

Contrasting primitive conceptions of Basic Income Guarantee

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to outline and compare the Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) proposals by Thomas Paine and Thomas Spence. In assessing the two proposals using the current version of BIG criterion, each proposal has consistent and inconsistent elements. It can be argued that the two proposals are 'primitive' versions of BIG, as espoused today by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) and the United States Basic Income Guarantee Network (USBIG Network). Nevertheless, beyond what would be perceived today as flaws in both proposals, Paine and Spence equally contributed to the historical development of BIG.

Keywords: Basic Income Guarantee (BIG); Thomas Paine; Thomas Spence.

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1 Introduction

The rise of capitalism and the establishment of markets entailed the co-development of a class of the poor: "those persons ...who, though willing to work, cannot subsist by labor" as explained by Richard Woodward an 18th-century exponent of the rights of the poor in his 1768 pamphlet, *An Argument in Support of the Right of the Poor in*

the Kingdom of Ireland, to a National Provision (Gilbert, 1988, pp.145–146). On all accounts in the course of the industrial revolution, there is no doubt that the standard of living of the poor fell steeply in relation to the standards of the middle and upper classes. At the same time, the extensive division of labor in the factory made much of the work so repetitive and straightforward that inexperienced women and children could equally perform the work of men. In view of the fact that women and children could be hired for much lower wages than men and since entire families had to work in order to earn enough to survive, women and children were widely employed. Many capitalists preferred women and children because they could be reduced to a state of passive obedience more easily than men; as a result, children endured the cruelest servitude and women were mistreated almost severely (Hunt, 1992, pp.81–82).

In concert, proponents of laissez-faire capitalism campaigned vigorously for the abolition of the Speenhamland system of poor relief that had come into existence in 1795. The English poor laws, which provided poor families various kinds of public assistance, dominated the writings of the new discipline: political economy (Persky, 1997, p.179). Classical political economists were opposed to any government assistance to the poor and many of their arguments were based on the ideas of Malthus (Hunt, 1992, p.85). Malthus said at the end of the turn of the 19th century, “half the population of the country received relief” (Jensen, 1999, p.456).

Classical economists from Adam Smith and David Ricardo to John Stuart Mill approached the poor laws with resentment (Persky, 1997, p.182). In the case of the classical economists, their world view campaigned in favor of independence and self reliance that comes from the workings of free markets, consequently poor relief was anathema. Malthus was of the opinion that if the poor laws of the time were allowed to remain in force, they would merely increase the number of poor and thus in the long run return them to the subsistence level. Therefore, poor relief would not raise the standard of living of the poor in the long run, since the poor relief would encourage the poor to have more children. Although the poor laws were instituted in order to alleviate ‘the intensity of individuals misfortune’, these laws had actually ‘spread the evil [of poverty] over a much larger surface’ than would have been the case if they ‘had never existed’. According to Malthus (1826, pp.355, 381, 367), the ‘evils of the poor laws seem to be irremediable’. Ricardo gave unqualified support to Malthus’ position on poor laws and entitlements. In 1818 Ricardo (1952, p.248) wrote to a friend: “Great evils result from the idea which the Poor Laws inculcate that the poor have a right to relief”. Hence, the public associated the new discipline of political economy with the strong refusal of the right to subsistence and solid opposition to the English Poor Law (Gilbert, 1988, p.153).

Anti-Malthusians, those who rejected Malthus ideas, believed that poor laws could be structured in such a way as to satisfy the concerns of classical political economists. Fortright critics of the Malthusian population theory argued that even the able-bodied poor might be granted assistance without danger of over-population, if the relief were cautiously administered (Gilbert, 1988, p.154). Richard Woodward, Michael Sadler, Samuel Read, Poulett Scrope, William F. Lloyd and Mountifort Longfield argued that the poor have a ‘right to subsistence’ as a matter of justice and/or arguing the advantages of poor relief either for the economy or its usefulness in maintaining political stability (Gilbert, 1988, p.144).

More radical exponents of the rights of the poor were Thomas Paine (1737–1809) and Thomas Spence (1750–1814). Their versions of the ‘right to subsistence’ place them at a considerable distance from the abolitionist doctrine of Malthus and the classical political economists, and from the ‘right to subsistence’ of the Anti-Malthusians. Their proposals were largely ignored, as the Malthusian doctrine became the dominant way of thinking at the time, as well as it also influences thinking even today. It is hence important to explore the radical versions of the ‘right to subsistence’ associated with Paine and Spence. The purpose of this paper is to determine Paine’s and Spence’s recommended policies linked with the ‘right to substance’. I discover that Paine and Spence developed what I name ‘primitive’ versions of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG). In other words, the proposals espoused by the radicals of the time have consistent and inconsistent elements with the modern version of BIG advocated by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) and the United States Basic Income Guarantee Network (USBIG Network). Even so, Paine and Spence contributed to the fruition of the current form of BIG. Students of job and income guarantees proposals would benefit from this analysis as it places Paine’s and Spence’s contribution to the debate in a well-deserved appropriate context.

The paper is organised as follows: part two presents Thomas Paine’s views and recommended policies; part three introduces Thomas Spence’s beliefs and course of action; part four compares the two radical proposals and finally in the conclusion an evaluation of the two proposals takes place with respect to the current version of BIG.

2 Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

Among Thomas Paine’s salient, though neglected, works is ‘Agrarian Justice’. Paine wrote the pamphlet in the winter of 1795–1796 after his release from imprisonment in France and the pamphlet had definitely French origins. The complete title is ‘Agrarian Justice. Opposed to Agrarian Law and to Agrarian Monopoly Being a Plan for Meliorating the Conditions of Man’ published in 1797. While he was indecisive on whether to publish the pamphlet during the war of the time or wait for peace, he read a book entitled ‘An Apology for the Bible’ written by a Sermon preacher Watson, Bishop of Landaff. Watson’s book was a reply to the Second Part of ‘The Age of Reason’ written by Paine. In the Bishop’s writings there was a list of works that he had written and referred in the text ‘The Wisdom and Goodness of God, in having Made both Rich and Poor’, and an appendix, with the title ‘Reflection on the Present State of England and France’. Paine identified as an ‘error’ the title and that motivated him to publish the ‘Agrarian Justice’ as soon as possible. Paine strongly disagreed with the Bishop that God made the rich and the poor; God created only men and women and gave the earth for their inheritance. Preaching, Paine affirmed, should try to make the general condition of people less miserable than just rationalising the status quo. “Practical religion consists of doing good; and the only way of serving God is, that of endeavoring to make his creation happy. All preaching that has not this for its object is nonsense and hypocrisy” (Paine, 1797, p.397).

The significance of Paine’s defense of welfare in *Agrarian Justice* is that it overcomes the two earlier limitations in the *Rights of Man*, the lack of theoretical basis for private property and the limited applicability of welfare policies (Seaman, 1988, p.129). Paine (1797, p.397) pointed out in the ‘*Agrarian Justice*’ of the contradiction that existed in modern societies, that the most affluent and the most miserable people are to be found in

so-called civilised societies. The development of civilised societies is associated with the co-development of poverty; poverty is created and maintained, strangely enough, only in civilised societies. Poverty does not exist in the natural state: “Civilization, therefore, or that which is so called, has operated, two ways, to make one part of society more affluent, and the other part more wretched, than would have been the lot of either in a natural state” (Paine, 1797, p.397). But the earth in its natural uncultivated state is the common property of all human kind. Natural rights, a very popular concept at the time, provided to all members of the society an equal claim to the fruits of nature during their lifetime. The natural rights doctrine was built on the postulate that no person is to be considered as naturally superior to another; there cannot be a reason for one person’s claim to nature to be superior to another’s. Because no person’s claim to nature is superior to another’s, no one will have a right to exclude another from nature. The rights of all to nature are accordingly equal. Even civilisation should not violate this equal natural right to nature. That is interpreted by Paine that people should not be worse than they would had been born in the natural state. It is quite interesting to note that in the Rights of Man, Part One, Paine acknowledges natural rights in the form of rights inhered in individuals (intellectual rights and those rights of acting of individuals of their happiness), no mention of the ‘natural state’ and of natural claim to common property (Claeys, 1988, p.23).

In the natural state every person is born with the property rights of the soil and with it the natural produce of vegetables and animals. The natural state can be visualised by the North American Indian tribes, Paine declared. Thus, “there could be no such thing as landed property originally. Man did not make the earth, and though he had a natural right to *occupy* it, he had no right to *locate as his property* in perpetuity any part of it: neither did the Creator of the earth open a land-office, from whence the first title-deeds should issue” (Paine, 1797, p.399). Thus land is a free gift of the Creator to the human kind, as it is stated in the biblical account of Creation, by which command over the earth was given to the first man and woman which serves the foundation of Christianity. The establishment of personal property is the result of the development of so-called civilised society. It is as impossible for an individual to acquire personal property without the existence of society. “Separate an individual from society, and give him an island or a continent to possess, and he cannot acquire personal property” (Paine, 1797, p.408).

Paine recognises that the value of the improvement only, and not the land itself, is individual property. Since without the improvement due to cultivation, arts and sciences there would only be subsistence for one tenth of the population (Paine, 1797, p.398). The inequality of wealth is a natural outcome of differences in industry, superiority of talents, quality of management, extreme thrift and fortunate opportunities. Commerce, Paine stated, is a civilising force and freedom of trade is the principal source of wealth (Dorfman, 1938, pp.373, 380). However, the system of landed property has taken the natural property of all those whom it dispossessed, without providing, as ought to have been done, a compensation for that loss (Paine, 1797, pp.400–401). Thus, every proprietor of cultivated land owes to the society a ground-rent for the non-improved land which the person holds because it is common property. This ground rent would take the form of a tax of 10% on inheritances of land as the best alternative to the sharing of the land by the members of society. It is this ground-rent that would fund the payments made to every person, rich or poor, since everyone is an owner of non-improved land so there is no reason for distinctions. Those who do not want to claim their entitlement it can remain in the common fund. Paine (1797, p.400) proposed:

“To create a Natural Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of 21 years, the sum of 15 Pounds sterling, as a compensation in part for the loss of his natural inheritance by the introduction of the system of landed property. AND ALSO, The sum of Ten Pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living of the age of 50 years, and to all others as they arrive at that age.”

This plan would provide a better environment for the economy – Paine repeatedly argued that the rich should support his scheme as they would benefit and enjoy their riches without abject poverty (Buber Agassi, 1991, p.456) – since it is a devise to prevent people becoming poor from the start of their productive life. Every person, when they arrive at the age of twenty-one, is an inheritor of something to begin with and become productive citizens rather than burdens on society. In addition, so often rich people fall into unexpected poverty, even at the age of sixty, but in Paine’s proposed scheme they would have an income provided and the right to draw from the arrears own to them. As a result of the scheme the wealthy classes would benefit substantially and that is why they should not resist its implementation. The scheme would increase land prices. There will be no violence against property, as the poor would not question property rights since they would be rightly justified. Lastly, there would be no resentment by the poor to increased wealth by the rich, as increased wealth would result in increasing the national fund proportionally; thus the more wealthy people become at the same time the living standards of the poor also increase (Dorfman, 1938, p.383). Paine defends the proposed plan: “It is not charity but a right-not bounty but justice, that I am pleading for”.

Paine’s ideas, in contrast to some writers of his time, did not provide a challenge to the existence of market-based economic systems and to the reasons behind the market inequalities (Little, 1999, p.63; Keane, 1995, p.427). He sought to invoke the authority of the biblical account without reaching sweeping propositions (Claeys, 1988, p.25). Paine argued that the uneven distribution of ‘natural’ property can be repaired by establishing the national fund and not as a result of returning the land to its natural owners by expropriation. The later is impossible due to the fact that social progress and civilisation was irreversible: “It is always possible to go from the natural state to the civilized state, but it is never possible to go from the civilized state to the natural state” (Paine, 1797, pp.397–398). From a moral point of view people are self-sufficient and could exist without society and progress, but they cannot be economically self-sufficient; it is the economic need that encouraged people to establish society and progress (Christian, 1973, p.369). Paine was not a primitivist.

‘Agrarian Justice’ did not have any substantial influence on the political debates of the time. Plummer (1927, p.212) argues that Paine’s scheme was more advanced for its time as he suggested a non-contributory social insurance, where the state provided the funds from taxation. Paine’s scheme was devised before the advent of the industrial revolution, long before workers organised and demanded government intervention and before the real threat of the socialist revolution (Buber Aggasi, 1991, p.456). Paine argued for a version of universalism making him a forerunner. However, generally his work as an economist suffered neglect due to his political views, as both Smith and Malthus openly denounced his political beliefs and as such his economic proposals were dismissed (West, 1967, p.380). Paine’s proposal in the political climate of the 1820’s and 1830’s is not mentioned at all by Read, Scrope or Sandler (Gilbert, 1988, p.157). The proposals in the *Agrarian Justice* had gone largely uncritical.

3 Thomas Spence (1750–1814)

Thomas Spence's 'The Rights of Infants; or, the Imprescriptable RIGHT of MOTHERS to such share of the Elements as is sufficient to enable them to suckle and bring up their Young' is the title of a pamphlet in response to Paine's 'Agrarian Justice'. In the Preface, Spence states that he was very happy that Paine, even though late, acknowledged the indisputable truth of vast importance to humankind that "God hath given the earth to the children of men, given it to mankind in common" (Spence, 1797, p.46). This was a very positive statement since Paine's celebrity status would encourage readers to investigate this great fundamental truth. Spence's appreciation of Paine had always an indication of envy, as the popularity of the author of the 'Agrarian Justice' ensured an audience far beyond of Spence's expectations. However, the plan that Paine advocates, Spence argued, did not appear to be just or satisfactory. The 'poor, beggarly stipends' that Paine proposes are 'so contemptible and insulting' (Spence, 1797, p.46). Spence is convinced that landed interest is incompatible with the happiness and independence of the people because landlords raise the rents to the point where they get the 'whole fat' of the produce of hard working people. For Spence, Paine's proposal was merely the thief returning to his victims a part of what had been stolen and was condemn for Paine's failure to envisage the transformation of private property into common property (Keane, 1995, p.427; Thompson, 1964, p.137). Spence found it strange that Paine having the status as democrat would suggest agrarian reforms which were undemocratic and unlikely to root out the injustice. Spence viewed his proposal without compensation as being more plausible and practical (Chase, 1988, p.67). Spence has been associated with agrarian utopianism and land reform. He was a member of the radical-democratic organisation London Corresponding Society and of a revolutionary association Lambeth Loyal Association (Parssinen, 1973, p.135).

The pamphlet was written in the form of a dialogue between a woman and an aristocrat. The main character takes the form of a woman as men are not to be depended on (Spence, 1797, p.51) and it is a mouthpiece for his advocacy of the rights of women. The woman states "that mothers have a right, at the peril of all opposers, to provide from the elements the proper nourishments of their young" (Spence, 1797, p.48). This right is not only known to women but they also have the courage and spirit to defend it "to the downfall of you [aristocracy] and all tyrants... and throw you [aristocracy] and all your panyers in the dirt" (Spence, 1797, p.49). It is clear that the exercise of women's right to feed, nurse, clean, cloth and lodge their children requires the abolition of the aristocracy, abolition of 'the bloody landed interest', the 'band of robbers', the 'beasts of prey'. Control of the land meant control of the lives of the people who depended for their livelihood on the cultivation of land; the landlords are tyrants (Parssinen, 1973, p.135). It is in the interest of the aristocracy to submit peacefully and give up their land for the sake of achieving a fair system not for revenge or retaliation. Otherwise, if the aristocracy resist the change 'by foolish and wicked opposition' then their total wealth would be confiscated, they will be cut off and "then let your blood be upon your own heads, for we shall be guiltless" (Spence, 1797, p.52). So Spence advocates the violent overthrow of the aristocracy, in case the aristocracy did not voluntarily give up their wealth. Unlike most land reformers – including Paine who believed that the aristocracy would adopt his proposal voluntary as a result of self-interest – Spence's plan appropriates land, industrial establishments and equipment (Ashrah, 1983, p.120). The concept of natural right to land was transferred to industrial establishments and equipment in the early 1830s and the

argument was developed that workers have been twice robbed: the land by the lord and of machines-equipment by the capitalists. Thus, for Spence the power and the ‘drinking of the blood of infants’ by the aristocracy were at an end. This would take place by dispossessing instantaneously, ‘as by an electric shock’ all revenue from lands, and ownership given to parishes to administer and make land available for use by all inhabitants. Gradualism was rejected by Spence.

Spence, through the voice of the woman, does not expect the fruits of labor for nothing. There would be equal right to land but unequal reward to labor. What hard working people are ‘sick’ about is laboring for an insatiable aristocracy. The abolition of the aristocracy would not hurt production rather in actual fact it would be for the better, as rents would not be accrued to the landlords but rather to the people. In this context, the right of work would be guaranteed as well through the parish system as property would be administered in such a way to provide work to the unemployed though public works or to provide tools and machinery for self-employment or to provide land for cultivation. In other words, Spence is a supporter of the parish taking the role of employer of last resort. The Parish system proposed was an alternative to nationalisation of land, Spence as other radicals distrusted remote government, as he was in favor of self-government and democratic principles. The numerous benefit clubs and societies, a thriving experience of the common people as voluntary associations administered on democratic principles without friction, provided a prototype for self-government. The women will appoint in every parish a committee of their own sex – under the assumption that men will not oppose it, as it is in their own self interest as well – to receive the rents from houses and land and also lease vacant properties to the highest bidders for a seven year lease. In addition, large scale industry would have been common property managed by the parish or by ‘corporations’ of work collectives (Ashrah, 1983, p.120; Parssinen, 1973, p.136). Spence used the example of joint stockholding from shipping, mining and commerce to demonstrate the feasibility of communal land ownership and industrial equality (Chase, 1988, p.29). The action of one parish would soon be mimicked by other parishes, thus in a short time the land, houses and industrial structures would be own as common property by the parish system of corporations. The income derived would pay state taxes (so there would be no need for taxes and tax-collectors) and finance public goods (such as to clean and light the streets, pay public officers and build and repair houses). The remaining income which should be around the two-thirds of the total amount of rents collected:

“shall be divided it fairly and equally among all the living souls in the parish, whether male or female; married or single; legitimate or illegitimate; from a day old to the extremest age; making no distinction between families of rich farmers and merchants, who pay much rents for their extensive farms or premises, and the families of poor laborers and mechanics who pay but little for their small apartments, cottages and gardens, but giving to the head of every family a full and equal share for every name under his roof.” (Spence, 1797, p.51)

Hence, Spence’s proposal is truly universal independent of age in contrast to Paine’s age restrictions.

The justification for this equal distribution of net rents is based on the imprescriptibly right of every member of a civilised society to the natural fruits of the earth, being undoubtedly common fruits. This is in contrast to the landlords’ implicit claim, “as if they had manufactured land” (Ashrah, 1983, p.122). However, by giving up the right to the common estate by allowing it to be rented for the sake of cultivation, members of the

civilised society are deprived from the natural fruits of earth. As such, an equivalent for the natural materials of the common estate is required as compensation to everyone. Spence wished for to make everybody “landlords of property that they did not occupy, the owners of land-capital and the recipient of rent interest” (Ashrah, 1983, p.124). There was no longing for the re-establishment of the old peasantry: not as ‘back to the land’ but as ‘forward to the land as it would be’ (Chase, 1988, p.188). In the society proposed by Spence people will not need to work all the hours, there will be a 5-day work week, holidays and feasts, people will be able to enjoy their fruit of their own-labor, be hospitable, dress decently and bring up their children in a proper manner. But the radical agrarianism of Spence is not a return to nature; rather it was the establishment of a society based on economic and social democracy: “Thus each parish is a little polished Athens” (Spence, Important Trial, 2nd edition, 1807, p.64–65).

4 Paine versus Spence

At the end of the dialogue between the woman and the aristocrat and before the conclusion Spence inserts an appendix with the title ‘A Contrast between Paine’s Agrarian Justice and Spence’s End of Oppression, Both being built on the same indisputable Principle viz. That the land is the common Property of Mankind’ (the original text is inserted in the appendix of this paper). Spence, in the appendix, contrasts the two proposals by creating a table of two columns and twenty rows, one column for ‘Under the system of Agrarian Justice’ and the other ‘Under the system of End of Oppression’. The twenty rows compare one by one each element of the contrasting proposals.

In this context, Spence attacks Paine to demand from people to give up their birth-rights ‘for a mess of porridge’, which would encourage people to ‘become supine and careless’ in public affairs and be ‘like pensioned emigrants and French priests’, as people will not have a claim on public money. As well, people cannot derive their right of suffrage from Paine’s stipends, as the proposal is also consistent with a non-democratic government, while at the same time it enhances the non-accountability nature of ‘public establishments’. In addition, Paine’s proposal is inconsistent with the spirit of a free state at it maintains and increases the dependency of the poor, maintains and increases taxes, maintains the perception that children are a burden, maintains the dependence of the education of the poor on charity-schools and maintains in times of scarcity substitutes for bread. People would have to compromise with their ‘conquerors and oppressors’ under Paine’s proposal, all the benefits of international and domestic trade would increase land prices so the benefits would be accrued to the landed interests, monopolies privileges and government would be maintained, and as a result there would be a ‘dissimilarity between their (= people’s) natural rights and enjoyments’. Meanwhile, actual domestic trade would always be lower than the potential level due to the maintenance of the poor class of people. Also, Paine’s proposal increases the influence of government and due to the provision of stipends the rich will use it as an excuse to abolish hospitals, charitable funds, and parochial provision for the poor. In Spence’s conclusion, he directly attacks Paine for providing only a tenth of the value of land to the people due to the fact of improvements in the land from the natural state that these improvements were expended by landlords.

In contrast to Paine, Spence's proposal would result in: people would receive their common inheritance in full; people would be watchful over public expenditure; people would be concerned with improving their parishes; universal suffrage will be derived from common property; government would be democratic; fewer public officers with moderate salaries; robust spirit of independence; a progressive society; no taxes; industrious and decent modes of life would be promoted; children would be treated equally; education would be available; there would be no need to substitute for bread; oppressors must submit to the general mass of citizens; any increases in commodities would increase rents and they revert back to the people by increasing quarterly dividends; no monopolies; justice would prevail; no poor; the government would have little influence and no need for public charities.

Paine wanted to reform the political system, Spence wanted to substitute the whole system with an entirely different one. For Paine, annual parliaments, proportional representation, universal suffrage and the secret ballot were adequate. The duty of the government is to maintain property and freedom as we need government, Paine explains, due to the right to every person to pursue their occupation and exploit their property. While human beings are naturally social, the reason for establishing a society are economic, thus the government was a subordinate and partial instrumentality and intervene only when rights are threatened (Christian, 1973, p.369–370). Consequently, when workers attempt to raise their wages that is unlawful, as is fixing maximum price (for food) when farmers prevail, thus causing great suffering (Dorfman, 1938, p.380).

But for Spence a republican government espoused by Paine, is not a substitute to any real social equality, as effective political rights for the lower classes are not sustainable since the power of landlords would control the parliament and government. The ownership of land gives rise to economic and political power. It is "the distribution of landed property, rather than political systems, dictates the real character of a nation and its liberties" (Chase, 1988, p.30). For Paine and the republicans hereditary government was based on conquest, but for Spence conquest was interpreted as the expropriation of the people from their natural rights. "Natural rights, since they arise at birth and are inalienable, cannot be bartered for civil rights nor mortgaged for future generations" (Ashrah, 1983, p.126). For Spence it is natural then to also dismiss the 'social contract' as there cannot be any legitimate contract between those who are unequal. But society cannot change by preaching and/or peaceful tactics (as the example of the French Revolution demonstrates) and there is no 'enlightened self-interest' only 'natural and universal interest' as collective interest, solidarity and mutuality for which people do not need to wait or perfected by education. People, especially the working class, on the whole are good and they do not need any 'transformation' to a state established by natural rights.

5 Conclusion: Paine, Spence and Basic Income Guarantee

For Paine every proprietor of cultivated land owes to the society a ground-rent for the non-improved land which the person holds because it is common property. This ground rent would take the form of a tax of 10% on inheritances of land, as the best alternative to the sharing of the land by the members of society. It is this ground-rent that would fund the payments made to people. The rent would be deposited in the Natural Fund, which would provide to every person, when arrived at the age of 21 years, the amount of fifteen

pounds sterling and the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person of the age of 50 years and over. Thus, for people between the ages of 22–49, no income would be provided from the natural fund. Per annum payments independently of income takes place at the age of 50 and thereafter, as such the proposal is not universal. For Spence, ownership of land was removed from the aristocrats (either peacefully or violently) and was appropriated by the parishes to administer and make land available for use by all inhabitants. Parishes would receive the rents from houses and land and also lease vacant properties to the highest bidders for a seven year lease. The income derived would pay state taxes, so there would be no need for taxes, and finance public goods. The remaining income would be divided equally among all the members of the parish and granted to the head of household.

Using the BIG criterion we can assess the policies recommendations of Paine and Spence. The BIG is a government insured guarantee that no citizen's income will fall below some minimal level for any reason. All citizens would receive a BIG without means test or work requirement. BIG is an efficient and effective solution to poverty that preserves individual autonomy and work incentives while simplifying government social policy. In sum, BIG is being paid to individuals rather than households; is paid irrespective of any income from other sources; and is paid without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job if offered. Some researchers estimate that a small BIG, sufficient to cut the poverty rate in half, could be financed without an increase in taxes by redirecting funds from spending programs and tax deductions aimed at maintaining incomes.¹

Paine's program involved a tax on inheritance (inconsistent with BIG), maintenance of private property (consistent with BIG), payments only to people the age of 21 and 50 and over (inconsistent with BIG). Spence's program involved a change of property (inconsistent with BIG), the elimination of taxes (inconsistent with BIG) and the remaining rent income after the provision of public goods distributed to all citizens (consistent with BIG). Hence in assessing the two proposals using the BIG criterion, each proposal has consistent and inconsistent elements. It can be argued that the two proposals are 'primitive' versions of BIG, as espoused today by the BIEN and the USBIG Network. Nevertheless, beyond what would be perceived today as flaws in both proposals, Paine and Spence equally contributed to the historical development of BIG.

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Note

- 1 www.usbig.net; www.basicincome.org

Appendix A contrast between Paine’s ‘Agrarian Justice’, and Spence’s ‘End of Oppression’, Both being built on the same indisputable principle, viz. that the land is the common property of mankind.

<i>Under the system of Agrarian Justice,</i>	<i>Under the system of the End of Oppression,</i>
<p>THE people will, as it were, sell their birth-right for a mess of porridge, by accepting of a paltry consideration in lieu of their rights.</p>	<p>The people will receive, without deduction, the whole produce of their common inheritance.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The people will become supine and careless in respect of public affairs, knowing the utmost they can receive of the public money.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> The people will be vigilant and watchful over the public expenditure, knowing that the more there is saved their dividends will be the larger.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The people will be more like pensioned emigrants and French priests than interested natives.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> The people will be all intent upon the improvement of their respective parishes, for the sake of the increased shares of the revenues, which on that account they will receive.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The people cannot derive right of suffrage in national affairs, from their compromisory stipends.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> Universal suffrage will be inseparably attached to the people both in parochial and national affairs, because the revenues, both parochial and national, will be derived immediately from their common property.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The government may be either absolute monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, or mixed.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> The government must of necessity be democratic.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> All the complexities of the present public establishments, which support such hosts of placemen, will not only still continue, but also the evils of them will be greatly enhanced by the very system of Agrarian Justice.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> There can be but two descriptions of public officers, parochial and national, and those but few in number, and on moderate salaries.</p>

<p><i>Under the first,</i> There will exist two spirits, incompatible in a free state, the insolent and overbearing spirit of aristocracy, and the sneaking unmanly spirit of conscious dependence.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> There will exist only the robust spirit of independence, mellowed and tempered by the presence and checks of equally independent fellow-citizens.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The destructive profligacy of the great, and the wretched degeneracy of the poor, will still continue, and will increase, to the pitiable unhappiness of both parties.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> All the virtues being the natural offspring of a general and happy mediocrity, will at once step forth into use, and progressively increase their blessed influence among men.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> Taxes, both directly and indirectly, will not only be demanded, but will be increased to the utmost the people can possibly bear, let trade and seasons be ever so prosperous.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> There can be no taxes, nor expenses of collecting them, because the government would be supported by a poundage from the rents which each parish would send quarterly to the national treasury, free of all expense; thus leaving the price of all commodities unencumbered with any addition but the price of labour.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The poor would still continue, through despair, unambitious to arise out of their hopeless state of abject wretchedness and vulgarity</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> The lowest and most profligate having such frequent opportunities, by the aid of their quarterly dividends, of starting into industrious and decent modes of life, could not always resist the influence of the general virtue every where displayed, without some time or other following the example.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> Children will still be considered as grievous burdens in poor families.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> As both young and old share equally alike of the parish revenues, children and aged relations living in a family will, especially in rich parishes, where dividends are large, through high rents or the productions of mines <i>etc.</i>, be accounted as blessings.</p>

<p><i>Under the first,</i> If the aristocratic assistance afforded by charity-schools, in the education of poor children, be withdrawn, the labouring classes must inevitably degenerate into barbarous ignorance.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> If the people are not generally learned it must be their own fault, as their inexhaustible means of comfortable subsistence must furnish also the means of education.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> The poor must still look up for aristocratic benefactions of rotten potatoes and spoiled rice, and other substitutes for bread in the times of scarcity, to preserve their wretched existence.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> What with the annihilation of taxes and the dividends of the parochial rents, together with the honest guardianship of their popular government, we may reasonably suppose that the people will rarely be driven to the dire necessity of using a substitute for bread.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> After admitting that the earth belongs to the people, the people must nevertheless compromise the matter with their conquerors and oppressors, and still suffer them to remain as a distinct and separate body among them, in full possession of their country.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> After insisting that the land is public property, the people's oppressors must either submit to become undistinguishable in the general mass of citizens or fly the country.</p>
<p><i>Under the first</i> If foreign and domestic trade increase, the productions of the land with increase in price, of which the landed interest will reap the advantage, by raising the rents in due proportion until the whole benefit thereof centers in them.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> If foreign and domestic trade increase, the price of commodities will in proportion also increase, and rents of course will rise, but this increase will revert back to the body of the people, by increasing their quarterly dividends.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> All the aristocratic monopolies in trade, in privileges, and government, will continue.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> There can be no monopolies; but a fair, salutary, and democratic competition will pervade every thing.</p>
<p><i>Under the first,</i> A timid and acquiescing spirit must be promoted among the people as now, lest they should discover the dissimilarity between their natural rights and enjoyments.</p>	<p><i>Under the second,</i> The justness and consistency of affairs will invite, nay, challenge, the most rigorous and logical enquiries, and will draw forth, uncramped, the utmost powers of the mind.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the first,</i></p> <p>Domestic trade will be far from its natural height, because multitudes of the people will be poor and beggarly, and unable to purchase numberless articles of use and luxury that their wants and inclinations would prompt them to wish for.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the second,</i></p> <p>Domestic trade would be at an amazing pitch, because there would be no poor; none but would be well clothed, lodged, and fed: and the whole mass of rents, except a trifle to the government, being circulated at home, in every parish, every quarter, would cause such universal propensity as would enable every body to purchase not only the necessities of life, but many elegancies and luxuries.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the first,</i></p> <p>The fund proposed by Paine will require a great number of placemen of various descriptions to manage it, and who being chosen, as they must be, by the ministry and their friends, will very much increase the already enormous influence of governments.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the second,</i></p> <p>The government can have very little influence by places, because the parish officers will be chosen by the parishioners; and all the complex machinery of financiering and stock-jobbing; all the privileged trading companies and corporate towns, which are the nests of influence and corruption, would be abolished.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the first,</i></p> <p>The rich would abolish all hospitals, charitable funds, and parochial provision for the poor, telling them, that they now have all that their great advocate, Paine, demands, as their rights, and what he exultingly deems as amply sufficient to ameliorate their condition, and render them happy, by which the latter of our reformation will be worse than the beginning.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Under the second,</i></p> <p>The quarterly dividends, together with the abolishment of all taxes, would destroy the necessity of public charities; but if any should be thought necessary, whether to promote learning, or for any other purpose, the parochial and national funds would be found at all times more than sufficient.</p>