

SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY

Money for Nothing

 By John Thornhill
and Ralph Atkins

Switzerland's traditionally conservative electorate will next month vote on the superficially preposterous idea of handing out an unconditional basic income of CHF30,000 (USD30,275) a year to every citizen, regardless of work, wealth or their social contribution.

Opinion polls suggest the June 5 referendum will be heavily defeated. And even if some kind of electoral convulsion results in the proposal being unexpectedly approved by voters, it is certain to be shot down by the 26 cantons that would have to implement it.

But the fact that one of the world's most prosperous countries is holding such a vote highlights how a centuries-old dream of radical thinkers is seeping into the political mainstream. In countries as diverse as Brazil, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands and India, local and national governments are experimenting with the idea of introducing some form of basic income as they struggle to overhaul inefficient welfare states and manage the social disruption caused by technological change.

Daniel Häni, a chirpy Basel entrepreneur who is one of the Swiss initiative's main supporters, said modern welfare states provide basic social support but are failing to adapt to the needs and values of our times. The trouble is that they are too costly and cumbersome, assume that a citizen's worth is determined solely by their value as an employee and rely on means testing by an overly intrusive state.

"Our social system is 150 years old and is based on Bismarck's response to Industrialisation 1.0," he said. "Our idea is simple. We want to render the conditional unconditional. UBI is about shifting power back to the citizen."

The idea of providing



“ Our idea is simple. We want to render the conditional unconditional. UBI is about shifting power back to the citizen. ”

DANIEL HÄNI
SWISS ENTREPRENEUR

money for nothing to all citizens dates back centuries and was nurtured by a radical cult before resurfacing in recent times. In the 20th century it was championed by thinkers on the left, such as John Kenneth Galbraith and Martin Luther King, as a means of promoting social justice and equal opportunity.

But it was also backed by some libertarians and economists on the right, including Milton Friedman, as a way of restricting the coercive state and restoring individual choice and freedom.

Incredible as it seems today, President Richard Nixon came very close to implementing a negative

income tax (a variant of basic income) across the U.S. in 1970. Nixon's initiative, part of his Family Assistance Plan, was strongly backed by the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate, where some Democrats considered it unambitious, and several Republicans considered it too bold.

Interest in the idea has surged in recent years largely thanks to the technological revolution, which is convulsing labour markets worldwide. The decoupling in many countries of median household income growth from expansion in gross domestic product has created a sense of middle class crisis, fuelling anger over inequality and the rise of populism in the U.S. and

Europe. 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."

At a conference in Zurich this month on technological disruption and social change, a succession of speakers from the US warned about further turmoil in the jobs market resulting from the automation of routine tasks, the application of machine learning and the rise of robots.

Citing just one of many examples, Andy Stern, the former president of the Service Employees Inter-

national Union, said the introduction of self-driving trucks and cars would eliminate millions of jobs. At present, there are about 3.5 million truck drivers in the U.S., forming the largest job category in 29 states. "There is the potential for the greatest disruption of jobs in the history of the world," said Mr Stern, author of *Raising the Floor*, a forthcoming book advocating UBI as a partial solution.

Erik Brynjolfsson, an MIT professor and co-author of *The Second Machine Age*, said a convulsive "tech surge" was under way that was rapidly turning the promise of science fiction into a reality. But he insisted that technology remained the tool of humans and could

Society and Technology: Money for Nothing (continued)

be an enormous benefit so long as it was properly managed. With robots doing most of the work, he painted a picture of a “digital Athens” in which people had time to focus on sport and the arts.

He also warned of the potential for enormous upheaval if societies did not anticipate these challenges and adequately respond to them. “I can see revolution and violence and the failure of a lot of big companies. Our economy and political system has not adapted to this new world at all and we need to get out in front of it,” he said.

Robert Reich, a former Labour secretary in the Clinton administration who teaches at University of California, Berkeley, said the digital revolution was increasing economic insecurity and inequality. The development of car-hailing apps, such as Uber and Lyft, had brought great convenience for consumers but was also creating a “spot auction market” for labour.

This insecurity was fuelling too 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.

A more equal division of the fruits of the technological revolution would revive that demand while providing a broader social good. The aim of all rich societies, Mr Reich said, should be to provide a basic level of subsistence, enabling people to do more of what they wanted and less of what they did not want to do. For all these reasons, he said: “I think that UBI is inevitable.”

Even if many experts



Ulrich Spiesshofer, chief executive of engineering company ABB, says that it is important to have a basic level of social provision for those in need, however economic rewards ought to be based on creating economic value

agree about the scale and intensity of the technological and economic challenge, they remain divided about the appropriate social and political response. There is still less consensus about how it could be implemented and funded.

The resistance to the idea of introducing UBI in Switzerland - a recent GFS poll found 71 percent of respondents were inclined to reject it - is instructive. It is far from obvious that the Swiss social model is broken and in need of repair. Switzerland remains one of the richest and most productive economies in the world. Its much-praised apprenticeship system generates a steady stream of well-trained employees and provides opportunities for all. Its unemployment rate is just 3.6 percent.

Vania Alleva, a Swiss trade union leader, said it is worth debating the possible benefits of UBI and the principles of a just society but she does not see the need for such radical change. “We are critical

of UBI. We have a social system in Switzerland that works,” she says.

Labour leaders elsewhere remain equally wary of introducing UBI, fearing it might only be used by rightwing politicians to shred the exist-

there was a danger of “fattening the frogs to feed the snakes”.

Many executives are also lukewarm about the idea, objecting to the delinkage of economic reward and effort. It is notable that support for UBI is low-

“There has to be a basic level of social provision for people in need but beyond that, economic rewards should be based on actually creating economic value.”

The government estimates full implementation of UBI would cost CHF208bn, about three times current annual federal spending of about CHF67bn. Even then, it would not replace all existing social services, such as healthcare for the elderly.

Alain Berset, a Social Democrat member of the Swiss cabinet, has described the UBI initiative as “utopian”, saying it would require significant extra funding of at least CHF25bn.

“The unconditional basic income would be a risky experiment. It’s not clear how this basic income would be designed by parliament or how it would be financed. The precise implications are unknown,” he said in an interview.

Supporters of UBI accept many of these criti-

cisms and are launching pilot projects to help answer the objections. One of the most interesting initiatives is in Finland and basic income will be rolled out on a national scale if the experiment proves effective.

The centre-right government will this year begin making tax-free monthly payments of about €550 to a random sample of 10,000 adults of working age as part of a two-year experiment. The intention is to see what effect a basic income has on work incentives and life choices and how it interacts with the existing welfare model. The city of Utrecht, and 19 other municipalities across the Netherlands, are conducting similar experiments.

Matthew Taylor is chief executive of the RSA, a British institution that looks for practical solutions to social challenges, that recently published a study on the viability of UBI. He said societies will need to become a lot more innovative in the face of the latest technological revolution. In particular, far more flexible ways will have to be found to support part-time workers or those who wish to retrain or look after their children or elderly parents.

“What excites me about UBI is that it could act as a catalyst for a broader shift in public attitudes,” he said. “I think that UBI can potentially help overcome the attitudes that we have between strivers and skivers. It can help the state enable people to have autonomous lives.”

While acknowledging the near-certainty of defeat in the coming referendum, the Swiss backers of UBI believe that their campaign signals the beginning of a global debate on basic income, rather than its end. It may be premature to introduce UBI today but its appeal will grow as societies learn to prize creativity over productivity.

Mr Häni said that, irrespective of the result, he is delighted that every Swiss newspaper has been furiously discussing the principles of a basic income. He said the Swiss debate is like a movie trailer for the main event and “trailers always end with the phrase: coming soon . . .”

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Experts may agree about the scale and intensity of the technological and economic challenge, but they remain divided about the appropriate social and political response

ing welfare state. By setting the rate too low and withdrawing other welfare benefits, it could end up hurting the very people it was designed to help most. As one participant in the Zurich conference put it,

est in the predominantly German-speaking cantons of Switzerland where the work ethic is particularly strong.

Ulrich Spiesshofer, chief executive of the engineering company ABB, says:

Back to basics: An idea long in the making

The Basic Income Earth Network, which links campaigners around the world, traces the original concept of basic income back to Thomas More, the 15th-century humanist scholar and author of Utopia, who wrote about the need for a minimum income.

But BIEN suggests that the true father of the idea of a guaranteed minimum income was Johannes Ludovicus Vives, a Spanish-born humanist and close friend of More.

After fleeing the Spanish inqui-

sition, Vives moved to Bruges, where he wrote tracts in support of the poor. “Even those who have dissipated their fortunes in dissolute living - through gaming, harlots, excessive luxury, gluttony and gambling - should be given food, for no one should die of hunger,” he wrote.

The idea was developed by the 18th-century radical Thomas Paine, who argued that every person should receive £15 on their 21st birthday and £10 a year thereafter to be paid out of “ground

rent.”

John Stuart Mill, the 19th-century utilitarian philosopher, wrote sympathetically about the idea of a basic income in his Principles of Political Economy, although he did not develop the concept.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist James Meade argued for a “social dividend” in the 1930s as a means of alleviating poverty and creating a just and efficient economy. In 1962 the American economist and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman argued for a radical sim-

plification of the welfare state and introduction of a “negative income tax.”

Jay Hammond, the Republican governor of Alaska, created the Alaska Permanent Fund in 1976 to distribute some of the proceeds of the state’s oil wealth to all its residents. Every Alaskan still receives a dividend of about USD2,000 a year in what is arguably the only full universal basic income system in operation. The poverty and inequality levels in Alaska are among the lowest in the U.S.



Tour de France



Hong Kong Rugby Sevens

By Richard Rosenblatt

PARTY AROUND THE WORLD

Great sports, great spots to party

FROM the breathtaking view at a ski station in the French Alps to a horse race that “stops the nation” Down Under to the wackiest golf hole in the Arizona desert — make that the entire planet — sports fans will find the party.

Pardon us “Field of Dreams,” but if someone promotes it, they will come.

Some of the world’s most popular sports events, be it the Tour de France, the Melbourne Cup, the — we’re not making this up — Waste Management Phoenix Open draw on their reputation as ‘the place’ to be for the day. Eat, drink, drink a little more and cheer like hell for your country, your horse, your team, your favorite player.

While most of us feel confident we’re on top of the big sports party scene, we’ve conducted an informal spot check and compiled a list of spots worth checking out:

TOUR DE FRANCE

Who wouldn’t love the Alpe d’Huez ski station located 3,000 meters up on the snow-covered French Alps along the route of the Tour de France? Known as “Dutch Corner,” it’s one of 21 hairpin turns to the station. The scene: A combination Woodstock, Munich beer festival and orange-clad Dutch fans in costumes (nuns, animals, superheroes). As exhausted riders in crazy-colored suits carefully weave their way through inebriated fans who have camped out for days waiting for this moment, they are doused with beer, and forced to inhale fumes from smoke bombs and flairs, not to men-

tion cigarette smoke. All in the name of a party several thousand strong.

AUTO RACING

Nearly 30,000 Indianapolis 500 fans crowd onto the mud and beer-soaked grass of the area that traditionally has become known as The Snake Pit. They are the dirty die-hards that through the years have sat on sofas atop vans, slept in car trunks, and set up bars next to ice-filled swimming pools. Known for X-rated antics since at least the early 1970s, the unruly part of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway infield was once known for drunkenness, fights and exhibitionism. It’s a tamer version these days than its 1970 and ‘80 heyday — the concert series held there over the weekend now has a corporate sponsor — but it’s still the place to be for a good time. And maybe catch some of the race.

OLYMPICS

Of course, just being there is party enough. The world’s athletes mingling with millions of fans... at stadiums, arenas, velodromes, ski slopes — and designated meeting places. One of the hotspots is the Heineken House. Since 1992, the Netherlands Olympic Committee hosts what many believe is the best party in

town. It’s usually a small tavern-like area for thousands of Dutch athletes, family, friends and fans to gather during the games. For those headed to Rio, the house will be set up in Ipanema, with about 4,000 “guests” per day expected.

WORLD CUP

Each country has its own unique way of welcoming the world when hosting the grandest soccer tournament of all. Stadium sambas during Brazil’s World Cup. Plenty of beer-guzzling during Germany’s. For those unable to score tickets to matches, special fan zones with large video screens and plenty of refreshments are set up near the stadiums. Start making plans for Russia in 2018, where a taste for vodka could help. You may want to think twice about vuvezleas, though. Those loud plastic horns from the World Cup in South Africa may be a tradition in that country, but are considered not-such-a-party-favor elsewhere.

HENLEY REGATTA

This one starts in late June, so start planning if you like rowing, sipping champagne or slogging down pints of beer along the Thames. There’s interest in the regatta itself, of course — but for a few days, thousands of England’s upper

and lower crust come together along the river banks. Some enclosures have dress codes, with many “Hoorah Henry’s” wearing salmon-colored pants and boater hats. Others, much less fashion-conscious and mostly unaware of the rowers speeding past, create their own outdoor party that spills into nearby pubs after sunset.

MELBOURNE CUP

Barely noticed in the U.S., this horse race in Australia has been described as “the race that stops the nation.” Nothing wrong with that. Offices around the country take a break about 3 p.m. to watch the race on the first Tuesday on November. Even school kids are allowed to watch. More than 100,000 fans pack Flemington Racecourse, dressed to the nines. There are even fashion parades at the track, with food and drink flowing all day. Around the country, Cup “luncheons” are held in just about every city and small town. It’s a public holiday in Victoria state. It’s the one day when just about every person in the country has a bet on a pony.

SUPER BOWL

The NFL knows how to throw a party, from Fan Fests to invitation-only meet-and-greets, to media day open to the pu-

blic, to halftime extravaganzas. But our pick for this unofficial holiday is any Super Bowl in New Orleans. Why? Bourbon Street. Booze, Cajun cuisine, jazz, parades, and more, all mixing with sports fanatics — and sometimes, athletes. For those who aren’t up for a hardy party, some of the world’s finer restaurants (though still crowded) can be found in the city.

GOLF

Golf is often secondary at the 16th hole of the Phoenix Open. A relatively-short par-3, the hole turns into “The Greatest Show on Turf” the week of the tournament with more than 20,000 fans cramming into an enclosed stadium built around it. Drinks flow freely and so does the noise; roars for every good shot, boos for missing the green. The players often get involved, kicking footballs off the tee, tossing items into the crowd, cupping their ears so the fans will get louder. Holes-in-one are celebrated with beer showers that cover the entire hole. Now that’s a party.

RUGBY

There are Rugby sevens tournaments all over the world, but the stop in Hong Kong is one the biggest party-goers are sure to attend. Fans often dress in costumes and are known to spend an entire day dancing in the stands. Striking is not uncommon. The annual event in Hong Kong features ex-pats and visitors from Commonwealth countries. The event became the catalyst for the world sevens series. And with Rugby sevens recently added to the Olympic program, many credit this three-day fun fest for the success. **AP**

Nepal honors 9 Sherpas who paved way for Everest climbers

AP PHOTO



Trekkers make their way to Dingboche, a popular Mount Everest base camp

By Binaj Gurubacharya, Kathmandu

NEPAL celebrated Everest Day yesterday by honoring nine Sherpa guides who fixed ropes and dug the route to the summit so hundreds of climbers could scale the world's highest mountain this month, following two years of disasters.

Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli praised the men at the ceremony in Kathmandu, where they were presented with bouquets and given checks for 50,000 rupees (USD460).

"The secret behind the more than 400 climbers ascending

Mount Everest is the successful rope fixing and successful route fixing," Oli said. "There was no confusion because the route fixing and the rope fixing made it possible for climbers to reach the summit."

Everest Day honors the first successful climb in 1953 by Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay. Since then, thousands of climbers have scaled the peak and some 280 people have died on Everest's unpredictable slopes, including at least four this month.

The nine Sherpas who were honored yesterday were the first

to reach the summit this season, reaching the peak on May 11. Since they fixed the ropes and dug the route, more than 400 people have climbed the mountain.

The Sherpas first fixed aluminum ladders and tied ropes over the dreaded Khumbu Icefall, just above the base camp. They then fixed ropes for climbers to hold onto for much of the route.

The busy climbing season follows two years of disasters on the 8,850-meter (29,035-foot)-high mountain. Last year's season was scrapped after 19 climbers were killed and 61 injured by an avalanche at the base camp triggered by a massive earthquake. In 2014, an avalanche at the Khumbu Icefall killed 16 Sherpa guides.

Prime Minister Oli offered bouquets yesterday at the statues of Hillary and Tenzing in Kathmandu. People attending the function observed a minute of silence in memory of those killed on Everest this season.

Two Indians, an Australian and a Dutchman died on the mountain this month, while another Indian is missing and believed to have died near the summit. **AP**

SEVERE WEATHER

3 people still missing after floods in Kansas and Texas

AP PHOTO



AT least three people were still missing yesterday after torrential rain in Texas and Kansas flooded rivers, washed out roads and left four people dead.

In Kansas, the search for a missing 11-year-old boy was suspended late Saturday because of darkness and fatigue of first responders, according to Wichita Fire Department battalion chief Scott Brown. The boy was swept away in a swollen creek on Friday night.

Near Austin in Travis County, Texas, officials planned to resume aerial searches yesterday for two missing people whose vehicle was swept off a flooded roadway after the area got 9 inches of rain this week, said emergency servi-

ces spokeswoman Lisa Block.

The threat of severe weather had lessened in Texas over the long Memorial Day holiday weekend and the focus now is on homes that could be flooded by slowly rising waters. Evacuation orders were issued on Saturday for parts of two Texas cities along the Brazos River near Houston.

"The skies are clear and things look good. But we want to make sure people understand that we are not out of the woods yet. We have to keep an eye on water that's coming through our bayou system," said Francisco Sanchez, a spokesman for the Office of Emergency Management in Harris County, where Houston is located. **AP**

ASK THE VET

By Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



WARNING SIGNS OF DIABETES IN CATS

THE warning signs of diabetes should be taken seriously, as diabetes is a complex condition that may lead to blindness if left untreated. Diabetes may manifest through a wide range of symptoms starting from increased urination and thirst to lethargy. Check with your veterinarian if you notice one or several of these diabetes symptoms.

EXCESSIVE THIRST

Excessive thirst is among the symptoms of diabetes. This is due to the fact that the cat cannot properly assimilate the glucose after meals and there will be a high level of glucose in the blood, so he will try to dilute the elevated concentration of glucose. Polydipsia (drinking a lot) is symptomatic for several other diseases including urinary tract infections or hyperthyroidism, so you should watch out for additional symptoms or get a clear diagnosis from your vet.

EXCESSIVE URINATION

Excessive urination or polyuria is symptomatic of felines with diabetes and may be due to:

- The increased level of glucose in the blood
- The fact that the cat consumes an increased amount of liquids

You can monitor your cat and see if there are changes in the urination schedule.

You can also watch the litter box and establish if your cat eliminates more urine. If tested, the urine will have an elevated level of glucose, as this cannot be stored in the cells of the body and is ultimately eliminated.

WEIGHT LOSS IN DIABETIC CATS

A cat with diabetes will lose weight, despite the fact that he may have an increased appetite. This is due to the fact that the body doesn't get the needed nutrients and starts using the glucose stored in the fat deposits and the muscles.

DIABETES AND INCREASED APPETITE

Increased appetite or polyphagia is due to the fact that the cat's body will not assimilate glucose properly and will feel the need to provide more energy for survival. The lack of nutrients in the blood will send a signal to the cat's brain and he will eat more. You may find your cat looking for food in addition to his meals.

CAT DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth is among the symptoms of diabetes in cats, but it may be more difficult to detect. However, the cat may drink more water also due to the fact that he feels his mouth is dry.



DIABETES AND A CAT'S LACK OF ENERGY

A cat with diabetes may be lethargic, as he doesn't have enough energy. The lack of energy results from the fact that the body cannot assimilate the glucose. Glucose is formed from the food consumed by the cat. When the cat has an insulin deficiency, the glucose cannot enter the cells.

DIAGNOSING DIABETES IN CATS

Diabetes can be diagnosed with a test of urine and some blood tests. Both the blood and the urine tests will reveal abnormal levels of glucose. The vet will examine the cat and establish if the symptoms are indicative

of diabetes. Additional tests can be performed to establish if the condition has caused any damage in the cat's body. In advanced stages, cataracts may occur.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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