

**Dr. Sascha Liebermann**  
**University of Dortmund**  
**Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences**  
**Sociology/ Sociology of Work**  
**D-44221 Dortmund**  
**Germany**

**Phone** ++49 (69) 56 56 80  
**Fax** ++49 (231) 755 32 93  
**E-mail** [Sascha.Liebermann@udo.edu](mailto:Sascha.Liebermann@udo.edu)

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## **Political Communities - Constituents of Universalism<sup>1</sup>**

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## 1. Universalism and the Nation-State

Because a community organized as a nation-state<sup>2</sup> usually pursues particular interests different from those of other political communities, it may seem as though it cannot possibly play a significant – if any – role in ensuring universal values.

Accordingly, several NGOs and even some supporters of a Basic Income consider the nation-state one of the main obstacles to real justice. Instead of falling back into what they sometimes call "nationalism," they plead for an international movement as a safeguard to democratization. Only an international political order and government, they imply, could guarantee what an unconditional basic income other social and political measures.

It is one thing to advocate an "international government;" but it is another to think of realistic strategies to politically implement an unconditional basic income.

No international institution is legitimated by an "international people." International institutions are not controlled by any single government, and this explains why these institutions must rely on one, several, or many individual nation-states to legitimize and support them. There is a different way, to some, in which universalism (taken as an expansion of internationalism) may be advanced, and that is to regard the Universal Human Rights as ideals for governments and for citizens in individual countries.

Let us take a step back and ask: What is the "nature" of "rights," and how do rights "function"?

The Declaration of Human Rights contains universal principles such as freedom, equality, and solidarity as guidelines to everyday life. This code is considered universalistic because these Rights are supposed to be valid anywhere. We agree on most of the rights listed in the 1789 document – but we cannot agree, as supporters of an unconditional basic income, whether a right to such an income implies that we have a right to work (i.e. the right to a workplace), or not. But if this were our ideal, it would take us back to the "employment society" which we want to leave behind. Rights as such do not create a community<sup>3</sup>--they only protect a commu-

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<sup>2</sup> The nation-state is the ultimate institution that represents and defends the political order against enemies of the body politic. See Max Weber "Politik als Beruf", in: *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen 1988, pp. 509. See also Ulrich Oevermann, "The analytical difference between community ("Gemeinschaft") and society ("Gesellschaft") and its consequences for the conceptualization of an education for European citizenship", in: *Developing Identities in Europe: citizenship education and higher education. Proceedings of the second Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe* (Thematic Network Project, University of Athens, May 2000, London: CiCe., 2000, pp. 37-61). See also "Die Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft und das Bewehrungsproblem des modernen Subjekts", in: R. Becker, A. Franzmann, A. Jansen und S. Liebermann: *Eigeninteresse und Gemeinwohlbindung. Kulturspezifische Ausformungen in den USA und Deutschland* (Konstanz: UVK, 2001, pp. 19-39). See Francois Furet, "Lärm der Ratlosen: ein französisches Rätsel. Gaullisten und Sozialisten wissen keinen Ausweg aus der Krise", in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Nr. 226, 1.10.1997, p. 19. Emmanuel Todd, "Letzte Zuckung der US-Macht", Interview by Stefan Reinecke and Christian Semler, *taz* Nr. 7090, 28.6.2003, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> It is remarkable how little attention is paid in public debates to the fact that the European Constitution is outlined as a "contract." Contracts are signed for purposes with specific or limited goals. Cooperation is restricted to the goals set down in the contract. Consequently, the European constitution focuses on reaching full employment, instead of focusing on building a European Nation-State as political community.

nity or take it for granted<sup>4</sup>. In fact, rights need to be rooted in everyday life—in a given community's perception that it exists, that it has a particular culture, and that its members "belong" are at home in it.

Contrary to these notions of the nation-state being an obstacle to universalism, I want to argue that it was the main driving force in bringing about universalism, i.e. universalistic ideals resp. rights. Throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, political communities had to adopt the ideals of the nation-state and the political order brought about by the French Revolution. It was a struggle because there existed a discrepancy between these ideals of the modern nation-state and everyday life of political reality in European countries. In most of these countries, these ideals eventually informed and were stipulated in their constitutions. Universalism thus became material in the sense that it became part of everyday political decision-making in these countries. So it took particular communities and their political organizations to live and reinforce universalistic ideals and guidelines. For all practical purposes, universalism wouldn't exist without them.<sup>5</sup>

So, without a stable nation-state and its body politic, there won't be any relevant universalism. .

Let me now turn to what we can call the inner dynamics of the nation-state as an ideal. First I would like to point out what constitutes a political national community based on universalistic principles. I hope that my arguments will show how an Unconditional Basic Income, in its radical version as an income-guarantee from the cradle to the grave, derives from what I call the constitutive elements of the nation-state. I will try to show how it reinforces democracy by supporting the citizens' freedom to make choices.

My arguments refers to the situation in Europe, where the nation-state is established. I am aware that the situation in most African countries is quite different. In many countries, democracy is unstable or absent.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Universalism through Community

Modern nation-states are created by political communities of a dialectic character: Citizens bind themselves to their communities voluntarily on the one hand. They—as an ultimate consequence—give their lives for the community. Such a sacrifice may be indispensable to defend the community's political order. Citizenship is not (as is sometimes suggested) a role, it

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<sup>4</sup> That is what, for example, Emile Durkheim calls the non-contractual elements of contracts. See *The Division of Labor in Society*. Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press 1964 [1893].

<sup>5</sup> That is the main reason not to use term "capitalism". It does not identify the political legitimisation of power through the sovereignty of the citizens and that this power must serve to protect and preserve the integrity of the body politic. In the tradition of Marx's arguments reciprocity is reduced to "Äquivalenttausch" (the exchange of equivalents) or "Gebrauchswert" (practical value) and does not allow for the conception of an exchange without purpose, that constitutes reciprocity or - in Hegel's terms, "Sittlichkeit." The same holds true with Marx's conception of political community. In his theory citizenship as the universal bond of political communities underlies class interests.

<sup>6</sup> Some politicians and Social Scientists in Germany argue for a European Citizenship and the end of the nation-state, even though there is no European state in a full sense. The nation-states still constitute the European Union.

is nothing one could get rid of. Role-positions are defined by fulfilling a certain task that does not involve the person with respect to all aspects of its life. In contrast citizenship does involve the person "in its totality." Citizens cannot choose to deny rights and duties without violating norms of cooperation. They can, of course, not fulfill their duties (such as paying taxes), but they will have to justify their decisions, and such justification requires them to argue in terms of the common welfare (If caught, a tax-dodger may do so in court, and he may be more or less successful.). But citizens are autonomous only because they were raised and socialized within a political community which provides a protecting and enabling order. In this way, the citizen's autonomy is at the same time reinforced and hence constituted by the citizens to bind themselves voluntarily to their community.

In keeping with the supposition of an autonomous individual that pursues its interests--the modern nation-state has given itself a political order that creates conditions for an exchange of goods and services, i.e. for a market economy. This is not just relevant as an empirical observation, it is related to the ultimate precondition of the nation-state: the autonomy of life-practice. The decision-making by entrepreneurs in a market corresponds to the individual's autonomy in general, in areas that are more fundamental than the market. Individual autonomy ("life practice") enables a certain kind of decision-making that relies on the individual's capacity for finding a purpose or goal to pursue. The market-system presupposes an individual that is able to follow private interest based on community orientation.<sup>7</sup> That the individual is able to pursue such goals is a result of the process of socialization and of the ontogenesis of the child within the family and in the political community.

From this point of view, the term "wealth" in its common usage is of limited use as it refers only to a community's affluence. In our (political) use of the term, however, it encompasses the increasing opportunities of leading a self-determined and community-oriented life.<sup>8</sup> In its sociological meaning, the primary use of the term "wealth" does not lie in its reference to the monetary aspects of success. We understand the term only once we connect it to autonomy. "Wealth" then encompasses the increasing possibilities of autonomous decision-making without the guidelines provided by tradition. To this, money and markets add another dimension, but they do not *create* the individual's ability to have goals and to make decisions.

This relationship between individual autonomy and personal probation is outlined and supported by institutional settings and the political decisions which bring them about. One such

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<sup>7</sup> Talcott Parsons assumes that "economic motivation is not a category on the deeper level at all, but it is rather a point at which many different motives may be brought to bear on a certain type of situation". See Talcott Parsons, "The Motivation of Economic Activities", in: *Essays in Sociological Theory* (The Free Press, p. 53). " See also Max Weber: „Reines Charisma ist spezifisch wirtschaftsfremd. Es konstituiert, wo es auftritt, einen »Beruf« im emphatischen Sinn des Worts: als »Sendung« oder innere »Aufgabe«. Es verschmäht und verwirft, im reinen Typus, die ökonomische Verwertung der Gnadengaben als Einkommensquelle, — was freilich oft mehr Anforderung als Tatsache bleibt“ (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1964, pp. 181). Weber emphasizes that it is not economic action which is the fundamental basis of entrepreneurship, it is the result. The constituent of entrepreneurship therefore has to be found in something more general, something that is the basis for economic action. Following an argument Ulrich Oevermann put forth, I would recognize this basis in the political community and their idea of the conduct of life.

<sup>8</sup> In his works on the Sociology of Religion and in his studies on Protestant Ethics in particular, Max Weber has shown the strong connection between a culture of "probation" (i.e. a culture of autonomous decision-making and an ongoing testing) and the process of rationalization in world history.

setting results from a community's decision to distribute income via paid work, tie it to individual achievement, and to thus link it to a market economy (as far as standardizable goods and services are concerned). It creates a dynamic of rationalization, of innovation and large-scale production, and, in the long run, wealth, because it is a system that gratifies the individual's responsibility. Communities compensate significant inequality resulting from economic developments. They dedicate a considerable part of their budgets (generated by taxing economic value) to even out these inequalities and by this to protect the individual's integrity.

As long as this connection between democratic institutions and market economy produces wealth for all citizens, it will not be questioned, even though there is a latent conflict between the citizen's rights, being bestowed unconditionally in a community, and , . Once the foundations of that system become contradictory, however, it loses its legitimacy—and that is where we find ourselves today.

### 3. Autonomy and Economic Development

In order to understand the underlying issues at stake in contemporary politics, I would like to consider these contradictions in more detail.

Generally speaking, economic booms before the 1970s generated full employment in industrialized countries. In the mid-1970s, however, things changed: *during* economic boom times, unemployment *barely decreased*, and following a boom, unemployment *usually increased*. The term "structural unemployment" came into use to characterize such non-cyclical unemployment which has been with us ever since. Today an ever *decreasing* amount of human labor is necessary to create an ever *increasing* amount of wealth.<sup>9</sup> Behind this development lies the introduction of technology (such as an increased use of computers) which replaces human labor.

This development is an indicator for the increasing automation of routine work (it is part of a general process of rationalization) and we can easily translate it as increasing potential for individual autonomy. Automating routine work opens up the opportunity to preserve time—by lessening time wasted by employing a human work force completing repetitive tasks.<sup>10</sup> Because of an accelerated substitution of human work force, and because we seem to be unwilling to give up a welfare system that is connected to an obligation to work, a structural unemployment has turned into a pressing problem. In Germany, the current system for the distribution of wealth which is based on work income has entered a fundamental crisis. This

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<sup>9</sup> See A. Bassanini, S. Scarpetta, I. Visco: "Knowledge, technology and economic growth: recent evidence from OECD countries." 150th Anniversary Conference of the National Bank of Belgium, How to promote economic growth in the Euro area (Brussels, May 2000: <http://aei.pitt.edu/view/conference/CE001.html>). Also Meinhard. Miegel, *Arbeitsmarkt und Arbeitslosigkeit. Probleme und Perspektiven* (München: Olzog Verlag 2002). Gerhard Schildt (2006): „Das Sinken des Arbeitsvolumens im Industriezeitalter, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*“, Heft 2006/32,1, S. 119 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Only where crises — not routines — are concerned does human labour remain irreplaceable. This is because the ability to solve a crisis and to be creative is a genuine human capacity which cannot be automated or computerized. Computers are unable to create new routines, and instead rely on routines — their software is the formulation of routine operations in a symbolic machine language. In discussions about "artificial intelligence", this is often overlooked. Machines which "learn" are nothing but machines which operate on a routine which lets them extract new routines.

crisis consists of the contradiction between upholding the obligation to work as a normative ideal and linking it to the system of public assistance, on the one hand, and the simultaneous substitution of the workforce by machines, on the other.

Despite their wealth, Western countries during the past decade introduced Welfare-to-work-programs which indicate that instead of expanding freedom from unnecessary routine labor, there exists an international tendency to put pressure on those citizens who are unemployed. We can also put it this way: these countries have reintroduced the idea of the workhouse regarding employment policies. To create work seems to have become an end in itself, without regard to its productivity and usefulness. The following main conclusions are drawn regarding this development:

- 1) Introducing or expanding the low-wage sector—some argue—will improve the situation on the labor-market and reintegrate citizens. This conclusion underlies welfare-to-work-programmes.
- 2) Work ought to be evenly distributed. This conclusion implies that work is a scarce and desirable resource. (German trade unions and left-leaning intellectuals frequently argue along these lines.)

That paid work is the central criterion for the distribution of wealth/income dates back to an era in which the human labor force was indispensable for economic success. That this normative assumption is hardly questioned today—even though its underlying premise is no longer valid—indicates how deeply a “work ethic” is embedded in our culture.<sup>11</sup> A community which allows its members to participate in its wealth only to the extent to which these members are pursuing paid work will ultimately have to provide all those citizens with a job who want to live up to this norm. If a community, however, cannot provide such work, and if it seems irrational to provide it, the question arises in what sense these goals still correspond to the community’s obligation to establish equality and justice—and whether this policy is undermining the citizen’s autonomy. On these latter goals—equality, justice, and autonomy, however, rests the legitimacy of the modern nation-state. Hence there have emerged two basic contradictions:

- 1) first, the citizen as the foundation of the nation-state, on the one hand, and the policy of upholding the obligation to work, on the other (even though rising unemployment rates<sup>12</sup> indicate successful use of automation technology);

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<sup>11</sup> See Talcott Parsons: “This attitude toward acquisition is correlated with a particular attitude toward labor, whether its immediate end be acquisitive or not. Labor also is not looked upon as a necessary evil, whether because of its traditional origin in the curse of Adam or for any other reason. It is carried out with the same sense of positive ethical obligation, as a field for directly realizing the highest ethical aims of man. The capitalistic attitude toward labor is what Veblen calls the spirit of ‘workmanship.’ One of its most conspicuous symptoms is the *ethical* feeling against early retirement from active work. A man who does not ‘produce’ as long as he has health and strength, no matter how well he can afford to retire, is somehow neglecting his *ethical* responsibilities.” Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action II*, (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 515.

<sup>12</sup> Unemployment rates follow the definition of “unemployment” as it is made by political institutions. We do have to take into consideration that according to the increasing possibilities of substituting human work force by machines, presumably unemployment would be much higher if automation became an explicitly promoted political goal. Instead of regarding this development as successful in relieving the human work force of unnecessary routine work, contemporary debates blame automation.

- 2) second, the entrepreneurial responsibility to create innovative products<sup>13</sup> (and thereby to "delegate" routine work to machines and to thus advance freedom from work), on the one hand, and the goal to create jobs (which results in a policy of avoiding the use of machines and to instead hire people), on the other.

I hope that it has become sufficiently clear that neither "capitalism" nor "neoliberalism" are responsible for our political problems. These terms are more a symptom of the crisis than the crisis itself and reflect the severe insecurity of political communities over how to conceive of themselves as part of the body politic.

The reasons for our problems are the discrepancies between institutional settings as a result of political decision-making, the reality of increasing wealth, and a human work force which is more and more dispensable. What follows from this analysis is that it has become obsolete to distribute income on the basis of paid work. This conclusion is not usually drawn in public debates because these debates seem stuck in their interpretive patterns. But when you stick to the traditional idea of social security you cannot grasp the opportunities for freedom with which we are presented. The crisis which Western democracies face today (consider the welfare-to-work- and workfare-programs as exemplifying this) are not financial in nature. It is a crisis of the legitimacy of politics, of finding new solutions for enhancing freedom and autonomy.

#### **4. Autonomy, Citizenship, and Solutions to Problems**

As outlined above, the citizen's *autonomy* is the basic constituent of the political community. The citizen is the founding basis of the nation-state, and any decision that affects the body politic can only be made with reference to him. In this way, citizens bind themselves to their community and thereby constitute and reinforce it. What I am implying here is that a political community (a nation-state) does not exist because it has the power to subordinate and "force" itself upon its citizens. When citizens elect their representatives they do not let go of their own responsibility. And even tyrannies and dictatorships have been legitimate in the sense that people believed in and supported or at least tolerated them.<sup>14</sup>

In modern democracies, of course, the community is bound together by the belief in people's sovereignty – by the belief in legitimate democratic power. This belief derives from the experience that this community is able to successfully solve its problems. This goes along with a loyalty to one's political institutions as problem-solvers. Problem-solving is what they are put in place for, it justifies their existence. Political institutions will have to live up to the promise

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<sup>13</sup> See the revealing and surprising interviews with the owner and CEO of DM-Dogieriemärkte (a German Drug-store-Chain), Götz Werner, "Immer am Säen" ("Steadily sewing"), in: *a tempo. sechzig, Konzepte für Deutschland XI* (December 2004). Being innovative is a permanent task of entrepreneurship.

<sup>14</sup> This belief can be found in self-justifying reminiscences of former citizens e.g. of the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic. In discussions on the lack of individual rights and the denial of the Freedom of speech, people defend the GDR by pointing out that things were not too bad. They often reproduce the prejudices against "false" political freedom of Western Democracies and the equality of people in the GDR. In the political culture of Germany the breakdown of the GDR is interpreted as a revolution or very often as a "turn". But either interpretation presupposes an integral subject or individual that has actively changed the political situation. In fact, following the chronology of the breakdown, it was the fleeing of people into western countries that caused the demonstrations in the GDR that were far away from being a public mobilisation in general.

of preserving the community by solving its problems. Every single decision made by government on all levels will have to prove itself adequate to solve the problem it is supposed to solve. Decisions have to prove themselves in the long run. This is what citizens expect from all levels of their government and what makes them trust it. When decisions are made that do not solve a problem in the long run, the loyalty of the citizens weakens and so does the community's binding power. In this case, citizens tend to mistrust in politicians' will or ability to solve these problems. So the trust in government and the community can be shattered, but then citizens will have to bring about a new government in whose problem-solving ability they can believe, or to mistrust in politics in general.

Considering the situation in western democracies today as far as the above discrepancy is concerned there has arisen a paradoxical situation. Problem-solving has brought about technological advances which allow for a dramatic substitution of the human work force. Labor market politics, however, are still focused on an obligation to work, and in political debate, creating jobs has become a goal in itself. Work is no longer measured by its outcome, it has become something like a value or a belief. By doing so we devalue human work force and its efforts to create solutions to problems.

## **5. Autonomy, Citizenship, and an Unconditional Basic Income**

What effects on the present accounting of the situation in western democracies would an unconditional basic income have instead of following workhouse politics? How would it strengthen the autonomy of citizens and the political community as a whole?<sup>15</sup> Clearly we cannot foresee what will happen. But the structure of leading a self-determined life, as it already is a constituent of democracy, allows us to draw some conclusions about future developments that are more likely than others.<sup>16</sup>

In order to spell out the effects of an unconditional basic income for the autonomy of citizens, I will compare its effects and those of upholding the obligation to work.

As structural unemployment will continue to grow and the obligation to work is upheld, an increasing number of citizens are excluded both from national wealth and from social life. It is obvious that all nation-states struggle with that development and because of their understanding of what it is to lead a meaningful life and to fulfill a citizen's duties, they turn to labor-market policies by which they aim to reintegrate the unemployed. These policies are paradoxical in a situation where the need for a human work force to produce our wealth today

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<sup>15</sup> Among supporters of an unconditional basic income it is not clear whether the connection to citizenship is necessary, even indispensable or loose. Some argue basic income is sufficiently legitimised by Human Rights (e.g. Philippe Van Parijs). To me it seems indispensable to relate the UBI to citizenship, because it is the citizen who is the founding basis of the body politic and his loyalty toward the political community is indispensable. See Carole Pateman, "Democratising Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income" ( *Politics & Society*, Vol. 32 No. 1, March 2004 89-105).

<sup>16</sup> Whether a political community *should* draw these conclusions and introduce an unconditional basic income is a question that has to be answered by political decision-makers, i.e. the body politic. It is often regarded as a researcher's task or obligation to tell politicians what would be the best action to take. But, as researcher, we could only prove and analyse what already belongs to the past. To advocate an idea or proposal refers to what we wish the future to be like—that is a decision only the people are legitimated to make. It is always bound to value-judgement.

is decreasing. They presuppose that a human work force is indispensable although it is not. It is a notion of leading a meaningful life through labor that seems to support this idea. This notion, especially in Germany, is reinforced by the mistrust in the individual's capacity to live without paid work, whereas in countries like the United States or the United Kingdom people do not mistrust this capacity, but they fear a strong state, a state which distributes the means for providing a basic income.

Why provide a "free lunch" at all, could be one objection. Modern nation states do have the obligation – no matter to what extent and under what conditions – to provide some type of public assistance to protect the integrity of their citizens, even though at present subsistence is given only to those individuals who are not able to earn their living. It is not unconditional and includes a means test. As a consequence of tying up that assistance to a normative expectation – the obligation to work – those who receive social aid are stigmatized as "needy," as having failed to provide for themselves. Stigmatizing citizens means degrading them. This contradiction between the citizen's rights being bestowed unconditionally and the public assistance being provided conditionally is currently weakening democracy. And yet this is happening when in Germany unemployed citizens are put under the control of the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (National Department of Work). In a cynical use of the term, the agency likes to refer to the unemployed as its "customers," even though these "customers" cannot choose whether to turn to this agency at all without losing their unemployment benefits. Being stigmatized at a time where the wealth of democratic political communities is higher than it has ever been before, destroys the loyalty of citizens to national politics.

It also destroys the notion of achievement ethics in a political community. Why? Because our present situation does not result in a failure of politics. It is the other way around. So, labor market policies that blame the unemployed do not acknowledge the following: unemployment follows the use of automation technology and it is therefore a result of scientific progress and its use by engineers to create automation technology. Unemployment shows, so to speak, the success of nation-states in creating wealth. Present labor market policies devalue this progress and its results we are facing.

As a further consequence, the process of rationalization is severely restrained. If all possibilities for rationalization were made use of, even more people would be made redundant.<sup>17</sup> Even today, however, managers feel loyal to their political community (against all prejudices) and try to avoid laying off staff for as long as they can. In this way, companies do not make use of the full potential for efficient production. It is obvious that any limitation on such rationaliza-

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<sup>17</sup> What the reasons are for not making use of technological progress is sometimes looked at as an unanswered question. Compare David Riesman: "In the present state of our social and economic accounting, I find it impossible to say where necessary personalization ends and unnecessary personalization begins. Nor have I the indices to separate profitably *productive effort* from *busy work* [Italics mine]. I cannot tell, for example, how much the slow progress toward automatization in the tertiary trades is due to low wages, *engaging Negro laundresses and pressers in a muscular race with existing mechanical power* [Italics mine], how much to failure to invent the necessary machinery, how much to consumer demand to buy personalization along with a product, and how much to the needs of the work force itself to personalize, for reasons already given, whether the consumer asks for it or not." David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1989), pp. 271.

tion, and, implicitly, on laying off workers, should be taken away since the community as a whole would stand to gain.<sup>18</sup>

If a job that has lost its economic *raison d'être* to technological progress is nevertheless preserved, it will inevitably alter its structure of meaning. Because it is dispensable, the respective employee cannot be proud of such a job. He is not contributing to innovation or even a meaningful activity. He is competing with machines that could easily do his job. Instead, the jobholder will need to be thankful that his community grants him the privilege of letting him do unnecessary work so that he will have a source of income. In this situation, the former ideal of gaining one's income (private interest) by rendering a service to society and by doing innovative and indispensable work (community orientation) has been abandoned. The jobholder will now have to seek his personal affirmation (which implies meaningful activity) outside of his occupation. The latter will merely serve as a source of income. It is a question of political decisions and the cost of human work force only until he will be substituted by a machine. Considering this dilemma, it is not surprising that individuals seek to prove themselves in challenging leisure activities, thereby paradoxically transforming what is a sphere of recreation into a sphere of ambitious activity.

Another consequence of upholding the obligation to work when it is no longer needed is the transformation of paid work into a *desirable good*. This is the effect of distributing paid work "justly" by reducing work hours (what trade unions regard as a solution to our problems). Such a plan does not take into account whether such a reduction is reasonable from the perspective of the production process. It ignores, furthermore, that creative and innovative work cannot be measured in hours—such work is too closely connected to the individual's dedication to a set of problems or questions which is more characteristic of leisure activities.

Another remedy which some managers and politicians have suggested is to expand the low-wage/low-productivity sector.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, they implicitly prefer human labor to existing potentials for rationalization and to "expensive unemployment."<sup>20</sup> Such a solution, of course, rules out regaining valuable time for activities not directed by paid work even in those cases where this is clearly possible. This is obviously an outdated idea because it considers a life meaningful only if it involves paid work. But in the face of ongoing rationalization of human labor, upholding paid work as the norm for adult life is nothing but *mistrust in the citizen's autonomy* — in the citizen's ability to live a reasonable and meaningful life without instruction or supervision.

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<sup>18</sup> Considering Germany, I have found that this is indeed the case. See my book "Die Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft im Bewußtsein deutscher Unternehmensführer. Eine Deutungsmusteranalyse" (Frankfurt: Humanities Online 2002), in which I am reconstructing normative patterns by CEOs.

<sup>19</sup> Such reform concepts normally contain three elements: 1. The reduction of welfare benefits ("Sozialleistungen") and a more restrictive policy with regards to eligibility, 2. the encouragement of low-wage/low-productivity jobs by a reduction of minimum wages (legislative minimum wages, wages guaranteed by collective agreements) and of labour costs (i.e. legislative contributions to social insurance), 3. the support of low-wage jobholders by way of supplementing their income so that they will reach a certain predefined level of income (e.g. negative income tax).

<sup>20</sup> It is rarely considered how "expensive" an abandonment of automation would be, i.e. not subsidizing human labour where possible and not relieving human work force of routines. An abandonment of automation, of rationalisation, is the equivalent of giving up the chance of more freedom.

It might be surprising to hear that neoliberal's and leftist thinkers agree on the necessity of the obligation to do paid work. Neither can conceive of the citizen as an individual with a strong community orientation, an individual who is striving for or even independently creating opportunities to contribute to the common good. That is the reason why they ask for "incentives"—instead of freedom—to stimulate the lethargic human being.

The idea of an unconditional basic income is frequently confronted with the argument that such an income would trigger "free riding" and laziness to the detriment of the community. Behind this argument is the assumption that to live with an unconditional basic income is the same as being off work (*Freizeit*). After one has completed a hard day's work, it is legitimate to relax. An unconditional basic income, however, would completely change the foundation for leisure. Without its counterpart — work —, *idleness would alter its meaning*. To watch TV all day would imply that one feels free to waste the freedom the community has provided. Every citizen would be free to do so, but he or she would have to justify this decision to him- or herself. We often overlook today that phenomena like lethargy, political resignation, reluctance against learning, and so on are effects produced by contradictions such as those outlined in this paper.<sup>21</sup> We often forget that some severe problems adults have in living a self-determined life are due to traumatic socialization experience. Laziness is not an anthropological constituent of human life practice, therefore the individual does not need incentives as workfare-politics are often regarded.

An unconditional basic income—from the cradle to the grave and dependant on the amount—would provide citizens with a sufficient income. They would gain the freedom to chose between paid work and other activities such as volunteering. Those citizens who cannot pursue paid work because of severe living experiences would be respected and would not be forced into the labor market.

In this way, the introduction of an unconditional basic income would radically alter the citizen's situation. Managers could now *offensively* apply new technological solutions and substitute human labor. The community could get rid of legal restrictions with respect to laying off and hiring employees. To hire individuals for only a short time in order to work on a project *would now be common*. Employees would gain bargaining power – the basic income backs them up. Companies could rely on motivated employees, they work voluntarily, on the one hand, and they must offer attractive working conditions and an attractive working environment., on the other. Both helping to create an innovative atmosphere in companies. The same holds true for public organizations like schools.

For those not continuing to be tied up in paid work, furthermore, activities would lose the stigma of irregularity and could now be appreciated as serious tasks. This is because an unconditional basic income is legitimized *as a citizens share in the collective heritage of the community*. The culture of each nation-state — and this includes the present *economic culture*

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<sup>21</sup> Compare David Riesman: "Work has the greater prestige; moreover, it is thought of as alien to man—it is a sort of disciplined salvage operation, rescuing a useful social product from chaos and the disorders of man's innate laziness. The same era, that of transitional growth of population, that saw the most astounding increase in man's mastery over nature, took it as axiomatic, echoing a series of writers from Malthus to Sumner and Freud, that people had to be driven to work by economic necessity. Today, knowing more about the nature of man and of work, we still nevertheless tend to accept the psychological premise that work and productivity are disciplines exerted against the grain of man's nature. We did not quite see, though we are close to seeing, that *what looks like laziness may be a reaction against the kind of work people are forced to do and the way in which they are forced to define it* [italics mine]." Riesman et al, op.cit. p. 262.

— is inherited from preceding generations. Our achievements today take for granted these generations' work and knowledge.

Idleness, doing something for its own sake, would be recognized as the basis of exploring the unknown. Inquisitiveness would be supported by such an income and it could be the basis of education.

Above all we should not forget how the obligation to work harms families and in by this the communities. Parents are put under increasing pressure by public debates. They have to decide whether they should take care of their children, or whether they should pursue their professional career to fulfill the community's normative expectations. Even worse if they must work to earn sufficient money for their subsistence which implies that they leave their children to child-care institutions.<sup>22</sup> Would it not be a much better support to leave it up to them, whether they prefer to stay home with their children or not? Even fathers would be able to spend more time with their children, be more present in the family. Mothers surely will be glad to get their husband's support, especially in the first years of infancy.

Without families, furthermore, there would be no responsible citizens in the first place. In terms of a work ethic, what is oftentimes portrayed as an individual achievement is in fact a result not only of this individual's achievement, but of the process of socialization that lies behind that individual. It can therefore not be regarded as this individual's achievement alone. The same holds true with regard to a company: Its products are not the achievement of that company's current staff alone, but also of the surrounding community and its culture, its schools and universities, infrastructure, legal order, families, hospitals, and so on. For this reason, the whole community has a *right* to participate in values created by that company.

Once an unconditional basic income has been introduced, the remaining jobs would again provide a meaningful perspective. Jobholders could again be proud of their work because it is useful. Furthermore, both the egocentric character of ambitious leisure activities and the exceptional character of voluntary and honorary engagement, would vanish.

An unconditional basic income as outlined above would affect the political community as a whole. Citizenship, already the fundament of each democratic nation-state based on universalistic principles, will be transformed onto another level. Today the status of being a citizen conflicts with the norm of doing paid work. Under conditions of a basic income the citizen in its fundamental meaning for the community is recognized. By providing an unconditional basic income, the community signals that it trusts<sup>23</sup> in the citizens' will to contribute to the well-being of the polity.

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<sup>22</sup> Findings on the effect of Welfare-to-Work-Programmes show that single mothers prefer to take care for their children than to work. So their reasonable decision as far as their children are concerned conflicts with the political consensus. Since Bowlby's study on this subject, much research has been conducted (e.g. by Theodor Hellbrügge and Gerald Hüther in Germany), and it shows the importance of family interaction during an infant's first years of life.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Beck's concept of "Bürgerarbeit" for example, still aims to control the life-content of the unemployed by installing a system of monetary incentives for state-operated "honorary" "engagement". His fundamental mistrust in the citizen's autonomy and ability to find something meaningful to do corresponds to his idea of a technocratic tutelage of these citizens. See e.g. U.Beck, *Schöne neue Arbeitswelt* (Campus Verlag Frankfurt / New York 2000).

Regarding public debates and our present economic situation it seems apparent to me, that the main obstacle to the introduction of an unconditional basic income is the mistrust in the individual on all sides.<sup>24</sup> People seem to fear freedom, they seem to fear the situation where the individual is responsible for leading a meaningful life without the obligation to do paid work.

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<sup>24</sup> It is remarkable that in Germany the public debate about an UBI has gained a lot of attention. It has become more and more common to discuss it in talk-shows on television. All this has developed after only three years of promotion through the initiatives of some UBI activists. See the following websites: [www.unterschied-zukunft.de](http://www.unterschied-zukunft.de) (Götz W. Werner, founder of DM-Drugstore); [www.grundeinkommen.de](http://www.grundeinkommen.de) (German affiliate to BIEN); [www.FreiheitStattVollbeschaeftigung.de](http://www.FreiheitStattVollbeschaeftigung.de) (Freedom, Not Full Employment).