

## Countering disablism: an alternative universal income support system based on egalitarianism

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### ABSTRACT

The long-term vision of economic security and social participation for people with a disability held by disability activists and policy-makers has not been realized on a global scale. This is despite the implementation of various poverty alleviation initiatives by international and national governments. Indeed within advanced Western liberal democracies, the inequalities and poverty gaps have widened rather than closed. This article is based on findings from a historical-comparative policy and discourse analysis of disability income support system in Australia and the Basic Income model. The findings suggest that a model such as Basic Income, grounded in principles of social citizenship, goes some way to maintaining an adequate level of subsistence for people with a disability. This article concludes by presenting some challenges and a commitment to transforming income support policy.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 August 2014  
Accepted 16 October 2014

### KEYWORDS

Disability policy; poverty; disability pension; economic security; universal income support; neoliberalism

### Introduction

Despite decades of advocacy by disability activists and policy-makers, the long held vision for egalitarianism in economic security and social participation has not been achieved. Modern expressions of disability policy have seen Western democracies introduce neoliberal-based welfare reforms as the 'moral a priori' response to changing global economic conditions and economic growth, unemployment and poverty (Wiggan 2012). The increased emphasis on accountability measures and improving the effectiveness of income support systems through pulling back on welfare expenditure have been adopted across Western industrial countries, such as Australia and New Zealand (Humpage 2007, 2008; Soldatic and Pini 2012), Canada (Malacrida 2010), the USA (Sommerfield and Reisch 2003), the UK (Drakeford and Davidson 2013) and Europe (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013).

This article adopts a different stance from other studies by presenting an alternative (Basic Income model) to the neoliberal policies on social security for people with a disability. An exploration of Basic Income is highly relevant to contemporary debates. The focus on national (Australian) and international disability income support policy bridges the often disparate disability and social policy studies. In doing so, I start from a social-relational ontology to suggest that there has to be a better way in the provision of disability income support. This article begins by contextualizing global social security (disability income support) policy and discusses some of the modern complexities of neoliberal policies. In exploring the potential of the Basic Income alternative model, historical-comparative policy research with critical discourse analysis was used to discern important ideological patterns and policy language aspects of disability income support policy (particularly Australia) and the Basic Income model.

The findings illustrate the potential for the Basic Income model to present as an egalitarian and collective redistributive strategy. It is acknowledged that, in reality, income support provision reflects

only one aspect of the disabling nature of society which requires redressing. There are also inherent tensions in any redistributive strategy. Therefore, I will conclude by discussing several complexities shaping disability income support policy discussions and proposing ideas for change.

### Modern context of global disability income support measures

Over the past four decades, transformations of modern welfare states, particularly social security and labour market programmes, have been driven by neoliberal philosophy under the guise of welfare reforms. The welfare reforms functioned to instil the active citizenship notion and individual self-reliance by compelling people with a disability reliant on disability income support into the labour market through activation policies and welfare-to-work schemes (known as mutual obligation in Australia and workfare in the USA; Collard 2013). The predominance of neoliberal economic policy over social policy is couched in a modernized authoritarian discourse with an aggressive application of hegemonic neoliberal principles. Neoliberal policies emphasize the principles of economic rationality, cost efficiencies and conditionality in social security programmes to respond to global economic conditions. The logic of neoliberal policies centres on claims that better targeting would function as an incentive to promote workforce participation of disability income support recipients. Yet, the reconstitution of modern welfare states through neoliberalism has impacted on the way social security is perceived. As Wiggan (2012) reveals:

The consequence is that social security is no longer recognized as a welcome form of collective protection that ameliorates risks and/or compensates individuals for the unequal distribution resources and opportunities within society. Rather it is recast as an active agent in the moulding of individuals to the needs of economic policy. (Wiggan 2012, 384)

Under the neoliberal approach to economic security, people with a disability in receipt of disability income support are reclassified as 'genuinely disabled', 'job ready' and 'capable' (Humpage 2007). In turn, reliance on income support policy and provision becomes synonymous with welfare dependency and worklessness (Wiggan 2012).

There is an emerging concern in the literature (Grover and Piggott 2013; Parker Harris, Owen, and Gould 2012) regarding the propensity of neoliberal policies to perpetuate adverse consequences, such as economic insecurity, poverty and disablism, for people with a disability in receipt of disability income support. Globally, growing evidence points to the fact that poverty gaps and inequalities are widening under neoliberal welfare regimes, rather than closing (Saunders and Wong 2013, 51). The difficulty then is that the more inequalities created through ideological dimensions, such as the dominance of economic policies for social security, the worse off people with disabilities will be (Chouinard and Crooks 2005).

In responding to growing inequalities and the shift from collective benefits notions, this article suggests a return to egalitarianism in income redistribution. The idea of a redistributive strategy that redresses ideological dimensions and poverty consequences is important (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). An alternative universal, egalitarian approach is established in terms of an unconditional right and collective benefit, rather than based on charitable and deserving poor ideals. A decent income and access to resources is critical for people with a disability. As such people with a disability need to have opportunities to engage in the everyday life of the community through their social citizenship, rather than through activation measures. Thus, some form of alternative to the current neoliberal policy approaches is required. Seipel (2013, 69) in referring to social security in the USA asserted that:

Social Security is not broken; it is doing what it was designed to do. Yet for several decades opponents have systematically mounted attacks on Social Security in the belief that it is the cornerstone of a welfare state and that when it is dismantled, the rest of the welfare programs will follow.

Here, the Seipel (2013) discourse reveals that, for the USA (and globally), welfare states have a pejorative connotation. The erroneous nature of neoliberal claims identified by Seipel (2013) points to the

need for advancing the idea of a viable alternative that advocates fairness in the reallocation of money across *all* groups in society, as opposed to cost-cutting and privatization.

At the heart of the debate is that alternative redistributive strategies such as Basic Income have a place and potentially challenge neoliberal approaches to the social security programmes (Raventós 2007). The idea of a Basic Income grant is not new (Cunliffe and Erreygers 2005; Van Parijs 2007). Internationally, policy debates have contributed to the Basic Income proposal achieving a higher profile (Richardson 2013). The proposal of a Basic Income model as a universal right makes it a redistributive strategy that maintains the ideological soundness of an alternative model (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

### Complexities of modern neoliberal policies and the Basic Income alternative

Neoliberalism is a highly contested term. However, there are challenges in establishing the dominance of economic policy, welfare reforms and labour market integration as the panacea to manage global economic challenges (Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013). Neoliberal approaches to disability income support policy are reliant on targeting, conditionality and reciprocal obligation arrangements. The notion of 'labour market participation', and active citizenship (as distinct from the term social citizenship), has become a *precondition* for the participation and social inclusion of people with disabilities (Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013). This precondition of active citizenship underpinning welfare reforms is in itself disabling in nature and part of the disablement process. Examining neoliberal discourse and practices gives insight into the way productive capacity and the able-bodied worker ideologies functioned as the prerequisite for citizenship (Prideaux et al. 2009).

Growing inequalities demonstrate that poverty, unemployment and marginalization for people with a disability continue to remain a significant global social problem, especially across Western democracies (Palmer 2011). The enforced dependency and financial hardship reduces the capacity for people with a disability to attain an adequate standard of living. In view of the limited economic independence and therefore material disadvantage, there is an increased need for financial security for disability pensioners to prevent extreme financial hardship (Palmer 2011).

In both the disability policy and social welfare policy analyses, little attention has been drawn to the need for a Basic Income model as an alternative universal income support provision for people with a disability. Policy analyses tend to place greater importance on resolving disagreements about economic imperatives (such as cost–benefit and feasibility analyses as in Mendelson et al. 2010) at the expense of social and disability dimensions, such as preventing discrimination. Consequently, alternative models of income support, such as the Basic Income, have been discounted on the grounds of ideological inappropriateness. Few disability policy commentators actually put forward what an alternative reality might look like (Gibilisco 2003; Malacrida 2010). Even in instances in which research studies explore employment policy and labour market exclusion, disability pensions either receive a cursory attention or are found to be a barrier to the labour market. Extending policy debates requires an examination of a non-marginalizing income support provision, such as Basic Income, to assist in maintaining an adequate level of subsistence for people with a disability.

### Research method

The author applied an abridged version of the welfare state regime typologies proposed by policy theorists Esping-Andersen (2000), Standing (2002), and Tomlinson (2000) to conduct historical-comparative policy research. The typology contained categories of liberal/neoliberal, conservative/neo-conservative, corporatist, social democratic and social solidarity ideologies which helped to uncover ideological patterns shaping welfare state regimes approach to social security (disability income support). Given the absence of disability dimensions, the author extended the welfare state regime typologies to incorporate the disability dimension. These included *social disability*

*perspective, disablist ideology and discourse, and collective disability solidarity.* Drawing on the approach suggested by Fairclough (2009), critical discourse analysis method was also used to reveal the ideological and social dimensions of language and social-material aspects of disability income support policy production and legitimation situated within the broader context of the political economy.

Several seminal Basic Income policy texts and Australian policy reports and parliamentary Hansard documents<sup>1</sup> provided the basis for analysis. Data were analyzed paragraph by paragraph using thematic and pattern analysis to discern patterns in policy and language (such as political ideologies of the welfare state, discursive formations and rhetorical devices; Fairclough 2009). Descriptive codes were assigned, reduced and refined to help identify relevant themes for comparison and generate higher-order analytical concepts.

## Findings and discussion: major themes and sub-themes

This section now turns to examining the two major themes Basic Income as a universal right based on justice and non-disablist principles and Citizenship as a precondition for Basic Income, rather than categorizations of disability. Each theme comprises two sub-themes (distributive justice: meeting basic need and a non-disabling society for people with disabilities based on egalitarianism for theme one; and income support provision on the basis of citizenship rights, not a 'proven disability', and socio-economic independence for theme two). Each theme and sub-theme will be presented and discussed below.

### *Theme one: Basic Income as a universal right based on justice and non-disablist principles*

A Basic Income emphasizes justice through non-disablist principles where the aim of the model is to counter disablement processes. Non-disabling principles operate as 'necessary preconditions' (Standing 2005, 101) and are considered necessary for the transformation of systems and redressing inequities (Russell 2001).

#### *Distributive justice: meeting basic need*

In a Basic Income model, the idea of distributive justice is underpinned by ethical justifications, as reflected in the excerpt: 'everybody needs a sense of basic security in order to function rationally ... be responsible, and ... to develop competencies' (Standing 2005, 91). Here, distributive justice: meeting basic need is found in phrase 'a sense of basic security', which communicates economic security. In Australia, the reliance on economic policies and cost-cutting by governments has led to the opposite experience, that is, increased insecurity in employment. In contrast to the Australian system, a Basic Income contains the potential for shifting power to people with a disability by decommodifying labour power and strengthening distributive justice (Russell 2001). This shift is seen in the next discursive formation whereby a Basic Income functions as a means for generating an equitable distribution (distributive justice) of benefits and basic security: 'the advantages of ... Basic Income approaches is their effectiveness in ... encouraging a smoother income distribution curve which maintains equity' (Howe 2004, 4). This illustration infers that the Basic Income model has some capacity to address inequitable income support systems which have left vulnerable groups, such as disability pensioners, in a precarious position.

The discursive theme of distributive justice: meeting basic need is also seen in the following extract through aligning the discourse of distributive justice with the notion of a good society:

A Good Society will ensure that everybody has sufficient security to enable them to have a decent existence and pursue their sense of occupation [rather than imposed work requirements]. Distributive justice is about the distribution of security just as much as about the distribution of income and the balance of control and freedom. (Standing 2002, 238)

Here, Basic Income represents a shift from economic authority to social power through distributive justice: meeting basic need. As an ethical justification, the Basic Income proposal has the capacity to direct structural change to income support policy based on distributive justice and economic security, as opposed to an economy based on neoliberalism, economic policy and the private market (Oliver 2009). The principle of distributive justice is counter to neoliberal responses and economic principles underpinning targeting measures such as in Australia. Given the consequence of increased insecurity for disability pensioners, the dominance of economic over social objectives can no longer be justified. As a transformational redistributive strategy, the Basic Income model operates as a constraining force in the attempts by governments to regulate disability pensioners (Fairclough 2009).

The following discursive formation illustrates why distributive justice is central to meeting basic need and protecting vulnerable groups in society from unintended consequences under a Basic Income model:

Little is said about the need to revise the policies and institutions that distribute income and the right to an income. This is where BI [Basic Income] comes in as a rational policy for distributing income in a more stable and egalitarian way to people who live from their labour. (Lo Vuolo and Raventós 2009, 3)

The findings from this section suggest that an ethically sound redistributive strategy can only be achieved through a political commitment to the transformation of existing disability income support systems. A Basic Income model represents such a transformational redistributive strategy.

### *A non-disabling society for people with disabilities based on egalitarianism*

A Basic Income model addresses the oppressive elements of existing models through principles based on egalitarianism. In the Basic Income data, egalitarianism refers to achieving a society and social security system which protects the civil, social, political and human rights of people with a disability. The model goes some way towards developing a society based on non-disablist principles of egalitarianism where oppressive features such as disablism are redressed. The non-disabling society and egalitarian discourses were demonstrated in this account:

A Basic Income ... enhances equity and promotes a more egalitarian society. The increased income security which a Basic Income would give to low income earners and those without access to other funds, is part of living in a more egalitarian society. (Tomlinson 2007, 34)

The Basic Income proposal provides a relevant income support alternative for disability social theorists. It generates a clear vision for both addressing disablism in social security measures and aligning with the disability movement's central theme of egalitarianism. Preconditions based on egalitarianism function to counter disablement processes, such as targeting (Russell 2001). An egalitarian Basic Income provides the necessary prerequisites essential for transitioning to a more equitable income support system.

The Basic Income model protects the rights of all people, including people with a disability, not just the 'able-bodied'. This is in contrast to Australia, including modern Western democracies such as Canada, whereby income support for people with a disability has been eroded by the dominance of neoliberal policies (Malacrida 2010) which rely on punitive mechanisms (such as mutual obligation and self-reliance discourse) at the expense of social objectives. In an egalitarian society, the income support system does not discriminate between particular groups. This is because, under a Basic Income model, entitlements would be egalitarian-based rather than needs-based:

*The greatest benefit to society as a whole will be the influence it has towards a more equal and egalitarian society [emphasis in original] ... This will not only provide the basis for a more cohesive and tolerant society, but also pave the way for a more diverse society ... more concerned with social satisfaction than with material wealth.* (McDonald 2000, 5)

The discursive formation operates as a unifying theme to promote a positive representation of egalitarianism (Fairclough 2009). The discourses of egalitarianism and universal income support allow for an alternative proposal to the existing neoliberal imbued reality (Raventós 2007, 108).

The discourses indicate why egalitarianism promotes a non-disabling society built on rights and citizenship. Egalitarianism is used to garner support for broad consent and a new collective will (Fairclough 2009). In countering disablism, egalitarianism is established as a new truth and operates to challenge and replace dominant neoliberal hegemonic views of disability income support policy. This is achieved by moving away from authoritarian tendencies which mitigates the necessity for targeting and moral imperatives. An egalitarian income support system would be free from targeting and means-testing. This is in stark contrast to the way Australian (and global) governments have traditionally designed the disability income support system.

### ***Theme two: citizenship as a precondition for Basic Income, rather than categorizations of disability***

Following on from theme one is the overarching theme of social citizenship as a necessary precondition for Basic Income as opposed to categorizations of disability.

#### ***Income support provision on the basis of citizenship rights, not a 'proven disability'***

A Basic Income grounded in citizenship rights would preclude the need for targeting and pejorative associations with entitlements (who is deserving and who is not deserving, such as the case with Australia and globally) given that it is paid to *all* citizens who are 18 years of age and over, regardless of income [dis]ability and classifications (Raventós 2007, 9). The claim that a Basic Income is paid to all regardless of whether a person with a disability engages in paid work or not represents the reconstitution of citizenship (Fairclough 2009). Social citizenship (as opposed to active citizenship) as a prerequisite requirement is evident in the following extract: 'entitlement to ... [a] fair share is no doubt unconditional with respect to both income from other sources and willingness to work' (Van Parijs 1992, 10). Here conditionality is transformed. This transformation occurs through a change in meaning. Social citizenship shifts from the language of economic participation to a new interpretation based on social and political participation and collective responsibility (Fairclough 2009). Thus, social citizenship is reconstituted to represent a social right, rather than a conditional moral duty: 'citizenship is the unifying principle of society ... A citizenship income [Basic Income] would be a means of strengthening the sense of citizenship' (Standing 2002, 205). The claim is made that the Basic Income grant is a right without specific obligations or conditions (Milner 1920). The absence of any state authority and regulation attached to Basic Income is distinct from global and Australian approaches. This is because a social citizenship as the starting point for redistribution counters coercive and regulatory strategies found in neoliberal approaches. Given that an unconditional payment is the fundamental element of basic security, it does not depend on harsh penalties or the regulatory control of disability pensioners through compulsion measures or incentives. Coercive means are considered unnecessary or counterproductive (Van Trier 1995).

The next account demonstrates the way a Basic Income model does not apply conditions or productivity incentives to the provision:

Giving an unconditional income to everybody would be a good way to guarantee the recognition of all the members of a society, when the labour market cannot perform that function ... Basic income would ... end society's reliance on the market to satisfy the most ... fundamental needs of its members, something that is necessary for the exercise of citizenship. Basic income would give recognition to all citizens, independent from the market. (Pérez 2005, 232)

Under this model, citizenship rights operate independently from the market and regulatory aspects of government policy. Thus, people with a disability are free to exercise their basic citizenship

(Standing 2002) and are empowered to access other forms of income without being subject to marginalizing consequences or regulation:

Basic Income is defined as a 'bottom line' or 'base' that is not incompatible with other sources of income ... There is no need to 'hide' the fact of receiving a Basic Income and neither can it be withdrawn when income is received from other sources. (Raventós 2007, 124)

The next extract also demonstrates social citizenship discourse as a proletarian hegemonic principle to counter neoliberal approaches:

The serious problem of interference by the social services [social security] in the lives of beneficiaries, which is so characteristic of means-tested subsidies ... never arises with Basic Income ... because of the fact that it is universal. The only requirement is accredited residence, but the invasion of private life (for example in investigating ... levels of income) disappears. (Raventós 2007, 127)

In this account, the notion of universal provision and the absence of interference from the state authority means that people without a disability are not set apart from non-disabled people. The discursive frame highlights the problems associated with the imposition of restrictions on particular groups (such as interference and those found in welfare-to-work schemes) in means-tested approaches. Basic Income challenges the hegemonic consequences of regulation that are found in modern neoliberal market-oriented policies (Russell 2001). The legitimizing discourse of citizenship rights gives credence to Basic Income as an appropriate alternative.

*A non-stigmatizing provision: citizenship, not a 'proven disability'.* A Basic Income that is universal would not be stigmatizing to people with a disability. It achieves this in two ways: first, as a universal provision, it is free from strict eligibility criteria and categorizations, and second, there are no pejorative ideological associations with welfare dependency and worklessness.

A Basic Income grant has no stringent eligibility criteria (such as a 'proven disability' or genuinely disabled connotation) as a qualifier for receiving income support, apart from citizenship. The provision does not factor in the quantification of disability as a precondition nor does it require medical evidence:

A straightforward monetary payment ... should be paid to every [person] ... in the country ... This would take the place of all social security benefits, such as unemployment benefit, old-age pensions, health benefits ... Every man, woman and child would thus have [their] ... basic minimum whether in sickness or in health, in work or out of work ... There would be no means test and no tests whether a man [sic] was seeking work or whether a man was genuinely ill. Doctors could stop writing out health certificates. (Van Trier 1995, 356)

Here, this discourse is concerned with the way the Basic Income model makes obsolete disability classifications. Where neoliberal policies generate categories on the basis of 'ableness' as a condition of citizenship, Basic Income avoids the need for disability to be measured and proven in relation to standard income support. This contrasts with the Australian model which has a long history of relying on state authority, individual-dysfunctional theories and medical criteria in determining disability income support eligibility.

A Basic Income grant provides a guaranteed minimum income without controls attached (Lo Vuolo and Raventós 2009). It is this feature that significantly distinguishes a Basic Income grant from neoliberal social security policies. The following extract also depicts the way the grant is free from stringent controls: 'the [universal] support incomes are unconditional, and this characteristic alone frees the system from any political or ideological pressures. This system engenders freedom ... whereas politically or ideologically driven systems ... support conformity and regulation' (McDonald 2000, 2). The Basic Income grant being unconditional, and in a sense a right of citizenship, rejects conditionality based on disability dimensions. Basic Income upholds the notion that people with a disability are considered citizens in their own right (Oliver 2009).

The next extract highlights the citizenship rights discourse underpinning the Basic Income grant: 'the aim ... [is] to cover the ... needs of every citizen. Being paid as a civic right, it will be of equal

amount for all' (Van Trier 1995, 392). Where an individual is unable to work, the individual would not be coerced into finding work. Thus, participation is promoted as a non-coercive civic right. The Basic Income model uses the individual civic rights discourse as a counter-hegemonic politics to transform the traditional Australian targeted disability income support system (Fairclough 2009).

A Basic Income contains the potential to reduce the stigmatism of particular groups in receipt of a pension, including the disability pension:

At the same time accessibility would be greatly increased and stigmatisation reduced. Everyone becomes eligible for payment under a guaranteed income scheme, and take-up is automatic in most cases ... The 'automatic ... guarantee of an income' does not 'consign beneficiaries to second class citizenship' ... [whereas] ... social services carry an inherent risk of stigmatisation. (Tulloch 1979, 149)

This discourse highlights the way stigmatization is removed because of automatic take-up. The discursive frame shows that social citizenship is greatly enhanced through a Basic Income model as the grant eliminates the tendency for all people with a disability to be stigmatized through 'special categories' of disability (Commonwealth of Australia 1975, 68). A similar discourse was demonstrated in the following extract:

Basic Income does away with the 'social failure' stigma that many people associate with the fact of receiving any kind of poor relief because every citizen would receive a Basic Income and therefore nobody is 'marked' by the fact of receiving it. (Raventós 2007, 126)

The account reveals the way an unconditional grant prevents pejorative associations between disability and worklessness or welfare dependency on the basis that all citizens receive the grant without obligations attached to the payment.

The Basic Income grant reframes disability income support and has the power to transform neoliberal policy rhetoric by eliminating stigmatizing effects (Fairclough 2009). The precondition of social citizenship underpinning Basic Income is the precipitator for effecting change and challenging disability (Russell 2001).

**Socio-economic independence.** The Basic Income grant seeks to counter neoliberal policies and disability by redressing economic insecurity and providing a modest level of income security. The idea that Basic Income provides some means for addressing poverty and enhancing socio-economic independence is a consistent theme found in the Basic Income texts (for example, Milner 1920; Standing 2002; Van Parijs 2007). An Australian policy document (Henderson Poverty Report 1975) made similar claims: '[such a universal scheme] set at a level sufficient ... [would] make it very difficult to fall into poverty' (Commonwealth of Australia 1975, 73). This is an important finding particularly given that people with a disability have a long history of being reliant on disability pensions, exclusion from the labour market and precarious employment opportunities (Gibilisco 2003). Another extract reveals the basic security principle in the form of socio-economic independence underpinning a Basic Income provision:

Pensioners would generally be better off financially and ... the working poor, although not receiving a full guarantee against poverty, would obtain some additional security. The minimum payment would provide a floor under incomes which would be particularly significant for those with fluctuating incomes. (Tulloch 1979, 150)

Here, the discursive formation emphasizes the strength of the economic security principle as a means to secure legitimacy for the Basic Income alternative. A Basic Income responds to 'privation, material want and economic disparity' (Raventós 2007, 21) through policy goals of socio-economic independence, economic security and equity.

Where a universal Basic Income proposal may not fully redress the propensity for poverty in its totality (as it is dependent upon the level it is set), the grant goes some way in responding to poverty traps. The following extract, drawing on findings from a micro-simulation model, demonstrates this assertion of abolishing poverty traps:



[It was found that a] Basic Income ... proposal ... seeks to eradicate poverty [through the provision of €5414 per annum]. However ... if this is a goal to be pursued it is precisely because eradicating poverty by guaranteeing the material existence of all citizens is a necessary condition for the exercise of freedom. Putting an end to poverty is essential for making people equal ... equal in the more precise sense of being reciprocally free ... by having the means of material existence. (Raventós 2007, 108)

In this illustration, the discursive theme of preventing poverty traps points to the way a Basic Income can improve the material existence of disability pensioners. The grant *seeks* to redress poverty and underlines the true nature of the social citizenship principles. The precondition is central to enhancing the material existence of people with a disability and mitigating the effects of economic hardship and poverty (Oliver 2009).

The McDonald (2000, 2) text makes visible the financial security assumptions identified in the commentator's use of the socio-economic independence discourse:

The feature that contributes most ... is the lifelong financial security of the universal income support. Taking as an example the proposal for a Support Income for Australia, this financial security is provided by an individual income which is free of tax, free of means test and for an adult sufficient to maintain a basic standard of living. This is a level of financial security which is simply not achievable within the limitations of a means tested income support system.

The discourse suggests that adequate socio-economic security is the foundation for reducing fear, attaining real self-determination and promoting self-autonomy, which is contra to neoliberal ideals of self-reliance. The next extract illustrates the socio-economic independence principles: 'possibly the most significant feature of universal income support is the ability to develop individual self-determination and independence, in contrast to the welfare dependency created by means tested income support' (McDonald 1995, 8). Thus, socio-economic independence is important for reducing financial insecurity (Raventós 2007; Standing 2009). The findings from the Basic Income data indicated that the provision of a Basic Income above the poverty line is one way of remedying this experience of poverty.

It is beyond the scope of this article to undertake an economic analysis of Basic Income feasibility (see Raventós 2007, Standing 2009 for economic modelling). However, in countering the neoliberal efficiency argument, Australia is a wealthy nation and can afford to introduce a Basic Income scheme. One way to fund such a grant is through our general taxation revenue system at a modest rate of approximately 25% of average weekly earnings (Tomlinson 2000).

## Conclusion

This article started with the premise that there has to be a better way in the modern provisions of disability income support policy. Historical-comparative policy analysis and critical discourse analysis were applied to examine the extent to which a Basic Income represents a relevant alternative to national and international neoliberal social security (disability income support policy) responses. The analysis showed that, in contrast to modern neoliberal approaches, the Basic Income model provides a transformative strategy to counter the more oppressive effects of neoliberalism, such as poverty and stigmatism. The model has the capacity to mobilize support by applying a counter-ideology to disrupt neoliberal hegemony (Fairclough 2009). This is identified in the transformative features of Basic Income as a universal right based on justice, non-disablist principles and citizenship as a precondition for Basic Income, rather than categorizations of disability.

The Basic Income model applies the social citizenship discourse as a transformative strategy based on distributive justice and egalitarianism in meeting need in the transition to egalitarian income support provision. People with a disability marginalized at the lower end of income distribution can receive some form of support and achieve socio-economic independence based on egalitarianism, rather than disability categorizations. This aligns with disability theorists (such as Gibilisco 2003) call for non-disabling models of social security (income support). Social citizenship discourse and

language transforms constructions of disability in relation to social citizenship, rather than categorizations of 'ableness' as a condition of citizenship. There are no stigmatizing, disabling distinctions generated under a Basic Income model (Raventós 2007). This finding helps understand the way a Basic Income as a transformative strategy redresses *one* aspect of disability in relation to social security policy.

There are inherent tensions underpinning any transformative strategy such as the Basic Income model. Tensions can be evident in relation to the equity principle and the precondition whereby the grant is paid to all people. The issue centres on the notion that maybe an ethically sound approach is better placed to provide payment to some vulnerable members of society (such as people with a disability) over others (who have wealth). Yet, these tensions form part of an ongoing debate that continues to be played out across policy research, publications and public forums. The difficulty in focusing on the most vulnerable groups as opposed to all people is in reproducing the same neoliberal policies that marginalize people with disabilities. It also leads to governments relying on reformist strategies that is inherently the same and does not respond to poverty or disabling income support measures. Reformist approaches to disability income support (as with Australia) use repertoires that suggest the restructuring of systems (Fairclough 2009). However, reformism in redistribution is a form of passive revolution. It espouses transformation, yet the change process is stringently managed in order to preserve the traditional hierarchy, authority and natural order of society and system (Fairclough 2009). Consequently, these prescriptive changes tend to result in the tightening of social protection measures. In contrast, a Basic Income is transformative in that it replaces the existing social security (income support) system with an egalitarian, universal model.

A change in the existing form of social security such as modifying the general taxation revenue system does not happen immediately. Any change requires policy debate and time. Nonetheless, the transition to a Basic Income model is not an impossible task (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). What is required is political will on the part of governments (Gibilisco 2003). This political commitment would align with a grass-roots vision for alternative income support policies grounded in non-disablist principles, egalitarianism and social citizenship.

## Note

1. These include Commonwealth of Australia (1975), Howe (2004), Lo Vuolo and Raventós (2009), McDonald (1995, 2000), Milner (1920), Pérez (2005), Raventós (2007), Standing (2002, 2005, 2009), Tomlinson (2007), Tulloch (1979) and Van Parijs (1992).

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their feedback and helpful suggestions.

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