

Socioeconomic Democracy: An advanced socioeconomic system, by Robley E. George

By Citizens Basic Income Trust 14th March 2003

(Praeger, 2002). Paper back. £18.99. **Order this book**

In this book Robley George combines discussion of a Universal Guaranteed Personal Income (with its level democratically agreed) with advocacy of a Maximum Agreed Wealth (with the level again democratically agreed). The style is rather quaint (and there are too many adverbs), and the book is overlong (and could have been half its current length), but it contains a road-map which, if followed, would lead to a democratic and socialist society.

The first chapter defines 'Universal Guaranteed Personal Income' (UGI): "Society guarantees some minimum amount of purchasing power to each citizen, with citizenship the only requirement for eligibility" (p.8). As we suggested in our last edition, 'guarantee' is ambiguous as it can suggest either an automatic, universal and non-withdrawable payment or a means-tested guarantee.

Chapter 2 compares a Basic Income to a Negative Income Tax, and then relates the ideas' histories and a variety of unresolved dilemmas related to the concepts. The argument rambles and is rather colloquial, but there is useful material, especially the historical.

Chapter 3 is about the 'Maximum Allowable Personal Wealth' (MAW), and mainly about different kinds of taxation; chapter 4 is about democracy and the different ways in which the population might control the levels of the MAW and the UGI; chapter 5 is a short passage on different types of society; chapter 6 offers justifications for MAW and UGI; chapter 7 offers a history of Islam and discusses Islamic taxation and its treatment of wealth; chapter 8, in discussing economic incentives, suggests that the MAW offers an incentive to the wealthiest to increase others' wealth so that they will vote for a higher MAW; chapter 9 discusses practical approximations to a UGI (such as means-tested benefits with work tests); chapter 10 is about financial benefits and costs; chapter 11 is about realisability; and chapter 12 is on ramifications in relation to ecology, budget deficits, etc.. There is an appendix containing questions for further study or discussion – and if this were a shorter book with concluding paragraphs for each chapter then it would indeed have been suitable for sixth-form study. For instance, it would be useful for a class to discuss the feasibilities of a government-controlled Citizen's Income and of a democratically-controlled UGI,

and to ask itself whether a 100% tax rate (which is what a MAW would imply for high earners) would ever be politically feasible.

Tony Atkinson is quoted in the bibliography but not the surely essential *Public Economics in Action*.

This is a useful book as it should stimulate important debate in the USA. Its importance for a European readership is that it reveals a serious gap in the market: since Tony Walter's *Basic Income* and Hermione Parker's *Instead of the Dole* are now out of print, there is no accessible book-length introduction to the Citizen's Income debate for a British or European audience.

Footnotes