said brief was sound, that we do not know enough about BI. This was due to the way the movement for it has developed.

He thought I should talk with the author of the brief, Noah Zon, and pointed him out. I went over and talked with Noah and we seemed quite eager to read whatever response we had to his work.

So, it seems we have a worthwhile project going on.

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The Yonge street Mission group is making some progress.

I have just learned that they will be holding two events related to the provincial consultations new year. Both will be at 40 Oak street at 1 PM.

The first will be an information session on January 12.

The second will be on January 18 and involve a consultation of their own on the province's pet Pilot project and presumably other aspects of provincial social policy.

Sounds innovative and exciting. Can't wait to hear more.

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That's it for this year. The next GLI Newsbreeze will be on January 8, 2017.