

“Basic Income is an idea whose time has come”: But why here, why now, and in what way?

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Abstract

That Basic Income has received increased attention recently is noted in both academic and media discourse. A critical question about this attention is whether it amounts to more than “just a fad”. Contesting the label of “fad”, this thesis argues that the contemporary attention to Basic Income emerges through interlinked debates around the social understanding of work and the extent of the State.

This argument is developed from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who have relevant expertise in and around the Basic Income discourse, as well as thematic analysis of print media discussion of Basic Income in 2015 – 2017.

This thesis examines the significance of the attention through the framework developed by Levitas as the *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. That is, it considers the discourse around Basic Income as fragmentary utopias, containing a mixture of critiques of the present, visions of the future “good society”, and policy proposals to move between the two. This leads to the conclusions that (i) the attention to Basic Income is rather attention to a plurality of Basic Incomes, with different purposes and bases, and (ii) that Basic Income cannot be understood as a policy in isolation, but instead as a part of a broader policy platform.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“...there is something in the water... I was just making a list of all the famous people who have come out in favour of a Basic Income in the last twelve months – it’s a long list... some very mainstream characters” (Standing, 2016a)

Standing’s statement that there was *“something in the water”* corresponded with my own understanding that there was some significant change in the nature of the attention to Basic Income occurring as I was commencing my doctoral studies in 2015/16. Although Standing emphasised *“famous people coming out in favour,”* just as interesting to my mind was the increasing engagement with the idea of Basic Income by the mainstream UK press.

Standing’s point about this way in which attention to Basic Income had appeared to have taken on a more mainstream character was raised early in 2016. At this point, a year had passed with 38 pieces published in the UK print media, which was unprecedented, given that coverage over the previous 30 years had only once reached double digits (14 pieces in 2014). Moreover the discussion of Basic Income was not limited to The Guardian or The Independent, but had also appeared in The Times (Russell, 2015) and The Telegraph (Warner, 2015). Both Warner and Russell had been moderately positive about the policy as a plausible approach. There had also been a report advocating for Basic Income from a major UK think tank (Painter and Thong, 2015) – the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) – again, unprecedented, and the society at whose event Standing was talking.

I first encountered Basic Income as an idea as a first-year undergraduate in 2007. The seminal essay, ***A Capitalist Road to Communism*** (van der Veen and van Parijs, 1986) was a part of the extended reading on an ethics module, and the idea of a welfare state arranged around unconditional and universal support for citizens intrigued me. It was an unfamiliar idea for a mature student whose encounters with the benefits system had been characterised by inflexibility and unhelpfulness. My focus – like the majority of the academic literature at that time – was on the political philosophy of Basic Income, and questions of need, ethical obligations to ‘others’, and the justice of a Basic Income scheme, rather than on questions of precise formulation.

I maintained my interest in Basic Income from this point, but outside of networks focused on the Basic Income (such as the Basic Income Earth Network, or the then Citizens’ Income Trust) discussion of it was minimal. Within Basic Income networks there was an increasing emphasis on the practical plausibility of Basic Income – how it might be realised into policy, rather than whether it ought to be. The occasional sighting of a mention of Basic Income in the UK media – online or print – was unusual

and exciting. By 2014, as I was starting applications for doctoral study, Basic Income appeared to be gaining slightly more serious attention from established voices – for example Larry Elliott’s positive response to the policy in his piece “***Would a citizen’s income be better than our benefits system?***” (Elliott, 2014). However the idea was still relatively obscure, and my focus was not upon the media attention, but instead on public attitudes to unconditionality – which could be a serious barrier to the political plausibility of Basic Income, and which could potentially contribute to the body of research around Basic Income.

However, by the end of 2016, a further 283 pieces had appeared in the UK print media, a further report discussing Basic Income had been published (Reed and Lansley, 2016), a Westminster Hall debate had taken place, an evidence session was scheduled for the Work and Pensions select committee (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2016), and the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had twice made his support for the policy clear. There was indeed “*something in the water*”. The media attention was happening *now* and this thesis had become an appropriate space to interrogate *why*.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to understand this contemporary attention to Basic Income in the UK. It is focused upon the UK context and the UK mainstream in particular, but there is a significant international component to the attention. The attention to Basic Income has included such diverse international components as American high-tech industry leaders inviting a British scholar and proponent of Basic Income (Guy Standing) to a Swiss ski resort (Davos) to talk about their work on trials in India.

The attention – and commentary about the attention from prominent figures in the field like Standing – was clearly significant. In order to further understand this attention to Basic Income I developed the following research questions (which I shall discuss in more detail in chapter 2):

- Q1. Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in during 2015 – 2017 as compared to the years before?
- Q2. What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it?
- Q3. What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal?

These questions helped to disentangle threads in the attention to Basic Income, as well as seeking to clarify what the attention to Basic Income was about.

The attention to Basic Income is, I argue, better understood as the attention to Basic Incomes. There is no single, consistent understanding of what is meant by Basic Income in the attention being paid.

This is not an issue of differences over the exact construction of the policy – whether it amounts to £60 or £70 per person per week, for example – but instead differences over what Basic Income *is* and what it is *for*. These differences are understood in this thesis in terms of Levitas' (2013) *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (IROS) – which consists of a critique of the present, a normative argument about the “good society”, and specificity about how the present and future might be bridged.

I reconstruct a number of utopian visions of which Basic Income is a constituent part from the fragmentary elements which can be extracted from the attention to Basic Income. These visions are:

- Utopian abundance, with all wants amply supplied, in which Basic Income is viewed as a policy to ensure universal needs provision. This might be considered the “classic” understanding of utopia, and is evident in debate over how needs ought to be met.
- Utopia as sufficiency, where Basic Income fulfils a similar role to abundance, but alongside the objective of reduction of wants to be closer to needs. This alternative to utopian abundance emerges from some of the discourse around Basic Income linked to green parties, and highlights the cleavage between socialist and environmentalist emphases in green politics.
- “Real” utopia, which limits the objective of utopia to what can be achieved within the present context, based on present evidence. It is a discussion of the feasibility of Basic Income, and is particularly evident in the emphasis on revenue neutrality in Basic Income policy formulation, and the importance of trials.
- Post-state utopia, in which Basic Income is viewed as a possibility for welfare policy in the absence of a State, or as a means by which to reduce the responsibilities of the State. This emerges within the discourse around automation and Basic Income, as well as being a historic component of the Basic Income debate in the USA.

These utopian visions emerge from the central themes within the attention to Basic Income, as identified by analysis of UK print media pieces discussing Basic Income in 2015 – 2017, and by interviewees positioned to provide expert commentary on the contemporary attention to Basic Income. These themes are:

- Proposed (and in operation) trials of Basic Income as a policy in a number of different policy contexts (although principally the Finland trial).
- Engagement with the policy by UK political parties and think tanks.
- Linking arguments about mass unemployment from upcoming disruptive technology with the need for a Basic Income has resulted in a significant amount of press attention.

These themes interrelate with the utopian imaginaries discussed previously. Automation is tied both with abundance utopia of the post-work world, and post-state utopias. Discussions around trials lend support to, and encourage, advocates who envision abundance or sufficiency utopia – but at the same time they limit the discussion (and the vision) contained within Basic Income to the “real” utopia. The reason that these themes are significant is because they facilitate discussion of the normative questions with which these utopias interact.

Chapter Outline

In **Chapter 2** I discuss the Basic Income literature and the claim that Basic Income is an idea whose time has come, before reaching the core research questions which the thesis seeks to address. This review of the literature combines both the more general understanding of Basic Income as a policy and an account of the history of Basic Income in the UK. This account has been developed through the process of interviews, and benefits from commentary from interviewees where their expertise has been relevant for the contemporary and historical account of Basic Income debate in the UK.

Something which becomes evident in the discussion of the Basic Income literature is that, while the definition presented by the Basic Income Earth Network (“*A basic income is a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement.*” (Basic Income Earth Network, nd)) might be generally referred to, there is considerable variation in formulations. This leads to one of my research questions, which is “what is being proposed/discussed and why?”.

The account of the history of Basic Income ends in the contemporary history where these claims are made by Standing (2016a), Painter (2016), Russell (2015) and McDonnell (Field notes, 2016).

Although this claim is clearly made, and made because of the changing nature of the attention to Basic Income, what is *not* clear is *why* the change in the nature of the attention to Basic Income has occurred. This is another of my research questions and the one that receives a significant emphasis with the thesis.

Finally, the statement that Basic Income is an idea whose time has come implies that Basic Income is anticipated to have some role in the evolving contemporary welfare settlement in the UK. Thus, my third research question is what role Basic Income will have in the UK (which relates heavily to the previous two questions). This, rather than a question of predicting the future, is a question of engaging with how the Basic Income debate is impacting, and can impact, on the broader debate around social policy in the UK.

In **chapter 3** I discuss my methodology in addressing these questions. I detail the framework which I have adapted to assist in understanding my data – Levitas' *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (IROS). This framework forms the basis of thematic analysis of my research data.

I finish chapter 3 with a discussion of the two methods of data gathering used (semi-structured expert interviews and gathering articles from UK print media publications discussing Basic Income) and their attendant advantages and limitations.

After this, I move on to **chapter 4**, where I discuss the results of both my interviews and media analysis. From both come key themes within the attention to Basic Income: automation, trials of Basic Income, and attention from political parties. More detailed discussion (within the interviews) and more detailed analysis (of the media material) bring additional causes for the attention: the perception that the welfare state is not fit for purpose; the impact of austerity upon individuals; the changing nature of work and employment.

The interviews also contributed interpretations of the attention to Basic Income. Interviewees emphasised the importance of contextual change – the social and political circumstances had changed, and thus, the case for Basic Income had gained in weightiness and significance (for example Gamble, 2017; Pearce, Martinelli and Chrisp, 2017; Standing, 2017b). Discussion of the contextual changes is also clear within the print media discussion of Basic Income, and, taken together, forms a significant theme within the coverage. This contextual change is contrasted with arguments about the attention to Basic Income just being a fad.

For Jacobson the attention reflected a “rediscovery of utopian demands” (Jacobson, 2017). This is echoed within the wider media discourse, particularly around the argument that the next “BIG idea” was being sought (and found, in Basic Income). This understanding is a part of the reasoning behind the adoption of Levitas' *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (IROS) as a framework. Through the archaeological mode of IROS – which is a critique of present social and political context – I relate the argument about changing context to this rediscovery of utopian demands.

There was also an argument made (explicitly by Standing, implicitly by others) about there being “respectability” given to the idea as more individuals outside the small group of long-term advocates started to engage with Basic Income. This “mainstreaming” is important the ways in which it is achieved – reports by major think tanks, consideration by figures outside of the political left – can also reflect a deradicalization of the policy, a de-utopianising, as the policy becomes more limited in its ambitions.

In **chapter 5**, I explore whether attention to Basic Income is a fad or not. I argue that fad should be interpreted in two ways: the first is as a form of dismissal rather than engagement with critical debate; the second is whether the attention is justified, meaning in the case of adopted policies is there evidence to support it, and in (as yet) unadopted policies (such as Basic Income), is there a reason to consider implementing it.

Thus, in the second half of chapter 5 I consider whether there is evidence that the attention being paid to Basic Income has arisen for a reason. If there is a good reason at this time, and in this place, to be considering Basic Income, then it is not a fad. There are four principle arguments present/observable within the mainstream attention and expert commentary about the present context to justify the adoption of Basic Income (as will be discussed in chapter 4): the threat of automation; the changing nature of work (particularly around zero-hours contracts, and precarity in general); the failure of the 1945 welfare settlement; and the growth of populism.

These arguments can be questioned – on the grounds that they are not entirely new critical contexts, and that Basic Income does not form an effective policy remedy to the contexts. Evidence is mixed for the claim that the critical contexts being discussed are not new, and is thus insufficient to dismiss the arguments about the critical context having changed completely. Thus, the argument that Basic Income is not a fad cannot be wholly resolved.

What this discussion achieves however, is to discuss one element of the utopian imaginaries that Basic Income forms a part of: the criticisms of the present context. After establishing these I move on to discuss in the remaining chapters how the other elements of utopian imaginaries are reflected in the attention to Basic Income.

In **chapter 6** I argue that “Real” utopia is a distinct strand driving the mainstreaming of attention to Basic Income. Real Utopia is a concept coined by Erik Olin Wright (Wright, 2018) arguing for the application of rigorous social science methods to seemingly utopian ideas – that is, those policy ideas otherwise considered unrealistic. The feasibility of policies is examined on the basis of what can be currently known – what is known about economic and social behaviour, existing income and

spending patterns and so on. The problem with this that Levitas raises is that it limits the possibility of change – if an impact of a policy goes beyond what can be known then it is not deemed a realistic utopia. This means that there is potentially a co-option of Basic Income by existing elites, and it is this co-option driving mainstream attention, rather than a rediscovery of utopia.

In **chapter 7** I argue that the attention to Basic Income by some (Silicon Valley, particularly) elites represents a co-option of Basic Income to support a utopian imaginary which is distinct from the mainstream of abundance utopia. This is a distinctive post-state utopia – that is, a future in which the State no longer exists – rooted in Libertarian ideology, and which is wholly different from the mainstream of the advocacy for Basic Income.

This is, of course, not the only way in which Basic Income is argued for by those highlighting automation (the accelerationist left, discussed in chapter 6, reflects an alternative), but it is a significant part of mainstream attention to Basic Income, alongside the “real utopia” in chapter 7. This means that a significant part of the mainstream attention to Basic Income comes from the ways in which it has *departed* from its roots in utopia of abundance.

My conclusion is that the attention to Basic Income is better understood as the attention to Basic Incomes, each sharing central policy characteristics of universality and unconditionality (although even these characteristics vary), but varying in their interpretation of the present and vision for the future of society.

There are similarities in the analyses of the social world between these Basic Incomes – the changing nature of work, and the failure of the contemporary welfare state is common to all of the approaches. That is, work is no longer (or will no longer be) the stable means through which the majority of individuals primarily meet their subsistence needs – because of automation disrupting industries, and because of the shift from permanent, consistent, and secure work towards temporary, variable, and insecure work. The welfare state no longer works to consistently insure against social risks, such as injury and temporary unemployment, because the risks have become greater (due to the changing nature of work), and the generosity of support (in terms of economic amount, and in terms of availability) is reduced.

The differing visions of the future mean that the policy programme of which Basic Income is a part, and the exact formulation of the Basic Income policy under discussion, varies significantly. The post-state vision discusses a Basic Income that might well replace all forms of social security expenditure as a part of an effort to remove the State from individual and corporate lives. The abundance utopia put forwards by the accelerationist left, despite the same emphasis on automation as the post-state

utopia, views Basic Income as part of a State actively pursuing investment in technology as a strategy of reducing the need for individuals to labour.

The limited vision of “real utopia” from the focus on what can be demonstrated, tested, and measured means that the policy environment around Basic Income remains wholly unchanged, and the policy is restricted to what can be shown as revenue neutral. The mainstream of Basic Income advocacy sits between this “real utopia” focus and those more concerned with the possible impact; it is from the latter that proposals come such as setting the Basic Income rate at a level sufficient to meet basic needs, or funding through sovereign wealth funds created from some form of taxes on wealth, company shares or similar, rather than existing income taxation. These approaches are shared with the related sufficiency utopia, which is rooted in green thought and particularly around degrowth; they involve redistribution of current wealth, rather than the better distribution of future growth.

Basic Incomes are receiving significant attention because they answer to similar problems. The range of voices all arguing for nominally the same solution creates attention – even though the finer grain of details around proposals demonstrates that there are significant differences. Which, if any, of the proposals will play a role in the future of the welfare state is unclear. In the context of the UK, there is a concentration around the “real utopia” output from think tanks and political parties but whether that remains the case depends upon the impact of debates in other polities; success in the USA from a post-state libertarian advocacy for Basic Income might well impact adoption of the policy in the UK.

Chapter 2 – Discussing Basic Income

Introduction

Basic Income – the idea to “*give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income, and let them top it up at will with income from other sources*” (van Parijs, 2004) – is “*an idea whose time has come*” according to Warner (2015). Others echoes Victor Hugo’s words in 2015 and the start of when this thesis had its genesis (Bregman, 2016; Standing, 2016a; Reed and Lansley, 2016; Thornhill, 2016b; John McDonnell MP (in Field notes, 2016)). But why is it an idea whose time has come *now*? Both Painter (2016) and Standing (2016b) observe that while Basic Income had been around for some time there seemed to be something different about the attention being paid to it:

“what has captured imaginations is that it is something to cling onto in an insecure environment” (Painter, 2016, 0:49:40)

“[Basic Income] has become respectable because, as Keynes was meant to have said [apocryphal, to a critic] ... ‘when the facts change, I change my mind, pray Sir what do you do?’ And I think a lot of people are seeing Basic Income in that regard” (Standing, 2016a, 0:24:16).

In other words, the social and political reality had changed, and those changes suited the discussion of Basic Income as an alternative to existing welfare arrangements in the UK. Basic Income as a policy suited a growing disquiet with economic insecurity (which was later termed the “I, Daniel Blake” effect by interviewees, after the Ken Loach film). These observations formed the starting point of an investigation into what it was about Basic Income that appeared to be capturing attention (and whether that appearance was a reality).

This thesis emerged in the context of a developing understanding (in 2015 and early 2016) about there being something significantly different about the nature of the contemporary attention to Basic Income. The change in the attention was, as I will show later in this chapter (and throughout the thesis), occurring both in academic/policy circles and within the mainstream media attention. This understanding is still true in mid-2019, but within this chapter I will be focusing upon what was understood at the time that the thesis was developed. This will not be to the exclusion of material written (or learned of) later on, but there are points at which the context of the original development of the thesis are important (such as in the unclear position of the Labour Party on the subject of Basic Income in mid-2016 which is at time of writing (July 2019) more clearly a position of trialling Basic Income (Mudie and Drew, 2019)).

To interrogate the nature of the attention to Basic Income, and in particular the understanding that the attention was qualitatively different, I developed a number of research questions which were not adequately addressed in the extant material:

- Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in the last year (early 2015 – mid 2016) as compared to the years before? (within the scope of the thesis I include 2015 – 2017.)
- What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it?
- What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal?

These questions develop from a review of the materials around Basic Income and the attention to it. The question of what is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income develops from the range of different understandings of what Basic Income is that emerge from the literature. There is a general consensus on the usage of “Basic Income”, and commonly attributed characteristics. It is however clear that there can be significant differences in the ways in which the idea of Basic Income is presented, and in how it might be realised in concrete policy. The possibility of a disconnect between what is receiving attention as “Basic Income” and what specific proposals advocate is very real, and is significant for understanding the nature of the attention as a whole.

In order to understand how the attention to Basic Income has changed it is necessary to clearly establish the history of the attention to Basic Income, and specifically so in the case of the UK, the focus of the study. In this chapter, I will therefore briefly recount the history of Basic Income in the UK – this account is constructed out of both my literature review and historical accounts from interviewees. This historical account demonstrates a minor, but recurring role for Basic Income in welfare debate in the UK – but one with little transformative effect. The question of what is different this time around is thus important.

The other element of the observation about Basic Income being “an idea whose time has come” is that in addition to the change in attention to Basic Income, that there is an envisaged role for Basic Income in the future of welfare debate in the UK. This is further highlighted by the account of the contemporary attention which has been used to justify the statement: it is focused upon the ways in which Basic Income is *gaining* a role within welfare debate, and on the possibility of Basic Income being realised into policy.

These three elements – defining Basic Income, the history of Basic Income in the UK, and the contemporary Basic Income debate in the UK – are therefore addressed in turn in this chapter.

What is Basic Income

“A basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.” (Basic Income Earth Network, nd)

This is the definition provided by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), an international organisation of Basic Income scholars, with various affiliated national groups. BIEN recognises that there are however a *“wide variety of Basic Income proposals are circulating today”* (Basic Income Earth Network, nd) and BIEN does not take a more specific position on what is understood as Basic Income. This broad understanding of Basic Income is the one consistently referred to by advocates but even amongst advocates there are a number of dimensions on which “Basic Incomes” differ: universality, individuality, unconditionality, uniformity, the frequency and duration of payments, the modality of payments, and the adequacy of payments (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2013). There are also several interrelated ideas which are expressly *not* Basic Income but share some of these dimensions. The key controversies in Basic Income are around the adequacy of payments – whether Basic Income should be sufficient for an individual to live on without any other means, and whether a Basic Income short of this level ought to be campaigned for with the objective of gradual increase to such a level.

In this section I will discuss the dimensions within which discussion of Basic Income varies, and the way in which these dimensions interact with proposals which are commonly referred to as cognates of Basic Income (Stakeholder Grants, Participation Income, Negative Income Tax). I will then discuss the debate around the sufficiency of Basic Income (whether it, by itself, is sufficient to meet an individual’s needs) which is often characterised as an argument between “full” and “partial” Basic Income.

Prominent among contemporary proponents of a Basic Income is Phillippe van Parijs, who argued for a ***Capitalist route to Communism*** (van der Veen and van Parijs, 1986) via an unconditional and universal grant form of social security, on the basis that this moved closer to the communist ideal of *“...to each according to their needs”*. This model of a Basic Income is the form commonly under discussion in contemporary sources, with a direct payment to all, regardless of means or work activity. Karl Widerquist (founder of the US Basic Income network (USBIG), and former co-chair of BIEN) argues that the terminology of “Basic Income” has now through general consensus been adopted as the name of universalist welfare proposals previously given a plurality of different names

(such as Citizen's Income, Social Dividend, Guaranteed Annual Income, and Universal Basic Income) in which a regular income is paid, universally and unconditionally (Widerquist *et al.*, 2013).

This common description as "Basic Income" elides the variability between Basic Incomes, which de Wispelaere and Stirton (2013) argue occur in a number of different dimensions of variation: the *Universality, Individuality or Unconditionality* of transfers; the *Uniformity* of payments; the *Frequency or Duration* of transfer payments; whether payments are cash or goods/services in-kind (*Modality*); and the *Adequacy* of payments to provide for basic needs.

Universality and *Unconditionality* are core features of Basic Income, as the definitions given previously in this section indicate. However as de Wispelaere and Stirton (2013) observe, the universality is rarely as absolute as proponents suggest, as most proposals exclude based on a residency or citizenship basis and either exclude children or treat them differently. During the interview process, these features were highlighted as core to the understanding of Basic Income by most interviewees. The trials of "Basic Income" in both Ontario and Finland, despite the label of Basic Income, were neither universal nor unconditional – the Ontario trial had a 50% withdrawal rate based on income (Ministry of Children Community and Social Services, 2019), and both were selective in the application of the intervention by targeting those on existing welfare systems (Kela, 2019; Ministry of Children Community and Social Services, 2019).

Individuality as opposed to the payment at household level is, Torry argued, a natural outshoot of unconditionality – the exact nature of living arrangements are wholly irrelevant, and receipt is not conditioned upon specific household structures (Torry, 2017). The individuality of payments is one of the differences between Basic Income and Negative Income Tax (which is often described as cognate to Basic Income); Negative Income Tax "tops-up" the post-tax income of a whole household for those who are net beneficiaries (while an income tax funded Basic Income makes the transfer payment, and then takes higher amounts through the increased income taxation). Even though the arrangement of Negative Income Tax into an advance payments model (as in Tobin, Pechman and Mieszkowski (1967)) is argued to be equivalent to Basic Income (van Parijs, Jacquet and Salinas, 2000) the difference over household versus individual remains. This is important because in households with working and non-working members economic agency is given to all in the case of the individual payments of Basic Income.

Uniformity of payments is the second difference with Negative Income Tax. Negative Income Tax varies the amount of the payment according to household circumstance (as does Universal Credit) while Basic Income does not vary in amount. As a result, there is inconsistency and a potential lack

of clarity in Negative Income Tax meaning that there is not a shared experience of the welfare state as there is with Basic Income, as only some are recipients, rather than all.

The uniformity of payments over time is also important for planning – Basic Income remains the same over time, allowing for long term planning. The Alaska Permanence Fund (APF) is often cited as an example of Basic Income in practice (Callebert, 2016; Downes, 2017; Lucas, 2016; Thornhill, 2016a; Thornhill and Atkins, 2016), but it does not have a consistent value for recipients (individuals ordinarily resident in the state of Alaska); it is better termed as a resource dividend.

Frequency/Duration is the key difference between Basic Income and the variety of policies I will be referring to as Stakeholder Grants (the terminology used by Ackerman and Alstott (2004)).

Stakeholder Grants propose the one off payment of a significant lump sum to all at the age of majority (Paine ([1797] 1819), Ackerman and Alstott (2004)) which can be used in an unrestricted fashion, and are variously referred to as a Demogrant (Le Grand, 2003), Citizen's Stake (Paxton, White and Maxwell, 2006), Basic Capital (White, 2012) or Stakeholder Grant (Ackerman and Alstott, 2004). There are arguments in favour of both Stakeholder Grants and Basic Income: what is significant for the purpose of this thesis is that the difference between the two in this dimension is noted (as they are in other respects similar).

Basic Income is typically presented as a cash-transfer, rather than any variation of goods or services in kind, which is what de Wispelaere and Stirton (de Wispelaere and Stirton, 2004) refer to as the *Modality* dimension of Basic Income. Cash removes any form of state or social interference with the way in which the Basic Income is used by recipients, as it is indistinguishable from cash from other sources. However, van Parijs argues that services and goods which are impractical to individually purchase ought to be considered as a part of a Basic Income (and could even mean that his maximum sustainable universal basic income might have no cash transfer component at all (Parijs, 1995, pp. 41-45)). Despite this portion of van Parijs' argument in *Real Freedom for All*, Basic Income is consistently a cash transfer in discussions of the idea.

The *Adequacy* of the Basic Income to meet individual needs is a key dimension of variance between Basic Income proposals, and as noted earlier a point of contention in defining Basic Income. The argument given for proposals which are insufficient to meet individual needs (described as "Partial" Basic Income) is that a lower figure is all that is practically affordable in the short term, and is a feature of many proposals (e.g. Parker, 1989; Torry, 2015; Torry, 2016; The Green Party, 2015a; Reed and Lansley, 2016; Martinelli, 2017b). Other advocates – such as Kirkpatrick and Jacobson (both of Basic Income UK, an advocacy group for Basic Income) – argue for a Basic Income which is adequate to meet individual needs, although they recognise the usefulness of a partial Basic Income as a

stepping stone towards a higher figure (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Jacobson, 2017). After some debate over the issue of adequacy, BIEN notes that the definition of full and partial Basic Income is an issue of contention between advocates, as is whether full Basic Income ought to be argued for instead of partial Basic Incomes (Basic Income Earth Network, nd; BIEN General Assembly, 2016; Haagh *et al.*, 2016).

What is considered to be adequate to meet needs is also difficult to establish. Discussions of Basic Income and need refer to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), and present Basic Income as meeting the subsistence needs at the bottom of the hierarchy, but this is not the only way of discussing needs. One of the critics of Basic Income interviewed during the project, Ian Gough, developed a significantly more complex conceptualisation of human need, which emphasised autonomy, health, and political freedoms as the basis for human need, as opposed to the physiological base of Maslow's hierarchy (Doyal and Gough, 1991). While Basic Income is suited to *some* of the needs identified by Doyal and Gough, it can be at best a small part – unlike the physiological base of Maslow's hierarchy.

What de Wispelaere and Stirton do not consider in their interpretation of the dimensions of Basic Income is that there is also a further dimension of difference in terms of the ideological perspective of the advocate. Basic Income encompasses a host of political persuasions from socialism and anarchism (as in Bertrand Russell's (1919) proposal), the left-libertarianism of van Parijs, to liberals such as Parker (1989) and Rhys-Williams (Sloman, 2015), and libertarians like Charles Murray (2006). I will return to this dimension of difference in **chapter 3** when I discuss the usefulness of Levitas' *imaginary constitution of society* as a method for distinguishing between understandings of Basic Income on the basis of the thought surrounding the policy proposal.

Basic Income, while being commonly used as if it was a description of a single and specific policy, actually refers to ideas which can be significantly different from one another. There is a consistent understanding that at the core, Basic Income is both unconditional and universal. However, the application of the name Basic Income to trials, both past and present, and other policies (such as the Alaska Permanence Fund) reduce the clarity of what is being discussed. The variety of different analyses and purposes ascribed to Basic Income also make it unclear as to what *exactly* is under discussion when "Basic Income" is being discussed.

An idea whose time has come

The use of the phrase "*an idea whose time has come*" (Bregman, 2016; Standing, 2016a; Reed and Lansley, 2016; Thornhill, 2016b; John McDonnell MP (in Field notes, 2016); Warner, 2015) clearly assumes that ideas have a place and role in the interpretation of the social world and its processes.

In other word, that ideas have power. Béland interrogates this theme – of the power of ideas – in a number of ways.

Ideas are used by actors in “*making sense of their... environment*”, but also in persuading others of the that “*the existing state of affairs is inherently flawed*” (Béland, 2010, p. 148). Ideas can also take the form of ideologies or “*intellectual maps*” on how to act in uncertain situations (Béland, 2010, p. 148). Ideas are a part of social reality that “*can shape human behaviour and policy decisions in a direct way*” (Béland, 2016, p. 736).

Some of these understandings are visible in the way that Basic Income is talked about “*as an idea whose time has come*”. The phrasing clearly indicates that ideas are perceived as having impact upon the social world. There phrase is also positioned within arguments being presented about the critical flaws of the present, and the need for policy change – to adopt Basic Income – and thus has a persuasive function.

Béland also discusses the role of ideas as coalition magnets (Béland and Cox, 2016). In this argument, ideas are used, by policy entrepreneurs “*to frame interests, mobilize supporters and build coalitions*” (Béland and Cox, 2016, p. 429) in support of a specific policy. Coalition magnets, Béland and Cox argue, are novel, new, or unfamiliar – which is arguably the case with Basic Income, although, as I shall go on to discuss in chapter 2 there is an extensive history of Basic Income, including in the UK. Coalition magnets are also: (1) used as a new way to define and discuss a policy problem; (2) “*embraced or promoted by key actors in the policy process*”; (3) is unifying, or creates new engagement (Béland and Cox, 2016, p. 429). Béland and Cox discuss three examples of ideas as coalition magnets – sustainability, social inclusion, and solidarity.

Basic Income is not a good example of such a coalition magnet. As already suggested, there is a historical discussion of Basic Income, that while not prominent, is present. The policy itself is not being discussed in any way which significantly deviates from its recent history. Although John McDonnell, as Shadow Chancellor, discussing the idea has attracted significant media attention (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4) his interest is not new (he discusses the idea in 2007 (McDonnell, 2007)). Instead it is his prominence which is new. The examples of coalition magnets better fit the much broader idea of *unconditionality* (which is a critical component of Basic Income, as I shall go on to discuss) than they do of Basic Income. A discussion of the role of *unconditionality* as a coalition magnet would be an interesting avenue of investigation, but would not explain the specific attention to Basic Income in the UK.

History of Basic Income in the UK

Having discussed what is meant by Basic Income, I will now briefly discuss the history of Basic Income in the UK, which is important as it establishes that there has been a discussion about Basic Income in the UK for a long time. This shows that the attention to Basic Income is not attention being paid to a new idea, but rather new attention being paid to an idea that has had some attention paid to it for a significant length of time.

While the terminology of Basic Income is comparatively recent, the debate between conditionality and unconditionality in the provision of welfare is not. Elements of the contemporary Basic Income debate in the UK are found in More's *Utopia* (More, [1516] 2002), the Old Poor Law, and the Speenhamland system criticised by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1832 (Block and Somers, 2005). In the 20th century, Basic Income is best described as present, but not a major component in welfare debates. It also is not limited to policy debate in one political party, but instead is considered across the political spectrum – from the Labour Party (Milner, 1918; The Commission on Social Justice, 1994, pp. 261-264), to the Liberals (Sloman, 2015), Liberal Democrats (Stephens, 1989), and even some Conservatives (Chote, 1993, pp. 34-36; Torry, 2013) .

It is common to trace the lineage of Basic Income back to More's *Utopia* (1516). In More's *Utopia*, the initial kernel of a Basic Income is identified in a section where Raphael the Portuguese Trader is recounting a discussion with an English Cardinal in which he criticises the effectiveness of hanging thieves and murderers alike, arguing that:

“There are dreadful punishments enacted against thieves, but it were much better to make such good provisions by which every man might be put in a method how to live, and so be preserved from the fatal necessity of stealing and of dying for it.” (More, [1516] 2002).

Even though More does not specify what the means of making “*such good provisions... [for] every man*” are, the universalism is what resonates with the contemporary Basic Income debate.

The “Speenhamland System” which developed under the Old Poor Law – initially in Speenhamland but then spreading to other districts – of giving unconditional monetary relief when bread prices rose above a certain level is suggested as the earliest example of a Basic Income in operation in the UK (Block and Somers, 2005). Fraser (2003, pp. 37-40) notes that the “Speenhamland system” was in reality one of a wide range of local practices for responding to pauperisation and poverty, but that it is significant as a target of criticism in the run up to, and within, the Poor Law commission report of 1832. (2005, pp. 42-43) conclude that the (mis-) understanding of the operation and impact of the

Old Poor Law as a result of the Poor Law commission report of 1832 has shaped policy responses to guaranteed income policies such as Basic Income since its publication to present day, as I will go on to demonstrate.

The Royal Commission on the Poor Law (1834) was established to examine the administration and operation of the Old Poor Law. The Royal Commission collected many testimonials which suggested that given the opportunity of being given an income without having to work, many who were clearly capable of working chose not to do so – with statements such as:

“he has not unfrequently been obliged to give relief to men who, there is no doubt, could have procured work if they had exerted themselves: they speak of it as a matter of right” (William Senior and Chadwick, 1834 [1905], Part 1, 2. Outdoor Relief, II Allowances).

“Since the inquiry has been made, I have stationed persons at well-known gin shops to observe the number of paupers who came, and the money they spend; and, from all their statements, I have drawn the conclusion that 30l. out of every 100l. of the money given as out-door relief, is spent in the gin-shops during the same day.” (William Senior and Chadwick, 1834 [1905], Part 1, General Remarks on Out-door relief).

In addition to criticism about unconditional support encouraging idleness, and being mis-used in the purchase of “public bads”, the report criticised unconditional support as subsidising employers paying low wages (as their impoverished employees were then supported at the public expense) (Block and Somers, 2005, pp. 13-14).

This idea that recipients of welfare are dependent upon it and choose not to work has continued to be a theme in politicians’ speech about welfare – such as “*tackle the underlying problem of dependency*” (Smith, I.D., 2010) “*a hand up, not a hand out*” (Blair, 1999) (both quoted from (Hills, 2015, pp. 3-4)) – and is particularly challenging to a Basic Income because the response to this idea of dependency has been to increase, rather than decrease, conditionality of transfer payments. This idea that there is an undeserving other is present in contemporary understanding of welfare in public attitudes as well; Shildrick and MacDonald (2013, p. 292) report unemployed interviewees criticising others for being poor as a result of spending all of their money on drinking, or drugs. Other arguments that were made about unconditionality in the Royal Commission report on the Poor Laws are made today, such as welfare creates dependency (Murray *et al.*, 1990), it sabotages recipients’

ability to help themselves (Field, 2001), and it undermines community and social values (Pearson (2000), discussed in Curchin, 2016).

While the methodology of the Royal Commission has been criticised as essentially only seeking to justify a conclusion already reached (Block and Somers, 2005; Bregman, 2016, pp. 124-125; Fraser, 2003, pp. 44-45), it has had lasting impact, as, Fraser notes *“what people thought was happening was, for the purpose of social policy, more important than what was actually happening”* (Fraser, 2003, p. 45). I will go on to discuss the contemporary evidence that supports unconditional welfare – and that responds to the criticisms made in the report on the Poor Law, and since then – in the final section of this chapter when I discuss the contemporary debate.

Basic Income is discussed as an alternative proposition for a welfare settlement throughout the 20th century. In 1919, Bertrand Russell stated *“a certain small income, sufficient for necessities, should be secured for all, whether they work or not”* (Russell, 1919) in his attempts to synthesise socialist and anarchist thought. This approach was followed by Denis and Mabel Milner in their proposal for a State Bonus (Milner, 1918), rejecting both the insurance principle (of unconditional assistance if prior contributions have been made) and the work test (of assistance only under behavioural conditions) which were the dominant alternatives, and proposing that the Labour Party adopt a Basic Income Guarantee as a right of citizenship, but the idea was ultimately rejected in 1921 by the Labour Party Executive committee (Torry, 2013, p. 33).

Basic Income was discussed in the Labour Party’s Commission on Social Justice (The Commission on Social Justice, 1994) as an alternative strategy for welfare reform, but was ultimately rejected. Interviewees involved with commission and/or the Labour Party reported that Basic Income was not taken especially seriously at the time (Lister, 2017; Pearce, Martinelli and Chrisp, 2017). The Commission did have a significant number of links to the Basic Income debate, however, with commissioners including:

- Steve Webb, at the time with the Institute for Financial Studies, later a Liberal Democrat MP, and co-author of a book on Negative Income Tax with Samuel Brittan (Brittan and Webb, 1990))
- Ruth Lister, former Director of Child Poverty Action Group, who was not a supporter of Basic Income at the time, but pushed for its inclusion in the report and is now in favour of the policy (Lister, 2017)

- Tony Atkinson, academic economist who argued for both Basic Income and a partially conditional variant described as Participation Income (Atkinson, 1996)

This demonstrates a role for Basic Income, and its advocates in welfare debate within the Labour Party, albeit not an outright impact in the formulation of policy. The use of unconditional transfer payments has occurred in a limited fashion in Labour Party policy, however. Child Benefit, introduced by the Labour Party in 1975, was a small Basic Income paid to the guardians of children aged up to 18 without any form of means testing (until 2013, when an income taper and cut-off was introduced by the Conservative/Lib-Dem coalition). The short-lived Child Trust Fund which ran from 2005 till 2011 was a form of Stakeholder Grant – although it did have some means testing in the form of the top-up to the basic amount for children in low income families.

However, the idea of a Basic Income was not just limited to the Labour Party, indeed, Sloman argues that in the 20th century it was more linked to liberals (Sloman, 2018). Basic Income was taken up again by Juliet Rhys-Williams in her minority report to Beveridge's more prominent Social Insurance and Allied Services report of 1942. Her minority report was later expanded into ***Something to Look Forward To*** (Rhys-Williams, 1943), and in both she proposed a Negative Income Tax scheme as an alternative to the insurance based approach proposed by Beveridge. This was on the grounds of giving the same treatment to all (rather than support being given only to those claiming their insurance) and reducing the burden of taxes on the low waged by not funding the scheme through flat-rate contributions (as in Beveridge's insurance scheme), but rather by progressive taxation (Torry, 2013, pp. 33-34).

A Liberal Party connection to a Basic Income Guarantee occurred again in the 1987 SDP-Liberal Alliance manifesto, which implied the adoption of a Negative Income Tax (although it does not state it by name) as a long term objective for the party: "*a new basic benefit for those in or out of work*" and to "*merge the tax and benefit systems*" were the second stage of their plans for poverty reduction (SDP-Liberal Alliance, 1987). As previously mentioned, the Liberal Democrat MP Steve Webb co-authored, alongside Financial Times economics editor Samuel Brittan, a book advocating the implementation of a Negative Income Tax (Brittan and Webb, 1990). Basic Income was ultimately dropped as a policy after the merger into the Liberal Democrat party, however.

There have also been examples of a Basic Income Guarantee being considered by the Conservatives in the past: Malcolm Torry reports on a 1982 treasury and civil service committee in which there was a recommendation that Basic Income should be seriously considered after Sir Brandon Rhys-Williams MP's (Con) advocacy for a Basic Income (Torry, 2013, pp. 34-37); in 1993, then Chancellor Ken

Clarke proposed a study into the impact of a Basic Income, according to Robert Chote of the Independent (Chote, 1993) – although I have not found any evidence that such a report was ever conducted.

Hermione Parker, a research assistant to Brandon Rhys-Williams advocated for a partial Basic Income in her book *Instead of the Dole* (Parker, 1989), and was an important member of the Basic Income Research Group (BIRG, founded in 1984) which is now the Citizen's Basic Income Trust, a UK based educational charity focused on Basic Income.

The Green Party has had a longstanding relationship with Basic Income. Basic Income has been party policy since 1975 (when the Green Party was still the Ecology Party) and is discussed in the Social Welfare Section of the 1975 *Manifesto for a Sustainable Society* (The Ecology Party, 1975). The policy has remained party policy ever since, and gained press attention in the early 1990s as a result of the Green Party successes in the European Elections (e.g. Goodwin, 1989; Kavanagh, 1990; Schoon, 1990; Schwartz, 1989). The support for Basic Income by the Green Party is, as I will discuss in the next section, one of the ways in which Basic Income has gained contemporary attention and thus it is significant that their support has been so longstanding.

In all of these cases, a Basic Income has some role on the peripheries of policy debate, but never in a central position in debate, either as the alternative or as the focus of an implemented policy. In the case of Child Benefit, the possibility of their principal being extended to all as a Basic Income is not raised – it is a policy, very specifically, for children and families. Even in the case of the Child Trust Fund, it is discussed in terms of life opportunity for young people, and responding to child poverty, not in terms of a right of social citizenship such as Paine argued for. Therefore, it is not the case that Basic Income is a new discovery, or novel import, but that it has been present in policy debate in the UK for some time – so what, if anything has changed to make Basic Income's time now in the UK?

Contemporary discussion of Basic Income in the UK

"There is something in the water," says Standing (2016b, 0:35:00), a point echoed by Painter *"this time it does feel like there is something different"* (2016, 0:46:29) and there is evidence that this is the case. Something was clearly different about the attention to Basic Income in 2015 and 2016. The contemporary attention to Basic Income was thus particularly notable in the ways in which the attention was mainstream – occurring in the UK media, rather than purely within academic circles as was previously largely the case.

This press attention appears to relate to developments in the attention to Basic Income more generally: the discussion of a number of trials/experiments to study the impact of Basic Income as a

policy; and the adoption (or highlighting) of the policy by UK political parties. This attention presents the possibility that Basic Income had a role to play in the future of UK welfare politics in a way that was more significant than the “also discussed” that was its role in 20th century welfare debate. There is also an increased engagement with the idea in the broader policy community, rather than just within academic circles (which in turn links to the increased political attention).

In this section I will discuss these elements that are a part of the increased contemporary attention to Basic Income: the press attention; the proposed and past trials (and what they say about the criticisms of Basic Income); the engagement by the policy community and political parties; and the plausibility of Basic Income taking a role in UK welfare politics. I will then finish by highlighting the ways in which these engagements with Basic Income differ from one another in their detail, and the implications that this has for understanding the attention to Basic Income.

Press attention

Press attention had included, by the summer of 2016, both positive opinion pieces and neutral reporting (the latter primarily of proposed pilots), as well as some criticism. The positive press had not been restricted to the left-leaning press, nor to broadsheets only: *“Would a citizen’s income be better than our benefits system?”* by The Guardian’s economics editor Larry Elliott (2014); *“Basic income for all could end benefits trap”* a Times opinion piece by Jenni Russell (2015); *“Paying all UK citizens £155 a week may be an idea whose time has come”* by Telegraph assistant editor Jeremy Warner (2015); The Metro, *“Finland’s giving everyone £580 a month so let’s all pack up and move there”* (Nagesh, 2015); The Mirror, *“£1,000 for all - the BIG socialist idea Jeremy Corbyn should think about embracing”* (Nelson, 2016).

In addition to explicitly positive press for Basic Income, there has also been an increase in coverage more generally of Basic Income over the course 2015 and early 2016 in the press. Investigating titles using the online editions of various papers: The Daily Mail had three article titles containing Basic Income in 2016, one in 2013, and one in 2002; The Metro had one article in 2016, and two in later 2015; The Mirror had one in 2016, and three in 2015 (one of which was in December); The Telegraph four pieces discussing Basic Income in 2015, and one in 2014, 2010 and 2002 respectively; The Sun (the widest circulation daily) had had no coverage of Basic Income at all. Much of this coverage was been focused on reporting the Finnish Basic Income trial proposal, and the Swiss referendum on implementing a Basic Income (although the Mirror coverage also discussed the Green Party Basic Income Policy during the 2015 election campaign) and has been relatively neutral in tone.

The reviewed coverage tallies with Caffin’s (2016) claim that Basic Income is gaining more mainstream attention because of Basic Income experiments in Finland and the Netherlands, and the

Swiss referendum on Basic Income. The lack of any coverage in The Sun is problematic when making the claim that there has been an increase in mainstream attention to Basic Income as a policy. As the newspaper with the highest circulation it has more than four times the audience of the three broadsheets (The Guardian, The Times and The Telegraph) with positive pieces about Basic Income. Thus, while there was some increase in mainstream attention, the coverage did not extend across the whole of the media.

In addition to coverage of a Basic Income Guarantee as a result of the proposed experimental trials and Swiss referendum on implementation, a part of the increased coverage related to The Green Party's commitment to a Basic Income as a policy (e.g. Collins, 2015; Sylvester and Thomson, 2015; Wintour, 2015). In the run up to the 2015 general election the policy attracted heavy criticism in the media following interviews with Green Party leader Natalie Bennett (Bennett, 2015a; Bennett, 2015b) which were characterised as being a "car-crash" (BBC, 2015; Holehouse, 2015; Hutton, 2015). While the focus of coverage was Bennett's handling of questioning, it did mention and briefly detail the policies under question, which were on housing, and the Green Party's policy of Basic Income. Following this heavy criticism, Caroline Lucas later stated that the policy was not going to appear in the manifesto (Riley-Smith, 2015). The manifesto itself contained a commitment to the principal of a Basic Income, but only plans for consultation rather than the implementation of the policy (The Green Party, 2015b, p. 54).

This discussion around the press attention was developed during the initial literature review for this thesis, and was never intended as an exhaustive examination of press coverage about Basic Income in the UK. Instead it was to support the claims made around the attention to Basic Income – it shows that mainstream attention was occurring. The development of a more systematic examination of the coverage, particularly in order to establish the change in the quantity and nature of the press attention was indicated as useful. I discuss the development of this review of the press attention in **chapter 3**, and the results of it in **chapter 4**.

[Trials and experiments](#)

The National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) speculated that 2016 is "*The Year Basic Income moves into beta*" (Caffin, 2016), citing planned experiments in Finland and similar proposals in the Netherlands and Canada as examples for its claim. The proposals and planning of trials of Basic Income in Finland, in Utrecht (the Netherlands), and in Ontario (Canada) drove discussion of Basic Income in the UK press (e.g. Boffey, 2015; Charter, 2015; Cowburn, 2016; Perry, 2015).

In addition to the discussed trials of Basic Income, the Swiss referendum over the implementation of Basic Income took place in July 2016. Although defeated by a significant margin (over 80% voted against the motion) the Swiss referendum was more successful than expected, and resulted a significant public discussion of the idea in Switzerland (Stojanovic and Schmidt, 2016). The referendum was as a result of a citizen's initiative in Switzerland, which allows for a proposal with sufficient collected signatures to be put to a public referendum, and achieved its outcome despite not being supported by any Swiss political parties. There are many examples of the UK press covering the Swiss referendum (e.g. Eleftheriou-Smith, 2016; McGoogan, 2016; Morley, 2016; Payton, 2016) supporting the claim it was a factor in driving UK press attention.

As shown, both the various trials and the Swiss referendum were discussed in the UK press. For many this coverage would have been their first experience of Basic Income – this was the case with one of my interviewees, Becca Kirkpatrick, who encountered the idea as a result of early coverage of the referendum (Kirkpatrick, 2017) and has since gone on to campaign for Basic Income. Trials and experiments are an important element of making the attention to Basic Income different not only because of their impact on media coverage, but because they build up an evidence base from which to respond to the criticisms of Basic Income.

Critiques focusing on the undesirable behavioural impact of a Basic Income would be central to arguments against its implementation in the UK, and a core difficulty is that there is no way of comprehensively ending this debate beyond implementing a Basic Income and then observing the outcomes. There have been a number of experimental trials, or examples, of a Basic Income: four experiments undertaken in the USA between 1968-1976, the largest of which was the Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance Experiment (SIME-DIME); MINCOM, an experiment run in Manitoba, Canada, between 1975-1978 (Widerquist, 2005, provides a summary of a range of analyses of the data gathered; Forget, 2013, a more recent detailed analysis of the MINCOM data); the Alaska Permanence Fund (an operating Basic Income Guarantee since 1976); and a number of Basic Income experiments which have operated more recently in India, Kenya, Namibia and Liberia and others (in overview Blattman and Niehaus, 2014; Discussing India, Standing, 2013; in Kenya, Haushofer and Shapiro, 2013; in Namibia, Haarmann and Haarmann, 2012; in Liberia, Blattman, Jamison and Sheridan, 2015).

While these experiments and examples of a Basic Income do provide some evidence of the impact, the contemporary examples are all located in the Global Economic South in a development context which differs significantly from the UK, and the examples from a more similar economy (such as SIME-DIME in the USA) are from nearly half a century ago, and thus evidence from them could be

dismissed by opponents as not applicable to the contemporary UK economy. A study on the impact of giving rough sleepers in London an unconditional cash grant of £3,000 (Hough and Rice, 2010) is both recent and not contextually different, but the sample was limited to just 13 recipients so the overwhelmingly positive impact the study found is difficult to generalise.

Foremost amongst the critiques on the basis of behaviour impact is the argument that a Basic Income would reduce work effort, resulting in recipients choosing not to work, and instead relying on their Basic Income. This would in turn restrict the size of the taxable population, making a Basic Income less affordable as a policy. This criticism – that unconditionality would result in people choosing not to work – has a long pedigree and is not unique to the contemporary Basic Income debate (as discussed earlier, it was one of the arguments raised in the Royal Commission on the Poor Law, for example).

The four US experiments of the 1960s and early 70s found that there was a limited work disincentive effect and that the impact was primarily confined to recipients reducing the amount of total hours worked, rather than removing themselves from the labour force altogether, particularly with male recipients (Widerquist, 2005). The studies on the experiments also identified that there was not a sizable reduction in work effort at different levels of Basic Income Guarantee – experiments varied significantly in the amount of the guarantee and the withdrawal rate at higher income levels, but studies aggregating all four experiments have a similar range of work effort reduction to those just examining the results of SIME-DIME, the largest (Widerquist, 2005).

The finding from the SIME-DIME experiment which caused a great deal of concern was the apparent impact of a Basic Income Guarantee on divorce rates. In part, this was an expected result; by targeting at an individual level it was noted that the transfer payments would increase the financial autonomy of female partners in a relationship (and thus provide the scope to leave abusive relationships). It did however have an impact on the eventual failure of the Family Assistance Plan (1971/2) – which was based along Basic Income lines – to pass through Congress according to Levine *et al.* (2005, p. 96) and Steensland (2008, p. 24). The extent to which the finding of increased divorce rates was an accurate observation is was later questioned, especially as the effect seemed strongest in the groups with the lowest guarantee rates in the experiment, and these later analyses found no dissolution effect (Levine *et al.*, 2005, p. 100).

Related to the debate over the impact of a Basic Income on divorce rates is the debate over whether a Basic Income would be as positive for women as Basic Income advocates claim that it would be. Robeyns (2000) characterises this debate as one between “Hush Money or Emancipation Fee”, with many scholars taking either a gender-blind approach to Basic Income, or assuming that it would be

emancipatory. The counter position which Robeyns suggests is that the focus on compensating unpaid caregiving and reproductive labour within Basic Income will mean that it will instead take the form of “hush money” for the continued acceptance of women of a gendered division of labour. Robeyns (2000, pp. 130-135) argues that the impact of a Basic Income is more complicated than an either/or between these two positions, however, and that the impact of a Basic Income on women will depend on the strength of their labour market attachment, and their earning generating capacity, with only women with low earning capacity and weak labour market attachment unambiguously benefiting from a Basic Income – for women in the opposite situation, a Basic Income has the potential to be damaging by reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Linked to the idea that welfare recipients will chose to reduce their work effort and availability is the criticism that money given to the poor will be spent on public “bads”, such as alcohol, tobacco or gambling, rather than on the necessities it is intended to provide for. Again, this is a criticism which was a part of the Royal Commission, as discussed earlier, and persists to the present day discussions around welfare more generally, even in discussions around poverty by those in relative poverty themselves (e.g. *“I've seen children even now in this day and age where it's jam and bread because mum and dad has gambled it or boozed it or whatever”* (respondant Diane in Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013)).

However, research findings of the impact of unconditional cash transfers have not found evidence of these negative outcomes. Evans and Popova (2014) assessed seventeen cash transfer schemes, a mixture of conditional and unconditional, and found that there was no quantitative evidence of increased spending on “temptation goods” such as alcohol or tobacco despite the qualitative interviews claiming that such behaviour was widespread. Experiments in Liberia which took the form of a one-off grant (after a therapy course in some cases), rather than a regular income, found that the majority of recipients who were selected from an area with high levels of joblessness, crime and drug abuse had spent their (unrestricted) funds in non-wasteful ways, investing in businesses or saving. Both therapy and cash transfer had positive impacts on criminal behaviour in the short term, but the therapy plus transfer treatment had a significantly higher, and more lasting, impact on behaviour (Blattman, Jamison and Sheridan, 2015). This suggests that non-conditional transfer payments, even in the worst circumstances, will not necessarily result in the money being spent badly. The previously mentioned Rowntree Trust experiment with giving cash transfers to rough sleepers in London corroborates the lack of a behaviourally negative impact of a Basic Income Guarantee; the recipients were prudent with the grant, and used it to improve their long term situation (Hough and Rice, 2010).

The behavioural critiques all pertain to the idea that there will be beneficiaries of a Basic Income who do not deserve to be benefiting from it, and who will damage their “hosts” (the tax paying – working – majority): “Malibu surfers” (as Rawls (1988, p. 257 n.7) puts it) who choose not to work; an undesirable residuum who spend their Basic Income on public bads; “irresponsible” single mothers. The evidence that exists from experimental trials of Basic Income suggests that many of the suggested behavioural impacts will not occur, or at least will not occur to a damaging degree. However, the experimental trials are either old, or conducted in areas at a significantly different level of development than the UK, and can thus be dismissed by critics of a Basic Income on those grounds. This is why new experiments and trials of Basic Income are so important – they further establish the impact of the policy, and cannot be dismissed as inapplicable to the contemporary advanced welfare state.

Policy community and political engagement

The increased attention to Basic Income is not all about press discussion of the policy, although this is the element in which the mainstreaming of attention to Basic Income is most visible. There is also an increase in engagement with the idea by think tanks, and by academics not previously associated with the idea. Notable in the formulation of research questions was the advocacy of the idea by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (the RSA) in their report *Creative Citizen, Creative State* in December 2015 (Painter and Thong, 2015). The RSA were not previously associated with the idea, and are a respected and mainstream organisation.

The Compass report *Basic Income: an idea whose time has come?* (Reed and Lansley, 2016) followed later in mid-2016 and provided a detailed and revenue neutral proposal, with a microsimulation study to show the impact of the policy on individuals. More reports followed over the course of the next years, summarised in the table below, page 34. What is significant about these reports is that they are the start of Basic Income being considered in this fashion – previously Basic Income discourse was in academic journals, conference proceedings and academic working papers, not in think tank reports. The table below does not include all of the publications from think tanks that discuss Basic Income, just reports with reasonably significant discussion of Basic Income (thus, I have excluded some reports where Basic Income is briefly mentioned, and shorter articles and blog posts focused on Basic Income).

Year	Organisation	Title	Authors
2010	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	<i>Providing personalised support to rough sleepers: an evaluation of the City of London pilot</i>	Juliette Hough Becky Rice

2013	CLASS	<i>Financing the Social State</i>	Richard Murphy Howard Reed
2014	Compass	<i>Building Blocks</i>	Rosie Rodgers Stuart Speeden Howard Reed Jon Bloomfield Robin Wilson
2015	RSA	<i>Creative Citizen, Creative State</i>	Anthony Painter Chris Thoung
2015	The Green Party	<i>Basic Income: a detailed proposal</i>	The Green Party
2015	The Adam Smith Institute	<i>Free Market Welfare: The case for a Negative Income Tax</i>	Michael Story
2016	Compass	<i>Basic Income: an idea whose time has come?</i>	Howard Reed Stewart Lansley
2017	Fabian Society (commissioned by the TUC)	<i>Universal basic income and the future of work</i>	Andrew Harrop Cameron Tait
2017	Institute for Policy Research (IPR) (policy brief)	<i>Assessing the Case for a Universal Basic Income in the UK</i>	Luke Martinelli
2017	Institute for Policy Research (IPR) (Working Paper)	<i>The Fiscal and Distributional Implications of Alternative Universal Basic Income Schemes in the UK</i>	Luke Martinelli
2018	New Economics Foundation Public Services International	<i>Universal Basic Income: A union perspective</i>	Anna Coote Edanur Yazici
2018	The Adam Smith Institute	<i>Basic Income around the World: The unexpected benefits of Unconditional Cash Transfers</i>	
2018	RSA	<i>Realising basic income experiments in the UK</i>	Charlie Young
2018	RSA	<i>Pathways to Universal Basic Income The case for a Universal Basic</i>	Anthony Painter Jake Thorold

		Opportunity Fund	Jamie Cooke
2019	New Economics Foundation	<i>Nothing Personal: Replacing the personal tax allowance with a weekly National Allowance</i>	Alfie Stirling Sarah Arnold
2019	Oxford Economics	<i>How Robots change the World: What Automation really means for jobs and productivity</i>	James Lambert Edward Cone
2019	Institute for Policy Research (IPR)	<i>Basic Income, Automation, and Labour Market Change</i>	Luke Martinelli

Table 1 - Reports discussing Basic Income from UK organisations

The importance of the move into the think tank policy discourse is that this discourse interacts more visibly with politicians, political parties and journalists than spaces in which academic discourse occurs – they are the intended audience. Thus, the Compass report has salience not just for the detail it provides in the study of the impact of Basic Income but because at the launch of the Compass report, the shadow chancellor John McDonnell stated that he hoped to win the argument for Basic Income within the Labour Party (Field notes, 2016).

John McDonnell was known to be sympathetic to a Basic Income prior to 2016, having chaired discussions on the subject in the past (Citizen's Income Trust, 2014), and after stating “*It's an idea we want to look at. Child benefit was a form of basic income so it's not something that I would rule out*” at a talk at the LSE in February 2016 (reported in Sheffield (2016a)). He also included it within his manifesto during his contestation of the Labour Party leadership in 2007 (McDonnell, 2007). Jeremy Corbyn had also expressed interest in a “guaranteed social wage” during his leadership campaign (reported in Stone (2016b) and Sheffield (2016a)). During the Shadow Chancellor’s State of the Economy conference in May 2016 there was no mention of Basic Income, however, so at the time it was not clear what priority, if any, Basic Income would receive from McDonnell. The statement at the Compass report was therefore the first strong indication about the continued enthusiasm for Basic Income from McDonnell.

Labour Party adoption of Basic Income as a policy would significantly increase the plausibility of the implementation of Basic Income in the UK – and thus the possibility of adoption of the policy was an important element of understanding the attention to Basic Income, and therefore, the claim that something about it was different. This meant that continued study of the interaction between the Basic Income and the Labour Party was to be an important part of understanding the likely impact that Basic Income could have on the future of welfare in the UK.

The attention being paid to Basic Income was not limited to the Labour Party, however. In addition to the press coverage around the Green Party policy of Basic Income in early 2015 (discussed earlier in this section), Green Party MP Caroline Lucas tabled Early Day Motion 974 (2015-2016) calling for the funding and commission of research into the practicalities of Basic Income by the Government. It received 35 supporting signatures, including Labour (8), SDLP (2) and SNP (23) MPs. While Early Day Motions are not generally debated, it still represented a specific Basic Income proposal before Parliament which has support crossing party lines.

In addition to the support given to EDM 974 by 40% of their current MPs, the SNP committed to a Basic Income policy during their 2016 spring conference, agreeing to the principal of a Basic Income and aiming to fund further research into its impact, as well as considering it as a possibility in the design of a welfare settlement in an independent Scotland (Stone, 2016b). Both the Green Party and SNP support for Basic Income as a policy (when coupled with the possible support by the Labour Party leadership) made it into a plausible policy to emerge in negotiations around a hung Parliament.

Plausibility and public support

The support for Basic Income from political parties means relatively little if public opposition to Basic Income is significant. A 2016 Europe-wide survey by Dalia found that 62% of British respondents (just under the 64% average across all respondents) favoured a basic income, after it was defined as *“an income unconditionally paid by the government to every individual regardless of whether they work and irrespective of any other sources of income. It replaces other social security payments and is high enough to cover all basic needs (food, housing etc.)”* (Jaspers, 2016).

This result can be compared to a poll undertaken by Comres for the ITV in 2015, where 36% supported, 40% opposed and 23% did not know, when asked do you support or oppose as a future policy *“Introducing a ‘Citizens’ Income’, giving every single person in the country £72 per week irrespective of their working status or income”* (ComRes, 2015). This would seem to indicate that there has been an increase for public support between the Comres and Dalia polling figures.

A major difference (aside from the outcome) between these two polls is that they define their Basic Incomes differently. The Comres poll specifies a £72 a week sum while the Dalia poll does not mention a figure but specifies sufficiency to cover housing and food which would require more than £72 – the Green Party policy specifies that the £72 figure would need to be supplemented with housing benefits. The Comres poll also does not specify that that the Citizen’s Income would be a replacement for any existing policies, while the Dalia one does so explicitly. The Comres poll was conducted in the context of the negative coverage surrounding the Green Party and Basic Income during the 2015 election long campaign period. This means that it is unclear as to whether the

apparent significant increase in support between for a Basic Income suggested by these two polls relates to the changing circumstances for Basic Income, differing public attitudes about a full and a partial Basic Income, or just a reaction to the way Basic Income is treated in the press.

Basic Income policy design

Given the role which what (exactly) is being advocated for could have played in this significant shift between 2015 and 2016 opinion polls – from 36% in favour to 62% in favour of a Basic Income – it is important to understand what exactly is being discussed. Are the Basic Incomes under discussion the same, or do they differ in amounts, in funding design, and/or in interaction with other components of the welfare state? In some cases it is clear that they do differ dramatically: ***Financing the Social State*** (Murphy and Reed, 2013) proposes a significantly higher rate of Basic Income than ***Creative Citizen, Creative State*** (Painter and Thoung, 2015) for example, while the latter's proposal is similar to that of the 2015 ***Basic Income: a detailed proposal*** (The Green Party, 2015a). In other cases, such as in the media coverage, there are limited details (often just a weekly or monthly value of the income), or no details at all beyond the essential principals of a Basic Income. I will give an overview of the different specific Basic Income plans, before looking at what is being discussed in the media to show some of the range of what is being advocated for.

The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) report, ***Creative Citizen, Creative State*** (Painter and Thoung, 2015), proposed a £3,692/year Basic Income for all between 25 and 65 with higher rates for pensioners and younger children, and lower rates for children and young people between 4 and 25, with a total estimated cost of between £285bn and £289bn. To fund this, they propose replacing £272bn worth of different (primarily conditional) entitlements, tax credits and benefits, leaving housing and disability policies as they currently are. Replacing these existing policies with the Basic Income they propose significantly reduces marginal taxation rates at low incomes (reducing work disincentives), and does not leave anyone significantly worse off than under current arrangements (Painter and Thoung, 2015, pp. 22-25). The funding gap of £12bn-£16bn between the proposal and the spending it would be replacing is a challenge, given the contemporary spending climate but, Painter and Thoung argue that despite the focus on austerity "*Government had found scope for three big tax cuts in 2015-16, totalling £19.5bn*" (Painter and Thoung, 2015, p. 29) so suggesting the extra cost of such a policy was implausible is, in their words, "*pretty risible*". This detailed Basic Income proposal gives a fair indication of one sort of Basic Income which would be plausible in the UK.

The RSA proposal is itself a modification of an earlier proposed formulation of Basic Income from the Citizen's Income Trust – the only difference being the higher rate between 0-4 years – which views

Basic Income as replacing existing benefits, but not being especially sizable in relation to subsistence needs of individuals, and still requiring the support of housing benefits (Citizen's Income Trust, 2013).

Like the RSA Proposal, the Green Party proposal modifies the original from the Citizen's Income Trust, but with the main (18-65) rate set higher at £4,060/year (£78pw) with a rate for all children under 18 of £2,600. They estimated a cost of £331bn, and found £331bn in savings from removing existing schemes which the Basic Income is intended to replace (The Green Party, 2015a).

In the Compass report *Basic Income: an idea whose time has come?* Reed and Lansley (2016), test a number of formulations of Basic Income, both partial and full, and conclude that their favoured formulation is a weekly rate of £71 for 25-65 year olds, while maintaining some existing means tested benefits. This is similar to the proposals by the Green Party and by Citizen's Income Trust. Again, their modelling requires a combination of replacement of existing welfare policies, and increased taxation.

In its earlier *Building Blocks* report (Rodgers *et al.*, 2014), on the other hand, Compass advocated a significantly higher rate of Basic Income proposed originally by Murphy and Reed (2013). In Murphy and Reed's proposal, the Basic Income is designed to meet the "*minimum income standard... set sufficiently high to completely eliminate poverty*" (p. 30), suggesting a Basic Income at a rate of £10,014/year for a single working age individual, increasing to £31,501/year for a couple with four children. In their model, costs of the scheme are met by a combination of discontinuing existing benefits and altering the taxation system to a Unified Income Tax rate of 45% with a lower 25% starter rate, increasing to 70% on incomes over £200,000 (Murphy and Reed, 2013, pp. 30-34). While this proposal does provide a "full" Basic Income in terms of amount given in relation to actual living costs, the taxation changes make it politically implausible. It also varies from the other Basic Income proposals in that it is based on household rather than individualised payments.

Guy Standing advocates for a modest Basic Income – he criticises the 2,500 CHF (Swiss francs) per month¹ figure which Basic Income campaigners have advocated for in the Swiss referendum on a Basic Income (Standing, 2016a, 0:35:54-0:36:10). Although he explicitly states that he does not want to specify figures, but instead discuss and advocate the idea in the abstract, it is reasonable to consider this to mean that Standing's idea of a Basic Income more like the proposals from the RSA, CIT and Green Party than that in *Building Blocks* or *Financing the Social State*, if not actually lower.

¹ Around £1,950 GBP in July 2016.

Standing argues that a Basic Income should be drawn from a sovereign wealth fund (Standing, 2016a, 0:57:50-0:58:19), based on a principal that the ability of society now to create wealth is built upon a long accretion of social capital, rather than upon current efforts, and everyone in society, rather than a limited subsection, ought to be an inheritor of that common wealth (Standing, 2016a, 0:25:32-0:26:33). As with the value of a Basic Income, Standing does not specify the route through which such a sovereign wealth fund would be developed; similar proposals suggest from inheritance taxation, resource extraction taxation (Nystrom and Luckow, 2014; Pogge, 2002), or environmental taxation (Pogge, 2002; Heeskens, 2005). The other detailed proposals specify general (income) taxation increases and savings from abolishing existing schemes, and their focus is upon responding to inequality, poverty and unrecognised labour.

The media reports on Basic Income do not, however, report on any of these proposals. They either lack in any specific details, or they use entirely different figures for the rate of a Basic Income. The Daily Mirror's regular column "Nelson's Column" does pick a specific number – £1,000pcm, £12,000 a year – although it does not delve heavily into details (Nelson, 2016). This figure is £2,000 per year more per head than the most generous scheme already discussed, but it is also not a ridiculous figure plucked from the air – it is close to a month's post-tax earnings on National Living Wage (£1,091), and thus at least supposedly what is considered liveable.

Warner (2015) discusses a lower figure of £155 per week (£671 a month, £8,060 a year) but this is still double the RSA and CIT proposals, and near double the value suggested by the Green Party. Russell (2015) discusses instead the figure of £80 or £100 per week, which is closer to the Green Parties proposal (£78pw) but still higher than most of the proposals which have been detailed.

Warner focuses on technological unemployment and anti-work disincentives. He gives back-of-the-envelope figures which do not include savings from cutting programmes (although he does suggest that this would occur, as is suggested in the Green, CIT and RSA proposals), but he does not discuss any form of tapering of the income through tax adjustment (other than a blanket "higher taxes") which is also often proposed as a means of reducing the total cost of a Basic Income scheme. Both Nelson and Russell also discuss savings from cutting existing programmes, and Nelson also suggests tapering the benefit from the Basic Income through taxes at high incomes.

Warner also expressly and negatively raises the issue of EU benefits and migration and completely fails to mention past experiments. Russell is aware of contemporary studies, but does not mention the existence of any past studies. Nelson also discusses Indian and South American experiments, but not any others (such as those in Sub Saharan Africa), and suggests that the experiment in Ontario

will be the first large scale trial (again, not mentioning the experiments in the USA and Canada in the 1960s and 70s).

The assumption within a discussion of the specific proposals about a Basic Income – be it is a limited sense of just a figure for the amount given per week, or a more detailed proposal – is that the purpose of Basic Income advocacy is to see a Basic Income implemented as a policy in some form. It could be a complete replacement for all existing welfare policies, or it could be more limited, replacing just unemployment benefits, or being even less, or designed for a very specific purpose, such as Child Benefits, or Child Trust Funds. An alternative way to view these proposals is that Basic Income advocates are proposing a utopian vision which critiques the current operation of the welfare system, challenging it to adapt to deal with its inadequacies. Universal Credit can be viewed as an attempt to adopt some of the advantages of an unconditional and universal scheme while still maintaining conditionality. Moffitt (2003, p. 138) comments that one of the principle products of the Negative Income Tax debate in the USA in the 1970s was that it focused future welfare policy efforts on the problem of the poverty trap, with new programmes involving tapering of receipt rather than flat cut offs.

Conclusion

The assertion that Basic Income is an idea whose time has come is not based around a single clear and specific policy, but rather around the concept that welfare provision would be better achieved with a policy that is unconditional and universal than with the existing focus on conditionality and means and needs targeting. There is variation within the detail of the policies being proposed, both in terms of the formulation of the Basic Income policy and in how it interacts with other welfare policies. The change in coverage in the mainstream media is consistent with the idea that something is different, but it does not explain what has changed. Speculation around the possibility of adoption of Basic Income as a policy by the Labour Party is just that – speculative – at best. The increased attention to Basic Income suggests that it might have a role in the future of welfare provision, although not exactly what that role will be: it could be implemented, or adopted as a policy, trialled in the UK, or used as a tool for critiquing other welfare proposals. It is also clear that there are a range of ways of formulating a Basic Income policy, and that it is important to understand the differences between them. The differences between how a Basic Income was defined in two different polls makes it impossible to be confident that the increase in approval for the policy was the result of changing public attitudes towards the policy, as they could have instead been the result of differing opinions on the substance of the proposals, rather than the general intentions of the proposals.

This leads me to seek to answer the following three questions:

- Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in the last year (early 2015 – mid 2016) as compared to the years before?
 - This is not adequately answered; there is evidence that something has changed, as well as statements that change has occurred from Basic Income advocates, but not a conclusive answer as to what that change is.
- What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it?
 - While in some cases this is clear, it is not the case for all advocates, and it is important to recognise the effects which differences in the proposals could have.
- What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal?
 - While some proposals and ideal outcomes for Basic Income advocates are clear, their expectations of the reality are not and nor is the reaction to an increasingly “mainstream” idea of a Basic Income

Table 2 - Research Questions

Together, these questions will contribute to explaining the basis of the assertion that Basic Income is an idea whose time has come, by establishing what it is that has changed, and the way in which a Basic Income policy will respond to that change.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the increasing attention to Basic Income was, at the start of the investigation, very much an emergent phenomenon. As such it was necessary to investigate it in a fashion which could be flexible and respond to what could include quite significant fluctuations. It was a concern that the identified attention would fade away during the course of the research despite the statements that “something was different”. This prompted the use of semi-structured interviews, with some questions in common, but mostly adapted for each interviewee as the research developed. It also resulted in the use of media coverage – not only to compensate for a lack of journalist interviewees, but also to adapt to the importance of the mainstream media coverage.

The extant literature on the attention to Basic Income was minimal. It was limited to the recognition by key figures within the Basic Income field that something was occurring (a change in the nature of the attention), and some commentary as to why that might be (the threats of populism and automation, increasing inequality, precarity in the labour market). As a result, my research questions’ purpose was to expand upon the limited existing commentary and to delve into the claim that “Basic Income was an idea whose time has come”.

Through the literature review (discussed in the previous chapter) I thus posed the following research questions:

- Q1. Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention during 2015 – 2017 as compared to the years before?
- Q2. What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it?
- Q3. What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal?

Although it was not a working hypothesis at the start of my fieldwork, I concluded that the use of a framework derived from Levitas’ (2013) *imaginary reconstitution of society* (IROS) would be an effective means for interpreting the attention to Basic Income during my analysis. The IROS framework effectively draws the three research questions together and facilitates constructing and interrogating coherent narratives from disparate sources. As a result, it is a useful mechanism through which to disentangle and then aggregate the arguments surrounding Basic Income contained within my data. I will discuss IROS as described by Levitas, and my use of it as a framework, in detail in the first section of this chapter.

The “attention to Basic Income” covers a variety of events, media coverage, and reports, as discussed in chapter 2. My data comprises content identified – by myself, and by interviewees – as “the attention to Basic Income”, as well as commentary upon that attention from my interviews. The identification of the attention to Basic Income is itself an act of interpretation – by those who I have discussed as observing the phenomenon that is the attention to Basic Income, and by myself as a researcher of the attention to Basic Income. I will discuss in more detail the identification of the attention to Basic Income in the section on data collection.

What I am interpreting is *why* what is identified as the “attention to Basic Income” has occurred: a part of this is *why that* interpretation of events; another is what are the events/causes attributed to the attention; a third part *why those* events/causes are impactful. My interpretation developed from thematic analysis of both interviews of figures and media coverage identified (by myself, and by interviewees) as significant within and to the attention to Basic Income. These figures were identified through the literature review, as well as through interviews and media coverage analysis itself. I discuss the coding and my interpretation of themes from both media coverage and interviews in more detail later in this chapter, as well as the process of identifying and gathering data.

Utopia as Method

I have used the structure of Levitas’ *imaginary reconstitution of society* (IROS) as the framework through which I am interpreting the material I have identified as constituting the attention to Basic Income. In ***Utopia as Method*** (2013) Levitas sets out the argument that utopia is “is better understood as a method, than a goal” (xi). That is, it is a sociological method in which utopia is given immediate policy specificity – in other words to a particular place and time – rather than being a blueprint to be followed. My use differs from Levitas’ as rather than constructing an account of utopia through IROS myself, I am using IROS as a thematic framework for coding in this instance.

This method is described by Levitas as the *imaginary reconstitution of society* (IROS) and consists of three modes of enquiry: the archaeological mode (critical social commentary on the present), the ontological mode (the envisaged good society), and the architectural mode (the specifics of policy which forms a bridge between the two). In addition to Levitas’ account of the imaginary reconstitution of society, Levitas also relates a specific example of utopia within the text. I will distinguish the two using “IROS” as the method, or type of account, and “Levitas’ utopia” as the specific example given by Levitas.

My use of IROS deviates from Levitas’ in that, rather than developing a complete account of utopia using IROS, I am searching for the three modes of enquiry (archaeological, ontological, and

architectural) within the attention to Basic Income which I have identified. I am doing this in order to illustrate the partially developed IROS contained within, and shared between, the attention to Basic Income. This facilitates the answering of my research questions by clarifying: the social problematic that the Basic Income discourse is responding to (Q1); the detail of proposals under discussion (Q2); and what impact is envisioned (Q3)². I will return to a further discussion of how this is important within my analysis in chapter 5.

Archaeological mode

“The premise of utopia as archaeology is that most political positions contain implicit images of the good society and views of how people are and should be” (Levitas, 2013, p. 154). This premise is the one on which my search for utopian ideas within the attention to Basic Income is based. It is unlikely that there is deliberate intent within any part of the attention to Basic Income to make use of IROS as discussed by Levitas. However, fragments of IROS are present (and in some cases these suggest a similar interpretation of utopia to the one recounted by Levitas). It is for these fragments that I am searching, as taken together they will facilitate a richer account of why the attention to Basic Income is occurring.

The work of the archaeological mode is to uncover the *“implicit images of the good society”* and then *“[piece] together images of the good society that are embedded in political programmes and social and economic policies”* (Levitas, 2013, p. 153). The archaeological mode is one of critical evaluation of present social and political arrangements, identifying the unspoken assumptions and “common-sense” understandings and their importance in the operation of society. This includes not just the unspoken assumptions and common-sense arguments of a single government and its according political position, but also the work of identifying the depoliticised and uncontested areas between political parties.

This is, as Levitas notes, a common endeavour and approach in sociology, and is useful in addressing both explicitly political positions as well as the depoliticised, uncontested assumptions about what is the “good society”. This engagement with present social and institutional arrangements, and the assumptions underlying them, facilitates critique, which in turn establishes the basis for the ontological mode of IROS (in which the argued image of the good society is presented as an alternative to the present). The *present* is a significant part of what Levitas is arguing. IROS is construed as being applied to a specific place and time, rather than being a theoretical critique of a theoretical society. It is therefore useful in addressing questions about “why now?” and “why here?”

² See Table 2 - Research Questions, page 35 for full details of the research questions.

– as these are central to what the archaeological mode does. It is a discussion of what about the present time and place requires, necessitates, or impels change.

The extent to which the attention to Basic Income critically reflects on existing social arrangements unsurprisingly (given the range of styles of communication involved, as I shall discuss later in this chapter) varies. Developed arguments about the assumed “common-sense” and unspoken assumptions about society is uncommon, but simpler critical analyses are present within most of the discussion. These are arguments such as “we need Basic Income because automation will cause mass unemployment” or “Basic Income would reduce poverty” or “Basic Income is an effective response to economic insecurity” or “Universal Credit is bad; Basic Income is better”. As I shall discuss in chapter 4, they are the sorts of explanations given by my interviewees as explanations for why there is attention being paid to Basic Income.

The criticisms of Basic Income contained within the attention (particularly the media attention) are also reliant on the unspoken assumptions about the good society – on assumptions that work has intrinsic value, or on meritocratic ideas about effort and intelligence being reflected in income, for example. These reveal the understanding of Basic Income that critics are responding to, and thus also help in understanding what the attention to Basic Income is about.

Where these arguments are in response to particular circumstances in the present as opposed to being more general claims, they can provide an explanation as to why the attention to Basic Income is *now*, rather than in the past (the first of my research questions). If the circumstances which are under critique have changed, then it is reasonable for the attention to a policy which is presented as a response to the criticised circumstances to have changed. I examine the case for this argument in chapter 5.

These simpler critiques are however, I would argue, part of more extensive criticisms of the sort that Levitas envisages as a part of the archaeological mode of IROS. For example, the arguments for Basic Income on the basis of economic insecurity start to engage with whether work ought to be the primary way in which individual survival needs are met (which I shall be discussing in chapter 5), as do those around the threat of automation (although, as I shall discuss in chapter 7 there are alternative explanations for these).

Ontological mode

The ontological mode:

“addresses the question of what kind of people particular societies develop and encourage. What is understood as human flourishing, what capabilities are

valued, encouraged and genuinely enabled, or blocked and suppressed, by specific existing or potential social arrangements” (Levitas, 2013, p. 153)

In other words, it is the examination of what the good society ought to look like that arises as a response to the examination of what society currently looks like which was undertaken in the archaeological mode. Where the archaeological mode looks for what image of the good life and good society underlies existing policy and institutions, the ontological is about arguing for what ought to be understood as the good life, and the good society which enables it.

The data (the attention to Basic Income) does not discuss in complete detail the question which Levitas presents as the ontological mode, in the same way as it does not give a complete critical account of the present. It does give indications of the envisaged “good society” however, in the ways in which the anticipated impact of Basic Income is discussed. Where the discussion of Basic Income emphasises its role in enabling people to pursue a cultural life, it is clear that the discussant envisages that cultural life as a part of the good life, for example. Thus, this allows for the piecing together of similar visions of the good life from within the attention to Basic Income with one another, and combining them with more complete accounts of the good life and the future society which facilitates it.

This supports a more developed understanding of what is being advocated for, which is the second of my research questions, by constructing a more complete picture of the future anticipated as an outcome of given Basic Incomes under discussion. It therefore provides clarity in understanding what exactly is being discussed as Basic Income. It also provides a partial answer to the anticipated impact of the Basic Income policy (alongside the more specific answers found within the architectural mode) and thus an answer about the potential impact on the future of the welfare state. As I will discuss shortly, however, there is a broader question about whether the debate around Basic Income will have any outcome in policy – either through implementation or by alteration of existing welfare policies to a form which more closely resembles Basic Income – which falls outside what can be understood through the IROS framework.

Architectural mode

In the architectural mode the policy means by which a movement might be achieved between the present critiqued in the archaeological mode, and the future envisioned in the ontological mode is discussed. This situates the policy clearly within the specific context – rather than just being a general “one-size-fits-all” recommendation – while at the same time being aimed at a utopian future. Levitas stipulates further that *“these must in turn be subjected to archaeological critique, addressing silences and inconsistencies all such images must contain, as well as the political steps*

forward they imply" (Levitas, 2013, p. 153). This means that the architectural mode is expressly *not* a final step, but rather the first step in a continuing reflexive examination of policy and the way in which it facilitates the good life.

Policy specificity is most clearly visible in the analysis performed by think tanks in which models of the operation of a Basic Income are proposed and discussed – they are specific in the formulation of Basic Income in a way which does not occur elsewhere within the attention to Basic Income. There is some policy specificity in discussions elsewhere – such as about the source of funding (whether it is through general taxation, or other means like resource taxation) or the economic value of a Basic Income – but it is not to the same degree of detail (nor as situated within the existing structure of policy as the microsimulation models are).

Levitas does not however discuss the architectural mode as one of highly detailed microsimulation models or similar, just specificity about a policy proposed in relation to a specific time and place. Thus, the detail of funding sources, and broad detail of the level of the Basic Income is sufficient. What Levitas is arguing against in her discussion of the architectural mode is a generally applied policy unrelated to specific circumstances – in other words just arguing for “a Basic Income”. This lack of detail does occur within the attention to Basic Income, and inferring further detail in these cases is difficult because of the range of possibilities for design of such a policy (as discussed in chapter 2). Where similarities exist in the other two modes (archaeological and ontological) between two discussions, and one does not discuss policy in any detail, it is reasonable to argue that there would be similar conclusions about the architectural mode. Again, this facilitates grouping similar items within the attention to Basic Income.

The detailed policy proposals of the architectural mode, like the normative discussion of the ontological mode, support understanding exactly what is under discussion as Basic Income (the second of my research questions) as well as the future impact on the welfare state. While the ontological mode discusses the bigger picture of the impact, the architectural mode details at the level of specific policies which will be impacted (for example, the tax-free personal allowance being lowered or removed to “pay for” Basic Income). Both of these are significant in understanding the impact of Basic Income on the UK welfare state.

Thematic analysis

The *imaginary reconstitution of society* provides a basis for the thematic analysis of my data – with themes corresponding to the three modes of analysis. Thus, I examined my collected data for examples of critiques of the present society (the archaeological mode), for discussions of what the

future good society ought to look like (the ontological mode), and for specifics about the construction of policy (the architectural mode).

Before using this basis for examining my data, I used an alternative thematic schema. This developed both from the interpretations of my interviewees as to why the attention to Basic Income was occurring, and from my own interpretation of the media coverage developed through thematic coding.

My interviewees (and literature review) identified automation, austerity, party political discussion of Basic Income, rising populism, and trials/proposals of trials as causes for the attention to Basic Income. These themes were limited however, in that while they provided a good descriptive account of the attention to Basic Income, they did not support a deeper account as to why they were important.

Manual coding of the media content was undertaken in two blocks, encompassing January 2015 – June 2016 (pre-interviews) and July 2016 – December 2017 (post-interviews) respectively. I picked out key phrases, concepts and subjects within the media content, developing a large number of codes. I then grouped these codes by similarities (e.g. John McDonnell, The Labour Party, the SNP, the Green Party are all grouped under UK political parties). The major nodes within the coding of the media content are broadly consistent with those proposed by interviewees as being significant elements of the attention to Basic Income, and I shall discuss these in more detail in chapter 4. I did not use an identical coding schema between the two sets of coding, to allow for the possibility of new codes emerging from the reading of the second batch of media content. While this does present a problem in consistency of codes, I have mitigated this by returning to the first batch of codes to harmonise the two batches. This resulted in, for example, the identification of a larger category of “future of work” in the first batch than previously identified (it had previously been subsumed under the categories of “automation and technology” and “advocacy”, but when placed together in the same fashion as in the second batch made its own significant category).

Data collection

My data collection consisted of two methods: semi-structured interviews with individuals identified as being particularly relevant to the contemporary discussion of Basic Income, and the systematic gathering of print media coverage discussing Basic Income from UK national newspapers (dailies and Sunday editions where appropriate).

In this section I will detail the selection of interviewees and approach to interviews and the methodological considerations arising from each before turning to the methods used in the media analysis. I will then finish the section with brief biographies of the interviewees.

Interviewees

I approached individuals for interviews who were involved in the contemporary attention to Basic Income, which included academics, activists, journalists, politicians, and policy researchers. These individuals were approached on the basis of a variety of reasons such as their specific knowledge about the field, their involvement in specific events or publications, and/or their organisational role. These individuals could be considered expert in terms of their “*explicit, tacit, professional or occupation knowledge*” (Littig, 2009) although this expertise is not necessarily defined in terms of specific established sources of authority (such as a professional role), given the emergent areas of research (Pfadenhauer, 2009) such as Basic Income advocacy.

Identification of “involvement” in the contemporary attention occurred both through the interpretations from interviewees and through my own interpretation of what comprised the attention to Basic Income. I identified the following broad categories:

- Had discussed the contemporary attention to Basic Income
- Academic working in the field of Basic Income
- Prominent academics recently discussing Basic Income
- Recent Basic Income critics
- Think tank researchers working on Basic Income
- Journalists discussing Basic Income
- Politicians discussing Basic Income
- Basic Income activists

Membership of multiple categories was not unusual. In Table (below), I detail where my interviewees fall in these broad categories (A more detailed biography of my interviewees is contained in appendix B (page 205)). This is clearly a purposeful sampling with no intention to create randomness or to be representative as would be the case with probability sampling, but instead an objective of selecting “*information rich cases... worthy of in-depth study because they provide detailed insight*” (Emmel, 2013, p.36). While my initial intention had been to attempt to “chain sample” through interviewees facilitating access to others (following Patton’s characterisation of chain sampling (Patton, 1990, p.174-6)), in practice this did not occur.

Names included in **bold** are individuals interviewed, in *italics* are some examples (not an exhaustive list) of individuals contacted, but not interviewed (either non-responsive, or specifically declined).

Had discussed the contemporary attention to Basic Income	Jon Cruddas MP, Nick Pearce, Neal Lawson, David Piachaud, Guy Standing, Malcolm Torry
Academic working in the field of Basic Income	Nick Srnicek, Guy Standing, Malcolm Torry, <i>Louise Haagh</i>
Prominent academics recently discussing Basic Income	Pete Alcock, Andrew Gamble, Ian Gough, Ruth Lister
Recent Basic Income critics	Pete Alcock, Ian Gough, David Piachaud
Think tank researchers working on Basic Income	IPR (Nick Pearce, Luke Martinelli, Joe Chrisp), Neal Lawson, Howard Reed, Ben Southwood, <i>Anthony Painter, Stewart Lansley</i>
Journalists discussing Basic Income	<i>Jon Stone, Jeremy Warner, Jenni Russell, Samuel Brittan, Larry Elliott</i>
Politicians discussing Basic Income	Ronnie Cowan MP, Jon Cruddas MP, Ruth Lister, <i>Caroline Lucas MP, Jonathan Bartley MP, John McDonnell MP, Ken Clarke MP</i>
Basic Income activists	Barb Jacobson, Becca Kirkpatrick, Malcolm Torry

Table 3 - Interviewees listed by category

Interviewee categories

I will now discuss the categories, giving examples of the membership of them, and why they are important parts of the attention to Basic Income. I also reflect on their potential problems as interviewees.

Had discussed the contemporary attention to Basic Income

Individuals specifically discussing the contemporary attention to Basic Income (such as Guy Standing, Anthony Painter, and Sonia Sodha) clearly had the scope to be relevant to the investigation, although this could be limited in its usefulness given that they had already publicly discussed their ideas about the attention to Basic Income (thus they might have little further to contribute on the subject). However, the scope to clarify or to expand on the subject would make them potentially very useful interviewees.

Academic working in the field of Basic Income

Prominent academic advocates of Basic Income (such as Guy Standing, Malcolm Torry, and Louise Haagh) could contribute expertise derived from their involvement in the discussion of Basic Income over time, as well as knowledge from those they had talked to about Basic Income. They would thus be well placed to reflect upon the change in the attention to Basic Income. However, the drawback is that potentially these figures could overemphasise the importance of the attention (because they want to see increased attention to Basic Income). They could also overemphasise the importance of their own work as a part of the attention.

Think tank researchers working on Basic Income

Think tank reports were identified as being a significant way in which the present attention was different. Researchers involved in the preparation of detailed reports on Basic Income (such as Nick Pearce, Howard Reed, and Anthony Painter) had the scope to comment upon *why* think tanks were engaging with Basic Income. Interest in broader questions about the attention to Basic Income might be limited in such cases however – as it is unlikely to be the focus of their attention (but instead a part of a wider interest in social policy).

Prominent academics recently discussing Basic Income

Prominent academics not previously associated with Basic Income who have recently engaged with it (either in 2015 – 2017 or shortly before) are a part of the contemporary attention to Basic Income as they expand the range of those discussing the idea. This category includes those giving (often tentative) support (such as Ruth Lister and Andrew Gamble) as well as those newly prominent in

critique (such as David Piachaud). They lend their existing prominence to the policy by discussing, rather than ignoring it.

They can thus comment upon *why* they have done so. The prominence of their recent work on the topic is not always indicative of recent attention – it could be that they also have work on the topic that is not as well-known as more recent pieces – and with all three named individuals it was the case that their familiarity with Basic Income *was* older, they were just not associated with it in the same way as other academics.

Critics of Basic Income

Although closely related to the category of prominent academics (above), the increase of critical responses to Basic Income is important as a sign of the attention to Basic Income in its own right. It reflects that there is an increased recognition (by critics) of there being a case to respond to, rather than ignore. Thus, critics of Basic Income who have recently engaged with the topic, even when their critical position is longstanding (such as Ian Gough and Pete Alcock) were potentially useful interviewees as they could give their interpretation of the attention to Basic Income – what they were responding to in their criticism.

Journalists discussing Basic Income

Journalists writing on the subject of Basic Income, especially those writing on the subject on several occasions (such as Jon Stone, Sonia Sodha, and Patrick Wintour) were a potentially useful source for understanding the attention to Basic Income. The discussion of Basic Income in the print media was one very visible way of making the case that there was increased attention to Basic Income.

Journalists could have provided commentary on why they chose to write about the subject of Basic Income when they did – however, I did not successfully recruit any journalists as interviewees.

The lack of successful engagement with journalists was problematic as it means that voices directly addressing the question of why the coverage occurred were lacking. However, journalists might have been of limited usefulness as they may have limited themselves to answers emphasising the neutrality of coverage that is the idealised nature of journalism rather than engaging with their own political perspectives.

Politicians discussing Basic Income

The engagement by some politicians (such as Jon Cruddas MP, Ronnie Cowan MP, Jonathan Reynolds MP, and Caroline Lucas MP) with the topic of Basic Income was an important part of the attention to Basic Income being considered significant, as it was not previously engaged with to any significant degree by MPs. The increased prominence of John McDonnell MP as Shadow Chancellor

has also meant that his support of Basic Income (although long-standing) has impacted on the attention to Basic Income.

A specific example of the political engagement with Basic Income was the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income. This was a significant event during the period being studied, taking place in January 2017 and being the first engagement of this kind with the policy in Parliament. The session had both advocates (Louise Haagh, Becca Kirkpatrick, Annie Miller, and Sam Bowman) and critics (Andrew Harrop, Pete Alcock, and Declan Gaffney) as well as members of the select committee (Steve McCabe MP, Mhairi Black MP, Ms Karen Buck MP, James Cartlidge MP, Frank Field MP, and Craig Mackinlay MP).

I approached all of those present at the evidence session for interviewees as it had the potential to be a major case study. None of the MPs from the select committee were willing to be interviewed, although only two specifically declined (Frank Field MP and Karen Buck MP). This meant that accessing *why* the evidence session had taken place at the time, and with the composition it had, was difficult. Additional explanations beyond “in response to the attention” were offered, but were not consistent. One interviewee suggested the SNP committee member Mhairi Black MP instigated the session (on the basis of the SNPs involvement with Basic Income (Southwood, 2017)), while others suggested Steve McCabe MP’s prior interest was relevant (Kirkpatrick, 2017). As I will go on to discuss (in the section on pragmatism later in this chapter) the lack of availability among committee members means that I am limited in the extent to which I can lay claims to knowledge about motivations, and the conclusions I do draw about this evidence session are clearly contingent on further details which could be contributed in the future.

Basic Income activists

I also identified Basic Income activists outside of the sphere of academia (such as Becca Kirkpatrick and Barb Jacobson) as an important part of the contemporary attention to Basic Income. The attention to Basic Income was previously concentrated around academic debate, so the inclusion of non-academics was a noteworthy change. The activists did not draw on the same sort of expertise as the academic activists (thus could not situate their understanding in the same technical fashion) but they did have their own expertise (within the trades union movement, within welfare rights activism).

Interviewee approaches

Approaches were not limited to an initially identified sample, but were instead made throughout the period of my fieldwork. The additions to the approaches came as further work/engagements with the policy of Basic Income occurred (such as with the interviewees I approached on the basis of their

involvement with the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income – I approached by the individuals giving evidence and the MPs on the committee (as previously discussed). I also approached new interviewees on the basis of either the direct recommendation of interviewees (such as Howard Reed’s recommendation to approach Neal Lawson), or on the basis of them being discussed as relevant in the interviews (such as Malcolm Torry’s discussion of David Piachaud’s involvement in the critical response to Basic Income).

Sampling of journalists as with others was purposive, with journalists writing pieces that I (and/or others) had identified as significant in the attention to Basic Income being included on the basis of the significance of the piece – examples of this would be Jenni Russell, writing positively on the idea of Basic Income in a Times editorial piece in 2015 (Russell, 2015), and Larry Elliott whose 2014 piece (Elliott, 2014) was identified as particularly significant in the mainstreaming of the media attention by Malcolm Torry (2017). Other journalists I approached on the basis of them being prevalent within the media attention to Basic Income in the data I had collected on the mainstream media attention to Basic Income.

A total of 80 approaches were made to potential interviewees. Approaches were made primarily through (posted) letters, rather than email, although where only email addresses could be found, these were used instead. A follow up approach was sent after the initial approach was unanswered for 3 weeks, by email where possible. A postal communication is more difficult to dismiss unopened (you cannot determine what it contains, unlike an email), and indicates a degree of commitment to the research – there is more effort involved than email. This was, for me, an early way of building my interviewees’ trust that I was valuing their time as important (by committing time to the interview recruitment) which Emmel argues is a vital part of recruitment (Emmel, 2013, pp. 121-127). With some potential interviewees the identification of a postal address was simple (both postal and email addresses for MPs and Peers are available publicly on the Parliament website, for example). Journalists’ postal addresses are more challenging, and I had to rely on correspondence addresses for their respective newspapers. This may have impacted on the lack of success in accessing journalists as a potential interviewee group (I will return to the subject of difficulties in accessing groups later in this chapter).

The letter of approach briefly outlined the project and the proposed interview (including details of the request to conduct the interview in a non-anonymised format). I proposed that interviews would take 45 minutes to an hour. This allowed long enough to discuss ideas in depth while also not demanding too much time of my interviewees (thus making them more likely to decline). This sort of time frame is typical of the type of interview and was sufficient to conduct the interviews within. In

practice, my shortest interview was 30 minutes (due to time constraints) and the longest close to two hours (as the interviewee was happy to talk for longer).

As there were relatively low numbers of potential interviewees, anonymisation of sources would have been problematic: it would have been relatively easy to identify anonymous sources based on the topics which they discussed. This would have meant either interviews would be of little use in order to protect anonymity, or the degree of anonymity would be inadequate. As a result of this I elected to pursue interviews on the basis of *not* maintaining anonymity, and approached interviewees on this basis. This lack of anonymity most likely impacted on the willingness of individuals approached for interviews to agree to the interview, as I will discuss in more detail in the next section (Access, Elites, and Pragmatism).

Out of these approaches, I conducted a total of 19 interviews with 21 individuals³. Only 7 potential interviewees who I approached specifically declined to be interviewed – most of those who were contacted but not interviewed did not reply at all. The lack of a response can be treated as declining (although it could also be a failure to reach them at the contact addresses used).

Contacting potential interviewees and completing the interviews took place over a nine-month period, from January 2017 till September 2017, with a pause in recruitment attempts during the General Election campaign (as many of the potential interviewees were either political journalists or politicians who were otherwise engaged during the campaign). As my later interviews were reaching the stage of not adding any significant variety in interpretations of the attention to Basic Income, I made the decision to not pursue further recruitment at this stage.

Access, Elites, and Pragmatism

Access to interviewees was a challenge that I recognised within the development of the research project – particularly with politicians and journalists – for a variety of reasons around their (elite) status and relationship with the Basic Income discourses. The political environment of 2015-2017, including as it did two General elections, the EU referendum, and two leadership contests in the Labour Party, also impacted upon the likelihood that potential interviewees would be willing to make time to discuss Basic Income. However, while problems in accessing interviewees is a limiting factor, it does not undermine claims to knowledge, when knowledge is understood on the basis of epistemological pragmatism.

³ One interview, with the Institute for Policy Research, was of a team working on Basic Income – Nick Pearce, the Director was the initial contact, and was joined by the primary investigator Luke Martinelli, and a PhD Student Joe Crisp

A pragmatic epistemology seeks contingent knowledge of social phenomenon, a knowledge with practical application, based upon experience. The purpose of this pragmatic understanding of knowledge is described by Dewey as *control*:

“Control, for Dewey, is simply our capacity to cope with the world around us; it is a means of action that becomes available to us through the understanding of relationships, a knowledge we only acquire by resolving problematic situations... to achieve control is merely to establish a temporary and contingent resting place for inquiry. Nothing is ever settled once and for all.” (Cochran, 2002, p. 527).

In the context of this project, “control” is the conclusions which I draw about the attention to Basic Income given the process of research. These are conclusions about the nature of the mainstream attention to Basic Income, and how activists should shape their work to recognise the variety of different utopian understandings which underlie the attention by being more specific in *their* utopian vision when discussing Basic Income.

What is significant in Dewey’s discussion of control is the *temporary* and *contingent* nature of knowledge. Future events, or the availability of different sources of information, or a differently positioned investigator could provide different insights and different conclusions. This does not undermine the usefulness of the existing conclusions – but instead recognises that knowledge, by its very nature, is not a settled affair. In the context of my interviewee recruitment, this means that although the lack of journalists and limited number of politicians interviewed does limit what can be known it does not invalidate what can be known given those limitations.

But why were some subjects reasonably accessible and others less so? Oblené (2009, p.193) notes that key to recruiting elite subjects is answering convincingly the question what benefit the interview would be to the interviewee as well as the researcher. The interviewee must also be convinced that the interview will be a worthwhile use of limited time, and of their expertise (Emmel, 2013, p.126). As all of my potential interviewees had expressed interest in, or advocated for, Basic Income, they would all recognise (to a degree) that the research was interesting on that basis. However, this would be far more the case for academics, activists, and think tank researchers than it would be for journalists and politicians as they engage in similar research – and are thus would be more likely to recognise my research as useful or to recognise having been in a similar role themselves.

In the case of journalists the argument about an existing interest in the subject is at its weakest as although they have pre-existing coverage, this does not necessarily imply a personal interest (the

coverage could be “doing their job”). With some journalists there was evidence of a personal interest in Basic Income: Jon Stone specifically stated his own interest in an earlier discussion on Twitter (Stone, 2013); Samuel Brittan co-authored a book on the subject (Brittan and Webb, 1990). Samuel Brittan, having retired and not been involved in the contemporary attention was not approached for interview however, and Jon Stone had indicated a willingness to be interviewed, but this was then disrupted by the 2017 General Election campaign (which is part of a general discussion on competing events drawing attention that I will return to shortly).

Another explanation for the lack of access to journalists and politicians is that they may not have wanted to be publicly associated with further comment on the subject of Basic Income as it could have been a sensitive subject. By a sensitive topic I am taking Renzetti and Lee’s definition of *“sensitive topics present problems because research into them involves potential costs to those participating in the research”* (Renzetti and Lee, 1993, p.4). For the politicians I approached as a part of my investigation, there is the potential for the subject to be sensitive, as premature public airing of private debate over policy could be damaging to the progress and openness of discussions. At the Compass meeting on the 6th June, John McDonnell was expressly being careful to ensure that his discussion of the idea of a Basic Income, and his ambition for it to have a role in internal debate over welfare policy direction, was not conflated with him stating policy (owing to his role as Shadow Chancellor) (Field notes, 2016). Journalists may have considered discussion of their perception of the idea of Basic Income and its attention to be potentially at odds with efforts towards neutrality.

A further explanation for the unwillingness to be interviewed (either in the form of a direct refusal, or a lack of response) is that the contacts may have been unwilling to have their motivations probed. This is plausibly the case with the Work and Pensions select committee chair (Frank Field MP) who stated that the evidence session was a response to the attention to Basic Income (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2016) but who may have had other motives (such as attempting to undermine or dismiss the idea). Similar questions about motives can be suggested of a number of pieces in the media – for example, the motivation for the coverage of the Green Party and Basic Income in early 2015 (e.g. Bennett, 2015a; Collins, 2015; Wintour, 2015) may have related more to a desire to criticise the Green Party than to reporting news. On reflection, modifying my approach to journalists (who might have been more easily anonymised than the other groups of interviewees) might have achieved better results.

On the other hand, such a modification might have achieved very little, as another explanation for the lack of willingness of the two least represented groups (politicians and journalists) was the political circumstance of Brexit. As well as the ongoing Brexit negotiations being a significant focus of

political attention (limiting time and availability of both groups), the calling of the 2017 General Election sat within the fieldwork phase of my research. In addition to the time and attention drawn by the 2017 General Election, the timing of the election disrupted the possibility for progress in the formulation and development of Basic Income as a policy proposal in the Labour Party. A working group was established in early 2017 (Srnicek, 2017; Standing, 2017), but had had limited time to develop proposals prior to the election which meant that Basic Income did not move onto the policy agenda in a visible fashion (e.g. in the manifesto) at this point.

The lack of availability of journalists to provide commentary on the nature of the mainstream attention to Basic Income does represent a way in which the conclusions drawn in this thesis are contingent. I have drawn inferences about motivations from written sources but there is only so much which can be inferred into editorial processes and discussions (in other words, why the decision to give space in the print format was made) from the printed pieces themselves. As noted, I have made use of the media analysis to support this lack of direct interviews, and I will return to discussion of the media analysis after detailing the interviews.

Interviews

Having detailed the types of individuals approached for interviews, I will now discuss the interviews themselves. The interviews were semi-structured and non-anonymised. The interview schedule featured questions that were asked of every interviewee around their interpretation of Basic Income and the contemporary attention to Basic Income, and specific questions tailored to the reason that they were being approached. Interviews were planned to take around 45 minutes to an hour. I will discuss the decision making behind the structure of interviews below, as well as discussing the already noted lack of availability of specific groups for interviews.

My interviews were semi-structured. As previously mentioned, it was necessary to adopt an approach which could respond flexibly to changing circumstances around Basic Income. A structured interview with a single set of questions would have failed to engage with the variety of different types of interviewees and their individual experiences. A fully unstructured interview approach was not appropriate either, as all of the interviews were sought in order to contribute on the central question of why there was increased attention to Basic Income. I give an example of an interview schedule in appendix A (on page 203) noting which questions are general, and which are specifically tailored to the interviewee.

While my selection of subjects primarily related to their position of specific knowledge, it was not my intention that my interviews were solely *“information gathering meetings used primarily for collecting facts and knowledge”* based on a *“naïve image of the expert as a source of objective*

information” (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009, p. 5). While my interviewees did have a role as information sources – for example in the interview with Ruth Lister around the history of Basic Income and Child Poverty Action Group and the Labour Party’s Commission on Social Justice – this was not their main purpose. Instead, the interviews sought to access knowledge and reflections upon the topic area – the contemporary and future role of a Basic Income in a welfare settlement – which interviewees were suited to provide as a result of their specific knowledge. Thus, in the example of Ruth Lister what was sought was an interpretation of the contemporary attention to Basic Income situated in a perspective of a career focused on poverty and welfare in the UK.

Christmann (2009, pp. 161, 165) states that providing questions in advance is both necessary and useful as most subjects request the questions before committing to be interviewed (thus increasing the likelihood of obtaining interviews), and it gives them time to reflect on the topics before the interview, giving them the opportunity to reflect more deeply than just the time in the interview itself would allow. In some cases, interviewees made direct reference to the questions supplied in advance, in others they did not, but most were prepared to answer the questions, and gave full and rich responses without significant further prompting from myself as the interviewer.

Being able to prepare in advance of the interview also created the risk that interviewees could choose to present an account more biased by their own interpretation than if they were responding to the questions on the spot. However, the use of follow up questions helped to mitigate this as a concern – as they would still be responding to some fresh questions. It is also the case that, given knowledge of the topic I was investigating if not specific questions I planned to ask, interviewees could attempt to present a specific interpretation anyway. Furthermore, as indicated in the earlier paragraph on the purpose of the interviews, the personal interpretations of the attention to Basic Income was what I was seeking to access.

Media Analysis

Supplementing my semi-structured interviews, I collated the media coverage discussing Basic Income in the UK national dailies (and Sunday editions where relevant) for the years available on the Nexis database (1984 being the earliest instance, 2002 for complete collections on all newspapers being discussed). Manual thematic coding was focused upon the 2015 – 2017 period. This collation and analysis had three purposes: to assess the observation that there was increased mainstream attention (which had been made in both media (Sodha, 2016) and academic (Sloman, 2018) contexts); to assist in identifying additional suitable interviewees writing in the print media; and most importantly to appraise the role of the coverage in the attention to Basic Income. I will discuss

the results within chapter 4, and detail the decisions around the gathering of data in the rest of this section.

Data was gathered using the Nexis database to search for all articles containing “Basic Income” or “Citizen’s Income” (Basic Income being the most common terminology by a considerable distance) in the print editions of major UK dailies (The Guardian, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Financial Times, The Metro, The Times, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, London Evening Standard, The Sun, The Express, City AM, i, Daily Star) and their Sunday editions. The Daily Record was excluded as being Scotland only, and the Morning Star on the basis of its low readership.

Nexis groups identical pieces automatically (in, for example, different editions of papers), but in some instances repeats of pieces with larger differences between editions had to be manually excluded. The pieces were then skimmed to check that they were not referring to “basic Income tax” or similar phrases that matched the search terms but were not about the Basic Income policy. It was also necessary to manually exclude pieces where the search result arose just from links to other pieces recorded within the database entry. Pieces with short or minimal discussion of Basic Income were not excluded however.

Pieces were then saved as individual sources in Nvivo, and classification data added. No attempt was made to distinguish between physical positions of the pieces within the print editions as although this might give an additional understanding of the importance of the piece, it would be difficult to establish the relative importance of positions on an inter-newspaper basis.

The focus on the print editions of national dailies is in order to attempt to develop some comparable figures over time. Print editions of newspapers are limited in their size and thus have to make decisions over what is most significant to be printed in a more consistent way than editorial decisions in online contexts (where there are no strict needs to publish a consistent amount between days). The consistency in length means that a comparison between when Basic Income has been discussed and when it has *not* been discussed (but something else has) gives an indication of its relative importance (from the perspective of newspapers’ editorial decision making). This in turn gives an indication of increasing mainstream attention when the number of articles about Basic Income in the print media increases. This is in a way which would not necessarily be true of media sources where there is not a maximum available length (as nothing is necessarily being excluded as a result of the presence of the Basic Income coverage)

While the length of the print sources do vary over the full time period in which I gathered data from (going back as far as 1984 in fully digitised content for the Financial Times), the period of detailed

analysis (2015 – 2017) did not see any major changes in newspaper formats, beyond the cessation of *The Independent* as a print edition. This means that this measure of relative attention is a consistent one within a particular newspaper – although the different lengths of newspapers means that inter-newspaper comparisons are not direct (thus direct comparison of how much more importance the Guardian places on Basic Income as compared to the Daily Mail is not possible).

The data on print edition coverage gives an insight into the importance of Basic Income as it is understood by journalists (and editorial teams). Disaggregating journalists and editorial teams is not possible with the available data, although it might have been possible to comment upon it if journalists had been willing/available for interview. This is not in itself equivalent to a measure of “mainstream attention”, as it fails to capture other mainstream non-print source of news, such as television, radio, and online coverage. It does however give *some* indication of a wider “mainstream” attention to the policy.

Excluding the BBCs online news coverage is problematic in terms of public familiarity with Basic Income, given that the BBC One news coverage is the most commonly used news source for UK adults (62%) and BBC News Channel (4th at 26%), the BBC website (6th at 23%) and BBC Two (10th at 14%) also all appear in the top ten most common news sources, and rank more highly than the most popular print paper (the Daily Mail, 11th most popular at 12%) (Jigsaw Research, 2018, p. 21).

While television and radio news have the same constraints upon space (or, more accurately time) as print media, the lack of searchable transcripts means that inclusion on the same basis as the print edition material was impractical, due to the difficulties of identifying all relevant material. The broad range of what could be included and excluded from the data as news output is also problematic – the key news bulletins are fairly clear, but there is a wide range of news and current affairs broadcasting that could include discussion of Basic Income. The discussions of Basic Income in broadcast media are relevant, and important, just not possible to compare on the same simple basis as the print media coverage. I do make reference to specific programmes, which have covered Basic Income in discussions of broader media content on Basic Income within the thesis, but not as part of the systematic discussion of media attention for these reasons.

The systematic gathering of print media material provides support for the claim that there has been a significant change in the nature of the attention – particularly the mainstream attention – to Basic Income in recent years. As I shall go on to discuss in the next chapter there are over 10 times as many articles published in 2016-2017 than in 2014-2015 (and nearly double the number of pieces in 2015 as compared to 2013-2014). The use of this specific data set does not preclude the use of other UK media sources, and I will refer to relevant pieces throughout the thesis.

Conclusion

The use of Levitas' imaginary reconstitution of society as a basis for my thematic analysis provides me with a useful tool with which to delve into the detail of why the attention to Basic Income has occurred in the way in which it has. It facilitates building detail around the topics being linked with the attention to Basic Income – austerity, automation, policy trials – by asking questions about how the idea that is Basic Income is thought about and discussed. It also facilitates the linking together of interviews and media discussions of Basic Income with similar themes and considerations. This in turn facilitates answering my research questions – why has there been so much attention, what is being discussed as Basic Income, and what role will Basic Income have in future welfare settlements in the UK. In the next chapter I will discuss findings from the interviews and media analysis, establishing the major themes which I will then go on to discuss in chapters 5 to 7.

Chapter 4 – Interview and media analysis findings

Introduction

In this chapter I will set out the principal findings from the media analysis and the semi-structured interviews. Though these I shall show how I moved from explanations of the attention to Basic Income which focused primarily upon the descriptive (such as the attention relating to discussion of automation, or trials) towards the explanations that engaged with why *those* explanations at *this* time were important. In other words, why here, and why now?

The increased attention to Basic Income is characterised by interviewees particularly in terms of changing mainstream media engagement. Coverage of Basic Income focused around discussions of: automation, problems with existing welfare policy and austerity, Basic Income trials, and political attention to Basic Income. This assessment of the coverage corresponds with the description of the attention from interviewees, although arguments around automation are not as highlighted by interviewees as they are in the press coverage.

Engagement by groups previously not involved in the Basic Income discourse (including both think tanks and politicians) is also identified as a significant indication of increased attention to Basic Income by interviewees. These engagements follow similar lines to the media output in their focus, although in these cases problems with the existing welfare settlement are more emphasised than automation, trials, and political engagement. Given the purpose of think tank reports (political engagement) and the format of the reports as trials of specific policy formulations, I argue that they also represent these two categories. I discuss the media and non-media attention to Basic Income in the first two sections of this chapter respectively.

After this, I will turn to the theories contributed by interviewees as to why the attention to Basic Income has occurred. Interviewees discussed both the attention in the media specifically and the attention more generally. There are three major strands within the interviewee interpretations of the attention: contextual change; hope, desire and utopian demands; and respectability. Each of these theories contributes to understanding the attention to Basic Income – they are not mutually exclusive.

Media Coverage of Basic Income (focusing on 2015 – 2017)

The media attention to Basic Income in 2015 – 2017 is a major indicator of a change in the nature of the attention to Basic Income. The significant change in the quantity of coverage which discusses Basic Income indicates that Basic Income has become more mainstream than in the past. The media attention most clearly indicates increased knowledge and attention to Basic Income among

journalists and editors, but it also indicates to an extent an increased attention to Basic Income more generally. This is both through readerships becoming more aware of the policy, and through the increased media discussion of Basic Income representing media outlets reacting to changing readership interests. However, this is limited as the media attention is concentrated within the broadsheet media, and The Guardian and The Independent specifically. The principal elements of the attention identified by interviewees are visible within the content of the media coverage; the pattern of the media coverage over the course 2015 – 2017 shows that specific events had a specific and significant impact on the coverage.

I discussed in the previous chapter the methodology used in gathering and analysing the media content. The count of articles published per year in the selected UK print editions demonstrates a major increase in the number of articles mentioning Basic Income (as shown in Figure 1, below).

There is clearly a significant increase in attention over 2015 – 2017 with the increase most marked in 2016 and 2017, but identifiable in 2014 and 2015. The first year in which there are more than 9 articles is 2014 (this includes data going as far back as 1984, although digitised editions for all of the newspapers only goes as far back as 2000 within the lexis database). Although the figures for 2016 and 2017 are the most striking, the change in coverage in 2014-2015 also reflects a significant increase.

By comparison with the coverage in 2015 – 2017, between 1984 and 2010 the number of articles published per year mentioning Basic Income averaged at around 3 per year. In 1989-90 and 1994-95 there are peaks of attention, with 8 articles published in each year. These years correspond to years in which the Liberal Democrats were engaging in discussions about Basic Income (1994-95) and in which the Green Party was receiving increased scrutiny after successes in European elections (1989-90). It is to be noted however that results are not complete prior to 2000, so it may be that there was coverage (particularly in the non-broadsheet newspapers, where digitisation is less complete) not captured within this analysis. It is improbable that there is any significant coverage missed as a result of the lacking digitisation, given that the majority of coverage from the later (more complete) data appears in the broadsheet press (as I shall discuss next). The 2000-2010 average of 1.4 articles per year is complete for all publications however, and shows that for a significant period prior to the identified contemporary attention to Basic Income, there was little or no mainstream attention to Basic Income occurring within the UK print media.

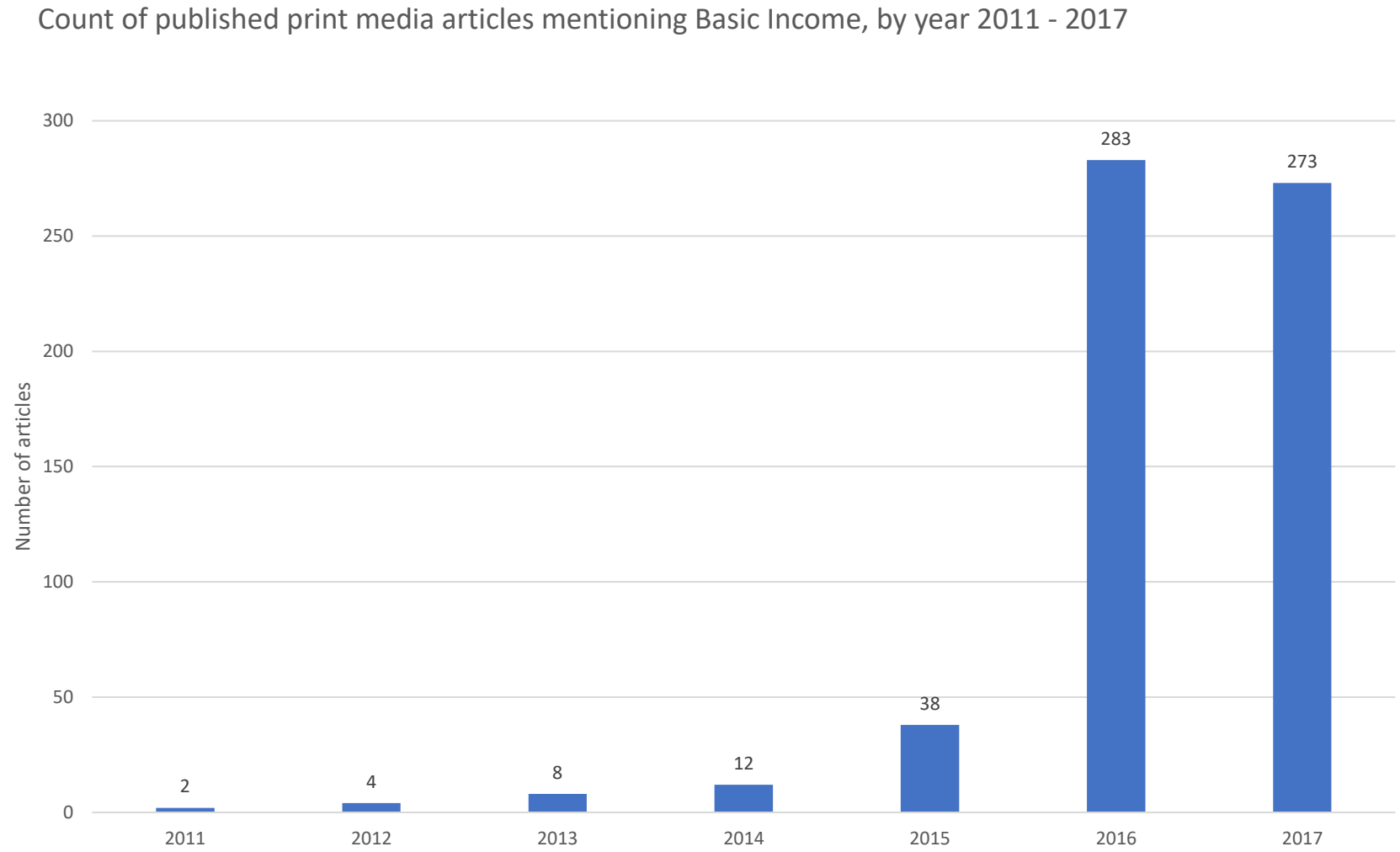


Figure 1 - Count of published print media articles mentioning Basic Income, by year 2011 - 2017)

The increased media attention to Basic Income was dominated by the discussion of the policy in The Guardian (36% of all coverage in 2015 – 2017) and The Independent/*i* (28% of all coverage in 2015 – 2017⁴). However, while these papers make up a significant proportion of the overall media coverage, it is not fair to say that the increased media attention is just increased attention from them. The proportion of the coverage I identified as discussing Basic Income in the tabloid newspapers (The London Evening Standard, The Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, The Sun, The Metro, City AM, The Express) drops only slightly from 16% of the overall coverage, to 13% of the overall coverage. Had the increased attention in the print media *only* derived from the coverage in The Guardian and The Independent then the proportion of the coverage coming from the tabloid press would have reduced more significantly.

The only significant change in the composition of the media coverage between pre-2015 and 2015 – 2017 is the change in the attention from the Financial Times. Prior to 2015, 24% of the media attention to Basic Income came from the Financial Times, whereas in 2015 – 2017 this dropped to just 3%. There are two explanations for this difference. The first is that the coverage prior to 2015 in the Financial Times was dominated by their economics commentator Samuel Brittan, a long-standing advocate for Negative Income Tax as a variant of Basic Income (see discussion in chapter 2 for their differences). In addition to several pieces within the Financial Times over a long time period (Brittan, 1987; Brittan, 1991; Brittan, 1995; Brittan, 1999; Brittan, 2000; Brittan, 2006) Brittan also co-authored a book making the case for Negative Income Tax as a welfare policy, with Steve Webb⁵ (Brittan and Webb, 1990). While Samuel Brittan has not retired, he has written significantly less for the Financial Times since 2014, thus his interest has not been driving their coverage. The second explanation for the drop in the coverage of the Basic Income debate in the Financial Times is that the attention has been significantly emphasising Basic Income as unconditional transfer payments as a “left-wing” policy, rather than the rational-integration of tax and benefits “liberal” policy of Negative Income Tax (of the sort championed by Samuel Brittan, and historically by Juliet Rhys-Williams).

⁴ While there are differences between the two publications, I have for this purpose aggregated the two given similarities in target audience and political stance, and because The Independent ceased operating as a print edition in mid 2016.

⁵ Who later was one of the commissioners for John Smith’s Commission on Social Justice, and went on to be a Liberal Democrat MP, and Minister of State for Pensions in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government.

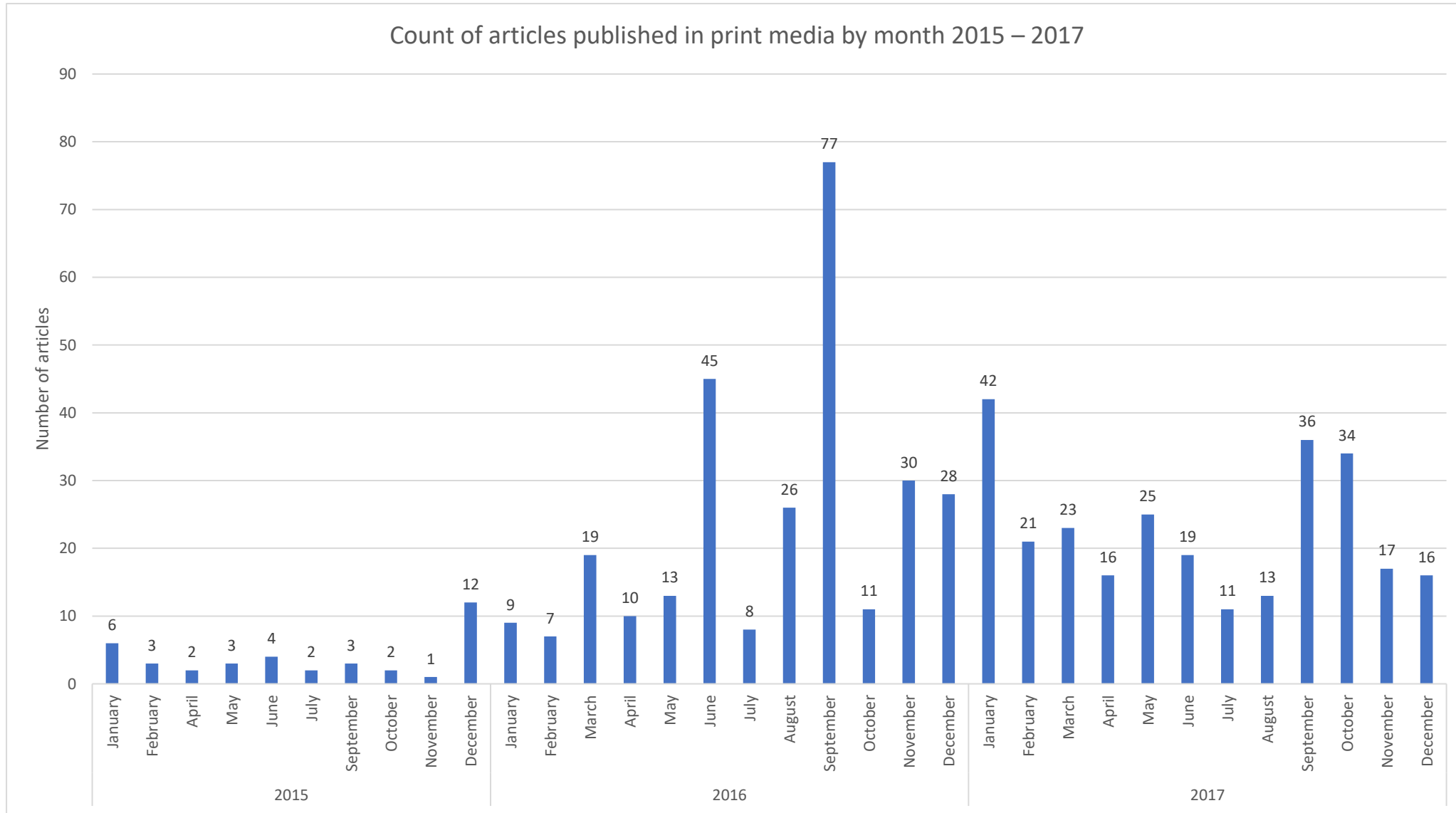


Figure 2 - Count of articles published in print media by month 2015 – 2017

Figure 2 (above) shows the articles published by month over the 2015 – 2017 period. Only two months have no articles – March and August in 2015 – otherwise, there is a relatively consistent level of articles published over 2015 (averaging just over 3 per month), and then there is an increase to a relatively consistent level of articles in both 2016 and 2017 (both averaging at around 23 articles per month).

There are a few significant spikes. These correspond to pieces covering:

- The Green Party discussions of the policy during the 2015 General Election long campaign (particularly January/February 2015)
- The publication of the RSA's report *Creative Citizen, Creative State* (Painter and Thoun, 2015) in December 2015
- The launch of the Compass Report in June 2016, with the corresponding announcement by John McDonnell that he intended to “win the argument on Basic Income in the party” (Stone, 2016a)
- The results of the Swiss referendum on Basic Income in June 2016
- John McDonnell's Labour Party conference speech in September 2016 in which Basic Income was referenced
- The start of the Finland trial of Basic Income in January 2017
- Inclusion of funding for Basic Income trials in the Scottish Parliament in September/October 2017

However, there are also consistently pieces discussing Basic Income across the whole of the 2016-2017 period, and most of 2015. This coverage discusses Basic Income in relation to a variety of other specific events (like the Ontario trials of Basic Income, or discussions of privately funded trials from a Silicon Valley start-up called Y Combinator) but also engages in discussion around the advantages and disadvantages of Basic Income.

The consistency of the publication of articles is important, because if the attention only occurred in response to specific events (such as the ones just mentioned) but not at any other time then what would be significant is those events, rather than Basic Income itself. Instead, there is a generally increased number of articles published on the subject which supports the claim of increased mainstream attention to Basic Income.

It is possible within the print media attention to Basic Income to identify several key contexts in which discussions of the idea are occurring: around technology and automation; around proposed/operating trials (including Finland, Ontario, and Utrecht) and the Swiss referendum on

Basic Income in 2016; and around UK political parties support of the policy. The coverage also contains (unsurprisingly) discussions of arguments in favour, and criticisms of, Basic Income and intertwined with these categories is debate around the current welfare state. There is also a strand of discussion around the future of work which links with the material around automation as well as the debate around the criticisms of/advocacy for Basic Income. As discussed in Chapter 3, coding was undertaken in two batches, covering Jan 2015 – June 2016, and July 2016 – Dec 2017 respectively. These halves of the time period form a relatively natural split on the basis of the concentrations of coverage, as well as being conveniently positioned within the timeframe of the research. As shown in Figure 2 on page above⁶⁶, the latter half shows a marked increase in the number of pieces per month, with a mean of 7.8 pieces per month in the first half as compared to 25.2 pieces per month in the second half.

The proportions of articles coded as discussing each of these contexts is shown in

The difference between the most discussed factor relating to Basic Income in these two periods is clearly a product of events. The Swiss referendum, and the early discussions of various trials all occurred within the first half of the 2015 – 2017 time period; meanwhile, the discussion of Basic Income by John McDonnell mostly developed after June 2016. Correspondingly, the proportions of pieces discussing trials or the referendum is less significant after June 2016, while political attention increases in significance as more events relating to the political attention occur.

Figure 3- Comparison between key nodes for Jan 2015-Jun 2016, and Jul 2016-Dec 2017 (below). This shows that in the first half of the focused period of study (Jan 2015 – Jun 2016) over half (54.2%) of all of the coverage discussing Basic Income was coded as discussing either the Swiss Referendum⁶ or a proposed⁷, in progress⁸, or previous⁹, trial/trials of Basic Income. In the latter half of the coverage (Jul 2016 – Dec 2017), the most significant context in which Basic Income is covered is in discussions of Basic Income by UK political parties (44%).

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⁶ Which took place on June 5th 2016, and which had been due to take place since receiving enough signatures on a public initiative ballot in October 2013.

⁷ This included the Finland and Ontario trials prior to them commencing, as well as proposals in Scotland, Barcelona, and Oakland CA (Y-Combinator), the Netherlands, and others.

⁸ Finland's trial ran from January 2017 – December 2018, Ontario's from November 2017-March 2019 (the project was cancelled in August 2018 after a change in government).

⁹ This included references to trials of Negative Income Tax in the USA in the late 1960s and early 70s (the largest of which was the Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance experiment – SIME-DIME), the MINCOM experiment in Manitoba (Canada), and more recent trials in the development context, such as the trials in Madya Pradesh (India), Namibia, and Give Directly's data from Uganda and Kenya.

Comparison between key nodes between two time periods (Jan 2015-Jun 2016, and Jul 2016-Dec 2017)

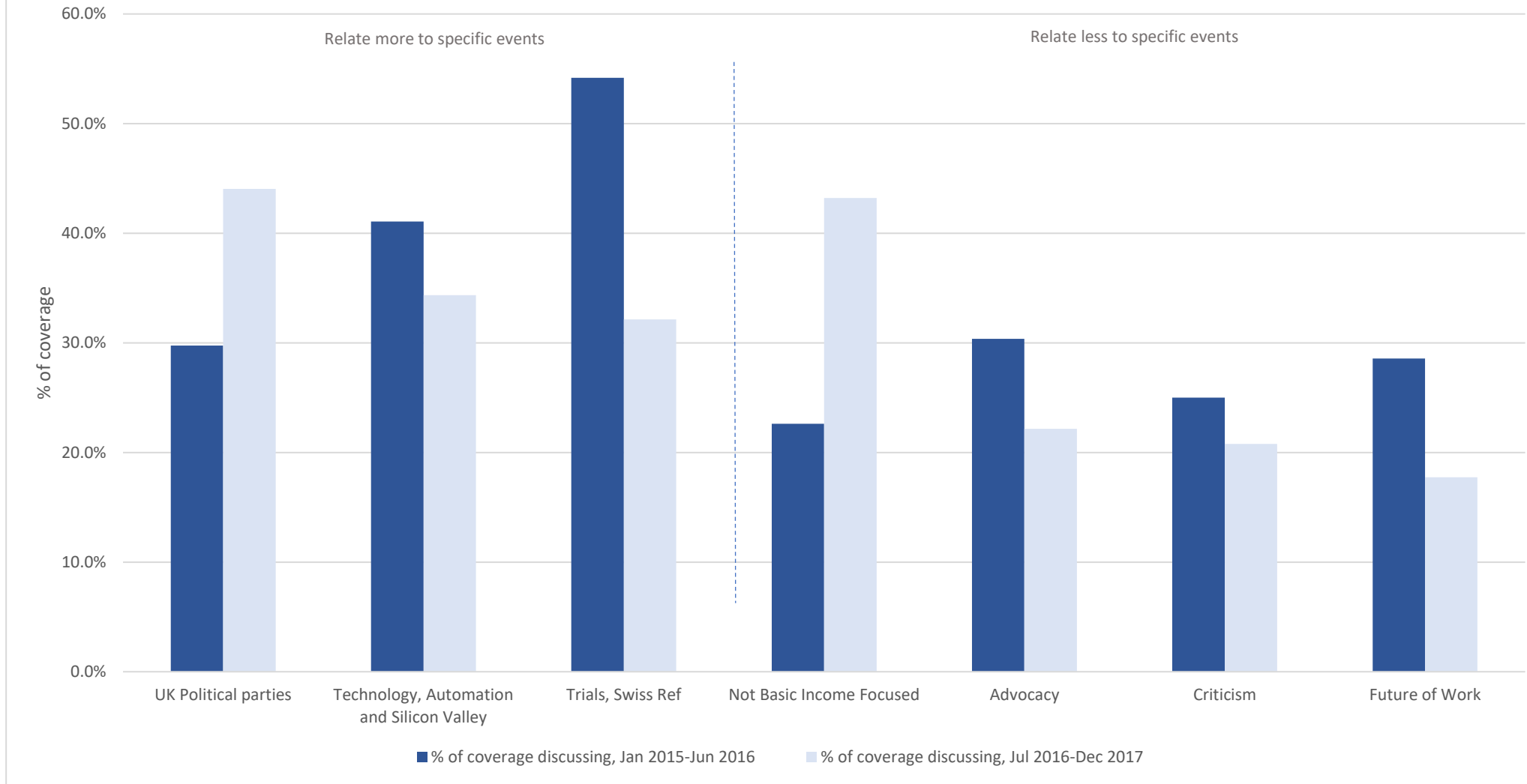


Figure 3- Comparison between key nodes for Jan 2015-Jun 2016, and Jul 2016-Dec 2017

UK Political Parties

The attention to Basic Income by UK political parties is important in the attention to Basic Income across the whole 2015 – 2017 period, being coded in 29.8% of coverage in the first half, and 44% of coverage in the second half. There are, as previously discussed, a number of significant events relating to the political attention to Basic Income which occur during the 2015 – 2017 period.

The Green Party policy of Basic Income is discussed and scrutinised at the start of 2015, with television interviews with Andrew Marr (Bennett, 2015b) and Andrew Neill (Bennett, 2015a) of the then Green Party leader Natalie Bennett as well as the print discussion (which included Collins, 2015; Hutton, 2015; Riley-Smith, 2015; Sylvester and Thomson, 2015; Wintour, 2015). Over 50% of all sources in Q1 2015 are coded for the Green Party (as can be seen in Figure 4, on pg. 71), showing that this element of the attention to Basic Income is a very significant part of the overall media attention to Basic Income.

The impetus for this discussion, however, was not a policy change, or speech by the Green Party, but appears to emerge more from the increased scrutiny of the Green Party resulting from their gains in polls and in party membership (dubbed the “Green surge”). Thus, it is not an event pertaining to Basic Income per se driving attention on this occasion, but rather changing circumstances (the relative prominence of the Green Party) making discussion more relevant. As this attention marks the start of the period I am focusing on I will return to further discussion of it, and its meaning, in later chapters. The focus here is on whether the media attention is to Basic Income, or just to events which happen to relate to it – in this instance, there is a mixture of the two. This is noticeable with the Green Party as, despite minimal events (a policy document (The Green Party, 2015a) and an article by co-leaders Lucas and Bartley (Lucas and Bartley, 2017)) pertaining to their Basic Income policy over the period, I have coded pieces discussing them throughout the 2015 – 2017 period as shown in Figure 4 below. The Green Party has become linked to the UK debate around Basic Income in media discussions, and is thus discussed regularly even when there are no specific events or actions prompting their inclusion.

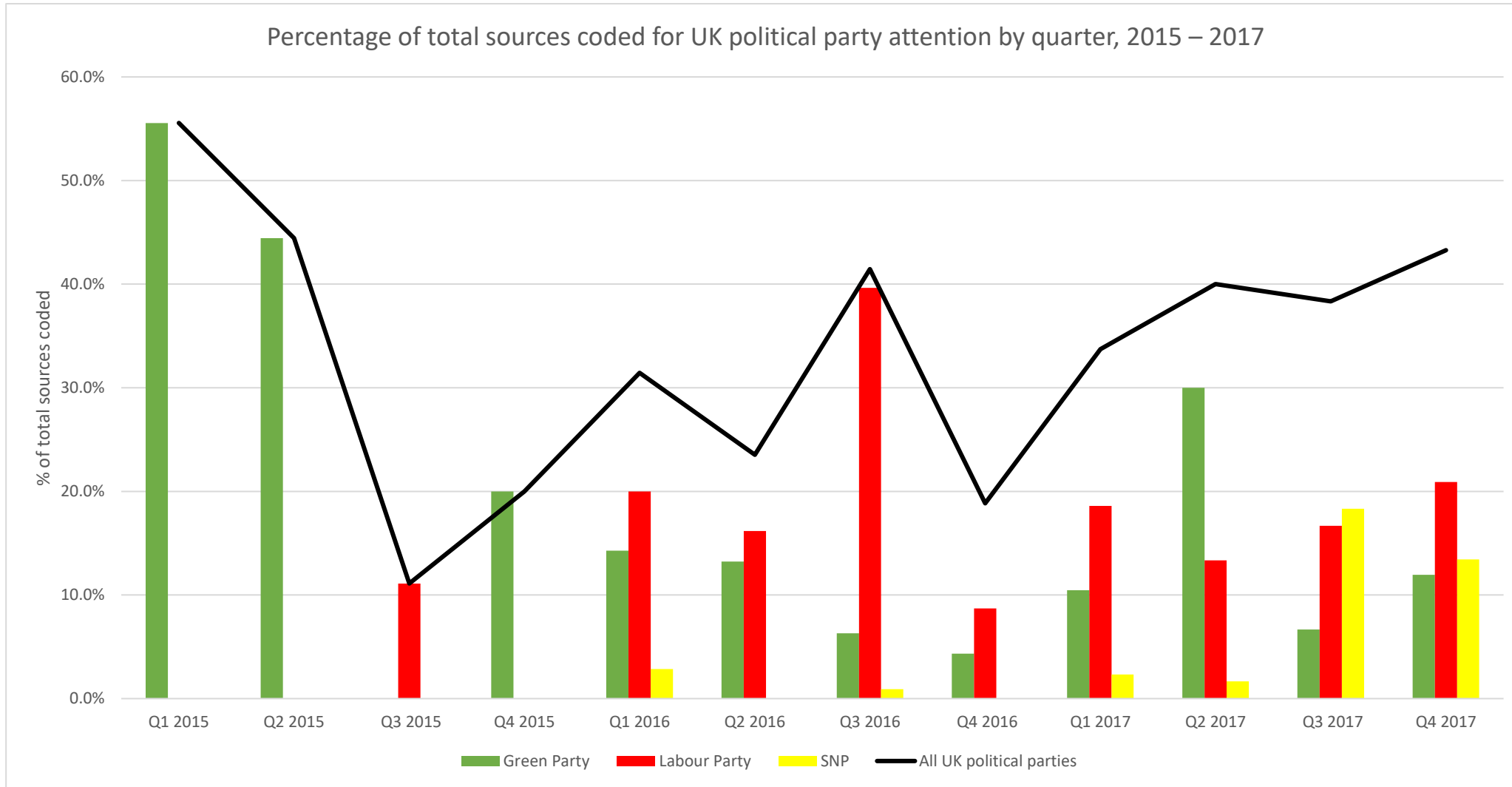


Figure 4 - Sources coded for UK political parties and Basic Income, by quarter 2015 – 2017

John McDonnell's advocacy for Basic Income within the Labour Party is a significant factor within the coverage of Basic Income over the 2015 – 2017 period. Both June 2016 (in Q2) and September 2016 (in Q3) see a considerable volume of coverage discussing the Labour Party and Basic Income, although in June 2016 this is as part of a significant volume of coverage in general (and thus the attention to the Labour Party is not as large a percent of coverage overall in Q2 2016 as compared to Q3 2016, where it is). This coverage corresponds to McDonnell's pledge at the launch of the Compass report on Basic Income to "win the argument on Basic Income in the Labour Party" (Field notes, 2016; Sheffield, 2016a), and his Labour Party conference speech in which he repeated this advocacy for Basic Income (Adams, 2016; Chorley and Fisher, 2016; Harris, 2016a).

However, discussion of the Labour Party and Basic Income occurs as a consistent portion of the coverage, rather than being isolated, as can be seen in Figure 1Figure 4, above. Discussion of the policy was (and is in 2019) ongoing, but without significant events. The Labour Party conference in 2017 had no major reference to the policy (although it did come up in fringe discussions (Field notes, 2017)) and neither did the General Election campaign of 2017. Consistent with Figure 3 (p.69) there is significantly more coverage of UK political parties' attention from Q3 2016 onwards shown in Figure 4. It is also clear from Figure 4 that the attention overlaps between the political parties – this varies between mentions of the policy being common to several parties in a longer discussion about one Party, or detailed reporting of several parties' discussions of Basic Income.

The SNPs attention to Basic Income – or more accurately its impact on the UK national print media – is driven by specific events (when it impacts at all), with the attention in Q3-4 of 2017 pertaining to the inclusion of funding for a Basic Income trial in the SNP's Holyrood finance speech in the autumn of 2017. The only significant discussion of the Conservative Party and Basic Income occurs in Q4 2016, when (then) Conservative MP and former minister, Nick Boles publicly criticised Basic Income – otherwise there has been little engagement by the Conservative Party.

Swiss Referendum, and trials (proposed, past, and in progress)

Discussing in detail the various trials of Basic Income which arose as serious proposals – and even actualised as trials – during the 2015 – 2017 period would involve a substantial digression. For the purpose of this chapter it is sufficient to note that there are three broad groups of trials which are discussed: proposed trials in a variety of "western" welfare state contexts (including those which started during 2015 – 2017: Ontario and Finland); current and recent trials in "developing" welfare contexts (including India, Namibia, Uganda, and Kenya); and historic trials in the US and Canada (Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance Experiment (SIME-DIME) and the Manitoba Income

Maintenance Experiment (MINCOM) being the major examples). Added to these is the Swiss referendum which took place in June 2016 as a result of a successful citizens' initiative.

Prior to 2015 there is, as shown in Figure 1 (pg. 64), relatively little attention paid to Basic Income in the UK print media. The variety of trials in developing welfare contexts (India, Namibia, Uganda and Kenya) between 2010 and 2014 receive little attention. It is only after 2015 that trials started to receive significant press attention; this coincided with proposals for trials in geographically closer, and contextually more similar welfare states to the UK. However, there were proposed trials (and ongoing ones) outside the context of western welfare states during the 2015 – 2017 period – such as those ongoing with GiveDirectly in Uganda and Kenya. Given this, it would seem that the proximity of the newer trials is what drove attention to them – as it is the more proximate examples (geographically, and in the context of economic development) that are discussed – rather than attention to Basic Income resulting in press paying more attention to trials (as otherwise the other examples might have more attention).

The Swiss referendum also played a significant role in the attention to Basic Income, although only during 2016, and especially in May/June (the vote took place on June 5th, 2016). This supports the conclusion that the attention to Basic Income within the media was more about the events to do with Basic Income, rather than as a more general increase in attention. However, the campaign for a Swiss referendum started in 2013, with sufficient signatures being collected to have the policy put to a referendum in October 2013. Coverage of earlier stages of the debate gained relatively minimal attention in the UK press, principally in response to campaign images of a Swiss bank vault filled with coins, and a public square outside the treasury building in Bern filled with coins (e.g. in Marie, 2014). Thus, it could be argued that it was not just the event (of the referendum), but instead the increased attention that resulted in the referendum being given significant attention – as initially the Swiss referendum campaign was not subject to significant attention. Alternatively, it could simply be the proximity to the vote itself that made the Swiss referendum important enough for media coverage. There is insufficient evidence to dismiss either conclusion in the absence of commentary from journalists involved in that coverage.

The older trials of Basic Income are referenced in the media coverage, but in the context of discussing trials as a whole, rather than being separate discussions. In this instance their discussion is clearly the result of the attention to Basic Income, rather than the other way around – as the trials are neither recent, nor recently rediscovered. The media attention to trials and the Swiss referendum appears to primarily be a reaction to events, rather than only being covered as a result of increased attention to Basic Income.

However, it would not be a reasonable conclusion that the attention to Basic Income is wholly the result of the trials. While I coded them as discussed to a significant degree (over 50% of the first 18 months of coverage is coded as discussing trials/referendum in some fashion), it is not universal. During 2015, 38% of articles are coded for trials – however, 71% of articles coded for trials in 2015 are from the final quarter, despite the discussions of trials in Finland and Utrecht being noted briefly in coverage earlier in the year. The discussion of trials and referendum in the UK print media starts relatively late compared to the events precipitating the coverage – it cannot be the sole explanation for the attention to Basic Income.

Technology, automation and Silicon Valley

The discussions around Basic Income, automation, technology and Silicon Valley are an important component of the attention to Basic Income throughout the period under examination. I have included it within the portion of the discussion which relates more to specific events, the degree to which the coverage appears to relate to specific events varies. Some articles are very clearly related – such as pieces responding to Mark Zuckerberg discussing Basic Income (Griffin, 2017; Williams, 2017) or to the announcement of plans to trial Basic Income by Y Combinator (Wong, 2016; Osborne, 2016). Other pieces however discuss the debates surrounding Basic Income and automation more generally (primarily, the concerns around mass unemployment resulting from emerging technology).

Automation and technological unemployment is the significant component of discussions involving Basic Income and automation, technology and Silicon Valley, as shown in in Figure 5 (below). There is some link to specific events in the form of advocacy from prominent tech industry leaders (Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and Richard Branson) but these major names play a relatively minimal role in the coverage. More general references to Silicon Valley figures¹⁰ feature more regularly in the sources coded for automation, technology and Silicon Valley but still are only a small part of the coding. If it formed a more significant component of the coverage the named individuals' involvement in the attention would be an example of events driving the coverage to Basic Income. However, it is not the most significant element of the attention to Basic Income and Automation, technology and Silicon Valley.

¹⁰ Which is either less well-known figures, like Sam Altman (of Y Combinator, notable for investment in Airbnb and Dropbox, Chris Hughes (a Facebook founder) or more generalised references to “Silicon Valley figures” or similar.

Percentage of total sources coded for Automation, Technology and Silicon Valley, by quarter 2015 – 2017

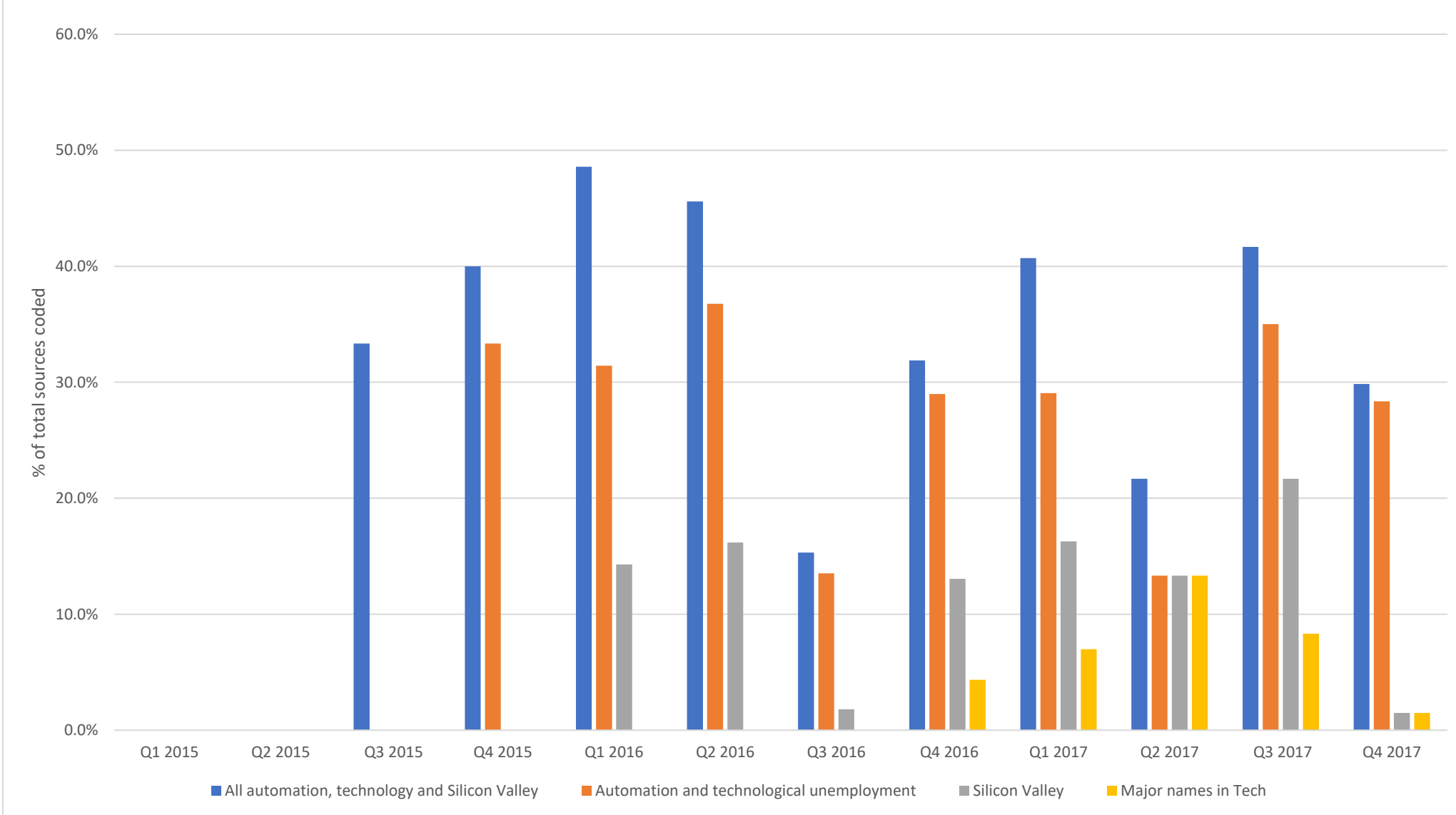


Figure 5 - Sources coded for Automation, Technology and Silicon Valley, by quarter 2015 – 2017

Instead, Figure 5 shows that the most important element of this area of the coverage is around automation and technological unemployment. Technological unemployment is the link between automation/technology and Basic Income which is made by the Silicon Valley figures, and others. The argument is made that Basic Income will be necessary as a policy response to technology which will significantly reduce employment. In many cases this is coupled with broader arguments about Basic Income (outside of the Silicon Valley advocacy for Basic Income, technological unemployment is given as one argument for Basic Income out of many).

Technological unemployment as a concern has some links to specific events during the 2015 – 2017 period: the 2017 trailing of Amazon GO (a cashier-less supermarket where customers' shopping is tracked through a variety of sensors and does not need to be processed through a till – the first such store opened generally in 2018); continued news about the development of fully autonomous vehicles; and a number of publications about the threat of technological unemployment.

Publications include monographs aimed at public (rather than specialist) audiences about technological unemployment (e.g. Martin Ford (2015), Jerry Kaplan (2015)) as well as those advocating for Basic Income in relation to automation (e.g. from USA labor leader Andy Stern (2016b) and Srnicek & Williams¹¹ (2015)). There are also reports released during the time period analysing the threat of technological unemployment (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2017; Arntz, Gregory and Zierahn, 2016). Various events (and especially publications) thus occur during the time period which could prompt coverage.

These do not form a *visible* significant portion of the attention however, as references to either publications or events in the media coverage discussing Basic Income and automation are limited. Indeed, more discussed is the Frey and Osborne (2013) report which predates the 2015 – 2017 period of attention to Basic Income. They *may* form the impetus for the attention, but there is insufficient evidence to assume that they do. Thus, there is an argument that the attention to Basic Income around technology, automation and Silicon Valley is the *result* of increased attention to Basic Income, rather than being the *cause* of the attention. In other words, that that the increased attention in this area reflects – rather than causes – a generally increased attention to Basic Income. I will return to the discussion of the media attention to automation and Basic Income in chapter 7, where I will consider *why* this attention occurs.

¹¹ Srnicek and Williams also argue *for* automation in their book, as they do not consider it inevitable in the same way as Stern and others.

Not Basic Income focused

The coding category of “Not Basic Income focused” captured articles which, although they mention Basic Income, do so as an aside in a piece which is focused upon other issues (e.g. about a tech conference and robot rights (Jarvis, 2017), about the history of child benefit (James, 2016)). In the first half of the coverage (Q1 2015 – Q2 2016) only 22.6% of the pieces are coded in this way, while in the second half (Q3 2016 – Q4 2017) 43.2% of articles are coded as “not Basic Income focused” (as shown in Figure 3, on pg. 69). This shift, which coincides with the considerably increased publication of articles in the Q3 2016 – Q4 2017 period (as shown in Figure 2, pg. 66), demonstrates a change in the way in which the media discusses Basic Income. Rather than Basic Income being a novelty about which articles are written in order to introduce it to readers, Basic Income becomes an idea which is treated as more familiar, and is cross referenced in articles where it is pertinent.

This indicates that Basic Income is being treated as more well known, more mainstream, over the 2015 – 2017 period. A brief comparison to the twelve pieces from 2014 has only one piece (8%) that is not Basic Income focused, which makes the 43.2% figure even more dramatic. The inclusion of the discussion of Basic Income is clearly not a result of a specific event in these cases as the discussion is not about Basic Income per se – thus the inclusion is for another reason

Advocacy and criticism

Advocacy and criticism are coding categories into which a number of smaller codes for specific arguments being made about Basic Income (both in favour, and in opposition to) were collected (such as “wishful thinking”, “right-wing trojan horse”, and “financial stability”). The advocacy or critique is not the primary focus of most articles, but instead an element of a broader discussion. Both of these overall categories demonstrate an engagement by the media with the ideas around Basic Income – with most pieces, but not all, engaging with either the arguments for or the arguments against, as can be seen in Figure 6 (below) – some pieces do engage with both side of the argument, and there is therefore overlap. The sub-arguments I will discuss at greater length in later chapters, but prominent amongst the criticisms were arguments about cost, and work disincentive effects (unsurprisingly as these are longstanding critiques of unconditional welfare systems in general, as discussed in chapter 2) and in the advocacy a response to inequality and income insecurity.

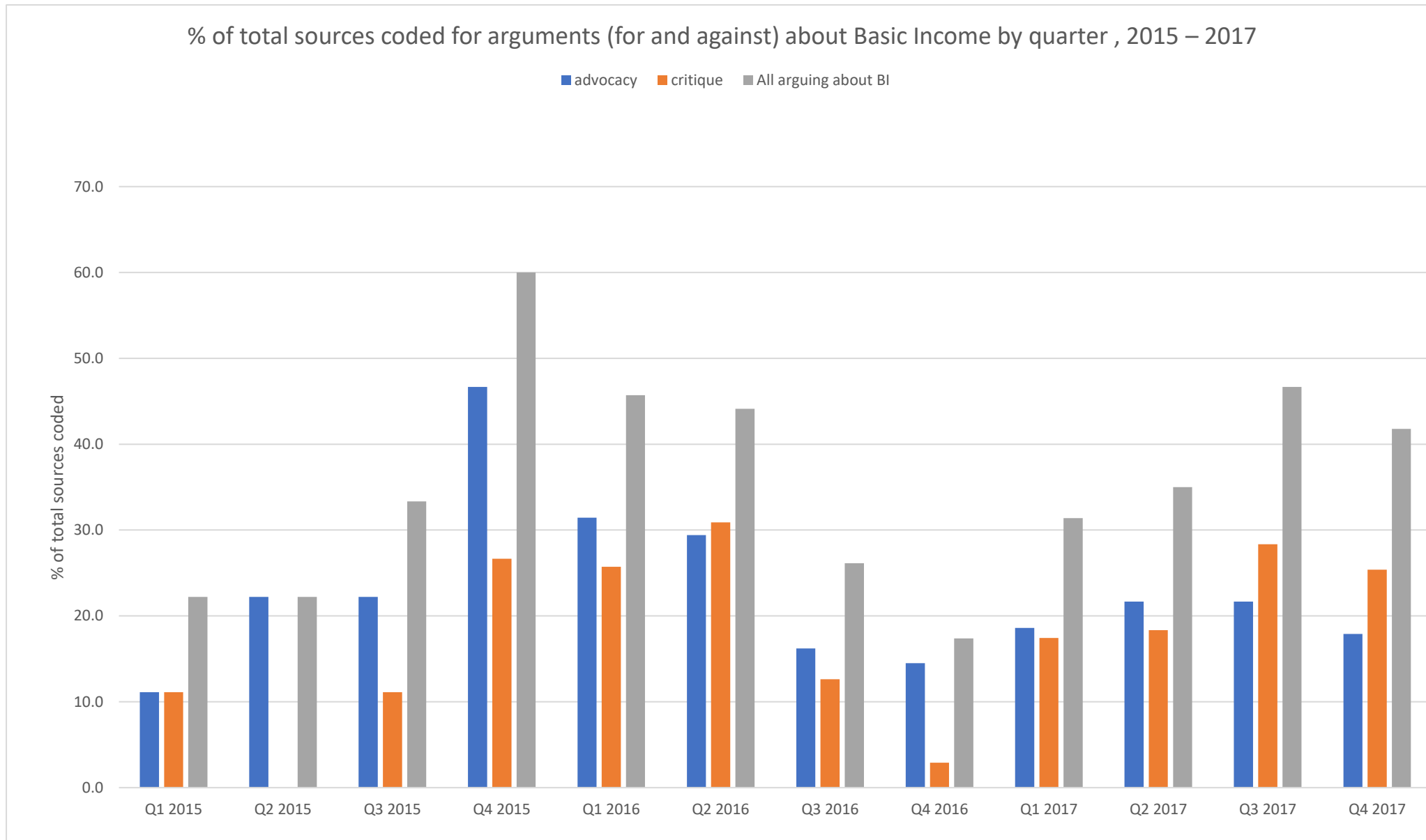


Figure 6 - Coding for arguments about Basic Income in media coverage, by quarter 2015 - 2017

As can be seen in Figure 6 (above), the earlier coverage during 2015 – 2017 which discusses the arguments for or against Basic Income at any length emphasise the arguments for Basic Income rather than the critiques – which are more emphasised as time goes on. The increase in sources coded over time mostly tallies with the increase in total number of sources; the significant exception to this is Q4 2015, when 60% of all sources are coded for arguments about Basic Income (the average being 35%). This exception coincides with the publication of the RSA's report *Creative Citizen, Creative State* (Painter and Thoun, 2015).

The steady increase in the critiques supports the argument that there is a generally increased attention to Basic Income. As attention to the idea of Basic Income (as opposed to specific events pertaining to it) increases, the engagement with the idea by critical voices increases. This is because the increasing attention makes it appear more important to critically respond to it. The significant amount of coverage focused on the case for Basic Income around Q4 2015, on the other hand, implies both a reaction to an event (in the form of the RSA report), as well as implying generally increased attention to Basic Income. Only one of the nine pieces was directly discussed the RSA report however – meaning that the latter is the most likely explanation.

Another feature of the arguments against and for Basic Income were the arguments (against, and for Basic Income respectively) that Basic Income was “unrealistic or utopian thinking” or “an important new idea”. Both of these types of argument engage with the concept of utopia, either as a bad thing, or as a source of radical thought about alternative social structures. The presence of a discussion – albeit oblique – of utopian thought within the media coverage supports the interpretation (which I will go on to discuss later in this chapter) of the attention to Basic Income relating to a “rediscovery of utopian demands”.

Future of work

Discussions around Basic Income and the future of work were coded for, on average, 23% of sources across the whole of the 2015 – 2017 period. This discussion interrelates significantly with the discussions around automation, technological unemployment and Basic Income – which is about the potential lack of future work. It extends beyond this, however, also engaging with questions of how work ought to be understood: as vital for self-meaning, as the primary means of subsistence, as intrinsically valuable, as employment contracts alone, or encompassing far more.

These engagements with debate around the nature and future of work, like the engagement with arguments about Basic Income (of which they are a subset), demonstrate engagement with the idea of Basic Income by the media beyond a reporting of events. Although, as discussed in the section on automation, there are publications which the media discussion could be reacting to around the

subject of the future of work (like Srnicek & Williams's (2015) *Inventing the Future* or Andy Stern's (2016b) *Raising the Floor*), the media attention to Basic Income does not reference them to a significant degree.

The discussion around the future of work has some of the characteristics of Levitas' (2013) *imaginary reconstitution of society* (discussed in chapter 2) with its critical interpretation of the present, vision of the future, and policy means to bridge the two. It discusses a critique of the contemporary world in its critique of the gig economy and economic insecurity (or the near future projection in the case of technological unemployment). The discussion around the future of work examines various visions of the future – in which work is defended as a source of valuable meaning, in which survival needs are detached from employment, in which non-economic activity is treated on a level with paid employment, and so on. Basic Income is discussed as the policy solution to achieve these goals (or, in the case of criticisms, it is seen as the policy that would bring around the negative future of dystopia). I will discuss these arguments at more length in chapters 5-7 (where I separate out several strands of the utopian discussion). In the context of this chapter, what is important is that this element of the attention being paid to Basic Income in the UK press coverage supports the argument that an element of what the media attention is about is an engagement with utopian demands and thinking.

Conclusions on media coverage of Basic Income

The media coverage of Basic Income in the UK over the period of 2015 – 2017 shows a clear and dramatic increase in the attention being paid to Basic Income. Examination of the content of that coverage shows three distinct components: discussion by UK political parties; discussion of trials of Basic Income and the Swiss Referendum on Basic Income; discussions around technology, automation, and Basic Income. These components show both signs of prompting the coverage of Basic Income (on the basis of significant events occurring in relation to them – e.g. a pledge to push for the idea by the Labour Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell), as well as being a part of a generally increased media discussion of Basic Income.

There are also signs within my thematic coding of the UK press coverage that further support the argument that there is a generally increased attention to Basic Income by the media. There is an increasing number of articles in which the discussion of Basic Income (or something directly relating to it, such as trials, referenda etc.) is not the focus of the piece, but rather is raised because of its association with the primary topic – which indicates an increased awareness, and acknowledgement of the importance of Basic Income. There is also an increasing engagement with advocacy and critique of Basic Income in the press coverage, rather than just reporting of events (which fits with

the conclusion about the three components in which there are events, but then continued discussion).

Also contained with the media coverage is evidence of an engagement with utopian demands and thought in the discussion of arguments around Basic Income, and, in particular the discussion of the future of work which has occurred in the coverage of Basic Income. The discussion of ideas around what the future society ought to look like, the problems of the present society, and Basic Income as a policy bridge between the two – in the style of Levitas' *imaginary reconstitution of society* – is present, and is likewise indicative of the media attention to Basic Income being more than just a reaction to events.

Other indicators of increased attention

The coverage in the UK print media is not the only indication of an increased attention to Basic Income in the media. I will not engage in as extensive a discussion of the non-print media as with the print media coverage, as the comparison between past and present attention is not so clearly presented as with the print coverage. There are also indicators of increased attention like the increase in publication of books and reports on the topic of Basic Income, and the engagement with the policy by political figures – which indicate increased attention as well as influencing the media coverage (in the ways discussed in the previous section).

Coverage in non-print media – be it television, radio, online editions of mainstream print or broadcast news, or newer online news media sources (such as Huffington Post or BuzzFeed News) – is significantly more difficult to quantify than print media sources, as discussed in chapter 3. There is, however, some coverage of Basic Income in these sources – which was not the case (or certainly not the case to the same degree) prior to 2015.

At the start of 2015, for example, there are the two previously discussed television interviews of Natalie Bennet (then Green Party leader) in which Basic Income (as a Green Party policy) is discussed (Bennett, 2015a; Bennett, 2015b) and the subject is also raised in radio interviews. There have also been radio programmes discussing Basic Income, including one by Sonia Sodha specifically investigating the attention to Basic Income (Sodha, 2016), and a discussion between Camilla Cavendish (a former policy adviser to David Cameron) and former Labour Party leader Ed Miliband about “Big Ideas” in which Basic Income was prominent (Miliband and Cavendish, 2018).

The BBC's online news coverage of Basic Income is was relatively minimal in 2015-2016 (and before that it was almost non-existent) but increased significantly in 2017 (when there are five pages, rather than just a single page of search results). The BBC online coverage is similar to that of the

print media coverage, in that trials and the Swiss referendum, and automation/technological unemployment are emphasised. The broadcast and online coverage from the BBC is not extensive, but it does increase in volume after 2015 – but on a scale similar to that of the Times/Telegraph/Financial Times, rather than that of The Guardian or The Independent (see the discussion of the composition of the media coverage, earlier in this chapter).

The coverage of Basic Income by online news media like BuzzFeed News and Huffington Post likewise have significant coverage post-2015. BuzzFeed News, like other media sources, has little coverage prior to 2015, but Huffington Post does engage more regularly than mainstream media outlets, with engagement with Basic Income as far back as 2012 (Giles, 2012) (with a discussion around alternative policy platforms for Ed Miliband's Labour Party), as a response to austerity (Finlay, 2014), and with the nascent interest in Basic Income in Scotland (Duffy, 2014). BuzzFeed has an early recognition of the Green Party policy of Basic Income, in an interview with Natalie Bennett in which Basic Income is discussed (Stone, 2014). The earlier discussion in these online sources reflect the audience (younger, politically more left-leaning). They are sources of news media outside the established media, discussing political ideas outside of established political ideas – it is not surprising that there is coverage in these sources.

Even so, the volume of coverage prior to 2015 while present, is not significant. Something alters the amount of coverage in these sources in the same way as occurs in the print media. Similar topics are present – the trial of Basic Income in Finland, the Swiss Referendum, and the discussion of Basic Income by the Labour Party. There are also pieces engaging with advocacy and criticism of Basic Income. A more exhaustive examination of the coverage might reveal ways in which these online media sources differ from the UK print media but, as noted in chapter 3, it is difficult to make comparisons between online sources and print (because of the lack of editorial restraints regarding publication space) or over time in a given online source (because of the potential inconsistencies in total volume of different publications).

The increase in the number of reports discussing Basic Income has already been noted in chapter 2 (see Table 1, pg.34). This engagement by the policy community reflects an increase in attention to Basic Income. Interviewees from this policy community note that this engagement is in response to increased attention (Pearce, Martinelli and Chrisp, 2017; Reed, 2017) which results in an availability of funding to support research (Lawson, 2017). Not all such research can be assumed to be reactive however – Southwood argues that research priorities for the Adam Smith Institute were not reactive to other organisations projects, although research which was successful in gaining attention was followed up on (Southwood, 2017).

Publication of books relating to Basic Income, like the media coverage, appeared to increase over the 2015 – 2017 period. Working from the compilation of books relating to Basic Income produced by Scott Santens (a US based Basic Income activist and researcher), in 2010-2014 a total of 24 books are listed, while in 2015, 2016, and 2017 there are 12, 24 and 15 respectively (Santens, 2019). Not as dramatic as the increase in UK print media coverage, but still significant. Both books and reports are clear examples of attention being paid to the subject of Basic Income.

The attention by politicians has already been noted in the discussion of the coverage of Basic Income as being unusual. Most prominent is the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's advocacy for Basic Income as possible Labour Party policy. Jonathan Reynolds MP and Ed Miliband MP have also both been prominent in advocacy for Basic Income since 2016. The SNP and Green Party have both pushed discussion of Basic Income within Westminster, with Caroline Lucas MP (Green Party) tabling an early day motion calling for government supported research into Basic Income (EDM 9742015-2016), and Ronnie Cowan MP (SNP) submitting written questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the subject of Basic Income in 2016 (Written questions 40099 and 42464). Ronnie Cowan MP also hosted a Westminster Hall debate on the issue in September 2016. Steve McCabe MP (Labour) has also shown interest in the policy (Kirkpatrick, 2017) and Jon Cruddas MP (Labour), despite the criticism of Basic Income in his piece with the Director of IPPR Tom Kibasi (Cruddas and Kibasi, 2016), might be considered a critical friend of the policy (Cruddas, 2017).

The Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income in January 2017 was a significant event in terms of mainstream attention being paid to Basic Income. The terms of reference for the session stated that it was in part a response to the attention paid to Basic Income, as well as being a response to the criticisms of present welfare arrangements and the Universal Credit reforms (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2016). The report published on this session concluded that Basic Income was either too expensive, or ineffective in assisting those with particular needs (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017a) but it did not engage with detailed microsimulations discussing partial Basic Income models (none of the proponents present specialised in these details). I will not engage in criticism of the session here as the point at this stage is to observe that the evidence session was a new and moderately significant example of an increased contemporary attention to Basic Income.

While I have not discussed these other indicators of increased attention to Basic Income in the same detail as the print media coverage of Basic Income, I have shown that they are similar to print media. This is both in terms of content, where similar issues such as trials, automation, and political attention are discussed, and in terms of changing volume, where the volume of attention increases

significantly in the 2015 – 2017 period. The other evidence of attention – the political attention, engagement by think tanks, the increase in books upon the subject – all both help prompt (to varying degrees) the media attention, and are themselves examples of increased attention to the idea of Basic Income. I will now turn to the ways in which my interviewees expanded upon these aspects of the attention to Basic Income and gave arguments about the processes involved in prompting the attention to Basic Income.

Interviewee interpretations of the attention to Basic Income

The key reason for conducting interviews was to explore the attention to, and causes of the attention to, Basic Income with individuals positioned to give expert commentary. Interviewees, as already discussed, identified similar aspects as important in the media attention to Basic Income as were identified in my own media analysis. Interviewee commentary on why the attention occurred developed along three broad lines, which, I will go on to argue, can be understood in relation to *Levitas' imaginary reconstitution of society*.

These arguments about how the attention to Basic Income has come about are: that contextual change has made discussion of Basic Income especially pertinent (and the counterpoint that the attention could be “just a fad”); that the attention reflects a rediscovery of some sort of utopian demands or new willingness to voice them; and that the attention relates to an increased “respectability” as individuals/groups who have never previously engaged with Basic Income doing so has made it less fringe. Interviewees also highlighted that despite the implication of the phrase “*an idea whose time has come*” (with the allusion to Hugo’s “*nothing can resist an idea whose time has come*”) there was nothing inevitable about Basic Income, but instead that the attention, and the factors underlying that attention made the political campaign for Basic Income a more plausible one.

The *imaginary reconstitution of society* with its three modes of thought (archaeological, ontological, and architectural) is compatible with these arguments. The argument about contextual change is one which is claiming that an archaeological examination of the specific and present circumstance is prompting the attention to Basic Income. The argument about the rediscovery of utopian demands is one in which arguments about the nature of the future are engaged in (as in the ontological mode). The arguments around respectability are – to a degree – around the engagement in the specifics and the existing institutions of policy formulation (such as think tanks, political parties, “prominent figures”). *Levitas* describes utopia as a process, rather than an end point, and the result of continued political action, rather than some inexorable progression – as those talking about Basic Income recognise that the current attention is a starting point, rather than a culmination.

Non-inevitability

The phrase “*Basic Income is an idea whose time has come*” was, as I have discussed in chapter 2, an instigating factor in the design of the investigation, and the development of my research questions¹². It was therefore an obvious question to put to my interviewees to ask them for their understanding and interpretation of the phrase. This led to a variety of interpretations of the phrase and ideas about whether Basic Income’s time had, indeed, come. The most common response was to reject the implied inevitability within the phrase, arguing instead that, although the context might be appropriate and the attention being paid to the policy encouraging, a future role for Basic Income in the UK welfare settlement was not inevitable but instead the plausible result of continued advocacy.

Andrew Gamble made this point firmly in his response to the phrase: “*I think that is not right, in the sense that there is not any sort of inevitability about it, and that phrase does almost suggest that it is just going to drop off the tree like a ripe fruit...*” (Gamble, 2017). Likewise, Ben Southwood states “*I’m always very cautious on interpreting there to be a kind of side to history ... [t]hings go in very unpredictable ways*” (Southwood, 2017). Both are arguing against the idea that the “time” of an idea is anyway an inevitable progression, that Basic Income is something which will become policy once people recognise that it is the “right side of history”. Gamble’s commentary expresses the point that effort will be required for Basic Income to become a part of the welfare settlement in the UK – it is not just going to happen.

Howard Reed did not outright (or implicitly) reject the notion of inevitability, but instead modified the statement in his response, suggesting he would instead say “*Basic Income is an idea whose time is close to coming*” (Reed, 2017). Although there is no explicit rejection of a sense of inevitability in the idea, what Reed said likewise implies that he does not believe that there is anything inevitable about the idea at this stage. Reed’s argument, like other interviewees’ arguments (Gough, 2017; Lawson, 2017; Torry, 2017), focuses on the reinterpretation of the statement as being about the context and contemporary attention (a point that I shall return to in the next sub-section).

This reinterpretation around the context being particularly suitable for Basic Income’s implementation as a policy was also posited Guy Standing. While he stated (as one of those who had said “*Basic Income is an idea whose time has come*” (Standing, 2016a) that he “*hoped that he was right*” (Standing, 2017b), Standing likewise rejected any suggestion of it being inevitable. Ruth Lister

¹² Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in the last year (early 2015 – mid 2016) as compared to the years before? What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it? What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal? (see page 42 for more commentary on these questions)

puts her rejection of the idea of any inevitability quite simply – “*the fact that it is an idea that has come doesn’t mean that it is going to be implemented*” (Lister, 2017). Both Standing and Lister frame “an idea whose time has come” in terms of the contextual suitability, rather than linking it to immanent policy implementation. This means that although they do not reject the notion that the idea’s time has come (like Reed) they give a similar assessment around inevitability.

The other aspect about non-inevitability was discussion over whether the present attention to Basic Income was just a fad, or something more significant. Howard Reed raised this subject in our interview, although he argued that this did not seem like a fad – although, he observed, neither had previous periods of attention to specific policies (Reed, 2017). Painter and Standing both made similar points at the RSA Angus Millar lecture about there being “something different” about the nature of the attention than in previous occasions (Painter, 2016; Standing, 2016a). This question of fads ties into the discussion around contextual change, as I will argue in chapter 5, when I examine this claim of whether the attention to Basic Income is “just a fad”. A fad is detached from social and political context of the sort that my interviewees were pointing towards – there is nothing inevitable about it, except perhaps the inevitability that attention will move on to a new idea.

Contextual Change

With any notion of inevitability rejected by most of my interviewees, their interpretations of the phrase “*an idea whose time has come*” instead focused upon explanations for why now – what was the social and political context from which the attention to Basic Income was emerging, what was *different*. Arguments about the attention to Basic Income being the result of changing social and political circumstances are a response to the argument that the attention to Basic Income is just a fad, even when that argument is not voiced. If there are changing circumstances which give the discussion about Basic Income a good reason to occur, then the discussion does not emerge from a baseless, passing fad – but instead from those good reasons. The social and political circumstances that interviewees point to are similar, and correspond to the themes emergent in the discussion of the media attention: poverty, inequality, and austerity in UK public policy; automation and technological unemployment; policy experimentation with unconditionality in other polities.

In addition to discussing broader themes within the attention to Basic Income, interviewees also highlight the importance of specific events to the attention to Basic Income (such as discussions of specific trials, announcement of support for Basic Income by John McDonnell, and so on). As was discussed in the media coverage section, these specific events do have a visible impact on the media attention to Basic Income, although they do not explain the mainstream attention to Basic Income

by themselves. The critical context in which the Basic Income debate currently operates is thus a combination of specific events and more ongoing situations.

For example, after rejecting any notion of inevitability in Basic Income, Andrew Gamble went on to argue that:

“in a different sense of ‘its time has come’ there could be some merit in it. And by that I mean that what people mean is that we are going through a period of very rapid social and economic change, the whole digital revolution and artificial intelligence” (Gamble, 2017)

Gamble is arguing that there are specific circumstances which underlie the notion of Basic Income’s time having come – significant changes in the social, economic and political context which make a significant change in the UK welfare settlement appropriate. Gamble highlights technology, and especially artificial intelligence as a context but also makes reference to broader social and economic change.

Standing makes the same argument, but expands upon it by highlighting the importance of overlapping conditions – *“a perfect storm of reasons for having a Basic Income”* (Standing, 2017b) – including automation, like Gamble. Standing highlights insecurity and social injustice in his discussion of social change (unsurprising given his academic work upon the subject). To these Standing adds:

[Basic Income] is almost becoming a political imperative because the insecurity and the growth of the atavistic part of the precariat is inducing neofascist populism (Standing, 2017b)

Standing contextualises neofascist populism in terms of the election of Trump, the outcome of the UK referendum on the EU, and the growth of far-right parties’ political success across Europe. The “atavistic precariat” is one portion of the precariat class Standing identifies in his academic work on the precariat (Standing, 2011; Standing, 2014; Standing, 2015; Standing, 2016c). The atavists are a portion of the precariat which is *“backward looking”* and has *“fallen from old working-class communities or families”* (Standing, 2016c).

Leaving aside discussion of whether or not Standing’s thesis around the precariat and the atavistic precariat is an accurate assessment of the social reality (as is questioned by, for example, Wright (2016) and Seymour (2012)), Standing is describing the departure from more centrist political parties and figures towards the more fringe as an element of the context in which the contemporary discussion of Basic Income is occurring. This he suggests is because elites can *“hear the pitchforks coming”* (Standing, 2016a) and this is the reason for their increased engagement with Basic Income.

This links to Standing's discussion of Basic Income gaining a degree of respectability through the attention elites are paying to it, which I shall return to shortly. Standing also links this discussion of *"the pitchforks coming"* to Silicon Valley elites specifically in the context of technological unemployment, and I will discuss this assessment in chapter 7.

A related, although not identical, line of argument to the one around social and political contexts is that Basic Income's *"time in the spotlight has come"* (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Kirkpatrick highlights not only the context in which the attention is occurring, but also the events which have impacted significantly on the coverage (such as trials, political parties' advocacy and so on – as discussed in the section on the media coverage). This emphasises further the question of "why now" as it engages with both larger critiques around social and political change which, while not timeless, cannot be talked about in terms of a specific point in time. As I will discuss in chapter 5, this is important when concluding between fad and not-fad because the broader social changes do not adequately explain why 2015 – 2017 is the point where attention to Basic Income expands, rather than 2012 – 2014 when these broader social contexts could also be observed. Specific events can help explain this by defining the temporal discussion more finely than changing contexts can. Thus, the contexts (the threat of automation, austerity, economic insecurity, and so on) are present, and the events (the start of the Finland trial (Jan 2017), the launch of the Compass report (Jun 2016), and Natalie Bennett's interviews with O'Neill and Marr (Jan 2015)) highlight those contexts.

Most of the interviews highlight broadly similar themes, of dissatisfaction with the contemporary welfare state (the *"I Daniel Blake phenomenon"* as Gough (2017) put it, and Lawson echoed) to the threat of automation (as Lawson put it, the *"march of the machines, the rise of the robots"* (Lawson, 2017)), to the pilots and Swiss referendum (*"Neal Lawson ended up on Newsnight and I ended up on Moneybox Live and all kinds of interesting things happened on the back of [that attention to trials]"* (Torry, 2017), to a growing post-consumerist perspective (*"it is about more than just turbo consumerised relentless work"* (Lawson, 2017)).

Ronnie Cowan MP, unlike other interviewees, highlights public attention in Basic Income:

"there is a genuine groundswell of interest in it... I think there's enough people, from enough political parties, enough academic institutions, enough politicians who are saying do you know what, let's have a serious look at this, yeah" (Cowan, 2017)

Cowan identifies political parties, and academic institutions, much the same as other interviewees, but he also specifies people – and contextually within the interview, he means members of the

general public. Barb Jacobson and Becca Kirkpatrick also discuss public attention, while none of the other interviewees do – they all focus on think tanks, politicians and academics. This is not surprising; Kirkpatrick and Jacobson are both involved in Basic Income UK which is a grassroots activist organisation advocating for Basic Income; debate around Basic Income is more widespread in Scotland (following, Cowan argues, political participation in the wake of the independence referendum (Cowan, 2017)).

Nick Pearce, on the other hand, argues that there is not attention to Basic Income from the general public, and he identifies this as one of the problems with the “spotlight” on Basic Income – that it does not reflect a widespread public interest in the idea, but rather a particular interest in it from individuals in the media, policy, and politics spheres (Pearce, Martinelli and Chrisp, 2017). Cruddas makes similar criticism of this idea of time in the spotlight, while broadly echoing its sentiment; *“It feels like that, it feel zeitgeisty... commentators always want to be on the cutting edge of something”* (Cruddas, 2017). It is, he argues appealing *“to be a part of that group that sort of interprets these contemporary transformations”*, and he implies that the spotlight on Basic Income might well have more to with the ambition of those aiming the spotlight to identify the “next big thing” than it does to any characteristic of Basic Income itself as his explanation as to why the spotlight does not reflect genuine public interest. This is another argument about the attention to Basic Income being faddish, expanding further and looking to answer *why* faddish attention occurs.

Malcolm Torry, like Cruddas, also critiques the media attention on the grounds of the potential motivations of the journalists involved in the attention to Basic Income. Torry however does not suggest that there is an effort to be “zeitgeisty” but instead argues (at least some) of the attention paid by the Guardian to Basic Income is really about critiquing the Green Party as unrealistic and utopian (in a pejorative sense) in the run up to the 2015 General Election. Again, the suggestion being that the coverage is not reflecting public discourse but attempting to shape it, which runs counter to an argument of “an idea whose time has come”. I will return to Torry’s arguments in chapter 6 when discussing “realistic” utopia, as it forms an important part of that debate.

Howard Reed adds a further note of caution to the “spotlight” idea by observing that there is a *“self-reinforcing effect where as soon as one or two places were looking at it [Basic Income] then everybody else thought that well as long as someone else is looking at it we can too”* (Reed, 2017). This is similar to Cruddas’ argument, but simply emphasises that the attention to Basic Income itself can create more attention, rather than criticising the motivations behind that attention. In Reed’s description, the attention demonstrates that an idea is important enough to warrant further attention, rather than the further attention involving the pursuit of a trend.

Malcolm Torry makes a similar point in arguing that the publication of a piece by Larry Elliott (Elliott, 2014) had “*burst the dam*” in terms of press attention (Torry, 2017). The discussion of Basic Income in the print media (and in particular by the economics editor of the Guardian) then positioned Basic Income as something which could be further discussed. This also ties into the arguments about respectability which I will address in a later subsection.

Another argument about the attention to Basic Income not raised elsewhere was suggested by Nick Pearce, who argued that one of the circumstances driving the attention in Europe was the devolution of responsibility for welfare to regional/local authorities. As a result of welfare expenditure contraction by the central governments, regional/local authorities are then engaging in policy experimentation with Basic Income as a possible means to reorient their spending (and particularly, Pearce suggests, to respond to the “*high costs associated with invasive conditionality and sanctions regimes*”). This fits some of the attention in terms of experimentation – in the Netherlands, attention is coming from Utrecht and a number of other city authorities, and the trials being planned in Scotland are likewise in the hands of devolved government. However, it does not fit all of the attention in Europe as the Finnish experiment was at the national level. This point about devolved responsibilities better explains why sometimes there are highly regionalised outcomes and discussions arising from the more general circumstances around austerity and welfare policy, rather than forming a distinct explanation.

Several explanations are thus put forward by interviewees as to why the attention to Basic Income is occurring for a good reason – and some make the argument that it is not. These cover discussions around changing social and political contexts, but also about specific events situated within those broader contexts. I will expand on these discussions further in chapter 5 when I consider the question of whether or not the attention to Basic Income is a fad. Next, I will turn to the discussion of respectability that was a part of the discussion around the social and political context, as it is not only a context in which the discussion of Basic Income is occurring, but also a shift in the way that the idea of Basic Income is being discussed.

Respectability

As discussed in the previous section, one of the contexts which my interviewees referred to when discussing what was different that resulted in the attention to Basic Income in 2015 – 2017 was that there was a degree of respectability to the idea. In other words, that it was no longer marginal, and dismissed as eccentric, but given more mainstream respect. This mainstream respect is reflected in the types of individual and organisation involved in the discussion – they themselves are more mainstream. In the previous sub-section I referenced Malcolm Torry stating that Larry Elliott’s

attention was important, for example, and in the section on press attention I highlighted the importance of the RSA as a mainstream organisation.

Another aspect of the respectability is in the types of engagement with the policy. Again, the RSA is relevant here – they’re a long-established think tank that engaged with the idea, developing the work in the form of a policy report, discussing specifics of policy, as opposed to a more academic form of engagement. The specificity about policy was built upon by other reports (as shown in Table 1, showing reports on the subject on pg.34). This type of engagement resembles the architectural mode of Levitas’ *imaginary reconstitution of society* in that it engages with the specifics of policy, rather than the more general discussion of the reasons for the policy (both the future goals, and the problems it will solve). Respectability involves both the changing engagement and the changing style of engagement which occurs.

After discussing the contextual factors which he believed were forming a “perfect storm” for attention to Basic Income, Guy Standing went on to argue:

... I believe this combination has suddenly made the debate ...respectable – so for me to get invited to talk about Basic Income in Davos – it wouldn’t have happened five years ago, or three years ago – it is dramatic change I think.

(Standing, 2017b)

Standing has highlighted the significance of the interest being shown by international elites as a significant part of the changing context in which the discussion of Basic Income is occurring on a number of occasions (Standing, 2016a; Standing, 2016b; Standing, 2017b; Standing, 2017c). It is an important part of the discussion – as shown in the earlier discussion of the media attention, major names in Silicon Valley discussing Basic Income has driven (to an extent) coverage of Basic Income. The international attention Standing points to includes Christine Lagarde and the IMF (which gave qualified support to the policy (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2017)), and “economics Nobel prize” winners (Coppola, 2017). This aspect of respectability has a strong international and institutional emphasis.

In the UK context, Howard Reed argued that you couldn’t have had a serious discussion about Basic Income in the past (he highlights 5-10 years ago, but that is just the rough timeframe in which he first encountered the idea) in the way that it is now possible to do so (Reed, 2017). He linked this to his argument about a self-reinforcing effect (as more people discuss the Basic Income in a serious way, more (other) people feel free to do so). Similar to this is the already discussed argument from

Malcolm Torry that the coverage of Basic Income by the economics editor of The Guardian added to the respectability of the idea, and encouraged further press engagement (Torry, 2017).

Likewise, Ronnie Cowan makes the point “*I think there's enough people... who are saying do you know what, let's have a serious look at this*” (Cowan, 2017). The use of serious both by Cowan and by Reed is important; it highlights that Basic Income was not, prior to this point, taken seriously, and it also suggests a different approach in how Basic Income is examined. The change in the way that Basic Income is looked at is significant, and relates as much to a different style of discussion as to different people looking at the idea. I will return to Cowan’s point about Basic Income not being taken seriously in the past later in this subsection, after considering this point about the different style of discussion.

The engagement with Basic Income by UK think tanks only starts to a significant degree in late 2015, with the publication of the RSA’s *Creative Citizen, Creative State* (Painter and Thong, 2015), as discussed in Chapter 2 (see Table 1, pg.34). The think tank reports are important because they discuss the specifics of the policy formulation – who gets how much, how the policy is funded – in the context of (then) current welfare arrangements. This is analogous to the architectural mode of Levitas’ *imaginary reconstitution of society*, albeit limited to a specific policy scope, rather than a more holistic vision.

The think tank reports are also significant because of their application of differing approaches to analysis of Basic Income: seeking to produce detailed, revenue neutral policy formulations; using detailed microsimulation models to assess the impact of specific proposals on recipients. Erik Olin Wright argued that the application of mainstream methods in the analysis of non-mainstream ideas could “*contribute to creating the conditions in which support can be built*” (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006, p. xi). This may be the case with the attention to Basic Income, as the RSA’s report does sit within the start of the significant increase in mainstream attention to Basic Income – but there is not the evidence (as discussed earlier in this chapter) to link the report directly to the coverage. It does, however, most likely contribute, as Erik Olin Wright argued.

This application of different methods to the discussion of Basic Income is not entirely new within the 2015 – 2017 period: Torry had produced the first of his detailed proposals in 2013 for Citizen’s Income Trust (Citizen's Income Trust, 2013); Erik Olin Wright’s “Real Utopias project” had examined Basic Income and Stakeholder Grants in 2006 (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006); even further back, Hermione Parker’s plan for a partial Basic Income gave a detailed account of the costs and impacts of other policies (Parker, 1989). What does change is the organisations and individuals discussing Basic Income in this fashion – as previously noted, they are themselves more mainstream. The

respectability of the investigator is thus likely to be as important, if not more so, than the respectability of their methods of investigation.

Returning to the ways in which Basic Income was not taken seriously (the first meaning taken from Ronnie Cowan's point) the present "respectability" of Basic Income can be contrasted to the sorts of ways in which interviewees talk about the history of Basic Income (particularly the 80s and 90s history in the UK). This is full of allusions to "*true believers*" (Lister, 2017) who were "*keeping the flame burning*" (Lawson, 2017) and that attending Basic Income events was "*like being an atheist at a prayer meeting*" (Gough, 2017). These comments paint a picture of Basic Income advocacy as being fringe, and almost cult-like; they also cut across the spectrum from supporters (Lawson) to critical friends (Lister) to trenchant critics (Gough), so it is not the case that this is just some deliberate denigration of the idea by critics, but instead something that is recognised as a historic problem for Basic Income (that has now changed with this increased respectability).

While interviewees discuss the increasing respectability of Basic Income as a factor in the attention to the idea, the un-respectability of Basic Income also played a significant role in the coverage of Basic Income. This is particularly the case with the coverage relating to the Green Party at the start of 2015 (Sylvester and Thomson, 2015; Collins, 2015; Bennett, 2015a; Bennett, 2015b; Wintour, 2015) and the Labour Party in September 2016 (Chu, 2016; Chorley and Fisher, 2016; Harris, 2016a). In these pieces Basic Income was treated with the same sort of critical language around fringe and utopian ideas as a dismissal of both the idea and the individuals discussing it. The absence of technical detail around policy formulation – and particularly the cost of the policy – was a repeated critique in the Andrew Neil interview of Green Party leader Natalie Bennett (Bennett, 2015a). The unintended impacts of the policy formulation from the Green Party at the time – overall losses for some on low incomes – were the other line of critique (from Wintour (2015)).

Keeping the overall cost and individual economic impacts to a minimum has meant that the formulation of Basic Income policies has emphasised these elements, and consequently there is little variation between them. Hybrid, or partial, Basic Income schemes at a low rate, coupled with existing means-tested systems which are retained, have been the focus of the detailed discussion of Basic Income. This is problematic, because it focuses on a very specific understanding of Basic Income when the wider discussion does not have that focus. It is also a moderation of the radical demands of Basic Income to a policy – to make it "respectable". This type of respectability – respectability in the method of investigation (detailed, and microsimulation analysis), and investigators (think tanks), and ultimately in the extent of radicalism in policy demands – reflects then a distinct strand of attention to Basic Income, which I will return to in more detail in chapter 6.

The newfound “respectability”, as Standing describes it, is not only a significant change in the context that the Basic Income debate is operating within, but also a change in the types of engagement with the idea which are occurring. It is possible to point to these types of engagement as examples of the potential future welfare settlement in the UK, as they discuss specific policy formulations of Basic Income and the alterations to the wider policy framework of the UK. Emphasising “respectability” has the potential to eliminate more radical variations of a policy however, which impacts upon the nature of the Basic Income(s) under discussion.

Utopian demands

The discussion of the utopian is where I shall now turn my attention. The discussion in the previous section focused on the argument that Basic Income was becoming more respectable – and that newfound respectability was contrasted with past utopian unrespectability. However, another argument that was put forwards in explaining why the attention to Basic Income was occurring was a “*rediscovery of utopian demands*” (Jacobson, 2016). That, rather than the attention being the result of a rejection of utopian radicalism in Basic Income advocacy, the attention was the result of an increased willingness to embrace the utopian by the mainstream. This interpretation looks at the growth in support for the Green Party, the growth of Momentum, and Jeremy Corbyn MP’s leadership of the Labour Party as broader examples of this rediscovery, and Basic Income as a specific example of how that rediscovery potentially impacts the future welfare settlement in the UK. It also raises the question of “which utopia are being demanded?” – of which I will discuss three principal varieties in chapters 5-7.

Jacobson’s argument about a “*rediscovery of utopian demands*” (Jacobson, 2016) is one that I raised in the research interview with her. Jacobson clarified that rather than being about finding old ideas, she was talking about making utopian demands as a political act, rather than just resisting (Jacobson, 2017). In other words, seeking radical changes like Basic Income, rather than being limited to defending the NHS, or existing welfare support. Jacobson went on to argue that discussions around Basic Income also prompted further discussions about reform and change in other area of society, such as education and healthcare (Jacobson, 2017). Jacobson made these observations with reference to her own experience as an activist and campaigner, rather than with reference to large scale events or other evidence. Becca Kirkpatrick (another activist with Basic Income UK) related similar experiences about people’s enthusiastic interactions with the policy (Kirkpatrick, 2017).

Ronnie Cowan expressed a similar sentiment about the desire for change: “*So I think the fuel is there ... a burning desire for change and social justice*” (Cowan, 2017). As noted earlier, Cowan is engaged with the debate around Basic Income in Scotland, which is further advanced than that in the rest of

the UK, but the desire for change is similar in nature to Jacobson's "rediscovery". This explanation relates to the discussion in the section on context about public attention to the idea of Basic Income, through further reference in the discussion with Cowan to austerity – but it is more than just a different context (although that is a part of why it is important). Cowan is not just arguing that the changing context about austerity is significant but also that a desire to change the *operation* of the welfare state is important – it is not just a question of resisting and rolling back cuts, but instead of making significant changes.

Neither Jacobson nor Cowan discuss the evidence for this rediscovery beyond their own experiences, and interpretation of changing discussions about welfare policy. There are a number of political events and developments over the 2015 – 2017 period which could all be taken as indicative of a rediscovery of utopian demands in conjunction with their experiences: The "green surge" of 2014/15 (as the significant rise in membership and polling figures for the Green Party at that time was described (Harris, 2015; Mason, 2015; Poletti and Dennison, 2016)); the election and re-election of Jeremy Corbyn MP as the leader of the Labour Party; the growth of Momentum (Harris, 2016a); and the success of The World Transformed alternative Labour Party fringe events (in 2017 many of these had queues stretching round buildings – the fringe itself was busy, but not that busy (Field notes, 2017)). Some of the press attention around Basic Income can also be interpreted in a similar fashion, such as in the engagement with the arguments about Basic Income (in eg. Callebert, 2016; Clarke, 2016), and in the direct discussion of the notion of "*the next Big Idea*" (in eg. Miliband and Cavendish, 2018; Monbiot, 2013).

What makes this observation about the attention to Basic Income important is the way in which it draws attention to the future-anticipating, utopian aspect of Basic Income and the ways in which that is apparent in the attention to Basic Income. There is participation in discussions about what the good society ought to look like, which supports arguments for Basic Income as a policy approach. This is distinct from the observation around respectability, which emphasises instead the role of the detailed analysis which focuses upon the present. Rather than either one of these explaining the attention to Basic Income by itself, the more likely case is that the attention results from *both*, alongside the contextual changes which make Basic Income particularly pertinent in the contemporary debate.

The observation about the rediscovery of utopian demands also raises an important question: *which* utopian demands?

What amounts to utopia – the vision of the future presented as a part of utopia – is contested. Jacobson makes reference to this in her discussion of about the rediscovery of utopian demands

when she argues that “*the left has always been the place of utopia and the right has managed to hijack that somehow*” (Jacobson, 2017). In other words, the expression of a vision of the future has been put more coherently by the right-wing within the UK in recent years – there is, Jacobson recognises, more than *one* utopia. I identify the one which Jacobson argues towards is a utopia of abundance; a utopia in which there is plenty (the exact extent of “plenty” I leave intentionally open for now), for all. This is a common expression of utopia (e.g. Diamandis and Kotler, 2014 [2012]; Kateb, 1965; Murtola, 2010, p. 39).

Mair, Druckman, and Jackson identify that, regardless of the exact mode of the abundance utopia, there is a common theme in such utopias: “*Central to the utopian visions of both Cokaygne and News from Nowhere is a critique of economic inequality, and both respond to this by separating consumption from production*” (Mair and Jackson, 2018). Basic Income works towards the achievement of this goal by providing income (for consumption) without any accompanying requirements for work (for production).

For example, in ***Utopia as Method*** (Levitas, 2013), Levitas makes the case for Basic Income as a part of the utopia which she uses to illustrate the principal of *the imaginary reconstitution of society* (IROS). This is a utopia of equality of dignity, and thus one of abundance (Levitas, 2013, pp. 200-1) that will be “*ecologically and socially sustainable and enable deeper and wider human happiness than is now possible*” (Levitas, 2013, p.198). Basic Income is “*a lesser demand of a social floor*” (Levitas, 2013, p.201) that a policy measure which Levitas argues would be a movement towards that abundance and equality of dignity. Basic Income would achieve this by – without any interrogation of merit – supplying material means of support.

Torry emphasised the failures of the welfare state to adapt to social circumstances which had changed from when the welfare state was created (a context which I will discuss as a core part of the attention to Basic Income in chapter 5):

And all the attempts to reform it ... [work on] the assumption that people still live in stable households, have stable single full-time employments and they don't. We are not going to return to that world. There might still be a lot of employment and self-employment and income generating activity, but it is not going to be like it was and we need a new way of securing peoples incomes (Torry, 2017)

Basic Income provides a secure income that is not reliant on work: it separates income for consumption from income from production (as Mair et. al. discuss). The problem, that Torry identifies in particular is that the welfare system attempts to perform two social goals – ensuring

that people have a sufficient income to survive, while also ensuring that work is the primary source of that income. When work cannot fulfil the role of a secure and sufficient income (as Torry argues it no longer does) then this approach to welfare cannot operate successfully – what is needed instead is one which just has the objective of providing secure income (thus divorcing income from production).

In the remaining chapters of the thesis I shall be discussing three principal strands of utopia which I identify within the contemporary attention to Basic Income. First of these is the utopia of abundance of the sort just discussed. The second of these is “real” utopia, as characterised (positively) by Eric Olin Wright as, and (less positively) by Levitas, as an attempt to apply methods of social science to utopian imaginaries, which either will contribute to their acceptance (Wright, in Ackerman *et al.*, 2006; Wright, 2018) or limit them in their vision (Levitas, 2013). This, in addition to being an argument about the methodological approach to utopia between Wright and Levitas, is also, I would contend, a variant of utopia itself in which rational policy is a part of the “good society”. Thirdly, is a Libertarian, Post-State utopia, which I will be contending (in chapter 7) is visible within a portion of the debate around automation and Basic Income, which interviewees and the analysis of the media coverage highlighted as an important part of the contemporary attention to Basic Income. These are not the limits of what might be contained within the attention, but instead three particularly coherent utopias which could be discussed in the context of the coverage.

These utopian strands relate to the arguments being made about the attention to Basic Income by my interviewees. Most clearly of all, they relate to the argument most clearly expressed by Jacobson that the attention to Basic Income was a “*rediscovery of utopian demands*”. The changing types of engagement with the idea of Basic Income which I argued is a part of the argument about “respectability” can be compared with the architectural mode of IROS. Both involve discussing the specifics of Basic Income as a policy in practice, in a specific time and place.

They also relate to the arguments about the changing contexts being significant in the attention to Basic Income given the use of Levitas’ *imaginary reconstitution of society* (IROS) as the means to understand utopia. The arguments about these changing contexts are, fundamentally, about identifying the current ways in which society is separated from the “good society” through the analysis of current policy context and its outcomes.

The relative importance of different contexts in the arguments being presented for Basic Income are indicative of the utopia under discussion as they both engage with the problems with society presently, and the vision of the “good society”. The arguments around inequality and austerity are concurrent with arguments about a good society in which there is abundant fulfilment of needs;

while those around the threat of automation and the future of work tend towards emphasising freedom of action (as well as an unspoken absence from regulation as a policy response).

Conclusion

Three arguments about how the contemporary attention to Basic Income has occurred were raised within my interviews. Firstly (and most frequently) interviewees argued that the social and political context had changed, and that those changes made the discussion of Basic Income increasingly pertinent. Secondly, an argument about the increased respectability of Basic Income was raised – rather than the policy being the reserve of a small group of advocates, it was now being discussed by more mainstream figures. Thirdly there was an argument about the “rediscovery of utopian demands”; that more radical ideas were being engaged with by think tanks, by the media, by politicians, and by the public.

These interpretations of the contemporary attention to Basic Income by my interviewees were supported by the analysis I had conducted of the media coverage of Basic Income in 2015 – 2017. The contexts which interviewees had highlighted as significant were significant components of the media attention to Basic Income. There was evidence that the attention being paid to Basic Income by individuals outside of those with a long-term involvement in the advocacy for Basic Income, such as the RSA, was important in driving the coverage of Basic Income (although there was also evidence that increased prominence of longer-term supporters such as John McDonnell was also important). Although limited there was also evidence within the press coverage of an increased engagement with utopian demands – such as in the discussion of the next “Big Idea” by Ed Miliband and others.

These three arguments about the attention to Basic Income, as well as the examples of utopia contained within the attention to Basic Income, will be the foundation of the next three chapters. In these chapters I will discuss whether: the changing context provides a solid case for claiming that the attention to Basic Income is not a fad – and what is presented as a utopia in reaction to these changing contexts (Chapter 5); the ways in which Basic Income has been presented as a respectable and realistic utopia (chapter 6); the alternative, post-state utopia which emerges as a part of the attention to Basic Income, particularly around the subject of automation and technological unemployment (chapter 7).

These three chapters will respond to my research questions, by highlighting the variation within what is being discussed as Basic Income, and exploring the reasoning behind what is being discussed, through the examination of these varied utopia. The exploration of the differing utopia using IROS focuses on the reasoning behind the proposals – in the form of the vision of the future and the critical account of the present – as well as the detail of the proposed Basic Income. The discussion of

the vision of the future in these utopias also lends itself directly to the third of my research questions around the role that Basic Income could have in the future of welfare provision. Finally, the discussion around whether or not the attention to Basic Income is a fad engages further with the question of why Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention, building on the discussion of that attention contained within this chapter.

Chapter 5 – Just a fad? Interpreting the attention to Basic Income

As discussed in the last chapter, one of the ways in which my interviewees responded to the attention to Basic Income was to make the argument that the attention to Basic Income was not a fad. Instead, they suggested there was a shift in the social and political context that meant that the increased attention to Basic Income was based on good reasons – rather than just being a (not yet passed) fad. I would argue that the claims being made by interviewees about the increasing respectability of Basic Income can also be considered part of the “not a fad” argument; it highlights the seriousness of the discussion as opposed to frivolous faddishness. Likewise the discussions of the next “Big Idea” and rediscovery of utopian ideas can be understood as a part of this “the attention is not a fad” argument; here the permanence of the Post-war formation of the Welfare State is being invoked as similar to current discussion around Basic Income. Whether these arguments will prove to be correct remains to be seen, as ultimately judgements of faddishness are only possible retrospectively. However, what I will be engaging with in this chapter is what is meant by fad, and what judgments can be made (bearing in mind the contingent nature of knowledge, as discussed in Chapter 3) at this time.

When considering frameworks for understanding the attention being paid to the policy of Basic Income an obvious route is to consider Kingdon’s multiple streams framework. As I will discuss, there is some relationship between the three arguments about the attention identified in my interviews, and the multiple streams framework. The identification of problems to which policy ought to respond corresponds quite directly to the arguments from my interviewees that the *context* is driving attention. This also relates to the policy stream of the political landscape of what is plausible. The political landscape also relates to the arguments around the rediscovery of utopian demands. The third of the policy streams – the work of generating specific proposals – is visible within the attention given by think tanks and is a part of the argument around respectability. However, I will argue that although the policy stream model is useful to an extent, it does not help understand the mainstream media attention that is such a prominent part of what I am investigating.

To understand the media attention I will focus on the question of “is it a fad”. I shall discuss how a “policy fad” is understood within policy literature. The interpretation I shall take of this “is it a fad” question is that it is questioning assumptions about a commonly discussed policy (Basic Income in this instance). This questioning takes the form of both asking: is there a good reason to be considering this proposed policy; and is there a good reason to consider it an effective policy. The former is a question about critical interpretation of the present, in a similar manner as the

archaeological mode of Levitas' *imaginary reconstitution of society* (as discussed in Chapter 3). Deciding upon the effectiveness of a policy requires some form of normative judgement – what is the effective to be measured against, and what is desirable? It then requires the assessment of policy design of the sort involved within the architectural mode of Levitas' utopian method.

Finally, I will discuss the changing contexts raised as significant to the attention to Basic Income, both through my own thematic analysis of the media attention (see Chapter 4) and by my interviewees (again, for discussion see Chapter 4). A significant part of the critical response to the attention to Basic Income (from critics such as Alcock, Gough, Piachaud, Gaffney, and Coutt) has been to argue that these critical contexts are (a) not new, (b) ill-served by Basic Income, or (c) unimportant in relation to other contexts, and I will examine these arguments in relation to those made by Basic Income advocates.

Shifting policy window

An early approach that I had during my analysis of both my interviews and the media attention to Basic Income was to suggest that there were multiple narrative strands that could be observed. These strands corresponded to the contexts being observed by my interviewees, and which were observable in the media coverage (such as automation, or the attention of political parties, as discussed in Chapter 4). While this observation was useful it did not provide a significant explanation of *why* the attention was occurring. I had already considered "*ideas as a coalition magnet*" (Béland and Cox, 2016, see my discussion in Chapter 2) but dismissed it as it did not fit with the specific nature of the policy under discussion (Basic Income). Another framework for understanding policy debate is Kingdon's policy streams model.

Kingdon's model highlights that although policy change is often gradual and incremental, significant changes in policy can occur. Basic Income, if implemented, would be such an example of a significant policy change. The policy streams model argues that a policy window (for the implementation of policy) occurs when several streams of activity coincide to facilitate the policy change. These are: (1) the identification of problems to which public policy ought to respond; (2) the generation and development of specific policy proposals; (3) the political landscape of party politics and public attitudes (Kingdon, 1993). When all three streams happen to coincide, that is when significant policy change occurs. In the case of Basic Income such an occasion arguably came close to happening, but ultimately failed in the 2019 General Election – had the Labour Party managed to repeat their gains (and extend upon them) from the 2017 General Election some form of trial of Basic Income would have likely been rapidly forthcoming (given manifesto commitments, and interest in the policy by key actors, such as John McDonnell MP).

The identification of problems to which public policy ought to respond to (the “problem stream”) is, Kingdon argues, a continual process. It is not that problems do not exist prior to being highlighted within the problem stream but instead certain problems can become prominent. This could be a result of particular precipitant events around that problem, or a different way in which problems are categorised. Poverty and income insecurity being highlighted as part of “public health” for example emerges in the contemporary Basic Income literature (for example Ruckert, Huynh, Labonté (2018) Elder-Woodward and Duffy (2018)). Although there is some history of this, e.g. Forget’s work on the MINCOME experiment (Forget, 2013), other problematics are more prominent.

The generation of specific policy proposals (the “policy stream”) is likewise continual process of refinement and alteration of policy ideas and proposals, that takes place over time. The development of specifics is necessary to have proposals ready for implementation when a policy window occurs (that is, the three policy streams meeting). The activity in the policy stream around Basic Income is clearly visible in the 2015-2017 period that I am focusing on, with developed proposals from several think tanks (see Table 1 p.34). Evidence of the variations on ideas is evident as well in the history of Basic Income, with variants around Negative Income Tax, Stakeholder Grants, and Participation Income for example (as discussed in chapter 2).

The third stream (the “politics stream”) is the events which surround the policy process. Internal debates in political parties, national (and regional) elections, shifts in public opinion, the impact of pressure and interest groups on the public and party opinions and so on. Kingdon argues that there are points in this stream – the most obvious being a change in administration after an election – where the policy stream and problem stream can coincide with a point in the politics stream where significant change can occur. This is visible within the attention to Basic Income in the UK with the attention being paid to Basic Income within both the Labour Party and the Scottish Nationalist Party – there is a point within the internal debates of political parties where Basic Income has become more feasible. A broader public opinion shift is not however evident.

Had this project been conducted earlier – completing in the opening months of 2016, rather than commencing there – the policy streams model may have been an interesting and effective framework for understanding the prospects for Basic Income being an “ideas whose time has come”. The project would be finishing with the movement in the Labour Party towards a Basic Income, with growing engagement with the policy by a variety of policy entrepreneurs, and with growing association between Basic Income and what looked to be the increasing focus of the problem stream in the form of insecurity and automation. However, this was not the end of the project, but rather

than beginning, and what is a prominent part of the project is the significant increase in mainstream attention to Basic Income which starts to occur in 2014-2015 and which explodes in 2016-2017.

The capacity of the policy streams model to provide insights into the press attention to Basic Income is limited. While an increased mainstream media attention can be taken as indicative (to some extent) of the politics stream moving towards a position where policy and problem streams could coincide, this is a role of the media attention in the policy stream model, rather than a cause of the media attention. Another way in which media attention could be explained in this model is that it indicates success by policy entrepreneurs in highlighting and advocating for their policy or problem-policy link. There is some evidence of this within the press attention – as discussed in chapter 4 – given the discussion of the problematics that Basic Income is being proposed in response to. However, the print media discussion does not show clear links to the discussion of the policy by think tanks (there is little press discussion of policy proposals, for example), and interviewees who would be involved in the policy stream (such as Howard Reed, Neal Lawson, and Nick Pearce) discuss their engagement with the policy as being responsive to the press attention, not the other way around. While Kingdon's policy streams models the three streams as operating separately (and thus, the politics stream could be ahead of the policy stream), the fact that mainstream attention seems to predate the policy attention means that it is necessary to look elsewhere to help develop understanding of the mainstream press attention.

The policy streams model does not help provide an insight into press attention, although it does provide some insight into why the claim "Basic Income is an idea whose time has come" might be made – that being that there are increased indications that the three policy streams might align over Basic Income. As the multiple policy streams model does not aid in understanding the upswing in media attention adequately, it is necessary to look for other approaches. In order to do this I will turn to the arguments being made by my interviewees in their interpretation, and their convergence around the question of "is this a fad".

Interpretation of Fad

In this section I will examine "fad" as a way of understanding and engaging in and with policy debates, by interrogating the significance of the policy discourse. I will argue that the use made of fad within scholarly discussions of policy is a critical enquiry over the *context* into which the policy is being applied, and the effectiveness of the policy in that context. This is particularly undertaken in response to policies, or practices, which have received significant attention, but not necessarily reflective attention. The question "is it a fad" ultimately consists of "is this policy a response to a present problem – and does it resolve it?". I will then demonstrate later in this chapter that this is

compatible with the framework taken from Levitas' *Utopia as Method*, arguing that it engages with the same questions.

Gough puts the general sense of fad into his response to the question of what he thought about the suggestion that Basic Income was “an idea whose time has come”: “*I suppose my prediction would be that it will fade away, but I might be wrong*” (Gough, 2017). A fad is something transient; a passing idea, soon to “fade away”, and soon to be replaced. It is also something uncertain. It might be possible to suggest that something is a fad, but not to be certain that it is a fad until after the fact.

A fad is also something that is something that is receiving attention – and not just any attention, but attention that is in some way considered significant. “It is a fad” is at the same time openly dismissive. It implies the opposite of “an idea whose time has come” by suggesting that the idea is unimportant, not deserving of serious attention and consideration. A fad is also not something that will have any permanent impact – it will not result in any lasting change.

The use of the question “is this a fad” is common within the discussion of policies and practices (Adams and Hess, 2001; Burritt and Schaltegger, 2010; Devine, 2006; Gardberg, 2017; Giest, 2017; Maynard, Gilson and Mathieu, 2012). This reference made within the broader scholarly literature to the concept of policy fads, shows an acknowledged role, but there is a lack of material focused explicitly upon the identification or features of fads. Instead “is this a fad” is raised in relation to policies in a variety of settings (such as public policy, and company or management policies) which have been applied, but without having necessarily received specific scrutiny in the contexts in which they are being applied. The question of “is this a fad” is phrased in terms of whether there is robust evidence for the utility of a given policy or practice, rather than a question of whether the discussion of the policy/practice will result in actual application.

That the Basic Income policy does not have this wide application requires a modification of the questions being asked, but only to a certain extent. I will take “is it a fad” therefore to be asking – is there a justification for the attention to this policy which is grounded in solid evidence? In other words, is there good reason to be considering Basic Income as an alternative to present policy, and is there good reason for believing that it would be an effective replacement to present policy? These two components have their analogues within the *imaginary reconstitution of society* framework taken from Levitas' *Utopia as Method* (Levitas, 2013) – I will return to their discussion in the next section.

While there is not a detailed scholarly literature around fads, there is a scholarly literature around the existence of paradigm shifts, or similar long-term alterations in thinking or policy formulation,

which can be examined to expand our thinking. This sort of long-term alteration asks similar questions to its inverse in the discussion of fads – is this transitory, or is it here to stay? Kuhn’s discussion of paradigm shifts in scientific thought (Kuhn, 1996) looks for a fundamental alteration in approach as a result of the paradigm-shifting idea. This covers more than the question of a fad does, as it is plausible that a not-fad could have a lasting change on policy while not fundamentally altering the landscape of ideas and relationships. Tax Credits, for example, are now an entrenched part of the welfare state, and questions were raised about whether the policy was a fad (Reed, 2017), but the implementation of tax credits could not be argued as having realised a “paradigm shift” in the UK welfare state or in thinking about it. A paradigm shift cannot be considered as the opposite of a fad – a paradigm shift is more than being about the longevity of a policy, but also this notion of a change in ways of thinking.

A fad is also a way of dismissing an idea, and this sort of language emerges in the discussion of Basic Income. One of the earlier pieces of press coverage, which was otherwise sympathetic to the policy, stated *“It is the ultimate leveller – and, as such, is the latest fad in leftish circles.”* (Fearn, 2016). Cruddas makes a similar point about the idea of Basic Income being *“fashionable”*, and that a cause of the media attention was an attempt to *“be zeitgeisty”* (Cruddas, 2017). Dismissive language is also present in discussion of Basic Income advocacy with references to *“true believers”* (Lister, 2017) and meetings being *“evangelical”* (Gough, 2017). This sort of language – like the use of “fad” – is both dismissing the policy and its advocates as unimportant, as well as dismissing the policy as ill-considered if not outright irrational. I will return to the discussion of irrationality and Basic Income in the next chapter.

Guy Standing agrees with this interpretation of the language of fad, giving his understanding of “policy fad” as:

“Look, when any new policy comes up that issue has to be faced, and within some superficial politicians’ minds and even some social scientists it will be a fad, this has not received much attention so I can throw it in and blah blah blah. But I genuinely believe that the structural factors mean that any faddish element will be pushed aside” (Standing, 2017b)

Here, Standing makes two distinct (and slightly contradictory) points about “policy fads”. First, he seems to be describing the notion of “policy fad” as a way in which new policy ideas are conceptually labelled and dismissed. His use of “superficial” is clearly indicative of an agenda in making this point; Standing is criticising the critics of Basic Income. He does not immediately expand on “superficial” but later in the interview he does (implicitly, rather than directly) provide an example of the basis of

this label, by recounting a discussion with a senior Labour politician (that had occurred earlier on the day of the interview – and thus was reasonably fresh in his mind). In this discussion, Standing had asked the MP their opinion on the subject of Basic Income, and they had stated that they were against it. When Standing asked why, they said that although they did not know much about it, “*people they respect are against*” and that this was a sufficient reason for them to be against the idea of Basic Income. Superficiality then suggests an unwillingness to intellectually engage with and contest the policy, and thus, Standing is presenting “policy fad” as not just a dismissal, but also a deliberate avoidance of engagement with a policy proposal.

Standing’s second point about “*faddish elements [being] pushed aside*” has several possible interpretations. It could be taken as meaning that a refusal to engage with the policy of Basic Income (by describing it as a fad) will eventually be overcome by structural factors which necessitate that discussion being engaged with. That does not seem to fit; a refusal to engage with an idea does not sound like a “faddish element”. A faddish element seems to imply that Standing’s meaning here is that he considers a portion of the attention being the result of “faddishness” rather than because of sound, legitimate reasons which will arise from the critical context of present structural problems. Standing’s discussion is useful because it highlights that, rather than being a binary state of attention being either “faddish” or “not faddish”, that the two modes of attention can exist simultaneously.

When discussing the attention to Basic Income as being “not-a-fad” what is being discussed is therefore not that the attention to Basic Income reflects a paradigm change of the sort discussed by Kuhn (1996), but something less extensive. “Not-a-fad” is a policy discussion which is based on a contemporary analysis of societal problems (of a specific society); it is a policy discussion which has a good reason to be occurring. The argument that attention to an idea is faddish can be that there is not a good reason to be considering the idea (either because there is no evidence that it is effective, or because there is no evidence that it is necessary) – or it can be just an act of dismissal, with little basis in evidence. It is also important to note that faddish and non-faddish attention might occur simultaneously, as some of the attention is focused around good reasons, but other elements may arise for other, less justifiable, reasons.

A Return to the Imaginary Reconstitution of society (IROS)

At the core of the arguments that the attention to Basic Income is not a fad is thus the counter-claim that the attention to Basic Income stems from present and changing social and political circumstances. A Basic Income is presented as (a part) of the means in which these problematised circumstances can be resolved. In other words, the argument that the attention to Basic Income is not a fad is presented in a way similar to the way in which Levitas argues that utopia should be

approached as a methodology (as discussed in chapter 3). Both involve an identification of the problematic current context (including the unspoken assumptions of that context), an argument for a better future society, and a discussion of policy means by which to bridge the two. Levitas presents IROS as a way of “doing” sociology; I intend to demonstrate that the framework of IROS is a useful one for examining the mainstreaming of attention to Basic Income (and indeed, other policy debates). I will show that IROS has distinct similarities with the policy streams model, but provides more insight into the mainstream press attention by facilitating the development of clear narrative threads across coverage. These narrative threads are distinct approaches to utopia, which are linked by the use of Basic Income as a policy tool – but a policy tool in response to differing problems, and being used towards different ends.

As discussed in chapter 3, Levitas’ *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* is proposed as a method for Sociology, that is an approach to sociology itself, and a methodology. In this approach, the objective is the use of the sociological imagination (that is, imagination rooted in sociological analysis) in order to imagine a society that is altered towards a utopian imaginary. This takes place in a number of differing modes of thought – the archaeological, the ontological, and the architectural – and is a continual process. The archaeological mode consists of thinking about the present social and political context, and analysing the spoken (and unspoken) vision of the good society which is embodied in social and political practice. This is an act of critical interpretation of the present. The ontological mode is arguing about how the good society ought to be. This is where much of the typically understood work of utopia occurs, but this is grounded by the activity in the archaeological mode – it is not the construction of a “timeless vision” of the good society, but rather one that is firmly rooted in relation to the *present* society. Much of the critique of the present in the archaeological phase develops from the judgements made in the ontological phase (you cannot say what is not the good society, without understanding what the good society *is*). The architectural mode is the work of developing concrete policy through which it is possible to move away from the critical present (as discussed in the archaeological phase) and towards the imagined good society (of the ontological phase). Being grounded in both of these phases, the architectural phase is about policy for a particular place and time, not in policies that would work in any place (or indeed the “no place” of utopia as it is commonly criticised). It is not the case that the ideal society is built, and then remains static, but rather than the striving towards the utopian imaginary is a ongoing exercise, thus the use of the three modes of IROS is a continual process.

My use of IROS diverges from Levitas, as, rather than developing my own utopian imaginary, I am using the framework of the three modes of thought to identify the common threads of utopian imaginary across the media coverage (as well as in the broader attention to Basic Income). As

discussed in chapter 3, this entailed using the three modes of IROS (Archaeological, Ontological, and Architectural) as a thematic coding framework in reassessing the media coverage. What this coding then facilitates is the identification of broad utopian narratives which emerge between the attention being paid to Basic Income. None of these are complete utopian imaginaries, but they indicate a broader trend when using the three modes of IROS as a framework upon which to fit the media coverage and broader attention together. What also becomes clear from this is that the attention to Basic Income is not about a single utopian imaginary, but several distinct ones, the prominent ones of which I will be characterising as utopia of abundance (which is the mainstream of Basic Income advocacy), realistic utopia, and post-state utopia.

Why, however, given the discussion of fads, and the more conventional heuristic of the multiple streams framework, am I using this approach to IROS as a framework?

Firstly, unlike the multiple-streams framework, this approach helps in interrogating the media attention to Basic Income; trying to understand how it is linked, why some events and connections to Basic Income are more prominent than others. It also interrogates the differences between what is being discussed as “Basic Income”, and delves into the reasoning behind it – one of my core research questions being “What is being proposed, and why”.

Secondly, IROS as a framework links the three principle ways in which my interviewees interpreted the attention together. These were arguments around faddishness and context, around increased respectability, and about utopian rediscovery or the next “Big Idea”. The last of these has a clear relationship to IROS – it is explicitly about the discussion of the utopian imaginary, about thinking about what the good society ought to look like. The critical discussion around the present social and political context of Levitas’ archaeological mode has a clear analogue in my interviewees’ identification of the discussion of the present context as a significant part of the attention to Basic Income. The discussion around “respectability” is in part a discussion of the engagement by individuals and groups outside of the more long-term academic networks (in the UK context, Citizens’ Income Trust, and Basic Income Earth Network), but it also a discussion around the specifics of a Basic Income policy which is being engaged in by these new actors (particularly the engagement by think tanks). This engagement with the specifics of policy design for Basic Income has its analogue in the architectural mode of IROS.

Thirdly, IROS as a framework ties into the discussion and analysis of fads, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The two components that I identified as being a part of the discussion of policy fads – “is there a good reason to be considering this policy as an alternative” and “is there a good reason to consider the policy effective – a have their own analogues within the framework taken from Levitas’

Utopia as Method (Levitas, 2013). The first element “is there a good reason to be considering Basic Income as an alternative to present policy” is engaging with questions about the critical interpretation of the present context (the archaeological mode of the Levitas method). The question being asked is whether there is a foundation within the present context for the policy proposal, or whether it is a policy being discussed uncritically, without being rooted within the specific policy context. The example discussed by (Adams and Hess, 2001; Devine, 2006) above about the use of “community” as a policy focus within different polities without a clear critical examination of why – only that there was an uncritical adoption of the concept by policy entrepreneurs.

Although the starting point might appear different between the discussion of fads and the utopian method, they are actually the same. The discussion of fads, as noted, is questioning whether a current commonly held and applied policy is rational – if there is a good reason for adopting it, and if there is a good reason for considering it effective. The archaeological phase of Levitas’ *imaginary reconstruction of society* (IROS) is the critical interpretation of the present. This critical interpretation seeks to dig out the assumptions within existing policies, discourses, and institutions – in other words, to question whether existing held and applied policy ideas are rational. The key difference is that the critical interpretation proposed by Levitas is not just applied to newly discussed policies and practices but to all existing policies and practices.

The second element of the fad questioning is more expressly about the evidence for the effectiveness of the policy. The analogue for this is between both the ontological and the architectural phases of IROS. The ontological mode is a necessary part of establishing what effective might mean, in that it is where the standard by which change can be judged is established. In order to make the judgement that something is effective it is first necessary to establish what is actually meant by effective – and that requires an understanding of what the desired outcome *ought* to be. The discussion about whether a policy can (or does) succeed in achieving the desired outcomes occurs within the architectural phase of IROS, as policies and practices are developed.

The three modes of thought that make up Levitas’ *imaginary reconstruction of society* are useful both for the purpose that Levitas’ describes them (the development of a coherent utopian imaginary) but also as a framework for aggregating otherwise incomplete accounts, which is the way in which I make use of IROS. Although this approach is novel, it suits my research questions by allowing me to interrogate the contemporary attention to Basic Income – and in particular the media attention – to demonstrate that what is being discussed is not necessarily one policy, but many distinct approaches containing a common element of Basic Income.

Basis for demands for Basic Income

To return to the question of “is the attention *just* a fad”, the question is thus: are there good reasons for the attention to Basic Income to be occurring now in the UK – or is the attention just a fad as Fearn (2016), Cruddas (2017), and others suggest? As shown in the discussion of contexts in the previous chapter, proponents would argue that there are good contextual reasons for the discussion of Basic Income at present: automation; the changing nature of work (particularly around the growth of the “gig economy”); increasing welfare state failure, and particularly the impact of Universal Credit and austerity; and the growth of right-wing populism. These contexts are all parts of the critical analysis of the present which could be present in a utopia of abundance (one of the different utopias which I will be illustrating in this thesis) in which Basic Income is proposed as a policy in the architectural mode of IROS. In other words, a Basic Income follows reasonably from these diagnosed problems.

In the following subsections I will discuss each of these contexts in turn, considering the claim that they are good contextual reasons for the discussion of Basic Income. I will do this by examining both the claims and counter-claims about the context, and relating them to the content of the attention to Basic Income – both the attention within the mainstream media, and the attention more broadly from the policy community and academics.

Automation

Automation, and the threat of automation-led job losses arising from automation, features prominently in discussion about the need for Basic Income. Several of my interviewees raised it as a problem for which Basic Income was a solution (Cruddas, 2017; Lawson, 2017), and it has been raised in this fashion by think tanks (Martinelli, 2019; Reed and Lansley, 2016), and journalists (Foges, 2016; Frayne, 2016; Mason, 2016a). It has also featured heavily in the attention being paid to Basic Income, particularly in the press coverage, as discussed in chapter 4. There are two strands in the arguments about automation and Basic Income. In the first, technological unemployment is a context, but one from which a positive future can be reached (assuming that policy steps are taken)¹³. In the second, mass technological unemployment is an inevitability which needs policy intervention to alleviate it. In this chapter I will be discussing the first strand, which fits within the

¹³ There is also a sub-strand to the second, which argues that automation ought to be actively pursued as a part of reaching a utopian future, characterised by Srnicek and Williams (2015) as *accelerationism*. As beyond their assessment of the need for – and the desirability of – policy intervention for automation Srnicek and Williams are otherwise similar to the mainstream of the Basic Income discourse, I will include them within the discussion of the second strand in order to avoid repetition. Although Cruddas (2017) identified accelerationism as a significant part of the attention to Basic Income in the UK there was no evidence that supported his argument. As discussion in the Labour Party continues the impact of accelerationism may become more evident.

mainstream abundance utopia described in chapter 4. I will return to further detail the discussion around automation in chapter 7, when I will be focusing on the second strand.

The discussion about automation particularly arises from a number of reports on automation-led job loss, starting with the influential report *The Future of Employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?* (Frey and Osborne, 2013), which suggested that 47% of total US employment could be lost as a result of automation. The report was also impactful because it suggested that the development of increasing sophisticated machine learning algorithms could result in white collar roles previously considered to be safe from automation being lost (such as legal clerks, journalists etc). Frey and Osborne also highlighted the improvements in autonomous vehicle technology that surpassed previously assumed limitations (Frey and Osborne, 2013). This makes the discussion of automation particularly relevant to the present – these threats to jobs are emergent, rather than longstanding. The discussion of why a Basic Income is needed then is in anticipation of the problems resulting from automation, which is the essence of arguments made by proponents of Basic Income arguing on this basis (e.g. Clifford, 2017; Stern, 2016b; Yang, 2019).

However, opponents argue that the threat of mass unemployment resulting from automation is not a new problem at all. As Neal Lawson put it when considering the response to his own use of the automation argument, the response is – “*you lot always bloody say that*” (Lawson, 2017). The technological unemployment debate is long-standing, and Brynjolfsson and McAfee argue that the mainstream view in economics concludes that technology creates new roles as old roles are automated – to “*believe otherwise is to succumb to the ‘luddite fallacy’*” (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014, p. 175). This position is repeated by independent policy consultant Declan Gaffney in the evidence he presented to the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income:

The idea that we are facing a permanent loss of employment due to economic developments, which are undoubtedly taking place due to technological change and so on, is not new but the last time it happened we did not see the kind of permanent loss of employment that would build the case for a universal basic income.

We don't know what is going to happen this time. I tend to go with the views of Alan Manning of the LSE on this, because he is one of our best labour market economists. His considered view was that the impact of technology on employment is effectively zero in the medium term and the long term. I am

sceptical about these prophecies of the permanent loss of labour demand.

(Gaffney in Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b)

Gaffney also discussed wider arguments about the changing nature of work and the gig economy, but this section highlights the argument that Lawson was observing – discussions of technological unemployment have happened before, and that technological unemployment did not happen.

While McAfee and Brynjolfsson recognise the orthodoxy of this position within economics, they go on to argue that while data supports this position in the 19th and 20th century as private employment rises alongside productivity increases, since the late 1990s it does not (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014, pp. 179-180). Thus, while the threat of technological unemployment is not new (it has been recognised as a potential problem, albeit one that will be resolved by new jobs being created), the circumstances around the problem may have changed. Similar arguments – that this time the threat is different, and won't just result in job replacement – are made by others discussing the threat of technological unemployment (Frey and Osborne, 2013; Stern, 2016a; Stern, 2016b)

Given that there is evidence of differences in the nature of the threat of technological unemployment it is reasonable to state that the attention to Basic Income and automation is not a baseless fad on that grounds. There is still an argument about whether or not Basic Income would be an appropriate policy response to technological unemployment. Meyer argues that it would not be: that the challenge presented by technological unemployment would be in ensuring that those losing their jobs as a result of technological change could maintain existing skills and develop new ones (Meyer, 2017). Meyer would be correct – if it was the case that only *one* policy could be introduced in response to technological unemployment. A Basic Income to provide secure income to meet needs while people accessed State supported training and education, however, would be effective – more so than a conditional welfare system alongside training and education, as workers could choose to leave jobs to train more flexibly knowing that they would be supported via the Basic Income, rather than waiting until they become unemployed involuntarily.

If we conclude that the predictions of mass unemployment arising from automation are flawed, as Gaffney and others argue, then the attention to Basic Income as a result of automation is faddish. If the predictions are accurate, then there is good reason to consider Basic Income. Basic Income is a plausible response to such mass unemployment, so under those conditions, the attention being paid to Basic Income as a result of concerns over automation is not just a fad, but justified. The “If” the predictions are accurate is however a significant “if”. I will return to a detailed examination of the arguments around automation, technological unemployment, and Basic Income in chapter 7.

The Gig Economy and the changing nature of work

The development of the gig economy, and the changing nature of employment more generally is raised as a justification for the advocacy of Basic Income. The arguments around automation are another instance of discussions around the changing nature of work, but they emphasise anticipated changes rather than changes which have already occurred (although the online platform economy element of the gig economy would be an example of automation technologies, which have already occurred, as I will discuss in chapter 7). In this section I will focus on arguments around the gig economy, as the more general argument emphasises discussion about the structure of the welfare state in the context of changing work (a discussion which I will return to in the next section), rather than the problems caused by the change in the nature of work itself. Arguments about whether the gig economy is a significant issue or not are inconclusive enough that it is reasonable to claim that the attention to Basic Income on the basis of the gig economy is not faddish.

Arguments on the basis of insecurity and precarity are common among advocates (Standing, 2017b; Torry, 2017; Jacobson, 2017) ,but they are also recognised by some sceptics as being plausible accounts for considering Basic Income. Cruddas argues, for example:

I think there is a factor on the left around, obviously around – with the proliferation of the so called gig economy – some of the labour market abuses around what are supposed to be the new developing sectors of the economy and the need to try and create more security in the labour market of profound insecurity, I can see the attraction of that. (Cruddas, 2017)

Cruddas recognises that the argument for some sort of intervention is necessary in response to the growth of the gig economy, and views Basic Income as a plausible solution. Cruddas also recognises this as a developing, rather than a longstanding problem, which is important in making the case that this is not a fad, but instead a contemporary issue.

Not all sceptics and critics share Cruddas' position, however. Gaffney was critical of this argument for Basic Income when giving evidence at the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session in Birmingham:

I think we should be conscious that the futurology of work has for a long time tended to always point in the same direction, which is we are going to lose massive amounts of jobs and never replace them again and it is all going to [be] ultra-flexible. The employment relation as we have known it for decades will

cease to exist and people will be essentially engaged by a kind of spot contract where you get hired by the hour to carry out tasks.

That is the way the futurology of work—at least the pessimistic futurology of work—has always looked for as long as I have been around. It has proved to be a very, very poor guide indeed to what was going to happen. The percentage of the work force that has a permanent employment contract has barely changed in 30 years. (Gaffney, D. in Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b)

Gaffney's argument makes two points. The first is that the arguments being presented for Basic Income are not new. This means that there is not a god reason to be considering Basic Income *now* as opposed to in the past, which supports the conclusion that the attention is a fad. The second argument is that the growth of the gig economy is exaggerated. Flexible working is not overthrowing more stable employment contracts. On this basis, there is no justification for the attention to Basic Income on the grounds of the growth of the gig economy. Gaffney does not support this argument with additional sources (a result of the context in which he is speaking) but The Work Foundation's report on the gig economy (Brinkley, 2016) is an example of the contestability of the existence of the gig economy.

Claiming that the attention to Basic Income is not faddish because there is an increasingly impactful gig economy is contestable. It can be contested on the grounds that it is not a new argument for Basic Income, but has instead been a part of the Basic Income debate since its contemporary inception (as both Alcock and Gaffney do in the Work and Pensions committee oral evidence session (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b)) – although this is open to the response that it is the intensification of the problem which makes Basic Income especially relevant. This is rejected by the second part of Gaffney's argument, which claims that there is little evidence for the gig economy being a significant proportion of the economy as a whole.

However, this argument is contested. Costa and Machin (2017) argues that there is an increase in the number of self-employed individuals without employees, and that the wages for that category have dropped, which reflects an increase in the type of worker described by arguments about the gig economy (were wages rising, it would reflect skilled professional/consultant type workers). It is also difficult to accurately determine the scale of the gig economy given that participation in the gig economy often occurs alongside more regular employment, with one study finding that 48.1% of those who worked gig economy roles had full-time employment as well, and only 10.7% identified themselves as being self-employed (Statistical Services and Consultancy Unit (SSCU), 2019). This

suggests that, in reality, participation in the gig economy is extensive, and attention to it is not faddish.

Gaffney also argues that Basic Income is not a good solution to the problem of the gig economy (if the gig economy is a significant problem at all). Instead, Gaffney argues:

What we should be looking at and what we could be looking at in things like the care sector is building employment relations in those sectors that are more like the employment relations that the majority of the workforce can take for granted, with permanent contracts, with proper in-work benefits with entitlements to holiday pay, sick pay and so on. (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b)

In other words, Gaffney argues that the solution is better located in addressing the specific problems of the gig economy, rather than in an alternative policy measure (like Basic Income). Basic Income is, in this case, being proposed as a solution because it is the current fad, rather than the best solution to the problem identified.

This argument from Gaffney is reliant, however, on the problem represented by the gig economy being not as significant as made out by Basic Income advocates (and others). It does also not outright reject Basic Income as a plausible response to the gig economy as it does exist, even if that form is more limited than advocates of Basic Income claim. As was the case in the rejection of Basic Income as a response to automation, there is no reason to suppose that Basic Income could not operate alongside efforts to address improved employment rights for those in the gig economy – indeed the common argument that a Basic Income could support such efforts if used as a universal strike fund is recognised by Harrop (Harrop and Tait, 2017, p. 17), who is otherwise critical. Basic Income would also provide effective support to workers whose hours of work varied in a way that made it difficult or impossible to enforce permanent and regular contracts as the standard form of employment. Basic Income would not be a wholly inappropriate response to the problems being identified – thus it is not a fad on that grounds.

One way in which it would be reasonable to argue that the attention to Basic Income around the subject of precarity and the gig economy is faddish in the distribution of this media coverage between different newspapers. Of all the articles coded for precarity, gig economy, uberisation, and similar phrases, the overwhelming majority appear in The Guardian (65% of all coding for those terms) and the majority of the remainder in the Independent (20% of all coding for those terms). While these two publications do provide the majority of the media coverage of Basic Income (as

discussed in chapter 4 – they are approximately a third of the coverage each), in this particular element of the discussion The Guardian is disproportionately evident. This suggests that, at least in terms of the context of the mainstream press attention, there is an element of faddishness.

As is the case with automation, if we conclude that the evidence for the impact of the gig economy is sufficiently convincing, then the attention to Basic Income which results from it is not a fad. This discussion is not intended to be a review of the evidence for the scope and impact of the gig economy (to do so would be outside the scope of the thesis). However, given that there is contention, it is the case that there might be a good reason for the proposal of Basic Income (thus, not a fad). Arguments over the effectiveness of Basic Income as a policy response to the problem of the gig economy are clearer, in that while it might be insufficient alone, it would be effective as part of a broader policy response, and be effective in dealing with specific things (such as providing support to people who want or need to work flexibly).

Welfare State Failure – Universal Credit, Austerity and sanctions

There are two lines of argument about welfare state failure and Basic Income. The first is the corollary to the argument about the gig economy, in that it argues that the reality of work has changed from the situation that the welfare state was designed for (stressing, as a part of this, the growing gig economy) and thus the assumptions underpinning the welfare state are flawed. The second line of argument is that austerity since 2008, and the introduction of Universal Credit in particular, has created a system which is inadequate in responding to poverty and inequality and that a more generous replacement is necessary.

These arguments are common among advocates: both Torry and Lawson give similar accounts, for example:

All I would say is that a citizen's income would function effectively in any employment market whatever its configuration, which of course the present system doesn't – it was designed for a 1940s labour market, they're still using it, which is a bit crazy... the assumption that people still live in stable households have stable single full-time employments and they don't. We are not going to return to that world... we need a new way of securing people's incomes. (Torry, 2017)

...you can keep tweaking the welfare system, you can bring in universal credit, and you could do this and do that – but actually the whole thing needs

restructuring again in a completely different way... there is no jobs for life, there is no male breadwinner, all of those things that were there when the welfare system was created are gone, and it is creaking badly and is going to fall over – the “I, Daniel Blake” reasons for Basic Income... the system isn’t working now, it humiliates people, it disincentivises people it is not fit for purpose, we need a different thing now (Lawson, 2017)

Both Torry and Lawson position their criticism of recent reforms, and Universal Credit in particular, in the context of the reform of the welfare state as established in the 1940s. The assumption underlying that settlement was that household incomes would be secured through a combination of long-term, stable, full-time employment for a (male) breadwinner, supplemented with social insurance for (rare) interruptions to that employment. This provided income security. The reality of the present is that this model of work is no longer the norm, and that even with reforms to social security (although reactions to changes) this means that income security is not universal.

The critique of this argument does not reject the analysis of the welfare state as dysfunctional, but instead argues that this has been the argument for Basic Income for much of the last 40 years:

So I am not sure that it... the argument behind that I suppose is that you have higher levels of inequality now, you’ve got the more... arguably evidence of disfunction or at the very least harsh treatment within social security systems, and attempts to reform social security systems have proved to be incredibly complex and difficult, Universal credit for example ... So I can see those arguments but actually, I am not sure that they have sufficiently changed the world to mean that Basic Income has a different attraction to what it had before or a different feasibility to what it had before because I still think we largely live – and this was a point that someone else was making in the evidence session – I still think we largely live in a wage-based capitalist economy and although there have been differences they haven’t been so significant (Alcock, 2017)

The arguments made in the past for Basic Income, Alcock argues, have not changed. There might be more evidence for them, but they are still fundamentally the same critique. If it is the case that the argument remains fundamentally the same as it has been for the last 40 years, then claiming that the attention is a result of changed circumstances is problematic. Therefore, the attention to Basic Income is just a fad.

An alternative argument against Basic Income on the basis of welfare state failure is made by Gough:

Well the arguments why it is particularly relevant now, I suppose there are several. One is the increasing shift towards activity and means testing and all the rest of it in contemporary social security, particularly in Britain I suppose – the “I, Daniel Blake” phenomenon you might call it I suppose, the really [awful] treatment of people in these settings, and I think that is a powerful argument for some groups, campaign groups and so on... but that is not necessarily an argument for unconditional, Universal Basic Income (Gough, 2017)

In this, Gough recognises that there has been change that makes the arguments being used in favour of Basic Income relevant, and powerful. However, he argues that these criticisms of the failure of the welfare state are not necessarily best resolved through a Basic Income. Gough instead argues for more generous welfare, but welfare that is still, as in the present system, targeted on the basis of need. In an intervention at the Compass event in July 2016 (Field notes, 2016), and again in a letter for the Guardian (and my interview) Gough (Gough, 2017; Various, 2016) described Basic Income as a “powerful engine to pull a tiny cart” on the basis of the costs involved to make a relatively small impact on poverty when more could be done through more targeted measures.

A similar criticism comes from Gaffney at the Work and Pensions Select Committee session on Basic Income. Gaffney argues:

...no logic that dictates that we have to have as draconian a sanction system as we currently have. We didn't have it until about 2012; we do not need to have it in the future. That is something that is eminently reformable, and it is reformable at the stroke of a Minister's pen. It does not even require primary legislation. So, conditionality and benefit sanctions that are the cause of so much controversy are things that are within the gift of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions already. We do not need Basic Income in order to get away from that. (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b)

Gaffney's argument (like Alcock's) is that the solution to the problem being reported in the welfare state is just the removal of punitive conditionality, not the replacement of the entire welfare state with an unconditional welfare system. The response to this from advocates is that there is more wrong than *just* increasingly punitive conditionality, even if it is a major, and critical problem within the welfare state.

That there could be multiple factors underlying the attention to Basic Income is a flaw within this approach of asking whether or not the reason for considering Basic Income is something that has

only become a reason now. The increasingly evident harshness of conditionality in the welfare state is a very present reason for advocating for Basic Income, but, as Gaffney argues it is perhaps best resolved by just reducing conditionality. However, taken alongside other problems for which Basic Income is a good solution, there is a good case for Basic Income as the solution to *this* problem as well.

Alcock makes the case that the argument about welfare state failures has been a central part of the argument for Basic Income for the last 40 years – which would imply that the current attention to Basic Income is just a fad. However, this fails to recognise that the failings of the welfare state are put into a particular contemporary relevance with the roll out of Universal Credit. This roll out provides a good reason to be discussing alternatives, such as Basic Income, in the present – thus it is not a fad upon those grounds either.

Growth of the atavistic precariat

The “growth of the atavistic precariat” is only raised as an argument by Guy Standing among my interviewees, although it is recognised in some of the press coverage (although not in terms of the atavistic precariat, which is Standing’s terminology). This portion of the precariat is a group that Standing (2014, p. 29) identifies as having fallen from the traditional working class owing to a lack of the long-term manual labour type of employment (discussed in the previous section). The atavistic precariat also looks to the past (both real and imagined) for a time when things were better. This argument is very much rooted in the present context, as the symptoms of the growth of the atavistic precariat are, Standing argues, the growth in right-wing and populist political parties, and their electoral successes (Standing, 2016c). Trump and Brexit are very much key examples. Standing’s argument around the atavistic precariat is also important because of the way in which he describes it as integrated with other contexts in a “perfect storm” – much like the discussion in the previous section where the impact of Basic Income in multiple contexts that justifies it, the multitude of contexts in which Basic Income is discussed is what gives good reason to the attention, a perfect storm.

I think – the term I use at the moment is that there is a “perfect storm” of reasons for having a basic income and these include ... social justice (the feeling of injustice that is really strong), the sense that we are not increasing our freedom, the feeling of insecurity is vast, the robots are coming... I don’t believe that we are all going to be made jobless by the robots but I do believe that it is going to be disruptive and is going to alter the distribution of income again for the worse and make it more uneven, and the new kid on the block is that it is almost becoming a

political imperative because the insecurity and the growth of the atavistic part of the precariat is inducing neo-fascist populism, I believe it was a factor in Brexit, a big factor in the election of Trump, for support for Marine le Pen and support for other dangerous politicians and populists out there.

Standing argues that Basic Income is necessary, and is necessary due to a “perfect storm” of reasons – his critically identified present. These reasons include those already discussed in the previous sections, but he then appends the “new kid on the block” as he puts it, which is the growth of the “atavistic precariat”. Standing’s points to Brexit, the election of Trump, and the political success of Marine le Pen (this interview took place after the French presidential election, so Standing is referencing the placing within the final two candidates) as examples of this growth. Standing’s “perfect storm” is, within the context of the interview, used an informal descriptor, rather than an analytic description – it is reasonably clear that he does not think that nothing else could be added to these factors, or even that they are the only conditions under which a Basic Income policy might be implemented. Instead, it is an indication that all of these factors together are important, and that their combination is important. Standing also points to the argument that the elements of this critical context are heavily interrelated, drawing the link especially between inequality, insecurity, and the atavistic precariat.

This argument arises from his work and arguments about the creation of the precariat – “a new dangerous class”, as his first book upon the subject put it (Standing, 2011). The precariat, Standing argues, is a class distinct from the traditional working class, or proletariat. The principal features of that class is that they are typically within low paid, insecure employment (linking to the rise of the gig economy) and that they are typically higher skilled than the roles they fulfil require, are not unionised, and have to undertake significant amounts of unpaid labour in order to maintain their paid labour (Standing, 2011)(p14-19)(Standing, 2014)(16-28). Within this class, Standing identifies three distinct groups: the progressive precariat; traditional denizens, or the displaced, which is comprised of migrants; and the atavistic precariat (Standing, 2014)(28-31). The atavistic precariat are often former parts of the proletariat, or the children of the proletariat who cannot access the same consistent work. The atavistic precariat, according to Standing fall back on memory of a better past (which can either real or imagined) and wish to return to it (Standing, 2014; Standing, 2015).

For evidence of this element of the precariat, Standing highlights the rise of right-wing populist parties and politicians in many polities: Victor Orban in Hungary; Germany’s AFD; UKIP, the EDL, and the Brexit vote in the UK; and the Trump presidency in the USA (Standing, 2017b). However, as discussed in the section on the gig economy, the actual prevalence of the gig economy is

questionable. The scale of success of right-wing populists far outstrip the proportions of populations in the position described as being the atavistic precariat. Concluding that the election of Trump, or the rejection of continued EU membership by a majority of the voting population in the UK, are the result of *just* an atavistic precariat seems wildly implausible. Standing argues that the growth of the atavistic precariat induces the success of populism, rather than is the basis for it however, so he is not arguing that the electoral success is wholly the result of the atavistic precariat, but a broader electoral coalition. While an atavistic precariat of the sort that Standing describes might be a part of the political coalition of interest involved in these results it is only a part, and not a *dominant* part, given that a feature of the precariat is its lack of political, social, and economic capital. It is reasonably clear then that there are other causes underlying the rise of right-wing populism either instead of, or in addition to, the atavistic precariat.

Standing does not dedicate a great deal of analytical attention to this grouping within his existing published work – dealing with the category of the atavistic precariat in a few paragraphs in various works (Standing, 2012; Standing, 2014; Standing, 2015; Standing, 2016c) with relatively minimal development after the discussion in his 2012 piece. The distinction between the atavistic, nostalgic, and progressive components of the precariat is not supported by a significant analysis of the prospective members of each portion. Manolchev, Saundry, and Lewis argue that the “*existence of a precariat is increasingly taken for granted*” (Manolchev, Saundry and Lewis, 2018). The distinction made in naming the atavists and the progressives is their political stance, whereas the description of their characteristics might better be accorded a distinction between urban and metropolitan, or between non-graduate and graduate. Taken in this fashion, there would also be a recognition of the significant cleavages between the two groups in terms of access to social, economic, and political capital. The terminology used for the two groups displays a clear preference being expressed; the implication of primitiveness, violence, and ignorance of the atavistic group is clear.

The rise of the atavistic precariat argument for Basic Income has two prongs. The first is that something must be done to reverse the loss of social and political rights of the precariat (the loss of those rights being a defining feature), and that a Basic Income would achieve this by providing a solid base on which the precariat could stand and defend those rights from. The second is that the impact of the atavistic precariat on electoral outcomes needs reversing – and this reversal could be achieved by putting this element of the precariat into conditions of secure and sufficient income (which is the (real or imagined) past that their atavism looks to).

A similar argument does arise in some of the media coverage around Pankaj Mishra’s (Mishra, 2017) ***Age of Anger*** which makes a similar diagnosis to Standing – that the electoral success of right-wing

populism is a new problem, and one that existing policy and politics is ill-suited to understand. Basic Income as a response to right-wing populism is raised in the press attention to Basic Income to a limited extent (Charter, 2017; Fortson, 2016; Rajan, 2016), and Rajan directly links this to Mishra's discussion of the age of anger (specifically, to an essay (Mishra, 2016) released in advance of the book's publication). Standing's analysis does not then stand by itself, but it is a relatively minor element in the discussion of Basic Income as a whole.

Again, as with the previous arguments for Basic Income, Basic Income as the solution to this problem could be argued as unnecessary. If the problem is the growth of the precariat, and in particular the atavistic portion of the precariat, then why is the solution not to create the sort of stable jobs whose absence has resulted in the working class and youthful educated moving into the precariat, much as Gaffney, Alcock and other critics argue in the case of the gig economy and welfare state failure? The argument resembles the response to the threat of automation, in that if the lack of jobs is the problem, then state investment to create more jobs is the solution. The choice of Basic Income as the solution to the problem is, as with automation, debatable. Thus, again, the attention could be just a fad.

Given that the argument about the atavistic precariat is not raised as a relevant component to the attention to Basic Income by other interviewees, or as a major component of the media attention, its significance as a good reason for the attention to Basic Income is limited. However, the conditions which Standing highlights as producing the precariat as a class *are* highlighted as a part of the attention to Basic Income – thus it could be the case that the growth of the atavistic precariat out of these other contexts (some of which, as noted, are not wholly new phenomenon) is what results in the attention to Basic Income, and that the attention is highlighting the underlying causes of the growth. This is essentially Standing's argument about a "perfect storm", although Standing does not emphasise the relationship between the atavistic precariat and his other causes.

Conclusion

Core to the argument about whether the attention to Basic Income is faddish is whether or not the social, political, and economic contexts within which Basic Income is being discussed have changed. If they have not changed to any significant degree then there is no good reason for the discussion about Basic Income to be taking place now, as opposed to at any other previous point. If there is no good reason for the discussion of Basic Income to be taking place *now* (as opposed to in the past, when it was not taking place) then the attention is faddish.

In this chapter I have argued that the contexts discussed as critical in the attention to Basic Income by my interviewees, and which I identified as being core to the mainstream media attention, are

sufficiently contemporary to claim that the attention to Basic Income is not faddish. Instead it is a response to a problematised present political, social, and economic context which Basic Income is proposed as a policy response to.

Advocates of Basic Income argue that the changing nature of work and employment, either in an anticipated future (the threat of automation), or the present of the “gig economy” with its attendant insecurity and short-term precarious work, are challenges which must be responded to. They also argue that existing welfare structures do not, and cannot, adequately address these problems. Alongside these principal critiques of the present, Standing argues that right-wing populism is a further symptom of a politics unable to address economic and political insecurity, which Basic Income would be a core part of a response to.

Critics of the attention to Basic Income (such as Alcock, Gaffney, and Gough) argue that, while they agree these contexts are problematic, they are either *not* new and distinct problems (automation), or are longstanding problems (failures of the welfare state), or are overstated problems (the gig economy). This critical response highlights that the contexts being discussed by advocates are contested, rather than fact – however, this is, I argue, sufficient to claim that the attention towards these contexts is not faddish. Furthermore, common to the critical discussion of Basic Income is the argument that Basic Income does not achieve the result of resolving the problems it is proposed to respond to (which would mean that the attention is faddish, as it shows that the attention consists of applying a policy tool to problems it does not fix). However, the problem common to these arguments is that it assumes that Basic Income is being proposed alone, rather than alongside other policy measures, as a “silver bullet”. This is something that advocates have highlighted is not the case (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b; Standing, 2017b; Torry, 2017).

The arguments about the contexts which I have focused upon have been from what might be reasonably considered the orthodox understanding of Basic Income, which, as I discussed in chapter four (see pages 94-98) describe what would be considered a utopia of abundance. The arguments around Basic Income are not, I argue, a fad: they instead indicate an engagement of the sort discussed by Jacobson as a “rediscovery of utopian demands” – and in particular that of utopian abundance, which is what Jacobson identified Basic Income with. This however, is not the only utopian imaginary which can be identified as playing a role in the contemporary attention to Basic Income. In the next two chapters I will be discussing two other utopia – a “real” utopia, which has emphasised a specific understanding of the potential scope of Basic Income as a policy, and a post-state utopia, which identifies Basic Income as a part of a minimal state, quite at odds with the mainstream discussion of Basic Income.

Chapter 6 – “Realistic” Utopia

Introduction

Trials of Basic Income, and reports discussing the potential impact of the policy in the UK are one of the significant elements of the attention paid to Basic Income in the 2015 – 2017 period. In this chapter, I will be arguing that this element of the attention arises from the ways in which Basic Income is discussed as “feasible” or a “realistic utopia”. “Realistic” utopia are attempts to present, discuss, and adapt utopian policy ideas to the political orthodoxy, and thus are not the sort of departure from existing political discourse imagined by advocates of an abundance utopia. In the case of Basic Income, this has resulted in a focus upon “feasibility”, both in terms of the cost to the exchequer and the impact of replacement of existing policies by Basic Income. The movement towards questions of feasibility has had some success for Basic Income, with significantly wider discussion accompanying it. However, the focus on feasibility – particularly in terms of revenue neutrality – has resulted in the analysis of Basic Income being limited to policies set at, or around, the current rate of Jobseeker’s Allowance, as opposed to more generous proposals.

The “real utopias” approach is criticised by Levitas for setting aside the creative imaginary of utopia, and with it much of the scope for imagining a world transformed. This mirrors the way in which the discussion of a feasible Basic Income has become limited to a very narrow range of policy possibilities. “Realistic” utopia also arguably tames the utopian imaginary in such a way as to serve as support, rather than critique, of the status quo. The criticism that Basic Income as a policy supports the status quo rather than significantly altering economic and political relations emerges for this reason. The critiques of the “real utopia” approach by Levitas, and of the current Basic Income proposals, are not necessarily fair; while they may not be as extensive in their ambition, the current Basic Income proposals (and the real utopia approach more generally) serve as a starting point, not an end state. While it can be argued that a mild success may reduce the impetus of political demands for further action, this does not tally with similar policies which have been implemented (such as national minimum wage).

In the second section I will expand upon the concept of “real” utopias, along with Levitas’ critique of the approach, as well as linking this to Gorz’ concept of non-reformist reform. This will provide the framework for the third and fourth sections of the chapter. In the third section I will discuss whether the vision of the world transformed is lost in the presentation of Basic Income as a feasible “real utopia”, or whether there has been an effective realisation of Erik Olin Wright’s objective for “real utopias” as “*posing clear designs for alternatives may contribute to creating the conditions in which support can be built*” (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006, p. xi).

In the fourth section I will question whether the Basic Income debate in the UK shows evidence of being a part of non-reformist reform or whether criticisms (such as Anna Coote's) are unfair. I will argue that although in the example of the UK it does seem to be the case – the vision of systemic change is still present – in other contexts (particularly around the Silicon Valley / automation arguments for Basic Income, which I will discuss in the next chapter) this line of criticism is not unreasonable. First, however, I will discuss the shape and nature of the attention towards feasibility.

Attention towards “feasibility” in 2015 – 2017

Over the time period that this project has focused on (2015 – 2017), and been conducted during, there has been a very significant emphasis on the question of whether Basic Income can be presented as a realistic (or feasible) policy. Referring to the Table 1 on page 34, the reports on Basic Income from think tanks in the UK have all related to the question of the plausibility of Basic Income, on the basis of questions such as: Is this affordable? Can a revenue neutral model be developed? Would this have a negative impact on incomes? The (press) attention to the discussion of trials of the policy of Basic Income in other polities is also, similarly, about understanding whether Basic Income is a realistic policy. The question of what the behavioural impacts of a Basic Income would be – particularly in terms of labour market participation – is central in determining the feasibility of the policy. If trials demonstrated significant work disincentive effects, then the potential erosion of tax base alone makes the policy impractical (it is worth noting that no trials to date of similar policies have shown this impact). Thus, when discussing the emphasis on feasibility within the attention to Basic Income I am including both the direct discussions taking place within the reports from think tanks establishing the economic impact of the policy and the media coverage of trials of the policy which are proposed, or which are occurring, in a number of different European and North American contexts.

Torry identifies discussion of feasibility as a relatively recent shift in the Basic Income discourse:

‘is this a good idea?’... is where the debate was until about a couple of years ago really, at which point it started to shift to ‘is it feasible?’, and that’s mainly where the debate is now... (Torry, 2017)

“*Is this a good idea*”, as Torry puts it, is a characterisation of discussions making the normative case for Basic Income. It is visible throughout the discourse, from ***The Capitalist Road to Communism*** (van der Veen and van Parijs, 1986) through ***Arguing for Basic Income*** (Parijs, 1992) and to ***The Precariat Charter*** (Standing, 2014). The shift to “*is it feasible*” that Torry suggests has occurred is exemplified both by Torry’s work on microsimulations (Torry, 2015; Torry, 2016) to the reports from think tanks in 2015 – 2017 (see Table 1, page 34). These focus on questions of the specifics of how a

Basic Income policy could be designed in the UK – the amounts to be paid, to whom, and funded by what changes to existing policies.

Torry's characterisation of the debate having shifted mainly to "is it feasible" appears to be drawn from his engagement with the debate and his focus. Torry was the first to use microsimulation tools in order to discuss the feasibility of Basic Income – with feasibility defined by Torry as "*losses that will be imposed on low income households by the scheme... [mean] it is politically infeasible*" (Torry, 2017). Microsimulations from Compass (Reed and Lansley, 2016) and IPR (Martinelli, 2017b) have had similar approaches in their study of Basic Income. However, other think tanks' work on Basic Income does not approach it in this fashion. The RSA report (Painter and Thoun, 2015) is primarily concerned with making the case for Basic Income, although it does use National Accounts process in order to give an indicative formulation of the policy.

The National Accounts process differs significantly as it uses the figures for the costs of various policies taken from the national accounts and can thus only talk about the overall fiscal cost, unlike microsimulation which uses the household spending survey data to model the impact on individuals. This limits the ability of these reports to provide significant discussion of the feasibility (at least if we are, like Torry, to include the impact on recipients as a component of feasibility). Other discussions such as Miller (Miller, 2017) likewise use National Accounts rather than microsimulation and primarily discuss the case for Basic Income, albeit with the inclusion of details in how it could work in the UK context.

Beyond the discussion of Basic Income by think tanks there is also a clear emphasis on the normative debate, rather than the discussion of feasibility in the post-2015 increased attention. In the political discourse this emphasis is best seen in John McDonnell's statement of wanting to "*win the argument about*" (Field notes, 2016) Basic Income, and in the continued advocacy by Green Party leaders (Bartley, 2016; Bartley, 2017; Lucas and Bartley, 2017). In the print media there is the significant discussion of the proposed (or in operation) trials of Basic Income in a variety of welfare state contexts which centres around questioning of whether or not Basic Income is a "good idea". In the academic discourse there is continued discussion and presentation of Basic Income as "a good idea": from its inclusion as one of the demands of the future by Srnicek and Williams (2015), to Guy Standing's insistence that the focus ought to be upon making the case rather than arguing the specifics (Standing, 2016b; Standing, 2017c), there is still significant discussion of the normative dimension of Basic Income.

However, Torry is correct in arguing that the sort of detailed attention he describes as the emphasis on feasibility is a recent phenomenon. There is no equivalent work in terms of microsimulations

prior to his own in (Torry, 2014), and there while there are trials of Basic Income (or of schemes reported as similar to) in India and several Sub-Saharan African States (Blattman and Niehaus, 2014; Blattman, Jamison and Sheridan, 2015; Haushofer and Shapiro, 2013; Standing, 2013), there are no discussion of trials in the context of the welfare state in the developed world until 2015¹⁴ (since the related Negative Income Tax trials in the USA and Canada in the 60s and 70s).

There are a variety of reasons as to why this has occurred – many of which are a part of the broader discussion of why there is increased attention to Basic Income at all (rather than specifically relating to the shift towards a discussion of feasibility). Guy Standing’s trial of a Basic Income scheme in rural India gave a very clear demonstration that the construction of a trial to investigate Basic Income was plausible – both to design, and in its operation. In addition to this there is an increased critical reaction to Basic Income in the mainstream UK media starting in 2015 which sets principal critiques for Basic Income advocacy to react against. This critique has two main dimensions. From the left, the critique is about how Basic Income would impact recipients of welfare schemes which Basic Income would partially or fully replace such as in Wintour (2015). From the right, the critique focuses on the fiscal cost of the policy (in, for example Andrew Neil’s questioning of the Green Party policy (Bennett, 2015a)) and the impact on work effort (Lynch, 2016; The Metro, 2016; Sheffield, 2016b). The feasibility discourse around Basic Income attempts to respond to these criticisms, and its emergence is a reaction to an emerging critical attention.

“Real” utopia and Reformist Reform

The UK attention to Basic Income involves then a focus on the “feasibility” of Basic Income. Feasibility is presented by Torry as essentially being a question of whether the least advantaged will suffer as a result of the implementation of the policy, combined with a question of how expensive the policy will be as a whole. “Feasible” by necessity resembles “how things are now”, even as it attempts to achieve critical changes to the present. This, I interpret as essentially resembling the “real utopia” approach as this ties to the broader discussion of utopia within this thesis, while at the same time attempting to capture the concerns of positioning utopia as politically attractive. This is not to say that those involved in the Basic Income discourse in the UK would identify their work in this fashion; but it is certainly understandable in this light.

¹⁴ There is the case of the incidental trial in the form of the Western Cherokee Band’s profit-sharing from proceeds of a casino (Standing, 2017a, pp. 258-259), which I have excluded as it was not intended to have any function in demonstrating feasibility. There is also the small-scale study of the impact on giving large cash grants to homeless individuals conducted by Hough and Rice (2010), which I am excluding as its purpose was in the discussion of whether cash was an effective intervention form.

Levitas dedicates a section of her discussion on the historical development of utopia within *Utopia as Method* (Levitas, 2013) to the development of “real utopia” as an approach to utopian thinking. Levitas’ discussion characterises this “real utopia” as an attempt to re-engage with the concept of utopia in a way which breaks from the common interpretation of utopia as fantasy or “totalitarian blueprint”. Levitas problematises this approach to utopia on the grounds that it loses the transformative power of the imagination in utopian thinking, particularly in the formulation made by Erik Olin Wright. For Wright, however, the “real utopia” approach has the possibility of “contribut[ing] to creating the conditions in which support can be built” (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006, p. xi) by illuminating policies otherwise dismissed as utopian with more orthodox tools of policy analysis.

Wright’s “Real Utopias project” began in 1991, and consists of six edited books discussing specific topic areas and a monograph from Erik Olin Wright discussing the general framework (Wright, 2018). The real utopias project is particularly relevant to Basic Income as the fifth book within the series focuses upon Redesigning Distribution (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006), and in particular Basic Income and the related Asset Based Welfare as policies. The “real utopias” project envisages creating evidence-based policy recommendations that are nevertheless radical (in the sense of their deviations from existing institutional arrangements):

The Real Utopias Project is based on the belief that it is important to engage in rigorous analysis of alternative visions of institutional change even when there seems to be little support for such ideas since posing clear designs for alternatives may contribute to creating the conditions in which support can be built. (Ackerman et al., 2006, p. xi)

Wright is then seeking to instigate analysis of “utopian” alternatives to establish their plausibility as the basis for providing a platform for change. The assumption being made within this is that merely utopian ideas are not subject to rigorous analysis in the way that more orthodox policies are subjected. The arguments as to why a policy ought to be must be supplemented with evidence as to the effective of the policy.

The utopias thus become *real* when they become possible to demonstrate as effective – as in the second portion of the distinction between fad and non-fad in policy design (see discussion in chapter 5). It must also be the case that this requirement means they must be demonstrably necessary (the first part of the fad distinction), as this must also be a part of the object of a rigorous analysis of a policy. The principal difference between what Wright is proposing and the common usage of the question of whether a policy is a fad is that Wright’s proposed approach takes place in advance of a widespread support (“*even when there seems to be little support for such ideas*”) while the question over whether a policy is a fad comes after there is widespread attention.

Levitas is critical of this reimagining of the concept of utopia. Firstly, because the project separates the utopian policy from the wider utopian imaginary (Levitas, 2013, pp. 141-148). By taking a single policy, the broader transformation of society which is imagined within the utopian project is ignored; a single policy is not a complete reimagining of society, and the policy alone cannot have that effect.

Levitas' second criticism is that the "*rigorous analysis*" which Wright proposes "*privileges science over imagination*" (Levitas, 2013, p. 147) and is cautious to limit "*real utopias*" to what is known, but, as Levitas explains:

*Real utopias must be both viable and achievable, and we just don't 'know' enough about the project of process of transformation... Rather than turning to imagination as a resource ... Wright's caution becomes an argument **against** utopia. (Levitas, 2013, p. 147)*

For Levitas, imagination is a vital part of utopia as a method, as it allows us to suggest the gaps in what is known. The point, for Levitas, of the utopian imagining of society transformed is that there is *transformation* from the present. This sort of transformation is not analysable in the present – the institutional arrangements that are being challenged are still in place. The impact of transformation cannot be subject to rigorous analysis because "*we just don't 'know' enough about the project of process of transformation*". As a result of this limitation, Levitas argues that the "real utopia" of Wright is, in fact, anti-utopian. The limits of utopia within Wright's "real utopianism" are the institutional limits of present social arrangements – the only *real* utopias then, are profoundly un-utopian as they cannot envisage a world transformed.

This idea, that "real utopia", by being based wholly within the present social order, without an appeal to the imagined future, fails to provide the basis for any transformative impact echoes Gorz distinction between reformist and non-reformist reforms. Non-reformist reforms, he argues, are unable to effect a transformation of the social reality because they are limited by the need to fit within the present system and what "can be". Reformist reforms however are "*determined not in terms of what can be, but what should be*" (Gorz, 1967 quoted from; Frase, 2016, p. 53) and the success of the reform is based on the "*implementation of fundamental political and economic changes*" (Gorz, 1967 quoted from; Frase, 2016, p. 53). The mirror with the argument over real utopia is imperfect; certainly the approach of "real utopia" requires evidence that the policy can operate within the existing context, but it does not require the continued functioning of the present system, just that it is possible to start within the present system. Levitas' approach to utopia as method requires the same positioning within the present context of the policy under consideration. However, the success of non-reformist reform being based upon the implementation of fundamental political and economic changes does step outside the limitations of real utopia – how

can evidence exist for a social policy being effective in a non-existent political and economic context?

The approach to utopia that Levitas articulates envisages a continuous process of reflection and critique that sees policy change over time with a continual vision of the good society as its guidance. The same iterative process could be suggested as possible within the “real utopia” approach. The implementation of a version of a policy demonstrable as feasible within the current context can provide the evidence necessary for a more radical version of that policy. In the context of Basic Income, the limited amount proposed within the microsimulation reports would provide the basis for campaigning for more generous transfer payments, as argued by both Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 2017) and Jacobson (Jacobson, 2017).

The argument that Levitas makes that the “real utopia” approach cannot envisage a world transformed is not necessarily fair. While it is the case that the approach does seek to limit the analysis of utopias to what can be evidenced, it is not that case that this involves abandoning imagination altogether. Instead, the role of imagination comes before the analysis; it is imagination that suggests a utopian policy to be made real through analysis. What the “real utopia” approach attempts to do is to take a utopian proposal, which has been reached through this very act of imagination, and then analyse what parts of it can be analysed. Furthermore, the suggestion that a part of the purpose of performing the analysis is to “*contribute to making the conditions in which...*” is itself seeking transformative effect. To suggest therefore that the “real utopia” approach is wholly anti-utopian is inaccurate.

The “real utopia” approach does, however, focus investigation in particular ways and it is this that makes it problematic from the perspective of the utopian advocate. If the limits of knowledge can only suggest that a policy is infeasible then there is no opportunity for the sort of iteration discussed above. While the microsimulations of Basic Income have not shown it to be infeasible, they have left questions over how useful the sort of Basic Income proposed would be as an antipoverty measure and as a measure which reduces the complexity and barriers within the existing social security system in the UK. Thus, we now move onto the question of how the focus upon feasibility has impacted the Basic Income debate within the UK.

[Feasibility and the UK Basic Income debate](#)

As discussed in the previous section, Levitas argues that there is a “real utopia” approach, exemplified by the work of Erik Olin Wright, which approaches utopian ideas in a way which limits their impact. In this section I will demonstrate that there is an extent to which this is a fair criticism (in the context of the contemporary discourse around Basic Income in the UK). However, I will also

show that the purpose Wright envisages for “real utopias” in “*contribut[ing] to creating the conditions in which support can be built*” (Ackerman et al., 2006, p. xi) is achieved within the UK. This means that the “real utopia” approach clearly does have an important role to play, despite its limitations.

This limitation is visible within some of the contemporary analysis of Basic Income, particularly where it is focused on the question of whether Basic Income is feasible. In the question of feasibility, what is important is determining whether the policy is affordable for the exchequer, and if the policy would result in income losses to any recipients. The microsimulation approach, which has been used by Torry, Lansley & Reed, and Martinelli is effective in giving a detailed account of impact on net incomes for households, but cannot include anything further:

Static models – also termed arithmetic models – are essentially calculators, adding and subtracting different income components for a given sample of households. In particular, individuals’ involvement in the labour market is the same regardless of changes to the financial incentives they might face under different policy scenarios. When modelling a policy reform such as UBI, to which one might expect behavioural response with respect to labour market participation, this represents a major shortcoming of the analysis. (Martinelli, 2017b, pp. 11-12)

As the impact on the ways in which people choose to interact with the labour market is a significant element of the imagined result of a Basic Income (both in speculating a withdrawal of labour and an increased participation, depending on circumstances, which Martinelli discusses in more detail in a later report (Martinelli, 2017a)), the absence of this from any calculations has an impact. Lansley and Reed elaborate on this problem – highlighting in particular the unknowability of the impacts on labour market participation.

This is not a very realistic assumption – in reality we would expect individual behaviour to adjust in many cases in response to the introduction of a UBI. However, adding behavioural responses into a tax and benefit micro-simulation model introduces considerable additional complexity and would have been impractical for this project on both timing and costs grounds. Moreover, given that UBI is such a major reform to the tax-benefit system, the direction and size of these impacts would be very hard – perhaps impossible – to estimate in the absence of running a pilot scheme first to generate actual evidence on how people respond to UBI payments and the concurrent changes to the rest of the tax-benefit system.” (Reed and Lansley, 2016, p. 26)

This represents, as Lansley and Reed (and Martinelli in the previous quote) recognise, a significant limitation in what the analysis performed can tell us about the impact of the proposed Basic Income policies. This is significant as one of the objectives ascribed to Basic Income by advocates (such as (Haagh, 2011; Raventós, 2007; Wright, 2006)) is the decommodifying impact Basic Income has on

labour. But because of the complexity and likely inaccuracy of estimating labour market impact, this part of Basic Income is omitted in analysis. This is a good example of the limitations which Levitas argued that the “real utopia” approach has. However, Lansley and Reed make the point that pilot schemes would “*generate actual evidence*” (Reed and Lansley, 2016, p. 26). Thus, a pilot put in operation on the basis that Basic Income was feasible (as shown in their report) would create the conditions for a further iteration of the policy design which could include such detail.

Although the limitation caused by the focus on what can be analysed becomes less significant when the above iteration is considered, the impact on labour market participation is not the only impact suggested in advocacy for Basic Income. Other such impacts are not even discussed within the microsimulation reports. The RSA report on Pathways to Basic Income argues for several of these economic impacts:

It is entirely plausible that an investment in people along the lines of the UBOF would be good for business and good for economic growth. It could kickstart a cyclical process whereby economic growth produced by a more skilled and fulfilled workforce could drive up living standards, producing a healthier and happier workforce able to push further economic growth...

Arguably, with the right support, the UBOF could support wider innovation strategies, at the margin at least, by providing the means through which creative citizens could invest in starting a business, developing prototypes or developing skills. (RSA report, Pathways) [#REF!]

In addition to these economic benefits of support for creative and entrepreneurial activity, and the impact of upskilled workforce which Painter et al argue for in the Pathways report, advocates who do not take the microsimulation “real utopia” approach suggest savings in the field of health (Forget, 2013), administrative costs (“*The universality of the basic income also means it is more efficient to administer than the current welfare system, providing savings*” (Bartley, 2017)), and a variety of other programme cost reductions (Pereira, 2017). This is because they have the scope – unlike in the microsimulations – to discuss benefits of the Basic Income which would emerge in an imagined future in which it is implemented. The “cyclical process” which Painter and Thoun discuss projects not just the immediate impact, but those which are ongoing and develop from each other – not just from the initial policy.

What these reports also do is demonstrate a particular version of Basic Income to be subjected to specific critique. While the reports do show that Basic Income is feasible, they also show Basic Income as a policy approach which is both expensive, but which does not have significant *measurable* impact on poverty. As the “real utopian” approach will not discuss what cannot be demonstrated with measurement, *only* the measurable impact can be discussed. Gough criticised

the proposals in the Compass report as being a “*huge engine to pull a tiny cart*” (Gough in Field notes, 2016; repeated in Gough, 2017) in terms of their actual impact on incomes. This is not to say that the policy is infeasible, but instead to say that the report suggests the money being spent on funding the Basic Income could be more effectively spent elsewhere – on more targeted schemes, for instance, or on the NHS.

The microsimulation approach also appears to limit the range of possible variations of Basic Income policy which can be discussed. All of the specific proposals gravitate to a rate matching, or close to, the rate of Jobseeker’s Allowance. The idea of a more significant rate of Basic Income is limited to a brief discussion (and is dismissed as infeasible) in the IPR report, and in an older report proposing a considerably higher Basic Income (Murphy and Reed, 2013).

However, those working upon the microsimulation reports provide different explanations of why there is this degree of similarity between the reports, and why they have concentrated on the models of Basic Income that they have used. Torry explains why his microsimulation is pitched at this level:

I don’t personally see Basic income as some major new social paradigm. You can see it that way and there is a sense in which in a certain light it is but it is no different from the NHS or child benefit in its structure, it simply extends into the realm of adult incomes what we have learned about the efficiency of universal provision in other areas and it is the efficiency of it that has always attracted me.
(Torry, 2017)

To Torry, the proposal is essentially an extension of the logic of universal provision to Jobseeker’s Allowance. Howard Reed recounted that the Compass report had used the previous microsimulation by Torry as a starting point in order to save time (and thus expense) in their analysis (Reed, 2017). The result of this, of course is that the focus of the analysis is around a similar model of Basic Income as Torry’s earlier microsimulation. Martinelli’s March 2017 working paper gives a wider range of possible schemes, but then concentrates microsimulation on models extending existing rates of transfer payments. This means that there is little diversity in the microsimulation discussion of Basic Income – the more extensive versions of Basic Income, with their accompanying higher cost, are not subject to a more detailed analysis of impact. They are simply treated as unimaginable.

Although the microsimulations which have formed a core component of the feasibility discussion have focused on a particular formulation of Basic Income, the broader expansion of the Basic Income discourse has not. Media coverage and commentary has not dedicated a significant amount of space to discussion of the specifics of the proposals contained within microsimulations, nor a significant degree of attention to exact figures. One piece in the Daily Mirror even discussed a figure of £12,000

per year for a Basic Income (Nelson, 2016), which is significantly higher than the figures within the microsimulation discussion. The majority of the feasibility related coverage in the UK print media has concerned the discussions of trials of Basic Income (as discussed in the first section). Print media coverage of think tank reports on Basic Income, where it has occurred (primarily in the case of the Compass report publication), has focused on the broad arguments surrounding cost and effectiveness (Birch, 2016; The Guardian, 2016; Kamm, 2016) or has focused on the political figures involved (specifically, the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell (Stewart, 2016; Spiro, 2016; Sheffield, 2016a; Stone, 2016a)).

The media discussion of the proposed trials has, likewise, not focused on the exact formulation of the Basic Income policy under discussion in the trials. While figures have been mentioned (in the case of the Finland trial for example [#REF!]), the discussion of trials has primarily been interested in whether or not the outcome of the trial will be as argued by advocates. Thus, the coverage, while motivated by the question of feasibility in terms of the impact on the labour market from Basic Income, does not limit the discussion of the broader idea of Basic Income.

What both sets of media discussions have done is to contribute to the significant increase in press coverage of the concept of Basic Income in the 2015 – 2017 period as compared to previous years in the UK (as is discussed at more length in chapter 4). What this suggests is that the sort of analysis proposed by Erik Olin Wright in the real utopias project *can* contribute to conditions in which a utopian policy concept can be considered. It is not the case that those microsimulations have operated on this principle in a deliberate fashion – indeed, Malcolm Torry is clear that he views this discussion about Basic Income as a logical extension of existing systems, rather than systemic change – but what they have done fulfils this purpose that Wright saw for “real utopias”.

Basic Income: reformist or non-reformist reform?

The discussions around Basic Income which I have characterised as “real utopian” (even if those discussing it would not consider it in this fashion) have, then, had an impact to some degree on the broader attention to Basic Income. The question I will now consider is whether this approach will, or could, lead to real change in social and economic relations (following from the discussion of Gorz and non-reformist reforms). Critics, such as Anna Coote, argue that Basic Income will not lead to a systemic change, but instead will do just enough to ensure that systemic change will not occur. This accusation is picked up particularly in critical discussions about the interest being shown in Basic Income among libertarian Silicon Valley elites.

The critical line taken by Anna Coote of the New Economics Foundation makes this point very directly:

Duffy suggests that collectively provided services are paternalist, elitist and, by implication, less empowering than giving people money (UBI) that they are free to spend on what they want. This sits comfortably within the neoliberal paradigm, which holds that free markets and individual choice are the best way to meet people's needs.

It is well known that people do not have equal power in the marketplace and some are better placed than others to meet their needs through shopping. Much depends on what particular needs you have, where you live, what you know and what's available to buy. Are you buying from a profit seeking multinational or a non-profit organisation and how far can your own purchasing power influence the quality of what you are buying? There is abundant evidence that markets often fail to meet needs, especially for those who are poor and powerless. Pooling resources and sharing risks through collectively provided services is a tried and tested way of addressing market failure. (Coote, 2018)

Coote makes the argument here that, far from being a radical policy which reshapes social relations, Basic Income “sits comfortably within the neoliberal paradigm, which holds that free markets and individual choice are the best way to meet people's needs”. What is problematic is that the free choice of how to meet needs that is delivered by Basic Income is not *real* freedom, because of the power inequalities between individuals and companies. Just because an individual has an income independent of any work, they may do does not mean that they have any specific power within the marketplace. In this sense, Coote is accurate – Basic Income does not specifically challenge power inequalities between producers and consumers. This is essentially an argument that Basic Income is non-reformist reform. Coote is arguing that it does not change the existing social and political relationships of the present system.

However, this argument arises particularly in the context of the piece from Duffy (Duffy, 2018) (to which Coote is replying), which Coote characterises as arguing that “*collectively provided services are paternalist*” – there is then a dichotomy established in the argument between provision of services and transfer payments. The piece from Duffy however is itself a critique of earlier arguments from Coote, in favour of Universal Basic Services (Jacobson and Coote, 2018) as an alternative new universalism to Basic Income. Duffy's piece then is focused upon the critique of Universal Basic Services, rather than making the case for Basic Income itself. There is not a direct choice to be made between a Basic Income and universalised services – one policy does not necessarily exclude the other – but there is a choice over the priority for funding.

This is not to say that the discussion from Coote is without merit. The argument *has* been made for replacing the entirety of social spending with a Basic Income and then allowing citizens to make their own choices, but this argument comes from the libertarian advocates of Basic Income (for example, (Murray, 2006)). In this sort of formulation – where Basic Income is set to replace all other social

expenditure by the state – the argument from Coote is more impactful. Then the choice does become one between services supplied with the objective of public interest, or Basic Income to purchase services from suppliers with a variety of motives. It is perhaps more accurate to argue that Basic Income “*could sit comfortably within the neoliberal paradigm if opposed to universal services*”.

The debate between Duffy and Coote also illustrates another problem of discussing utopian policy – which is that a policy alone does not wholly alter the social and political context. An imagined utopia of the type that Levitas discusses involves *many* changes in the architectural stage, not just one change. When attempting to analyse specific policy contributions from utopian thinking this broader change is lost; the focus is on the single policy and its impact. In the case of Basic Income, it is one of many policies necessary to achieve a significant social and political transformation. This is increasingly highlighted by advocates: Louise Haagh made the point at the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income that Basic Income was “*not a silver bullet*” (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017b). Impactful change in housing policy, support for disability, employment rights, effective healthcare, and many other areas would be necessary for complete transformation of the social and political context. Basic Income might have some impact in a variety of areas, but its major impact is in how society treats (and supports) the unemployed and the relationship between work and survival.

Frase (2016) argues that Basic Income does have the potential to have a significant and transformative impact on society through undermining existing patterns of wage relationships. The formulation of Basic Income as a policy that Frase uses differs from the hybrid- or partial- Basic Income that is commonly discussed in the UK. This formulation considers a Basic Income as being significantly higher – as van Parijs argues in *Real Freedom*, Basic Income should be set at the highest sustainable level (Parijs, 1995, pp. 38-41). At this (unspecified) higher level Frase envisages the possibility of Basic Income being the catalyst for a movement towards a utopian future resembling the moneyless egalitarianism of the *Star Trek* universe. Following a similar line to van Parijs, Frase argues that menial and unpleasant jobs would inevitably become automated. This is because with a sufficient Basic Income labour can demand higher wages for such roles, until the point where it is less expensive to automate them arrives. At the same time pleasant, satisfying jobs would eventually be undertaken for no wages at all, as without the need for income to survive people will not need to demand a wage to perform such tasks (Frase, 2016, pp. 56-57).

However, Frase’ argument here follows the assumption that this transition could occur without any interference, through a simple and unhindered operation of the marketplace (Frase recognises that this is problematic, and this is the most optimistic of his four futures). The problem that Frase

recognises is that existing power relationship and structures could, and would, be used to sustain those already in positions of power.

Tarnoff makes this point when arguing that the advocacy for Basic Income from Silicon Valley elites is deeply problematic:

Even if every kind of work is abolished by automation, with robots raising our children, growing our crops, and cleaning our teeth, there will be political decisions to be made about what kind of society we want. In the world imagined by the UBI tech elite, those decisions would inevitably be made by the people who own the robots – in other words, them. At best, this might resemble a benevolent dictatorship, where a small class of “wealth creators” manufactures and maintains the machines that make it possible for everybody else to lead workless lives. They’d give us an allowance to live on, and keep the rest for themselves. (Tarnoff, 2016)

Tarnoff argues that the reality of present elites arguing for a Basic Income is that the existing power structures that make them the present elites will remain in place. The present elites will maintain their position because they will still be the owners of capital, and the output of that capital would be unevenly divided between “an allowance” and keeping “the rest for themselves”. This is essentially similar to Coote’s argument that Basic Income is a “comfortable fit” with neoliberalism, but rather than highlighting the power imbalances between consumer and producer as Coote does, Tarnoff highlights the power imbalance between capitalist and worker. As Basic Income implemented alone does not impact the differentials in political power between the “wealth creators” who will own the machines and workers, the differences in power are unlikely to be changed.

Sonia Sodha likewise criticises the advocacy for Basic Income by Silicon Valley figures, singling out Mark Zuckerberg’s proposal of Basic Income. In addition to a critique about the cost of Basic Income as a policy (and thus its impact on services, following a similar line of argument to Coote), Sodha also questions the underlying motivation for Zuckerberg (and by extension of Silicon Valley advocates) in proposing the policy. Sodha argues that that Zuckerberg “sees a basic income as a replacement for, not in addition to, public services” (Sodha, 2017), referring to Zuckerberg’s argument that the Alaska Permanence Fund (a yearly resource dividend resembling a Basic Income) comes from “conservative principles of smaller government, rather than progressive principles of a larger safety net” (Zuckerberg, 2017). Sodha goes on to argue that the current arguments for Basic Income are “[a]t best... a dangerous diversion from how to improve the quality of work” and at worst:

“an enabler for the dark motives of the Silicon Valley tech scene. We’d be naive to buy into the idea that the owners of the robots would happily carry on paying the rest of us a basic income if it no longer suited them” (Sodha, 2017)

This final point follows a similar line to the one made by Tarnoff – that there would be a significant power imbalance between the owners of machines and the majority of Basic Income recipients. It also suggests that the motivation for advocacy for Basic Income by Silicon Valley figures is a deliberate subversion of the idea for their own ends.

As with Coote's point, both Tarnoff and Sodha's points raise the question of what other policies are implemented alongside Basic Income. Without any other policies alongside a Basic Income it is more than possible to interpret it as having a distinctly dystopian edge – the automated future of luxury for the elite, with the threat of Basic Income replacing all socialised services. This leads to a reasonable suspicion of support being shown for the policy. Is the advocacy actually part of an attempt to subvert a seemingly progressive, utopian, idea to maintain and reinforce existing differentials of power? A part of the increased attention to Basic Income in the international level has been the interest being shown towards the policy by international elites. In addition to the Silicon Valley elites that Sodha and Tarnoff refer to, there has been interest (if not support) demonstrated by the invitation of Guy Standing to the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos, as well as to the Bilderberg group in 2016 and 2017. Rutger Bregman, another Basic Income advocate, was invited to talk on the policy at the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos in 2019. Standing reported that the meetings showed an interest in the idea – a recognition of its importance (Standing, 2017b) – although he did not suggest the threat of subversion in the same way as Sodha.

Interest being shown in the idea by business and political elites is not necessarily an indication of a subversion of Basic Income as a policy. Both in Sodha and Tarnoff's discussion there is a clear impact from the existing public policy structure in the USA as compared to the UK. It is significantly more plausible in the US context that Basic Income would be introduced to fully replace all healthcare, and all other elements of the welfare state, as proposed by Charles Murray (Murray, 2006). This is because private healthcare provision is already the norm – so the provision of cash to purchase private insurance would not be a significant change (unlike in the UK, where private healthcare insurance is less common).

In contrast to the USA, in the UK there is little interest or advocacy for Basic Income from the political right. The Adam Smith Institute's advocacy for a Negative Income Tax does come from this position, but they recognise that the policy has little attraction for their target political audience: "*I would be surprised if there was anyone in parliament who openly favoured a Negative Income Tax... if they do I suspect that they would see it as a second best solution*" (Southwood, 2017). Instead, advocacy comes from left-wing political parties (the Greens, the SNP, and from John McDonnell among others in the Labour Party). In the UK context it appears unrealistic to suggest that the idea is

being subverted by the right, even if in the wider international context that case can be made. However, the problem with focusing too closely upon the policy of Basic Income without considering the other policies which also need to be implemented for it to achieve a transformation remains.

Conclusion

The detailed microsimulation work and discussions of Basic Income trials in other polities were a significant part of the attention paid to Basic Income in the UK in 2015 – 2017. These together I have characterised as being discussions of feasibility; feasibility being a reaction to criticisms of the Basic Income policy which attempt to meet and defuse the criticisms. Trials address the criticism that a Basic Income in operation would reduce work incentive by testing whether it would (or not). Microsimulations address the criticism of the cost of Basic Income – either to the polity implementing it, or in the form of reduced support to specific individuals.

In this chapter I have linked this discussion of feasibility to a broader discussion around utopia, in particular the “real utopia” approach advocated by Erik Olin Wright, and around notions of reformist reform. These approaches have led to broader questions such as whether the discussion of Basic Income is genuinely utopian, or even if it is subverted to maintain current hegemonic actors, and whether a focus on feasibility has assisted (or detracted) from the attention to Basic Income. In both of these cases, I have argued that the criticism of the “real utopias” approach is not entirely fair. Feasibility has contributed to the attention paid to Basic Income, and there is no evidence that in the UK the policy of Basic Income is being subverted away from its utopian roots. However, both criticisms have some legitimacy rooted in the weakness of the real utopian approach of detailed analysis which is limited to what is demonstratable.

One conclusion is that the idea of reformist as compared to non-reformist reform as discussed by Gorz is problematic. The case of the debate over Basic Income reveals that discussing a single policy in isolation makes it very hard to argue that the policy will have a reformist effect upon society. This is because, of course, society is a complex collection of interactions between policy and individuals. Considering the effect of a single policy being changed while the rest of society remains unaltered leads, inevitably, towards the conclusion that little will alter. Thus, considering a single policy as either reformist or non-reformist is problematic. Instead a broader platform of policy must be considered in coming to this conclusion regarding the reformist or non-reformist nature.

This in turn leads to a weakness of the “real utopia” approach. As the real utopia approach is focused upon policy it (naturally) focuses attention upon that single policy, divorced from any wider platform. As the point about non-reformist reform shows, this leads to the conclusion that the policy will not lead to a transformation of the social and political context, because the *other* policies that

form that context remain unaltered. This makes the real utopia approach weaker, as it leaves the policies which it analyses open to the critique that they fail to achieve the utopian future that they promise.

What then would be more effective from the perspective of real utopia is the discussion and analysis of a broader set of policies based around the same utopian objective. To an extent this is the objective of the Real Utopias series edited by Wright, which cover a range of areas of possible reform. There is not a unified vision of the future across the books beyond the need for a transformation of the present (although there are common threads between the policies under discussion). The development of a policy platform, with Basic Income as an integral part, which is subject to the same level of detailed scrutiny as in the microsimulations would be an interesting expansion of current discourse. Some effects would still be difficult to quantify, but a developed and examined policy platform would be buttressed against some of the criticism of the “real utopian” approach.

Chapter 7 – Basic Income and disruptive technology

Introduction

One of the major elements of the attention to Basic Income in the UK (and elsewhere) has been in relation to the discussion of automation. The link made between Basic Income and automation is consistent: Basic Income is proposed as the solution to anticipated significant job losses resulting from a current/anticipated wave of automations. In this chapter I will be arguing that this link between Basic Income and automation is reached through a vision of the future which is distinctly libertarian: pro-individual freedom and anti-State.

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the nature of the press attention in the UK at the intersection between Basic Income and automation. I will show that the coverage of Basic Income as a whole is heavily influenced by this intersection between Basic Income and automation, especially once automation is considered more widely in terms of “disruptive technology”. The press coverage discussing automation utilises it in a way which denotes a range of different technologies, from fully autonomous vehicles to textual analysis algorithms; but this usage is unhelpful. It loses the detail of the technologies being discussed, and focuses on the process, rather than the outcome – the social impact.

Disruptive technology is a better way to understand what is referred to more broadly within the coverage as automation, as it captures the variation in technologies and their social impact. It is this point that I will turn to in the second section. Disruptive technologies are those with the scope to significantly disrupt the existing patterns of work and employment within relevant industries, by removing (or significantly reducing) labour costs, or altering the structure of employment within the relevant market. Disruptive technology (as opposed to automation) draws in more clearly platform sharing technologies (such as Uber, Airbnb, and TaskRabbit) which are disrupting their sectors by altering the relationship between suppliers and consumers, and between businesses and workers.

Basic Income is proposed as a solution to the anticipated technological disruption, as it is an answer to the question “how do people live without a source of income?” This is the question being posed by advocates making the case that disruptive technology will cause significant unemployment. The exact nature of the Basic Income under discussion is – as with previous chapters – nebulous, particularly when considering the broader policy platform of which Basic Income is a part. In the third section of this chapter, I will consider the motivations of those advocating for Basic Income on the basis of the threat of disruptive technologies. This discussion will focus on Silicon Valley elites as they are critical figures in this segment of the Basic Income debate – they are relevant in the UK context because of their advocacy’s impact on the UK press coverage (as will be discussed in section

one). I make the case in this section that in this discussion of Basic Income and automation there is an underlying vision of the future in which the role of the state is minimised, and the importance of individual entrepreneurship is emphasised. This forms a distinct variation within Basic Income discourse – and one that is potentially disruptive to the purposes of more mainstream advocacy for Basic Income.

[Press Attention to automation and Basic Income in the UK](#)

[Section Introduction](#)

In this section I will be discussing the nature of the intersection between Basic Income and automation in the UK print media, and the ways in which this intersection has driven attention to Basic Income. I will argue that automation has been effectively (although not completely) linked with Basic Income – it is not the case that any mention of either will necessitate the other, but rather that automation has become a significant part of discussions about Basic Income both in the print media and more widely. I will also show that this linkage is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and that this is due to significant figures in the tech industry, particularly in the USA, advocating for a Basic Income in the context of automation.

The link made between Basic Income and automation by advocates is a very direct one: Basic Income is the answer to the question of how people live without a source of income. In other words, when technological change (and adoption of that change) results in significant increases in unemployment, how will society respond when paid employment is the primary means through which needs are met? This link also reveals the breadth of what underlies the somewhat nebulous terminology of “automation”: it is not just automation in the sense of (for example) assembly line automation but rather technological change which significantly disrupts the availability of employment and the levels of compensation for employment.

[UK print media attention to automation and Basic Income](#)

Based on my analysis of the UK print coverage of Basic Income, during the 2015 – 2017 period, pieces referencing both automation (or some variant) and Basic Income were approximately 37% of total coverage. This (alongside the coverage discussing trials) is the single largest theme within the Basic Income coverage in 2015 – 2017, which shows that understanding the intersection between Basic Income and automation is an important part of understanding the attention to Basic Income more broadly. The attention to the intersection between automation and Basic Income grows over the time period (69 pieces in the first half, 124 in the second half), alongside the overall growth of coverage (166 pieces in the first half, 366 in the second). Although there is a reduction in the percentage of the coverage making the automation/Basic Income link, the difference is not dramatic

(40% down to 34% of overall coverage). Automation remains a significant part of the attention throughout the time period – it does not appear to be a temporary element of the attention limited to specific events, although there are some events that do have impact on the coverage, as I will go on to discuss. This can be contrasted with the attention paid to UK political parties discussing the idea, where attention is focused around specific policy speeches (see discussion in chapter 4).

Prior to the period which I have focused upon in the media analysis, there is little discussion of automation and Basic Income in the print media. There is a single piece from Jeremy Warner (2014) in the Telegraph covering some of the early US discussion, and no reference to Frey and Osborne's (2013) pessimistic report on the future of employment despite the frequent references to this report in the later coverage. This is as a part of a very limited print media discussion of Basic Income altogether, however (I identified 8 pieces in the print editions in 2013, and 13 in 2014). On both BuzzFeed.com and Huffington Post (two of the more significant online only news sites) there is also no mention of automation in relation to Basic Income prior to 2015/6 (while discussion of Basic Income itself predates this). In the academic Basic Income discourse, there is not a sustained discussion drawing the automation/Basic Income link until around 2014. On the Basic Income Earth Network's news archives, the oldest piece tagged with "automation" is from 2012, but the remaining pieces are from 2015 onwards (Basic Income News, 2019; Vanderborght and Rieger, 2012). "Redesigning Distribution" (Ackerman *et al.*, 2006) does not make any reference to automation as a context in which Basic Income is a policy response, despite drawing together significant authors in the Basic Income and Stakeholder Grant areas to "make the case" for their favoured policy. Despite the absence of the argument from the discourse prior to 2015, Lawson commented that the problem with the "threat of automation" argument is that people respond to it by stating "you lot always bloody say that" (Lawson, 2017).

The discussion of Basic Income and automation largely occurs in the traditionally broadsheet newspapers (92% of the overall), but not to a degree which is unusual in terms of the coverage of Basic Income in the UK print media as a whole (where 87% of the coverage is in traditionally broadsheet newspapers). The Guardian and the Independent published 65% of the total automation/Basic Income coverage combined, which is, again, consistent with the general composition of the coverage. This shows that, as with the attention more generally, the increased attention to Basic Income is focused within one sector of the newspaper market. The Guardian and The Independent both identify as having a younger readership (in comparison with other UK print media) that is affluent, progressive, and interested in technology (The Guardian, 2012; Burrell, 2016). The progressive and technologically interested elements of this are very much consistent with

the Basic Income/automation intersection, so the concentration of coverage in this fashion is unsurprising.

This suggests the first of a number of explanations for the coverage of Basic Income and automation: the two combined address this combination of progressiveness and interest in technology that is identified as characteristic of readerships. The publication of articles following this trend is then aimed at satisfying reader expectations. There is also not a change in the nature of the readership – or target readership – so the articles are not an adjustment in response to this. Thus, although reader characteristics give an explanation for the presence of articles about Basic Income and automation, it does not explain the increased coverage of Basic Income by itself – just the presence of this type of article within the two newspapers providing the majority of the coverage of Basic Income (and the intersection between it and automation).

Rather than focusing on the composition of the readership of newspapers, one of my interviewees, Jon Cruddas MP, focused on the journalists involved in the coverage. Cruddas considered the press attention to be “zeitgeisty” and driven by the fact that:

...commentators always want to be on the cutting edge of something. And despite the fact that there is not a lot of literature in support of this there is a feeling among that sort of commentariat that we are on the edge of sort of total transformation in the world of work. Because of robotics and technological change...

But by those who want to capture the moment it is quite an appealing idea to transfer from one epoch to another, to be a part of that group that sort of interprets these contemporary transformations. Without necessarily fully scrutinising the data which actually suggests a much more balanced picture of what is occurring. (Cruddas, 2017)

Cruddas makes a number of points here, but the main response to the question put to him (about why media attention to Basic Income had increased) was that commentators were essentially inflating the importance of automation. Cruddas argues that there is a desire (among social commentators) to “capture the moment” and “be on the cutting edge”; thus, to place significant weight on technology, and to seek out new, unfamiliar, ideas. Thus, discussion of fully autonomous vehicles and Basic Income are an ideal combination. Furthermore, Cruddas argues that there is something appealing about “interpret[ing] ... transformations”. This takes the point even further by

suggesting that commentators' perspective is skewed to look for signs of significant, systemic, change.

Cruddas' response also contains the fairly common – similar points are for example made by Chu (2016) and Colvile (2016) – critique that the threat of automation is overstated. Cruddas does this by pointing to a lack of “*literature in support*” and arguing that commentators are not “*fully scrutinising the data*”. What both of these statements also do is set out an evidence-based policy position – Cruddas is arguing that the claim for Basic Income on the basis of the threat of automation fails to derive itself from sufficient evidence. This, as with the “real utopias” discussion, excludes the use of imagination in policy analysis. The impacts of future technologies cannot be assessed with the sort of evidence which Cruddas indicates; the automation/Basic Income intersection imagines the social impact of emerging disruptive technologies.

Cruddas' assessment of the coverage does adequately explain the increasing coverage of automation and Basic Income. Once the link between the two is made, the sense that there is possible “contemporary transformation” to be observed and interpreted is present. The discussion and development of technologies which have the potential to provide a significant disruption then maintains the sense that this commentary of Basic Income and automation is “cutting edge”. This enables a continued, and increasing coverage of Basic Income in conjunction with the various technologies under discussion.

Another element of the attention at the intersection between Basic Income and automation comes in the form of significant actors involved in high tech industries (and in particular, within Silicon Valley) advocating for Basic Income. Advocacy for Basic Income by figures such as Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and (in the UK) Richard Branson (for an overview see Clifford, 2017; for an example see Zuckerberg, 2017a), has had an impact on the coverage of Basic Income. In the first half of the studied period (Jan 2015 – Jun 2016) there is reference to an interest in Basic Income among “Silicon Valley types” (as Harford (2016) describes them) in 18 out of a total of 69 pieces (approximately a quarter) discussing the Basic Income/automation intersection. Within these pieces there is also some discussion of specific (but not well known) figures involved in technology investment who favour Basic Income as a policy like Marc Andreessen (Mian, 2016), Albert Wenger (Harris, 2016b), and Peter Diamandis (Tarnoff, 2016). The most discussed figure was Sam Altman of Y Combinator (for example in Wong, 2016; Mian, 2016; Thornhill, 2016a), which announced in January 2016 it was intending to study the impact of Basic Income, the first planned privately financed trial of Basic Income as a public policy (although the Economic Security Projects Stockton trial started actual operation earlier (Tiku, 2018)).

In contrast, in the second half of the studied period (Jul 2016 – Dec 2017) discussion of the impact of the “Silicon Valley types” is more pronounced, comprising a quarter of the coverage (42 of 124 pieces). The discussion of named individuals is also more pronounced, and the names are more familiar – Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and to a lesser extent Bill Gates and Richard Branson. The shift in the prominence of the individuals involved in the attention helps to explain an increasing press attention to the Basic Income and automation intersection. The prominence of advocates focused on the automation and Basic Income connection also helps to explain the growing prominence of the arguments being made for Basic Income on the basis of the threat of automation (as compared to other arguments put forward for Basic Income, such as the failure of heavily targeted welfare systems, as discussed in Chapter 5).

The involvement of significant figures from Silicon Valley has an impact beyond the direct press attention to their opinion on the policy, by putting the policy onto the agenda at meetings of international elites at the World Economic Forum. Guy Standing was invited to speak about precarity and Basic Income to an engaged and interested audience at the Bilderberg group meeting in 2016 (Standing, 2016b) by Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Alphabet Inc (Google’s parent company) (Standing, 2017c). This then led to invitations to talk at the World Economic Forum, and has also led to engagement with the policy by the International Monetary Fund. The IMF made the argument after this engagement with Standing’s work that Basic Income is potentially viable, although this is dependent on the existing structure of the welfare state within the implementing countries (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2017). This type of attention from significant institutions creates a level of “respectability” (as Standing (Standing, 2017b) puts it) about the idea; and this new respectability traces back towards the Silicon Valley interest in Basic Income as a policy through these international engagements between multinational business and political bodies.

Section conclusion

We have discussed two mechanisms which are adequate explanations for the attention being paid to the intersection between Basic Income and automation (both in the UK print media specifically, and in a more general sense for which the print media figures are being used as a proxy). Basic Income is being linked to automation through the argument that it will be necessary to implement Basic Income in order to resolve the social impact of emerging technologies which will cause significant technological unemployment. This argument leads to the first of the mechanisms explaining the attention to Basic Income and automation. This is that the “newness” of both the policy of Basic Income and of the technologies which it is being linked to is appealing to commentators due to a desire to be at the “cutting edge”. It is also appealing because the Basic Income/automation intersection reflects a potentially significant social transformation – and as a commentator it is

appealing to be a part of identifying, and thus participating within, such transformations. This operates alongside the second mechanism, where the interest in Basic Income from significant emergent tech industry actors (within Silicon Valley especially) is covered by the press. The prominence of the figures within their industry – and in the case of Zuckerberg, Musk, Gates and Branson, their businesses’ international prominence – lends significance to their analysis of their sector, and thus to their support of Basic Income. This gives us an understanding of how the coverage of Basic Income and automation emerged in 2015 – 2017, and the significant role it played in the attention to Basic Income as a whole – now, I will turn to examining why this discourse emerged.

Disruptive technology

Section Introduction

In this section I intend to develop the discussion around what is meant by automation, in order to explain how automation – and the threat of unemployment resulting from it – has been given such prominence. Automation as the terminology for the phenomenon being discussed is, as discussed in the introduction, not adequate, although it is the common descriptor. I will expand upon what I mean by disruptive technology, by discussing a number of these anticipated disruptive technologies and how they support the case for a Basic Income as a necessity. I will then discuss an area in which the disruptive technology is already realised – the gig economy – and how this has contributed to the argument about the future of work and the need for Basic Income. This will establish that there is *some* evidence for disruptive technologies creating a challenge for employment as the primary source of subsistence income, but that this challenge is not necessarily inevitable, or on the scale stated by some advocates. This will then enable us to discuss the motivations underlying this aspect of the Basic Income advocacy in more detail in the final section of the chapter.

Self-checkout

While I have used the term “automation” within the first section of the chapter, this has only been for convenience and simplicity – and because it is used in a very general sense within the print media coverage (as well as in scholarly discussion of Basic Income). A more accurate term would be “disruptive technologies”; that is, technologies which are anticipated to cause significant disruption to their relevant market sectors by significantly changing the nature of the market, and, as a result, significantly impacting upon the employment market within that industry.

A good illustration of disruptive technology in action is the increase of self-service checkouts within the retail industry – one of several technologies that are commonly grouped under the broad umbrella of “automation”. Increasing deployment of self-service within the retail industry threatens

employment in an industry where significant numbers are employed (2.8M in the retail industry in the UK in 2017 (Rhodes, 2018)). In retail, however, the use of self-service checkouts is well established in major brands, replacing service by employees, although not wholly removing them (traditional checkouts remain, and self-checkouts are monitored by staff). This means the disruptiveness of the technology is questionable.

The disruptive nature of Amazon Go¹⁵ is recognised (and, later in the piece, linked to Basic Income as a solution) by Tim Dunlop in the Guardian:

Amazon Go, along with businesses like Uber, Airbnb, Netflix, and even Google and Facebook, are part of a fundamental restructuring of the economy and the work that goes with it. It is not simply that the technology is causing jobs to be lost. It is that it is changing the relationship between businesses and employees, governments and citizens. (Dunlop, 2016)

Dunlop links Amazon Go with the platform economy businesses, and the tech industry more generally, which is the approach I am taking with this understanding of disruptive technology. He also emphasises not just unemployment but the social impact in the restructuring of social relationships that emerge from these disruptive technologies. The Amazon Go concept supermarket suggests a development of this self-service model which entirely removes the need for employees, relying on newer technologies to monitor the customers' shopping. Rather than acting as a saving in labour costs by reducing the number of checkout staff, the Amazon Go concept removes one complete element of the labour associated with retail. It is this latter type of self-service that has gained press attention – because of its newness, as well as because of its reliance on newer technology (whereas self-service tills are just a re-arrangement of existing technology). The Amazon Go concept has been developed particularly during the 2015 – 2017 period, and has potential for significant disruption to the sector as a source of employment if it is developed to a point where it can be practically deployed *en masse*.

Autonomous vehicles

One of the most prominent among the discussed disruptive technologies is fully autonomous vehicles (29 articles are coded for this out of the total coverage identified in the first section – or

¹⁵ Amazon Go is a checkout-less supermarket operating in a limited, but increasing number of locations in the USA. Shoppers enter the supermarket and then activate an app on their smart phone. Their selections from the shelves are tracked by a variety of sensors and cameras and then stored in a virtual shopping basket. After exiting the store the items that have been recorded are paid for using payment sources already stored in the application. After the initial “signing in” upon entering the store, shoppers do not have to enter any further information.

about 15%). Road passenger vehicles are given prominence within the press attention – with high-profile efforts from major car manufacturers, as well as Google subsidiary Waymo, and Uber (the rideshare platform) – but the more significant application of the technology is in autonomous goods vehicles. The possibility of replacement of human workers within transport and delivery roles would represent a significant impact on employment and is a common element of this part of the discourse around Basic Income and automation. An example of the commentary from Andy Stern, former president of the Service Employees International Union (a major US union), and Senior Fellow of the Economic Security Project (a recently formed, and automation unemployment focused, Basic Income advocacy group):

Driverless trucks—which I think will be deployed before driverless cars, because business likes to free itself of labor costs—will eliminate 3.5 million truck drivers over time, which is the largest occupation in 29 states. There are another 6.8 million people in insurance and auto repair, plus jobs in hospitals and giving speeding tickets and rest stops that rely on trucking. I think when we talk about this kind of massive change, there is little chance to catch up with it with new jobs or with much more substantial social investment... So I don't see the universal basic income as the end-all policy, but I do think it's something we need to fully develop, so that if things get much worse than we expect, we are prepared with a universal basic income system. (Stern, 2016a)

Stern highlights that the impact is not just directly upon the employment of truck drivers which is threatened, but also industries which interact with truck driving in some form. Stern also makes it clear that his vision of the future (and Basic Income's involvement within it) is not a utopian one, but rather an avoidance of dystopia – the role of Basic Income is in providing a backstop. This perspective can be contrasted with the vision of the future from advocates such as Frase (2016), or Srnicek and Williams (2015) who view Basic Income as a part of a more positive automated future (which is a part of the utopia of abundance mainstream discussed in chapters 4 and 5).

Stern also directly refers to the idea that trucking driving is the “*largest occupation in 29 states*”. The claim that truck driving (either in the form of haulage, delivery, or similar) is a common part of the discussion of the threat of this type of automation, and most likely comes from a widely reported piece of analysis done for National Public Radio (NPR) in 2015 (Bui, 2015). This piece asserted that the most common job in a majority of US states was some form of truck driving. However, although the NPR data reporting that in most states in the USA the most common job was “truck/delivery/tractor driver” was widely reported, the use of aggregation within their analysis of

job categories was flawed, as the US census bureau categories (where the data was gathered from) vary significantly in how specific job categories are (Nutting, 2015). The combination of the headlines “most common job” and that automation threatens that job category significantly overinflates the threat posed. Even within the piece from Stern, where he acknowledges the actual figures (rather than just largest occupation category), the scale of the disruption is not contextualised within the total employment figures in the USA. The figure of 3.5M workers represents around 2% of the total civilian workforce (Civilian workforce figures from Statista, 2018), which is significantly less than the impression that might be given by the (as noted previously, erroneous) loss of jobs in the “largest occupation in 29 states”. If all of the jobs in trucking were to be eliminated, it would represent a 50% increase in the current unemployment in the USA (Calculated from figures in Ferreira, 2019), however, which is still a significant impact – just not quite as significant as Stern, and others, imply in this argument for Basic Income when they discuss the prominence of trucking as a source of employment.

Machine learning

A further type of disruptive technologies is in a more general category of machine learning and “artificial intelligence” (not intelligence per se, but rather in the informational gathering and processing technologies that are necessary components of a true AI). A key publication with regards to the coverage of this area is Frey and Osborne’s (2013) report on “The Future of Employment: Jobs susceptible to computerisation”. Their headline statement that “[a]ccording to our estimates, about 47 percent of total US employment is at risk” (Frey and Osborne, 2013, p. 1) is eye-catching, and Frey and Osborne’s report is either directly named, or referred to (as, for example “Oxford researchers”), in a portion of the coverage discussing Basic Income and automation (e.g. (Chu, 2016; Mason, 2016b; Dunlop, 2017)). The three largest areas of employment that Osborne and Frey estimate as being under high probability of automation (70% chance) are in the job categories of Service, Office and Administrative Support, Sales and Related (Frey and Osborne, 2013, p. 37). The latter two categories are in areas that have not been traditionally associated with the threat of automation as white-collar jobs, and it is this, alongside the eye-catching 47% figure, that make this kind of automation concerning. The argument made for Basic Income on this basis is that if 47% of jobs (in the US case) were to disappear, then an alternative to employment as the means of providing subsistence needs would be socially necessary.

However, while the 47% figure is eye-catching, it is questionable. Brandes and Wattenhoffer (2016) broadly endorse Frey and Osborne’s conclusions, but then they question the opacity of the calculations surrounding risk of automation. Specifically, they ask “*But what if a job is 87% automatable? Is every task 87% automatable? Or are 87% of the tasks completely automatable, and*

13% not at all?" (Brandes and Wattenhofer, 2016, p. 1). Conclusions about risk of automation are then made at the level of occupation, rather than at the level of tasks within an occupation – some of which will be hard to automate – which is one of the criticisms made by Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn (2016). In their analysis, the 47% figure is reduced to 9% of jobs with a 70% (high) automatability; they explain this difference:

not taking account of the variation of tasks within occupations exerts a huge impact on the estimated automatability of jobs. This is because even in occupations that [Frey and Osborne] expect to be at a high risk of automation, people often perform tasks which are hard to automate, such as for example interactive tasks (Arntz, Gregory and Zierahn, 2016, p. 14)

The distinction thus being made is that although many tasks within an occupation might be automated, this does not make the occupation at risk, because the remaining tasks are more frequent, and are resistant to automation. The outcome of this is changed emphasis within occupations, with automation assisting, rather than replacing.

Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn also observe (although they do not include within their analysis) that a risk of automation of the sort that Frey and Osborne are describing is not the same as *actual* automation. Legal, ethical, and economic reasons as to why an automation might not take place despite being possible are not considered in either the Frey and Osborne analysis (Arntz, Gregory and Zierahn, 2016), or the Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn report. The economic reasons are particularly significant – there is no reason to assume that a plausible automation is an affordable one. This means that even the significantly lower 9% figure is likely much higher than the probable outcome of these automations.

Gig Economy

Although it is treated as distinct from automation the gig economy is, essentially, based upon automation. I am using "gig economy" here in the sense used within the Taylor Report on modern working practices (Taylor, 2017, p. 25), rather than a broader sense which sometimes includes zero hours contracts in traditional businesses. In this case the various platforms (such as Uber, Airbnb, Taskrabbit, and Deliveroo) are automations that are disruptive to existing employment relations. In the case of Uber, for example, the Uber platform takes the place of private taxi hire companies, with dispatchers, management, and on payroll drivers – and replaces it with individual drivers. The platform does this automatically. The "gig economy" both in this (but also in the broader sense) is another part of the attention to Basic Income, and one which has (unlike the anticipated

automations previously discussed) had an impact on the structure of the employment markets with which they have interacted.

In addition to his concern (previously discussed) about the threat of automation to truck drivers, Andy Stern of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) emphasises the impact of the gig economy on the nature of work: “*We built a whole social infrastructure based on the concept of a job, and that concept does not work anymore*” (Stern, 2016b). This is because the rise of the gig economy conflicts with the concept of a steady job. Rather than “being” a taxi driver, you earn some money through Uber; rather than “being” a handyman you use TaskRabbit, and so on. By altering the importance of “job”, one of the criticisms of Basic Income (which is that jobs are socially desirable) is removed, and it becomes easier to envisage a Basic Income supported freelancing workforce.

These arguments about automation, the gig economy, and Basic Income are not unique to the USA. The Green Party MP (and former party leader) Caroline Lucas makes a similar argument to Stern’s:

But this is an urgently needed policy. With increased job insecurity, the idea of everyone working nine to five is outdated. People go in and out of work these days... People are increasingly working in what they call the gig economy. The current system is not fit for purpose. (Caroline Lucas MP, in Boffey, 2015)

Lucas supplements the argument made by Stern about a changing nature of work by also referring to the movement in and out of paid employment. This instability in work changes the nature of “a job” from something that is stable and long term, into something consistently short-term, and unreliable. Instability in employment also creates the conditions for the “gig economy”. In the final line quoted, Lucas refers to the current system not being fit for purpose – by this, she could be referring either to the social security system as a safety net, which is not designed around short term or gig work, or the broader system of employment as the means by which social product is distributed.

In a study conducted in partnership between Upwork and the Freelancers Union (2018), it was calculated that a third of Americans freelanced in 2018, with the freelance workforce at 56.7M¹⁶. This included both those doing relatively little work as freelancers, but the report also noted that full-time freelancing was increasing (from 17% to 28% of the freelance workforce between 2014 and

¹⁶ Although both Upwork and the Freelancers Union are stakeholders in the discussion around freelancing (and thus may wish to represent more significant impacts of freelancing), the figures produced in this report (and previous reports going back to 2014) is not contradicted by other government sources; for example, the following from the Bureau of Labor Statistics agrees with the figure (<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/freelancers-in-the-us-workforce.htm>)

2018). Although this freelancing covers considerably more than *just* the gig economy of the sort that Stern discusses, it is still clear that the change towards this sort of work is well entrenched in the US case. This then justifies the advocacy for Basic Income on these grounds.

In the UK case however, despite arguments (such as the one from Caroline Lucas MP discussed above) following a similar line about the gig economy, the case is not backed by such significant figures. The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices argues that there has been some impact from the gig economy but concludes that *“‘The British way’ works and we don’t need to overhaul the system...”* (Taylor, 2017, p. 31). The Taylor review does however acknowledge some problems (both with the gig economy and the changing nature of employment more generally) around the clarity of legal rights of employees (p26-9). However, there are not the same levels of freelancing in the UK as the USA; the estimated figure used in the Taylor Report is *“1.3 million people (4% of all in employment)”* (Taylor, 2017, p. 25). This significantly weakens the argument that in the UK a Basic Income is necessary to resolve the impact of the “gig economy”. It is the case however, that significance has been attached to the gig economy as well as to questions of the future and nature of work more generally. In addition to being addressed within the Taylor Report there are two other parliamentary reviews into the subject area (***Future of work and rights of workers inquiry*** (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017) and ***Self-employment and the gig economy inquiry*** (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2017c)), and the Taylor report highlights: *“There are many examples of increasing media and public concern in relation to worker exploitation”* (Taylor, 2017, p. 28).

The “gig economy” provides an example of the sort of impacts that might be anticipated from the other disruptive technologies which are less advanced in their development and application. There is a significant variance between the impact in the UK and in the US contexts – 4% of the workforce in the UK as compared to over 33% in the USA are considered as a part of this new model of work and employment. There are some difficulties in comparison due to the differences in analyses; it is not clear whether the comparison is accurate, or whether there is significantly more (or less) data considered by one data set. It seems unlikely that there is sufficient difference between methodologies to account for the 27% difference. The difference between the two national contexts likely derives from the differing standards of legal protection for works rights, as well as differences in historical philosophies (such as the lack of an equivalent to the corporatism of the post-war consensus in the UK within the US). There are however similarities in the arguments about the impact of the gig economy and of the need for a Basic Income between the two contexts, in that the impact of the “gig economy” is highlighted, and ideas about Basic Income are discussed in that context.

Section conclusion

There are, as has been discussed, some eye-catching arguments made about the threat of automation, or more accurately, the anticipated impact of disruptive technologies. Headlines about the automation of truck driving that call it the most common job in the USA, or reports about the high risk of automation of 47% of jobs, make a strong case for a policy solution to mass unemployment, such as Basic Income. As has been discussed, many of these are somewhat flawed predictions (or mis-interpreted predictions): truck driving is not the most common job, and even if it was, would not represent as significant a level of unemployment as implied by the headline; the “risk” of automation in no way reflects the probability that jobs will actually be automated. That there are flaws in the way that have been reached, or discussed in the press, does not alter the impact that the discourse about automation has had on press attention. It also does not alter the impact upon the press attention through the intersection between Basic Income and automation. This understanding of the arguments about disruptive technologies does, however, provide a basis for questioning the motivations for those making the case for Basic Income on these grounds, which is what I shall do in the next section.

Post-State Utopia?

Section Introduction

The previous section focused upon the justifications for the arguments being made about the need for a Basic Income on the basis that disruptive technologies would lead to significant unemployment and require subsistence needs to be met through some means other than employment. I concluded that the case for significant technological disruption was noticeably overstated and it was therefore necessary to discuss the motivations of the actors making the case for Basic Income on the basis of technological disruption. In this section I will discuss possible motivations which are accessed through reading of speech acts by the relevant actors, through accounts from my research interviews, and through other analyses. I will argue that one particular motivation, a libertarian ideological position, is especially significant, and will examine this in more detail through the framework of Levitas *utopia as method* as involving a particular post-state vision of the future. This facilitates an understanding of how the advocacy around Basic Income and automation is critically different from the more mainstream abundance (and sufficiency) utopia discussed in earlier chapters.

Motivations for Basic Income/automation advocacy

One of the starting points of this thesis was the RSA Scotland Angus Millar lecture in which Guy Standing argued that Basic Income was an idea whose time had come. A part of this was the

understanding that Standing presented on international elites paying attention to Basic Income, when he suggested that the elites can “hear the pitchforks coming” (Standing, 2016a). This quote was the basis for a question in my research interview with Standing about his understanding of the motivations of international elites, and particularly Silicon Valley elites in their discussion and advocacy for Basic Income:

I think that different individuals within that group will have a different combination of factors, but usually I have found it is partly technocratic for the robots issues, partly political, partly as they realise as, one billionaire I have in my mind said to me – my claim in the corruption book that the system is rigged for rentiers – he said to me “you are right, it is, and it is not acceptable” so I think there is some mixture of idealism, so of cynical libertarian ideology on the right and some, the technocratic problem and they see Basic Income as a logical solution. (Standing, 2017b)

Having been invited to talk about Basic Income and precarity both at the Bilderberg group and the World Economic Forum at Davos and having discussed the idea of Basic Income with these elite figures, Standing is in a position to provide commentary of this sort on the motivations. I shall use these factors (idealism, libertarian ideology, and technocratic solutions) as the starting point for discussion of the motivations behind the adoption of the idea of Basic Income (in relation to arguments about automation). Similar understandings are put forward by other commentators, such as Thornhill and Atkins:

Whether it is because of a sense of guilt at the upheavals they are causing in society or simply a celebration of innovative thinking, some Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have taken to the idea of a universal basic income, describing it as a “digital dividend” (Thornhill and Atkins, 2016)

The point about idealism – Standing recounts that “one billionaire I have in my mind said to me... ‘you are right, [the system is rigged for rentiers], and it is not acceptable’” (Standing, 2017b) – is a point that should be kept in mind during the rest of the discussion which will be critical of the motives of advocates around Basic Income and automation. There is a current of advocacy which appears to be attempting to envisage the type of utopia that resembles the “mainstream” of Basic Income thought, as discussed in chapter 4. This includes advocates whose focus is on other aspects of Basic Income, but who reference automation as a concern (Caroline Lucas MP is an example discussed earlier in the chapter, but this is a common inclusion). It also includes advocates from the accelerationist left – who view automation as desirable, but not inevitable (for more discussion of

this, see chapter 4). There are also figures like Democrat Presidential candidate Andrew Yang, former SEIU president Andy Stern, as well as the unnamed billionaire of Standing's account, who appear to be approaching the automation and Basic Income advocacy from this idealist standpoint.

The principal argument in favour of Basic Income arising from the Basic Income and automation intersection is around the question of how society will support subsistence needs when work as a means to support needs is largely unavailable. It is to this argument that Standing is referring to with "*partly technocratic for the robots issues*"; because the way that the interaction between the problem is described and the solution presented is, essentially, as an engineering problem, rather than as a social problem. This follows Njálsson's (2005) definition of technocrat as taking a problem-solution approach, rather than a more socially oriented mindset which would engage in a more extended fashion with the social purpose ascribed to and understood in employment. The technocrat would identify a lack of availability of employment-income as the problem, and thus propose an alternative basis for income – Basic Income. The problem with this is that the technocratic approach identifies the problem but not necessarily the causes, or the broader context in which the "problem" exists.

The technocratic argument for Basic Income on the basis of anticipated disruptive technologies makes a number of assumptions. The critical assumption is that mass technological unemployment is inevitable, but almost as significant is that the only policy choice is in mitigation of impact. Not only are the accuracy of the claims about the threat of technological questionable (as has been discussed above) but the assumption of mitigation as the only option is questionable as well. Many of the technologies under discussion are vulnerable to legislative choices – particularly the autonomous vehicles – about whether the use of the technology will be allowed.

This suggests a further plausible motivation for the emphasis on inevitability and mitigation – that the tech industry actors involved want to avoid discussion of legislative restriction upon the technology that has been invested in heavily. By focusing the narrative around emergent and potentially disruptive technologies on the inevitability of the disruption, and upon "technical fixes" society can make in response to the disruption, space is denied to discussions over the technologies themselves, and whether to limit their use and impact. Basic Income is useful concept to promote if this is the motivation because it represents a radical change in the way in which social security policy is conducted (particularly in the USA) – which helps in focusing the discussion on whether or not Basic Income is a good idea, rather than on whether or not the automation is a good idea.

Staying with the more cynical assessments of the motivation of those advocating Basic Income on the basis of automation, the argument that "*high tech plutocrats... are worried about the pitchforks*

coming" (Standing, 2016a) is in a similar vein. In his lecture for RSA Scotland, Guy Standing linked this "*pitchforks are coming*" to global inequality, and, in particular the rise of right-wing populism in addition to the technological aspects. The motivation for advocating Basic Income in this instance is an offering of a more generous social security policy in order to mitigate the side effects of socio-economic structures which make them elites. The purpose of this is to maintain those socio-economic structures. This is the criticism discussed in the previous chapter from both Coote and Mian. In this case, the motivation for the advocacy come from more than just the arguments about automation, by also considering rising inequality and the electoral successes of populist movements and leaders.

Related to this is the argument that Basic Income is being proposed as a policy on the grounds that it helps sustain consumer spending power. Brynjolfsson describes this as a motivation of a senior figure in the tech industry:

This insecurity was fuelling to a crisis of aggregate demand in the economy, he said, adding that recently he had been visited by the boss of a tech group worried about who would have enough money to buy his company's products in 10-15 years. (Brynjolfsson in Thornhill and Atkins, 2016)

Just as in the previous point about "*the pitchforks are coming*" the motivations being ascribed to the tech industry actors include economic insecurity in the present in addition to any considerations about the future impact of disruptive technologies. The concern in this instance is also about the maintenance of the current socio-economic position. However, in this case it is not maintaining the status quo against increasing objection to the status quo, but rather in the face of increasing inequality undermining the sustainability of the status quo.

The idea that Basic Income advocacy from Silicon Valley elites has the objective of maintaining the status quo is raised by Sadowski:

UBI subsidizes disruptive technologies... UBI becomes a consolation prize for those whose lives are disrupted. Benefits still accrue to the designers and owners of the technologies, but now with less guilt and pushback about the collateral damage. (Sadowski, 2016)

Basic Income facilitates, according to Sadowski, the continued development of disruptive technology by compensating (to a degree) its impact. This is similar to the earlier point about the focus on Basic Income as a solution distracting from other solutions to the impact of disruptive technologies. It also highlights that it is a *subsidy* – the State subsidises the impact of the technologies through Basic

Income, while the tech industry benefits from the profits from these disruptive technologies. This is recognised to a degree, and some of the automation related advocacy for Basic Income argues for it to be funded through taxes levied on the disruptive technologies themselves (e.g. Bill Gates' arguments (Gates, 2017)) but this is not the norm within the discourse.

We have four points now which consider that the motivation for supporting Basic Income is essentially as a distraction from, or solution to, other problems that the advocates themselves are a part of. The Basic Income proposal either distracts from discussion about the social desirability (and possible curtailment of) disruptive technologies, or acts as a sop to dissatisfaction with the status quo, or acts to continue unsustainable concentration of wealth, or effectively subsidises disruption by externalising its costs. In all of these cases Basic Income is a convenience for its Silicon Valley advocates, rather than an ideal.

A further negative interpretation of the attention to Basic Income around automation is the "*cynical libertarianism*" that Standing references. This is an argument previously discussed (in chapter 6) that Basic Income is an ideal libertarian replacement for the functions of a welfare state (see (Murray, 2006)). Rather than provide any services – such as health, education, unemployment, social services and so on – the State provides a Basic Income and citizens use this to purchase such services as they desire and require. This interpretation largely ignores automation because the only link it has to automation is through the political ideology of actors involved in that automation – in other words, though the strong libertarian current within Silicon Valley. The purpose of the advocacy in the form of automation and Basic Income is to give an alternative justification to the real reason for their support. In other words, Basic Income is being proposed as a solution to the problem of disruptive technology by those who really want Basic Income implemented as a first step towards abolishing the welfare state.

A Libertarian vision of the future?

This brings me to the interpretation of the Basic Income/automation intersection as a part of a distinct utopian project, which is informed by roots within Libertarian thinking. The discussion around Basic Income and automation presents two futures. The first is a techno-optimists' utopia of plenty and universal leisure. The second is a dystopian vision of a threatening jobless immediate future. The former utopia would be a utopia of abundance, and the presentation of technological optimism and abundance has been discussed in chapter 4. However, there is a critical difference in the way in which the accelerationist tech-optimism of Srnicek and Williams (and the abundance utopias more generally) is discussed in comparison to the discourse around automation and Basic Income. The discussions about Basic Income and automation are not about *pushing* for automation

and Basic Income in order to achieve this vision of the future, but instead they are about the *inevitability* of automation, and the need for Basic Income to mitigate it – they are focused upon the dystopian vision of the immediate future. This changes the understanding of what is being discussed; rather than being an argument for Basic Income *and* automation as the architecture to achieve a vision of the future, it is an argument for Basic Income as the architecture *because* of an inevitably changing context around work. This means that the vision of the future is not necessarily the one of abundance, but rather it is something distinct.

This alternative vision of the future views the State as problematic, rather than a location in which utopian desire can be located, and as the basis for social cooperation, as it is in the mainstream understanding of Basic Income. This vision of utopia is one which is post-State, and which is distinct from the abundance utopian vision discussed in chapter 4 because those utopia were realised *through* the State, rather than without it. It is also a vision of the future in which the self is the location of utopian desire; the objective is in achieving the best self that each individual can be, rather than creating an idealised State in which people can flourish. I am going to spend the rest of this chapter demonstrating the occurrence of these two themes (utopia of the self and post-state utopia) within the discourse around Basic Income and automation.

It is worth restating at this point that the discourse around automation and Basic Income enters the context of the UK primarily through the reporting of a debate which is mainly occurring in the USA. As a result, in this section I will be primarily discussing actors from the USA. Although this is a diversion from the UK context which is the focus of the thesis, it is important because the US discourse impacts upon the discourse in the UK. This is through the reporting of the debate in the USA through the UK print media, through primarily UK industry leaders repeating the same sorts of arguments (such as Richard Branson's endorsement), and this is also through UK based advocates adopting the discussion of technological disruption as a part of their advocacy (such as the Green Party including automation as a significant portion of their case for Basic Income).

If a truly post-State world is the utopia, then the ultra-minimal State of Nozick (1974) is a movement towards that utopia. The normative objective of smaller government is directly referenced within the discussion of Basic Income and automation. For example, the following is an extract from a Facebook post by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg after a town hall event in Alaska (the Alaska Permanence Fund (APF) which he is discussing is held up as an example of an operating Basic Income):

This is a novel approach to basic income in a few ways. First, it's funded by natural resources rather than raising taxes. Second, it comes from conservative

principles of smaller government, rather than progressive principles of a larger safety net (Zuckerberg, 2017b)

Zuckerberg's second point here suggest that he views smaller government as a desirable outcome of Basic Income. The use of "progressive" however, rather than a more critical description of the opposing option, suggests a sympathy with the opposite half of the partisan divide which he is suggesting Basic Income bridges. This post comes in July 2017, after the Harvard commencement address in which Zuckerberg also discussed Basic Income (and which I will discuss later). This is important, because a part of what Zuckerberg emphasises here is that the APF does not involve increased taxation, and in the earlier Commencement address Zuckerberg *had* stated income taxation as a means of paying for Basic Income.

Chang argues in the New Republic Magazine (which is rooted in progressive and Democratic politics, although it also has links with Facebook through its former owner, Chris Hughes, who was a cofounder of Facebook) that the reference to "small government principles" in Zuckerberg's discussion of bipartisan appeal is telling.

But a UBI policy can only reflect small government principles if one envisions it eating into the country's existing welfare state, rather than coming on top of it. In this respect, Zuckerberg's advocacy of UBI "bipartisanship" starts to look more like a veiled libertarian agenda.

This attitude echoes other pro-UBI tech lords like Altman, who sees basic income as providing a "floor" but not a ceiling. In his ideal scheme, no one will be very poor, but people like Altman will still be free to get "as rich as they fucking want." The tech vision of the world is one where it can wash its hands of the rising joblessness it will generate through automation, but where those at the top can still wallow in extreme wealth... (Chang, 2017)

Sam Altman, who Chang discusses, is (as mentioned earlier in the chapter) one of the critical earlier voices in the attention to Basic Income and automation, having set up one of the earliest private projects to trial a Basic Income policy through Y Combinator. Chang argues that the "bipartisanship" Zuckerberg suggests is a cover for the actual objective of Zuckerberg's advocacy for Basic Income; by suggesting that Basic Income could reflect small government principals, Zuckerberg demonstrates that the broader programmatic implications of Basic Income for him are not an expansion of a social safety net, but rather a simplification of the sort discussed by Charles Murray (2006). What Chang's critique indicates is that the vision of Basic Income for "pro-UBI tech lords" is one that is essentially

Libertarian – the ability of an individual to benefit without limit as a result of freely entered transactions being a central element of Libertarian ideology (as illustrated with the Wilt Chamberlin problem by Nozick (1974, pp. 160-164)).

Ferenstein argues that this characterisation of tech elites as Libertarian is flawed:

“While tech is often stereotyped as a libertarian oasis, no household Silicon Valley names publicly donated to the small government torchbearers, Rand Paul or Ted Cruz. (In past years, early Facebook investor Peter Thiel gave handsomely to libertarian champions like the former congressman Ron Paul, but he is a conspicuous exception. Thiel now backs Trump.)” (Ferenstein, 2016)

This is based on analysis of the spending from actors within the Forbes 400 undertaken by CrowdPAC – a tech start-up designed as a platform solution to gathering funds to support political causes (PAC being a common abbreviation of “Public Action Committee”) – and Bonica, a Stanford professor with previous work in analysis of spending by US elites (e.g. (Bonica and Rosenthal, 2015)). Ferenstein makes a significant point – if small government is the objective, then it would be logical to expect backing from politicians who are significant in their support of that objective.

Analysis of the attitudes of tech elites from Broockman, Ferenstein, and Malhotra (2017) based on interviews with “over 600 elite technology company leaders and founders” (p. 2) opposes the perception of them as being essentially self-interested and Libertarian. Instead, Broockman et al found a more complex relationship; tech elites were significantly anti-regulation in business, technology, and labour (as would be expected for Libertarians – and significant donors to the Republican Party), but at the same time favoured the attitude to redistribution held by Democrats (albeit not to the same degree as Democrat donors) (The Economist, 2017). There is a point that I will return to about individual flexibility and the labour market in the second half of this section, but the emphasis I wish to draw on here is the contention around the size and role of the State.

The willingness to support redistributive policies is taken by Broockman et al (and Ferenstein in his earlier quoted individual piece for the Washington Post) to indicate that a characterisation of tech elites as being Libertarian is flawed. The policy propositions they used to test this willingness included questions upon increasing taxes on high income earners, increased spending on programmes assisting the poor, implementing universal healthcare even if it required increased taxation. While support for redistribution might set Silicon Valley elites apart from traditional Republican wealthy elite donors, it does not indicate that they have an egalitarian perspective.

Broockman et al's data shows the tech elite group as distant from core Democrat donors' attitudes towards redistribution, but similar to the average Democrat.

What is significant here however is the nature of the redistribution, and the construction of policies within the welfare state, which the data does not address (beyond the specific question regarding healthcare, which again I will return to later). Basic Income is markedly supported by Silicon Valley elites and those with ties to them (the Economic Security Project, of which the former Service Employees International Union president Andy Stern is a Senior Fellow, was co-founded by Chris Hughes – who was also a co-founder of Facebook). It is not, however, a central part of any Democrat position on redistribution. Later within the Broockman et al data there is a question which helps demonstrate this point (although Broockman et al do not highlight it), which is around government programmes. Broockman et al found that:

although [technology entrepreneurs] strongly support taxation and redistribution, they have more positive views of markets and entrepreneurs, to the point that they would prefer the private sector to spend funds [that] they support the government collecting in taxes (Broockman, Ferenstein and Malhotra, 2017, p. 36)

This, and a further question about whether the government did a good job running social programmes, gives a distinct understanding of the position of tech elites in comparison to Democrats. It is also a demonstration of why Basic Income is an ideal policy for Silicon Valley figures – they accept higher spending, and taxation by government, but they are opposed to government being in charge of the social programmes thus funded. Basic Income is an ideal way to achieve this, as it places all of the control of the spending into the hands of individuals, rather than government – and opens the scope for *all* of the individuals to become entrepreneurs (a point that again, I will return to later within this section).

There is a further point which Broockman et al make in their case against the labelling of tech elites as Libertarian. Within their survey Broockman et al included a question to identify libertarian beliefs:

The surveys asked whether individuals agreed or disagreed with the statement "I would like to live in a society where government does nothing except provide national defense and police protection, so that people could be left alone to earn whatever they could." (Broockman, Ferenstein and Malhotra, 2017, p. 25)

The results had tech elites as significantly less likely to agree than the average Democrat (23.5% compared to 43.8%) although significantly more likely to agree than other major Democrat donors

(23.5% to 5.1%). However, this question is a crude instrument – it is obviously a question which is asking “are you a Libertarian”. Given the (assumed) knowledge of the common identification of tech elites with Libertarianism, it can be questioned as to how accurately the responses match with the actual attitudes of respondents, as they may alter their answers in response to the known stereotypes/assumptions about Libertarianism.

The opposition to regulation and to government management of social expenditure (coupled with the also identified social liberalism) are compatible with Libertarianism. The idea of a minimal floor provided by a minimal State involvement Basic Income coupled with the limitless ceiling of successful and unregulated entrepreneurialism is the Libertarian vision of the future utopia tempered by the necessities of the changing context around technology and employment, rather than something resembling the abundance utopia arguments for Basic Income. The involvement of the State in a Basic Income is minimal – it requires the gathering and the distribution of funds, but not significantly more than that, as Basic Income by itself, rather than as part of a larger policy programme, is indifferent to individual needs or circumstances.

In addition to being opposed to the State as the means to realise “the good society” (which is common with the anarchist tradition), there is also an emphasis on the individual in the advocacy for Basic Income by tech elites. It is this individualist strand which I am now going to turn in this discussion of the libertarian vision underpinning the attention to Basic Income and automation.

Throughout the discussion of post-state utopia (above) there has been references towards the flexibility of the workforce. This, I would argue, is where the tendencies towards favouring government expenditure identified by Brockman et al are directed – into creating the conditions for a flexible workforce conditioned and capable of operating under the technologies of the “gig economy”. The positive attitude towards redistributive policies, such as universal healthcare, reflect an acknowledgement that the existing US model of healthcare being delivered as a benefit of employment is incompatible with the employment model of the gig economy. In the latter there are no long-term positions, and the private insurance model is impractical.

Zuckerberg stated this position clearly within his Harvard Commencement address in 2017:

Now it's our time to define a new social contract for our generation... We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things. We're going to change jobs many times, so we need affordable childcare to get to work and healthcare that aren't tied to one company. (Zuckerberg, 2017a)

This statement gives a clear vision of the future. A new social contract, with Basic Income buttressed by healthcare and childcare provision – and these components are there because “We’re going to change jobs many times” and because they will “give everyone a cushion to try new things”. This continues the assumption – as discussed earlier – that mass technological unemployment is inevitable. Zuckerberg makes this point earlier in the commencement address “*Our generation will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks.*” He continued this theme later in the address:

Many of our parents had stable jobs throughout their careers. Now we’re all entrepreneurial, whether we’re starting projects or finding our role. And that’s great. Our culture of entrepreneurship is how we create so much progress.
(Chang, 2017)

Progress, the future, comes through individual efforts and entrepreneurial activity. This is why Zuckerberg makes the argument that the social contract must be renegotiated to facilitate that individual action in a series of short term, flexible, entrepreneurial gigs – rather than being designed around longer term “stable jobs”.

This commentary about entrepreneurialism and progress appears throughout the tech elite advocacy for Basic Income. Stuart Butterfield (CEO of Slack and cofounder of Flickr) tweeted “*Doesn’t have to be much, but giving people even a very small safety net would unlock a huge amount of entrepreneurialism.*” (Butterfield, 2017). Sam Altman of Y Combinator (a tech start-up investment company, which is also funding trials of a Basic Income) said “*I think about the amount of human potential that is being wasted by people that are not doing what they want to do. I think about how great it would be to undo that [with a Basic Income]*” (Clifford, 2017). It is also a strand of the arguments for Basic Income from the contemporary academic discourse around Basic Income (for example the argument that welfare institutions should “*underpin the abilities of individuals and communities to turn their ideas into positive economic and social impact*” (Painter and Thoung, 2015) made by the RSAs report on Basic Income). It is not given the same prominence in arguments however – tech elites position this individual opportunity for success as the primary argument (alongside the upcoming end of work as we know it). This is an important difference in understanding motivations: making it the primary argument indicates what is most important, mentioning it does not indicate more than the prominence of the argument in the contemporary Basic Income discourse.

This mass entrepreneurialism supported by Basic Income is a contemporary expression of the emphasis on the individual from Libertarians. Nozick’s expression of Libertarianism in ***Anarchy***,

State, and Utopia emphasises the individual to the extent that he argues “*taxation of earnings from labor is on par with forced labor*” (Nozick, 1974, p. 169). However, this is within the context of historic policy debate and understandings of work, and within the context of radically different rates of taxation within the USA. In 1974 the top rate of tax was 70% on income over \$180,000 (nominal) for head of household, and in 2013 the top rate was 39.6% on income over \$425,000 (nominal) for head of household (Tax Foundation, n.d.). Given this significantly changed context around taxation, and the increased significance (and anticipated, by advocates, increasing significance) of the gig economy it is possible to understand why Basic Income is now plausible from a Libertarian perspective. A minimal Basic Income which supports the flexibility of an employment market based around multiple short-term contracts (alongside a healthcare system that does the same) facilitates freedom for individuals in two ways. Firstly, by enabling individual workers to pick and choose their projects (at least nominally) and secondly, by enabling individual business owners to more easily select and fire workers as it suits them as task workers, rather than permanent employees. Thus, Basic Income helps facilitate an economy of free agents making free choices in their economic interactions.

It is also important to note that within his post on the Alaska Permanence Fund, Zuckerberg (2017b) highlights that the funding is through resource extraction rather than through individual taxation, suggesting an alternative approach to funding a Basic Income that is compatible with the Libertarian perspective about taxation discussed above (although this is not elsewhere emphasised in proposals).

Section conclusion

The prominent US advocacy for Basic Income on the basis of mass technological unemployment can be identified as having roots within a libertarian intellectual tradition that views the good society as one in which the State interferes minimally. The genesis of this part of the Basic Income advocacy is in tech industry elites in the USA, who have typically been labelled as Libertarian. The arguments made by Broockman et al that Silicon Valley elites are mis-labelled when they are described as Libertarian have been shown to be flawed. Although these elites do favour redistributive policies, their attitudes towards State involvement in redistribution, and toward regulation are consistent with a Libertarian perspective. Basic Income is a specific realisation of these attitudes: as it is discussed by Silicon Valley elites, Basic Income is understood as facilitating individual freedom, a flexible and unregulated labour market, and minimal state apparatus to administer. Basic Income viewed in this fashion facilitates a movement towards a vision of the future in which there is a minimal, if any, state, and in which the individual is emphasised over society.

Conclusion

The linking of Basic Income with automation has played a significant role in the press attention to Basic Income in the UK, specifically through the reporting of the debate over Basic Income in the USA (where automation is emphasised as the reason for needing a Basic Income). This portion of the Basic Income debate differs significantly in how it perceives the purpose of Basic Income however, and this results from the way in which its advocates perceive the good society as one in which the state is minimised, and the individual is emphasised.

I have shown in this chapter that approximately a third of the coverage of Basic Income over the 2015 – 2017 period which is the focus of the thesis has involved automation in some fashion. An examination of the coverage, and commentary upon it, shows that this is driven at least partly by the attention paid to Basic Income by Silicon Valley elites. The involvement of better-known figures (such as Zuckerberg and Musk) has coincided with the increase in coverage in the latter half of the period. This is not to claim causation – there is insufficient evidence – but there is an interrelation.

We then move on to discuss the accuracy of the arguments about automation, and disruptive technologies more generally. The term “disruptive technologies” better captures the concepts under discussion than automation; this is a discourse around technologies which will (or may) have significant impacts on the nature of employment in their sectors, not just the volume of employment. The arguments about the threat of disruptive technologies are overstated, both by reporting and the way in which they are discussed by advocates of this variety of Basic Income.

The overstatement of the threat implies *motive* in the emphasis which is given, and the final section of the chapter focuses on understanding the motivations of advocates. Self-interest and Libertarian idealism are possible motives proposed by commentators and interviewees. It is this idealism which I focus upon in the final section as I draw upon the framework of Levitas’ *utopia as method* to facilitate understanding of this part of the Basic Income discourse. Although there are criticisms of characterising Silicon Valley elites as libertarian (and advocacy for Basic Income and healthcare are among these), I demonstrate the types of policy under discussion are compatible with libertarianism, and the vision of a post-state utopia.

This is a threat to more mainstream abundance (and sufficiency) utopia discussed in the previous chapters. If this variation on the argument for Basic Income is taken alongside the other, there is a risk of the significant differences between the two visions of the future being lost. The case needs to be made that although the underlying mechanism of the policy (Basic Income) is the same, that the two policies *are* fundamentally different. This is because what is important is the policy platform of

which Basic Income is a part, and the vision of a world transformed that that policy platform attempts to take us towards.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

As has been stated, my interpretation of the contemporary attention to Basic Income is that it is not about Basic Income, but rather many different Basic Incomes. Although the policy under discussion is similar in nature in each case – it is some form or variation upon a transfer payment made to all, on an individual basis, without attached conditions of behaviour or circumstances – the ideas surrounding each of these Basic Incomes are fundamentally different. The “attention to Basic Income” is co-occurring attention to different ideas about the future, idealised society, and about the flaws within the present society, which share a common policy – a Basic Income.

As a result of this, Basic Income has differing projected outcomes and is postulated within (sometimes) radically different policy programmes – including policy programmes which are completely incompatible. This incompatibility occurs, for example, between (neo-liberal) arguments suggesting the outright replacement of all welfare, education and health programmes with Basic Income and market provision, and those placing Basic Income within a strengthened vision of universal provision in health, education, and welfare. This is important both for advocates of Basic Income, and for other individuals discussing the policy and the contemporary attention to it, because it highlights the importance of clarity in how Basic Income sits within the broader social policy environment rather than discussing it in isolation. Through this thesis, I have sought to do this by being specific in the diagnosis of social ills which Basic Income is being presented as the solution to (which is a common element of Basic Income discourse) and in making explicit the understanding of the nature of the good society which Basic Income is working towards. These, taken together, reveal the other policy interventions (or non-interventions) necessary to make the proposed Basic Income operate as intended.

In this chapter, I will discuss how this conclusion about a plurality of Basic Incomes is reached through the research questions set out within chapter 2. These questions were:

- Why is it that Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in the last year (early 2015 – mid 2016) as compared to the years before?
- What is being proposed by advocates for Basic Income and what is their reasoning behind it?
- What role might Basic Income play in future welfare provision, given past debate over the proposal?

The question of why Basic Income is receiving significantly more attention in the last year as compared to previously was not only extended to cover 2015 – 2017 as the project was conducted,

but also forms the primary emphasis of the thesis. This is not to say that the other questions are unimportant: the second question is important in picking apart the different strands of thought from which Basic Income is the output, leading towards the conclusion that the attention is composed of distinctive approaches, rather than to one single idea about Basic Income. The third question is less about predicting the future of social policy in the UK than it is about understanding what is distinctive about the contemporary attention as compared to prior attention to Basic Income. It can be inverted and rephrased to ask, as I did in chapter 5, whether the attention to Basic Income is just a fad, or something more.

All three of these questions are encapsulated in the framework developed from Levitas' (2013) *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (IROS) which is central to my analysis. This is the method that Levitas argues is encapsulated by utopia, which was discussed in chapter 3. IROS involves a critical analysis of the present context (the archaeological mode), a vision of the future good society (normative mode), and specificity over policy measures to move between the two (architectural mode). In answering the research questions I am interacting with each of these modes; the normative mode is an important part of understanding what is it that is being proposed and why, as well as the future role of Basic Income in welfare provision; the architectural mode looks at the specifics of what is being proposed; the archaeological mode engages in discussion of why Basic Income is relevant at this specific time.

In this concluding chapter, I will draw together the response to each of the research questions in turn, before finishing with a discussion of the contributions to knowledge and implications for future research arising from the thesis. This research highlights and explores the composition of, and explanations for, the media attention to Basic Income. This is an area not thoroughly explored by the academic literature on Basic Income. In a recent special themed section on Basic Income in European Welfare states, De Wispelaere and Haagh (2019) highlight that there has been significant global attention to Basic Income since 2014. They highlight the media attention to specific events (such as the Swiss referendum) and to specific contexts (such as austerity politics) in the same way that I have, but they then focus upon the policy, policy actors, and the contextual challenges faced. Haagh (2019) focuses on the institutional constraints as an explanation for the differences between the impact of Basic Income during this period of global attention, but does not theorise about the nature of the attention itself.

Why is Basic Income receiving increased attention?

Responding to this question is at the core of the motivation for this investigation. As a student interested in the idea of Basic Income since first encountering it as an undergraduate, the shift from

obscurity into the (relatively) mainstream of being discussed by the Guardian's economics editor (Elliott, 2014) and receiving sustained attention at the start of the general election 2015 long campaign (Bennett, 2015a; Bennett, 2015b; Collins, 2015; Riley-Smith, 2015; Warner, 2015) was an interesting phenomenon. During the course of developing my literature review in late 2015 and early 2016, the attention continued to grow, and, rather than being a side question, it became clear that understanding the mainstream attention to Basic Income was a significant research question in itself.

As an emergent phenomenon, the literature specifically discussing the *attention* to Basic Income (as opposed to Basic Income itself) was (and is) minimal. A key commentary on the attention to Basic Income was from the RSA Scotland Angus Millar lecture, when both Anthony Painter (of the RSA) and Guy Standing both commented on the attention being paid to Basic Income being *different* (Painter, 2016; Standing, 2016a). My principal approach in seeking to understand the attention to Basic Income was thus to discuss it in semi-structured expert interviews with individuals placed to comment upon the development: academics and others in the policy community, including both long-term and recent advocates (and critics) of the policy; activists in newly developed networks supporting Basic Income (Basic Income UK and Universal Basic Income Europe); politicians involved in the Basic Income debate and putting it on the political agenda. Journalists involved in the attention to Basic Income were also approached for interviews, but none accepted.

In addition to the interviews, I also collated media coverage of Basic Income in the UK newspaper national print editions in order to discuss the composition and nature of the mainstream attention to Basic Income. This was supplemented with media coverage more generally (including radio, televisual, and online sources) although this could not be gathered with the same degree of reliable, comparable completeness as the print media coverage (and thus is not considered in any comparative discussion). The results of this investigation are discussed in chapter 4.

There were consistent points put forwards about the nature of the attention to Basic Income by my interviewees, namely that it involved: the impact of automation, and the accompanying proposal of Basic Income as a policy response to anticipated future mass unemployment as a result of technological change; the attention being paid by UK political parties (particularly by the Labour Party's Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell); the trials in Finland and Ontario, and the Swiss referendum on Basic Income. These points about the nature of the coverage correspond with the major themes identified within the mainstream media coverage of Basic Income.

To these facts about the nature of the coverage, my interviewees added arguments about *why* these were important, and driving the attention to Basic Income: that the welfare state was not fit for

purpose; that the attention was a reaction to the impact of austerity in the public policy realm; and that there was a changing perception of the nature of work and employment (particularly around the gig economy). These were highlighted as a part of a contextual change in the social world and the public perception of the social world – that is, the context in which the welfare system operated was different, and Basic Income was given more attention as it was (and is) appropriate as a policy response to this changed context. Little media attention focused on the question of why, although there were a few commentaries, such as Ed Milliband’s discussion of the attention being an aspect of people seeking for the next “big idea” (in Sodha, 2016; Miliband and Cavendish, 2018) and John Rentoul’s (Rentoul, 2017) description of Basic Income as a “zombie idea” that just kept resurfacing. Other media commentaries, such as Sodha’s (2016), included similar assessments to the interviewees – Basic Income was receiving increased attention due to the social and political context, prominent trials, and automation.

In addition to these commentaries about the nature and causes of the attention to Basic Income, Standing observed that there was a degree of respectability in discussing Basic Income that was previously absent; it was no longer treated like a fringe and obscure idea. Standing noted the discussion of the idea at the World Economic Forum, at the Bilderberg group meeting, and by figures such as Christine Le Garde as evidence of Basic Income being more mainstream and respectable (Standing, 2017b). This notion was present within several interviews, although not with the same explicitness as from Standing, with interviewees discussing the historical debate around Basic Income with references to “true believers” (Lawson, 2017) and feeling like an “atheist at a prayer meeting” (Gough, 2017). There were also direct references to the idea being considered in the past, but not at all seriously (Lister, 2017; Pearce, Martinelli and Crisp, 2017). While this is an important element in understanding the attention to Basic Income, by itself it cannot account for the mainstream attention (to argue such would be to argue a tautology). The “respectability” can be (and is) an element of the mainstream attention, and can contribute significantly to expanding and maintaining the mainstreaming of attention, but it is not in itself a cause.

Finally, the attention to Basic Income was identified as relating to a “rediscovery of utopian demands” by Barb Jacobson (Jacobson, 2017; Long *et al.*, 2016) – that, rather than focusing on defending existing welfare rights and institutions, people were starting to pay attention to Basic Income as an expansion of them: a new radical demand. This is an assessment situated in a context of the (unexpected) electoral success of Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party in the 2017 snap general election, and in the recent history of growth in Green Party membership and media visibility, but also within the context of Jacobson’s long-term experience as a welfare rights activist. The utopian

demands that Jacobson envisages are what can be categorised as a utopia of abundance, with Basic Income providing sufficient income for all to meet their basic needs without needing to work.

While a similar assessment of a utopian turn was not directly made by other interviewees or in the media coverage, the concept of looking for the next “Big Idea” or a “1945 moment” (in reference to the creation of the post-war welfare state) is a repeated theme (Gamble, 2017; Lawson, 2017; Miliband and Cavendish, 2018; Monbiot, 2013). This reference can be interpreted as an ambition to locate an idea around which to build an electoral coalition.

When Miliband (Miliband and Cavendish, 2018), Cruddas (Cruddas, 2017), and Lawson (Lawson, 2017), talk about the “next big idea” they are tapping into the notion of significant institutional change. As the Beveridge report is put forward as a previous example of this sort of big idea, it provides the model of what is meant by those discussing the next “Big Idea” – a major policy intervention, aimed at addressing critical contemporary challenges, and which reaches towards an idea of the good society. While not making the same reference to utopian thinking as Jacobson, the essential point is the same; the attention to Basic Income is about responding to the critical context with a departure from the status quo, rather than revising and reforming.

This “rediscovery of utopian demands” discussed by Jacobson (Long *et al.*, 2016; Jacobson, 2017) proved compatible with the other explanations proffered for why Basic Income was receiving increased attention. When examined through the lens of utopia, it is evident that there are a number of different, but still utopian, imaginaries in the other explanations for the increased attention to Basic Income. I have reached this conclusion through the use of the framework I have derived from Levitas’ *Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (IROS) in thematic analysis.

Rather than applying these stages to developing a utopia (as Levitas uses them), I use them as a framework through which to interpret, seeking the different modes of enquiry (archaeological, architectural, and normative) as they occur within my data. This then allows me to draw together disparate and fragmentary arguments into four distinctively different approaches (utopias) within the data: utopia of abundance, utopia of sufficiency, “real” utopia, and post-state utopia.

The type of utopia to which the proposals for Basic Income from individuals like Jacobson (Jacobson, 2017) and Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 2017) fits with is a utopia of abundance; where Basic Income is the foundation upon which individuals can then pursue their goals and ambitions for life. Scarcity of the material conditions for life is removed through the use of a Basic Income. This might be considered the mainstream of Basic Income thought, and is discussed in chapter 4. This forms a

considerable amount of the academic discourse on Basic Income, and a portion of the mainstream attention discusses the form of Basic Income in which material needs are met.

The attention being paid to trials of Basic Income fits with an approach to utopia described as “real utopia” (Wright, in Ackerman *et al.*, 2006; Wright, 2018), where the utopian idea is analysed in the same fashion as existing policy approaches. The result of this is (as discussed in chapter 6) is that the construction of the Basic Income policy itself in these approaches is far from the more radical one of utopia of abundance. This approach to Basic Income dominates the trials and microsimulations, all of which as a result tend not to deviate significantly from existing welfare state arrangements in their generosity.

Post-state utopia is a part of the attention to Basic Income and automation, as I argue in chapter 7. Basic Income is being presented in this context as having no alternative – mass unemployment means that an alternative to wages must be created in order to meet subsistence needs. This form of proposal does exist within the utopia of abundance arguments, but the post-state utopia form, through its emphasis on the inevitability of mass unemployment does something further, and different. The post-state utopia argument for Basic Income ignores – and avoids – the alternative response to possible mass unemployment: state intervention in the market, through regulation of the technologies causing mass unemployment, or through job creation. Furthermore, Basic Income is viewed as an efficient replacement to existing social security programmes rather than a supplement – on the basis that individual interactions with the market are more efficient than state operated services. Neither of these are stated directly within the discussion of Basic Income automation, but are instead situate within the broader context of discussions – and it bears reiteration that post-state utopia is not the *only* perspective that discusses automation, but it is a significant one, particularly because of the political and economic influence of key actors in driving the attention in this direction (such as Mark Zuckerberg).

What is clear in each of these utopias is that they are not distinguished from one another by their Basic Income policy, but instead by the policy programme and intellectual frame surrounding the policy. These broader policy programmes, and interpretations of society (both present and ideal), become evident when examining the ideas through the IROS framework. This makes the second of the research questions a critical part of the examination in asking “what is being proposed as Basic Income, and Why?”. This highlights the importance to Basic Income research of providing clarity not just about the construction of Basic Income as a policy in and of itself, but also the surrounding policy framework within which it must operate. It also makes clear that while mobilising the argument that Basic Income is “beyond left and right” might be effective in building support for the

policy of Basic Income, it is at the risk of undermining the broader principles within which Basic Income is situated.

What is being proposed as Basic Income, and Why?

The question of what is being proposed as Basic Income and why was an important part of developing the methodological approach which I adopted (using Levitas' Imaginary Reconstitution of Society as a framework, discussed above, and detailed in chapter 3) because it was evident that much of the attention given to Basic Income did not make it clear exactly what was being proposed. That Basic Income in some fashion involved transfer payments to individuals (from the State, or the body trailing the policy) without behavioural conditionality (such as a requirement to seek employment) was consistent – other details were not. Either there was a lack of clarity in the specifications of the policy under discussion as “Basic Income”, or a lack of clarity about what sort of wider policy programme the proposed Basic Income policy ought to exist within. The lack of specificity, especially in the mainstream media attention, made this question important, and pointed towards the possibility of the discussion encompassing many, and in places conflicting, policy proposals, rather than the attention being about one single idea named “Basic Income”.

A major area of variation in proposals (and a central contention) is over the value of the transfer payment being proposed, and specifically whether it should be sufficient to meet basic needs to be considered a Basic Income at all. Among the microsimulation models of Basic Income (Martinelli, 2017b; Reed and Lansley, 2016; Torry, 2015; Torry, 2016), and several of the other proposals (The Green Party, 2015a; Miller, 2017), the payment under consideration settles around the current full individual rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (£73), if not lower. This is argued to be insufficient to meet basic needs, and is recognised as such by those proposing this Basic Income rate, who argue that it should supplement, rather than replace, existing programmes. Other advocates argue for a significantly higher rate – not necessarily specifying a figure, but arguing that the rate ought to be sufficient to meet basic needs without further supplements. This “sufficiency for needs” was proposed as an alteration to the definition of Basic Income used by the Basic Income Earth Network in 2016, but agreement on the point was not reached. A compromise amendment to the definition of Basic Income was agreed, focusing on the importance of meeting needs, but not going so far as to define Basic Income as being required to meet basic needs (BIEN General Assembly, 2016; Haagh *et al.*, 2016; Basic Income Earth Network, nd). This debate is a central difference between the “real utopia” and abundance utopia perspectives, with the lower figures with the revenue neutrality and low tax impact emphasis being from the “real utopia” perspective.

Unconditionality is central to the understanding of Basic Income, but what conditions proposals are free from does vary, as noted by Stirton and de Wispelare (2004). A lack of behavioural conditionality (such as requirement to work or seek work) is fundamental – and proposals requiring specific behaviours are distinguished from Basic Income by being called “Participation Income” (Atkinson, 1996; Pérez-Muñoz, 2015). Not all proposals are free from other forms of conditionality, however, which can include income requirements (such as phasing Basic Income out over certain income levels, as in the Ontario trial (Ministry of Children Community and Social Services, 2019)), or status conditionality (such as only targeting the unemployed, as was the case in both the Finland and Ontario trials). Differences in the design of Basic Income policies is not the only way in which proposals can have significant differences between them, however – it is also important to consider the broader policy environment in which the Basic Income operates.

The question of *why* Basic Income is being proposed shapes this broader policy programme which exists around the Basic Income policy. Functionally similar Basic Income proposals also have the scope to encompass radically different ideas through the policy programme in which they are embedded, which makes understanding *why* the Basic Income policy was being proposed important. A Basic Income of £73 per week that accompanies an abolition of minimum wages, on the basis that Basic Income resolves the income problems for those impacted by the removal of market inhibiting minimum wages, is radically different to the same Basic Income policy introduced alongside existing welfare systems and labour regulations. The Adam Smith Institute’s approach with its removal of minimum wages seeks to remove artificial constraints on the market (Bowman, 2016), while the latter approach seeks to reduce poverty (e.g. Reed and Lansley, 2016). The difference between the two policies stems from *why* they were proposed – which is due to the different visions of the “good society” discussed in the previous section.

Differences between the characteristics of Basic Income – whether it is sufficient for needs, how unconditionality it is applied – are also understood through these differences in *why* Basic Income is proposed. The objective shapes the formulation of the policy – and the objective differs as a result of the differing visions of what the good society looks like. This means that understanding and analysing the impact of policy is not just about an analysis of the policy – it has to engage with the normative arguments, and the “what could be”. If not, these differences are lost, and the explanatory power of the analysis is diminished.

What role does Basic Income have in future welfare provision in the UK?

The statement “Basic Income is an idea whose time has come” suggests that the speaker envisages a role for Basic Income in future welfare provision. While some of the uses of this statement have

been general (rather than specific to the UK), the phrase has been used in the context of the UK (such as McDonnell (Field notes, 2016) and the Compass report (Reed and Lansley, 2016)). Practicalities of location and access, as well as the practical need to limit the scope of the investigation, have also supported this focus.

My interviewees' responses to discussion of the statement added nuance, arguing that the "time has come" pertains more to the reasons to be arguing for a Basic Income (the critical context), or to the entrance of the policy into the mainstream of political discourse, than to the very direct interpretation of the phrase as meaning that the idea of Basic Income is likely to be implemented as welfare policy.

The statement can also be reversed, to ask "is the attention to Basic Income just a fad?". If it is just a fad, then the impact upon future welfare provision in the UK will be negligible. If a fad is only determined through policy impact, then an answer can only be given retrospectively; I have interpreted fad as asking whether there is a good reason to be considering Basic Income now, and is there evidence that it works? Both questions seek to demonstrate that the support is not unthinking excitement for the latest new idea.

The question of evidence highlights the importance of trials to the discussion of Basic Income as a policy; a part of demonstrating that Basic Income is not just a fad is showing that it works as intended. However, trials can only go so far in demonstrating that the policy works in practice – ultimately only an actual large-scale implementation can demonstrate the impact.

The question of whether there are good reasons to be considering Basic Income now is the focus of chapter 5, where I engaged with the question of whether the attention to Basic Income was a fad or not. The evidence is mixed; there are arguments to be made both that the current critical context that forms the reason for arguing for Basic Income is new, and that it is just a continuation of existing contexts.

This discussion of how to determine whether or not the attention to Basic Income is a fad, or whether it has a role to play in future welfare provision in the UK, feeds into the use of Levitas' Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (IROS). By focusing on discussion of whether there is a good reason to be considering Basic Income now, we engage with the archaeological stage of Levitas' IROS, where the present context is critically examined.

I concluded there was sufficient evidence to not dismiss the attention to Basic Income as faddish, although at the same time recognising that "it is just a fad" remained a plausible explanation for the attention to Basic Income, particularly in the case of the mainstream attention. There is certainly

evidence that there has been a significant increase in mainstream attention to the idea in the UK in the form of the UK print media coverage of the policy in 2015 – 2017, as shown in chapter 4. Anecdotally, the mainstream attention to the policy has been maintained since the end of 2017. There is also evidence of wider attention in the form of think tank reports, and engagement with the policy by UK political parties, even in the face of Brexit drawing focus. The commitment by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell to trial Basic Income (Mudie and Drew, 2019) shows that, for the immediate future at least, Basic Income will remain on the policy agenda in the UK. If the interpretation of “an idea whose time has come” is that of entering into the mainstream of political discourse, then it does seem to be the case.

This does not mean that the adoption of a Basic Income in the UK is inevitable. Politically, it is, at this point, tied to the success of the Labour Party’s current leadership, which has received multiple challenges since 2015. Evidence of significant grass roots political support for Basic Income within the Labour Party is limited, although the local advocacy for trials in Liverpool and Sheffield have been successful examples. This is unlike the way grassroots activism for Basic Income was reported in the Scottish Nationalist Party by Cowan (2017) and which is evident in the continued presence of Basic Income in the Green Party manifesto (which is developed by party conference (The Green Party, 2018)). Instead, the advocacy for Basic Income as a policy is a more top-down process connected to John McDonnell’s longstanding advocacy (McDonnell, 2007; Mudie and Drew, 2019; Stone, 2016a). Basic Income remains a policy possibility – but one that is contingent upon the long-term success of specific political actors, or upon on a shift in the scale of advocacy in the near future (e.g. the adoption of the policy as a fundamental part of the Labour Party platform).

A point that has been increasingly raised by Basic Income advocates is that whatever role Basic Income does play within welfare provision in the UK, it is not a silver bullet – it cannot by itself resolve all problems. If Basic Income is involved in future welfare provision in the UK its role will be alongside a broader platform of social policy, and as such it needs to be discussed and debated in that fashion if it is to have its intended effect. Using the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society as an approach facilitates this clear understanding of what is intended, and what can be achieved by Basic Income as a policy.

[Contribution and Implications for future research](#)

This thesis contributes a detailed discussion of a contemporary phenomenon in social policy (the attention being paid to Basic Income), thus far only discussed in any level of detail in Sloman’s article “Universal Basic Income in British Politics, 1918-2018” (Sloman, 2018), and to a certain extent within Standing’s “Basic Income: And how we can make it happen” (Standing, 2017a). The focus on the

media attention in particular gives a fuller account of the nature of the mainstream attention to Basic Income than the existing accounts which are more focused upon the development of attention within the public policy and academic spheres.

Related policies bear investigation with a similar methodology. During the investigation of Basic Income it has become apparent that ideas such as the four-day working week are gaining increased attention within the print media. Four-day week as a policy initiative relates directly to Basic Income through being combined as policy demands from the Green Party (Bartley and Lucas, 2017) and from accelerationists like Srnicek and Williams (Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Examining the discussions around a four-day week using IROS as a framework could reveal similar discontinuities between the ideas held by advocates. In the case of the Green Party advocacy, it seems likely that similar ideas around reduction of economic growth inspire their policy of a four-day week as it reduces the level of economic activity. Meanwhile, for the accelerationist advocacy, the focus is upon an abundance of leisure as a social good.

The long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, are of course, in the run up to the final submission of this thesis in March 2020, unknown. However the reframing of Basic Income in relation to a public health resilience during the pandemic has already achieved an impetus for the use of Basic Income as a response in the USA, and a verbal commitment to a cross party meeting to discuss it was given in the House of Commons by Prime Minister Boris Johnson at Question Time on the 18th March. Although the policy streams framework was not useful in understanding the media attention in 2015-2017, it is highly appropriate in this context in a situation with an attachment of a policy solution (Basic Income) to a prioritised problem (how to maintain income during social distancing) in a political environment where significant change is plausible. An examination of how the US and UK use the policy idea of Basic Income in this situation is thus an excellent avenue for ongoing investigation.

There is also a limited discourse around cryptocurrency and Basic Income, which, while not as developed nor as mainstream as four-day week, indicates a way in which the post-state libertarian vision of the future discussed in chapter 7 could be taken even further. Cryptocurrency is appealing from this perspective as it not dependent on the State being a trusted actor which ultimately backs the currency. Instead, the currency is guaranteed by the operation of the blockchain – technology which both generates new currency units, and which guarantees the validity of any given currency unit by proving all the transactions are valid (Greenfield, 2017). Basic Income is appealing as it does not involve a significant State apparatus to operate, unlike targeted social security. There is no need for an ongoing checking of the status of individuals, nor of any monitoring of their behaviour as

exists within contemporary welfare states. All that is required of a Basic Income is that it is paid to demonstrable individuals on a regular basis; if this can be achieved using blockchain technology (as is the ambition where Basic Income is linked to cryptocurrency), a Basic Income provided via blockchain could then be a route to diminishing the role of the State.

The usefulness of IROS as a framework for understanding discussions around a policy is a further contribution of this thesis. This use of IROS does this by providing a unified approach for examining public debate, as carried out through political activity, media coverage, and academic discourse, despite the differing styles and purposes of these communications. The “mainstreaming” of Basic Income is a phenomenon which occurs primarily within the media, but the degree of detail about the specifics of policy is limited within the media coverage. The media coverage does engage with normative debates about the good society, and in critical evaluation of the present. These discussions are fragmentary but sufficient to combine together the ways in which the Basic Income debate is presented in the mainstream with the detail of arguments from the policy and academic discourses.

IROS as a framework facilitates this drawing together by questioning what is it that Basic Income is being proposed as a solution for? What is the problem that is being discussed? How is an alternative future in which this problem is resolved anticipated? Unlike the policy and academic discourse, there is often a single, or limited number of arguments being presented in the media coverage. As a result, identifying key strands of arguments as having had an impact on the mainstream attention to Basic Income is possible – as well as the detail around those arguments, drawn from the academic and policy discourse.

IROS as a framework provides the prompts to investigate the underlying assumptions and unspoken desires of policy discussions. By doing so it also highlights the critical importance of examining policy in a holistic fashion, rather than attempting to discuss it divorced from the wider discourse around a policy. It is clear, when examining policy in this fashion, that there are distinctive variations on what Basic Income is seen as a part of. Different visions of the future – and analyses of the present – result in different sets of policies overall, even if they share Basic Income in common with each other. As a result, Basic Income – and the support for it demonstrated by its increasing mainstream attention – could have radically different impacts depending on the overall policy programme of which it is a part.

This is of importance for the Basic Income advocate, as it emphasises the need to clarify the detail around Basic Income, rather than just focusing on the policy itself. It also shows the necessity of interrogating the mainstream attention and making it clear when the policies under discussion in the

mainstream attention as “Basic Income” diverge significantly from the vision of the future of the mainstream of Basic Income advocacy, as otherwise this runs the risk of a Basic Income implemented for the wrong reasons.

In conclusion, the mainstream attention to Basic Income is, as I have argued, best understood as the mainstream attention to several Basic Incomes, rather than to a single idea. These Basic Incomes all have in common the form of a regular transfer payment paid without the same conditions as existing transfer payments – the remaining detail can differ significantly between proposals, and the context of the welfare state into which they are being proposed. While these variations are important, what is more important is the variation in reasoning that leads to the Basic Income proposal – the critical interpretation of the present, and the vision of the future that is desired. These will lead to significantly differing results from otherwise broadly similar Basic Income policies.

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Appendix A – Example interview schedule

General Questions

My aim with the general questions was to provide linkages between the different interviewees (as they will have similar/dissimilar answers), but also drive towards getting information not available through other sources.

When and how did you become [interested in/first hear] about Basic Income?

Simple starting point. Varying the interested in/first hear on the basis of whether the individual appear to be an advocate, or has spoken/written about it but not expressed much indicating an enthusiasm.

How would you describe Basic Income – what are its key characteristics?

This was intended to clarify interviewees positions on Basic Income. This question was intended to elicit positive interpretations of Basic Income. It also became clear over the course of the interviews that this question brought up differences in emphases between interviewees.

Has your opinion of Basic Income changed over time? Why?

This question was intended to both elicit critical reflections on interviewees current positions, and delve into personal historical accounts. It also supported discussions about changing social and political contexts.

Do you think Basic Income is a policy to be seriously pursued, or an alternative from which to criticise the current means tested and conditional approach to welfare?

This question developed from commentary by Declan Gaffney (Gaffney, 2015) in which he argued that Basic Income had validity in the form of a thought experiment and critical perspective, but that it was implausible as a policy. This facilitated reflecting on the role of Basic Income in criticising present social arrangements, and provided a point to depart towards positive arguments about the future.

What do you think of the suggestion that “Basic Income is an idea whose time has come”?

Hopefully will illicit some interesting responses about the core of my discussion.

Basic Income has received significantly increased press attention in the last [two years] – what do you think is driving that attention?

Again, relatively core to interests.

Should we consider the welfare state to be a right to be expected and demanded, or as something the State provides because it is useful?

One of the themes which runs through both the academic lit and the media coverage is the range of positions into which current/ideal welfare system and Basic Income are placed when discussing Intrinsic vs Extrinsic worth, and Legal Positivism vs Natural Law understandings of welfare as law.

And, at the end of the interview:

Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you wanted to raise, or any questions you wanted to ask me?

Specific Questions

Interviews then moved on to more specific questions about interviewees' involvement in the contemporary attention.

Sometimes, these specific questions would involve rewording general questions – e.g. in the interview conducted with Professor Standing, the questions about the phrase “Basic Income is an idea whose time has come” specified *his* use of the phrase.

All of the questions were used out of sequence, depending on the flow of the interview – thus, if an answer to an early (general) question related to something that I intended to ask about in the specific questions I followed up with the specific, rather than moving on.

Appendix B – Interviewee biographies

Pete Alcock

Pete Alcock is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy and Administration at the University of Birmingham, and has a background in social and welfare policy. Alcock was a critic of Basic Income during the 1980s (and remains a critic). Alcock was also one of the panel at the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income, representing critical perspectives on Basic Income (alongside Andrew Harrop and Declan Gaffney).

Ronnie Cowan MP

Ronnie Cowan is the Scottish Nationalist Party MP for Inverclyde and has been active on the subject of Basic Income, which has recently arisen as a policy commitment by the SNP. He introduced a Westminster Hall debate on the subject of Basic Income in September 2016, and has also tabled parliamentary questions on the subject.

Jon Cruddas MP

Jon Cruddas MP is the Labour Party MP for Dagenham and Rainham (in East London), and co-authored a critical piece about Basic Income in Prospect Magazine (Cruddas and Kibasi, 2016). Cruddas is a former Deputy Political Secretary to Tony Blair, and was policy coordinator under Ed Miliband. Cruddas' previous work includes working on the National Minimum Wage.

Andrew Gamble

Andrew Gamble is Professor of Politics at Sheffield University and emeritus Professor of politics at the University of Cambridge. He is also former co-editor of Political Quarterly. Prior to 2016 he had not been a visible part of the Basic Income debate, although he had previously written on the related topic of asset-based welfare. This made his 2016 book "Can the Welfare State survive?" (Gamble, 2016), with its (albeit tentative) support of Basic Income significant, as it reflected an increased attention to the policy, as opposed to a longstanding interest.

Ian Gough

Professor Ian Gough is visiting professor at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the LSE, as well as an associate of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (also LSE). Gough came to my attention criticising Basic Income at the launch event of the Compass Report in 2016, although he had been involved in Basic Income (as a critic) since the foundation of the Basic Income Research Group in 1984.

Institute for Policy Research – Nick Pearce, Luke Martinelli, and Joe Chrisp

Nick Pearce is Director of the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) and Professor of Public Policy. The IPR are currently investigating Basic Income, and have produced a number of reports on the subject. Pearce is a former Head of the No 10 Downing St. Policy unit (2008 – 2010), and was a special advisor to David Blunkett. Pearce was well positioned to discuss why the IPR was investigating Basic Income (and thus, to talk about the increased attention to Basic Income). Pearce also suggested the inclusion of Luke Martinelli (a research associate at IPR who is conducting many of the studies) and Joe Chrisp (a postgraduate researcher at IPR working on Basic Income) within the research interview.

Luke Martinelli is a research associate at the IPR and is the main researcher on the IPR's Basic Income project. Martinelli has performed microsimulation analyses of a variety of models of Basic Income as a part of the project. Joe Chrisp is a postgraduate researcher at the IPR working on the feasibility of Basic Income, supervised by Nick Pearce. His focus is on Basic Income feasibility in relation to labour market changes and takes a comparative approach.

Barb Jacobson

Barb Jacobson is a co-ordinator of Basic Income UK, a UK Basic Income advocacy community organisation. Barb Jacobson was also Chair of Universal Basic Income Europe (UBIE) from 2014 – 2017; this is a group campaigning for a European UBI, which developed out of the efforts to gain sufficient signatures during a European Citizens' Initiative for a Basic Income in 2014-15. Jacobson is also a current trustee of the Citizen's Basic Income Trust (an educational charity working on Basic Income, originally the Basic Income Research Group in 1984). Jacobson is also involved in Green Party politics, and is a housing rights advice worker in London.

Becca Kirkpatrick

Becca Kirkpatrick is a trade union activist (Unison Community), and a member of Basic Income UK (a Basic Income activism group). Kirkpatrick has been involved in visible and successful campaigning in the West Midlands for Basic Income, and gave evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee evidence session on Basic Income.

Neal Lawson

Neal Lawson is the Chair of Compass, which is a progressive think tank, originally founded with the intention of advocating on the left of the Labour party, but now operating more broadly. Lawson is also a trustee of Citizen's Basic Income Trust. Lawson was added to my list of interviewees after he was suggested by Howard Reed, who identified him as the motivating force behind the Compass Report on Basic Income.

Ruth Lister

Baroness Lister has recently written favourably on the subject of Basic Income, and was on the panel for the launch of the Compass report in July 2016.

Ruth Lister, in addition to being a Labour Party Peer since 2011, has had a significant academic career (currently emeritus Professor of Social Policy at Loughborough University), and a historical relationship with the Child Poverty Action Group (in a number of roles between 1971 and 1987) and is the current Honorary President of CPAG. Baroness Lister was also one of the commissioners on the Labour Party's Commission on Social Justice (1992-4).

Clive Lord

Clive Lord came to my attention at the Compass Report launch in June 2016, and is a long-standing Green Party activist (being a member from the foundation of the party as the Ecology Party). I hoped that Clive Lord would be able to provide commentary on the role of Basic Income in Green Party policy, as it is a long-standing policy commitment, but one which has only gained prominence since 2015.

David Piachaud

Professor David Piachaud is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at LSE, and an associate of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion. Piachaud was mentioned as a contemporary critic of Basic Income by Malcolm Torry during our interview. Piachaud has specialised in poverty and exclusion during his career, which has covered the 40 years of contemporary Basic Income debate, but has only been noted for critique of Basic Income recently.

Howard Reed

Howard Reed is a freelance economics consultant (Landman Economics), and the former chief economist of the Institute for Public Policy Research. Reed was a co-author of the 2016 Compass report on Basic Income ("Basic Income: An idea whose time has come?" (Reed and Lansley, 2016)) and his primary role in the report was the microsimulation modelling of the impact of the Basic Income policies tested within the report.

Ben Southwood

Ben Southwood was head of research at the Adam Smith Institute (ASI) and has written a number of articles on the ASI's advocacy for Negative Income Tax (which Southwood – and others – considered essentially an alternative arrangement of Basic Income). Southwood was also on the panel of the work and pensions select committee evidence session on Basic Income.

Nick Srnicek

Nick Srnicek is co-author of *Inventing the Future*, and at the time of the interview was visiting lecturer at City, University of London. The accelerationist position set forth in *Inventing the Future* was credited by Jon Cruddas MP as being a part of the attention to Basic Income on the left of the Labour Party. Srnicek's advocacy differed significantly from the longer-standing advocacy for Basic Income in linking Basic Income and automation.

Guy Standing

Professor Standing is one of the most prominent voices in the Basic Income debate, and has been involved to some degree in Basic Income Earth Network (formerly Basic Income Europe Network) since its inception in 1986. Standing is one of the key individuals to have made the statement "Basic Income is an idea whose time has come". Standing has also been involved in elite discussions around Basic Income, having been invited to talk on the subject at both the Bilderberg group, and at the World Economic Forum at Davos. Standing was also involved within the Labour Party working group on Basic Income established by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell.

Malcolm Torry

Malcolm Torry is Director of the Citizen's Basic Income Trust (then Citizen's Income Trust), the UK educational charity focused on disseminating research on Basic Income, and author of multiple books on the subject as well as microsimulation working papers.