

# **Education for the Poor in the Neoliberal Era: Socio-Educational Programmes to combat poverty in Spain <sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*The neoliberal capitalist crisis of 2008 brought to light poverty and destitution in our societies. In Spain, 13 million people live in poverty, structural unemployment is over 20% and levels of insecurity have risen in all sectors and social groups. In the EU, 120 million live in poverty, while globally, wealth is increasingly concentrated in fewer hands.*

*What mechanisms has the neoliberal hegemonic discourse employed to address these levels of poverty, inequality and insecurity? What role does education play in social policies aimed at combatting exclusion in a neoliberal order?*

*Privatisation of the public sector, an emphasis on individual responsibility, an education in entrepreneurship and the consolidation of bureaucratic, charitable and punitive intervention procedures are some of the features that characterise the emerging hegemonic neoliberal new humanitarian discourse on poverty.*

*This article attempts to analyse the role of neoliberal social policies targeting the most disadvantaged groups and the associated changes*

*being imposed on welfare states, looking specifically at the emergence of a hegemonic new humanitarian discourse of a markedly neoliberal nature. However, wherever there is a hegemony, there is also resistance and alternatives, and thus three emerging socio-educational proposals are also analysed that seek to move forwards in a more inclusive and supportive direction contrary to the one indicated by neoliberal thought, towards building fairer and more egalitarian societies. These are: a basic income, guaranteed employment and an education in critical and emancipatory resistance.*

**Keywords:** Poverty, neoliberalism, critical education, basic income, guaranteed employment

### **Social Effects of the Neoliberal Discourse**

The present context of capitalist crisis has served as a pretext to legitimise and reinforce neoliberal discourse in society. Neoliberal approaches, based on a rhetoric that presents adjustment policies and debt repayment as the “only way out of the crisis”, have in large measure contributed to impoverishing the population, increasing social fragmentation and bankrupting the social project of coexistence and solidarity. In Spain, the social consequence of these neoliberal policies has been a worsening in living conditions, especially among the most vulnerable social sectors. Some features of this impoverishment include the following:

First, severe job losses, with unemployment levels in the general population close to 26%, more than triple those prior to the onset of the crisis, and over 50% among people aged under 25 years old. In Spain alone, more than 3.5 million jobs have been lost since the beginning of the crisis, the vast majority in the construction sector (Seminario de Economía Crítica Taifa, 2014).

Approximately 6 million people are unemployed, nearly half of whom have been unemployed long-term and two million of whom are not entitled to any social protection or unemployment benefit (Sales, 2014).

Second, in addition to this exponential growth in unemployment, most of the jobs that have been created in this period in the Spanish labour market are of low quality and offer little job security. Flexibilisation and deregulation of the labour market, driven by the latest labour reforms, has led to worse employment conditions for the working class, with lower salaries, insecure contracts, the elimination of collective agreements and labour regulations, erosion of the role of the trade unions and reduced social benefits. Such measures have increased the profitability and economic benefit of business at the expense of reducing social and labour costs.

These labour reforms have resulted in an extremely unstable, insecure and fragile labour market for the working class, and have had repercussions on health (Sennett, 1998) such as an increase in depression, job stress and burn-out, since they impose significant barriers to developing a strong and stable life project and promote conformist and passive attitudes towards authority. It should also be borne in mind that the job insecurity, exploitation and pressure resulting from a reduction in labour costs and job security is behind many work-related accidents and instances of sick leave.

This has led to the emergence of a new social class, which is becoming mainstream in today's employment arena, the *precariat* (Standing, 2011), characterised by high employee turnover, job insecurity, low wages, instability and fragmentation of collective organisation. In short, these measures to liberalise the labour market have served to consolidate the power of the business sector and weaken the labour sector through the individualisation of working

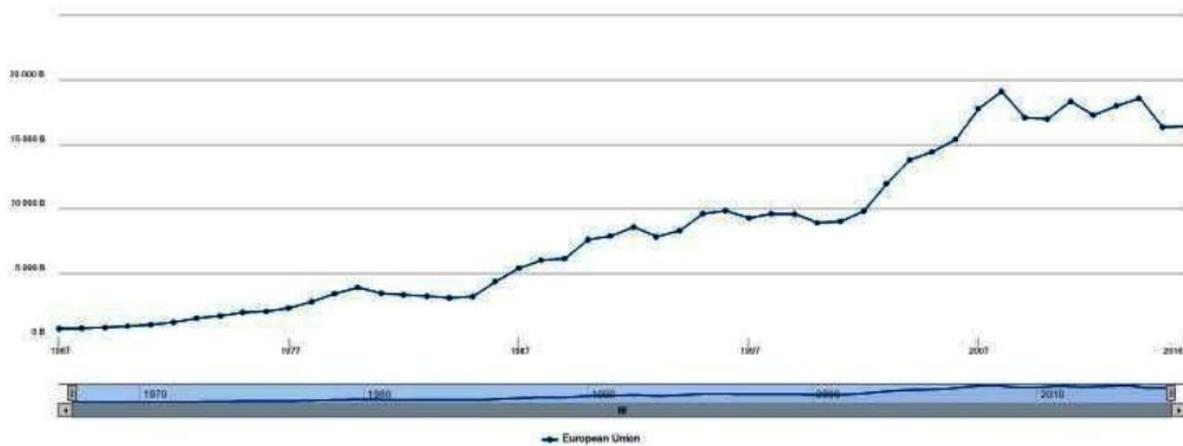
conditions, while at the same time establishing a draconian model of employment based on an attitude of “take it or leave it” and conditions that seem a return to semi-slavery given the vast, ever-increasing numbers of the precariat seeking work. However, this idea of precariat as a new social class is quite controversial, as it could exclude the potential for collective agency and solidarity of different kinds of workers (Smith and Wrigley, 2013). For instance, social movements like Occupy Wall Street (USA), Indignados (Spain), Anti-austerity movement (Greece) or mass student protest (Chile) are examples of organized social resistance where precariats had an important role in their development.

Third, and as a direct consequence of the above, there has been a substantial increase in social exclusion, inequality and poverty in our societies. Based on the poverty line measure (calculated as an income below 60% of the median income in a given area or region), almost 22% of the Spanish population live below the poverty line in situations ranging from severe to mild poverty (Fernández, Martínez, Pérez, Pérez & Sánchez, 2014). In 2014, five million people in Spain were living in a situation of extreme social exclusion, and there were 120 million poor people throughout the European Union as a whole. Moreover, this increasing phenomenon of poverty includes a growing group of people who work but do not receive sufficient income to escape from poverty, the “*working poor*”, who account for 12% of the total employed population in Spain (Fernández, Martínez, Pérez, Pérez & Sánchez, 2014).

However, poverty levels have not increased because we live in societies with dwindling resources or that generate less wealth; on the contrary, we live in societies where levels of production and productivity are higher than in previous decades, as we can see in chart 1. The real problem is that wealth needs to be redistributed more equitably and fairly. Thanks to the hegemony of neoliberal

capitalism, the wealth produced has accumulated in ever fewer hands, so that today in Spain, just 20 families possess a fortune comparable to the income of 20% of poor people (Oxfam, 2014). Globally, almost half of the world's wealth is owned by less than 1% of the world population (Harvey, 2012).

Chart 1: Gross Domestic Product. European Union (1960-2016)



Source: <http://www.worldbank.org/>

Lastly, it should be noted that the economic crisis has not affected all strata of society equally; those who have been worse hit by the crisis and the subsequent neoliberal policies of austerity and cuts include women, immigrants, elderly people and children. Almost 3 million children in Spain live in poverty, single women with unshared family responsibilities comprise the segment of the population most vulnerable to poverty and elderly people live in increasingly worse conditions due to spending cuts in health, social and dependency services.

The social and educational consequences of the capitalist crisis and the neoliberal policies being imposed as the “only valid strategies for overcoming the crisis” have in large measure helped to implement a new neoliberal ethic based on values of individualism, competitiveness, consumerism and lack of

solidarity as the moral paradigms to follow. In parallel to the promotion of these values, the notion of social citizenship has been eroded, whereby the State no longer has a strong responsibility to meet the social needs of citizens (while retaining its punitive capacity); such responsibility has now shifted to the individual who must meet his or her social needs according to his or her resources (Wacquant, 2009).

Training programmes and guaranteed minimum income schemes form part of this neoliberal transformation.

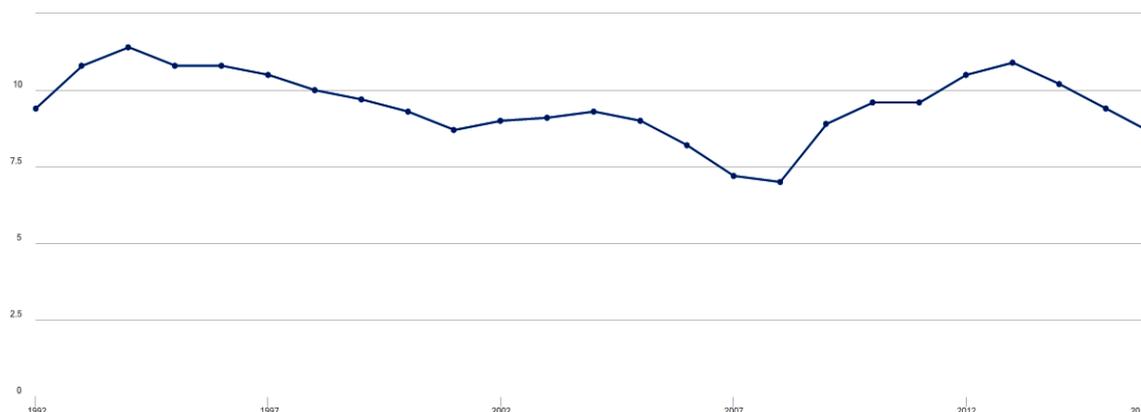
### **Neoliberalisation of Social Protection Systems in Spain. Guaranteed Minimum Income Schemes**

The main public action to combat poverty in Spain is the guaranteed minimum income (GMI). Minimum income schemes emerged in the early 1990s as a result of Council Recommendation 92/441 of 24 June 1992, whereby European Union member countries were urged to develop, within their respective powers, measures that guaranteed a minimum income for citizens. Such schemes were aimed, at least on paper, at combatting social exclusion and achieving more cohesive and egalitarian societies.

This EU recommendation is significant in at least two respects: first because it was merely a recommendation, since the EU does not provide any financial support or help to implement the measure, leaving this aspect to the possibilities of each member country, with the result that there is not only a great variety and difference between GMI schemes in EU member states, but also some countries have not had yet developed one, like for example Italy or Denmark; and second because it implicitly recognises that unemployment and poverty are structural social phenomena in capitalist Western societies –see chart 2- and that it is

therefore necessary to take steps to mitigate, alleviate and manage them (Sales, 2014) in order to avoid the possibility of some kind of social revolt.

Chart 2: Percentage of unemployment in the European Union (1992-2016)



Source: Source: <http://www.worldbank.org/>

GMI schemes consequently arose as a means to promote the integration of marginalised and impoverished people in capitalist society, on the one hand by facilitating access to consumption through a basic income and on the other, by making this income conditional on integration into the labour market through participation in educational and training activities aimed at professionalising the work force.

Despite the heterogeneity of the different GMI schemes, it is possible to establish a common dual structure in all of them. First, all provide a regular income, usually monthly. This income is funded and managed by a local, regional or national public entity, and is aimed at meeting the basic social needs of the family unit to which the applicant for this benefit belongs. In order to receive this benefit, applicants must be living below the poverty line, i.e. have an income which is below 60% of the median income in a given area or region. According to this measure, the poverty line for a family of two adults and two

children in Spain would be an annual income of approximately €17,000 (Spanish National Statistics Institute, 2013).

Second, to greater or lesser extent all schemes make receipt of the benefit conditional on participation in various activities aimed at social integration and employment. These activities may relate to a range of spheres (family, personal, health, education, employment) through a *personalised integration programme*, which requires various commitments on the part of the beneficiary to participate in and carry out the activities proposed by professional social services staff.

One could say that in exchange for an income, the GMI beneficiary agrees to active participation in a programme designed by professionals and agreed with the beneficiary to promote his or her social integration. The programme is aimed at helping a person in a situation of marginalisation or social exclusion to integrate in “normal society”.

### **Limitations of the Guaranteed Minimum Income**

GMI schemes have a number of limitations and problems inherent to the theoretical and political premises on which they are based. These limitations are exacerbated by the influence of neoliberal thought and the transformations this has brought about.

Although GMI schemes are designed to combat poverty, they are insufficient to meet basic social needs. The average GMI in Spain in 2013 was €418, which was not enough to meet minimum basic expenses such as housing and food since the average cost of rented accommodation alone in Spain vastly exceeded this amount. Furthermore, GMI schemes receive very little public funding: in 2012, a mere 0.49% of autonomous region budgets was allotted to funding the GMI, and in Extremadura, the GMI accounted for a meagre 0.03% of public

expenditure (Arriba González de Durana, 2014). In addition, the measure has little capacity for social redistribution of wealth and does not contribute to more cohesive societies, but merely serves as a stopgap to prevent social unrest. Above all in these times of neoliberal austerity, these *social policies for the poor* are *poor policies*.

Furthermore, GMI schemes tend to stigmatise the recipient population by being exclusively aimed at poor people rather than all citizens. Implementation of these minimum income schemes has involved the creation of an entire bureaucratic labyrinth dedicated to verifying applicants' compliance with the economic and social requirements established for receipt of these benefits. This engenders *symbolic violence* on the part of the public sector authorities as regards access to this right, in the form of moral judgements about applicants' living conditions that cause psychological and moral harm due to intrusion into and assessment of their lives.

Implementation of a personalised integration programme that focuses on areas in which the recipient presents deficits and shortcomings that hinder his or her social integration and employment serves to reinforce the idea that social exclusion is primarily caused by the individual and his or her characteristics. Emphasising the quest for solutions at an individual level helps conceal the social and structural nature of poverty and social inequality.

### **Education for the Poor in Guaranteed Minimum Income Schemes**

Training courses constitute one of the most important measures in the integration programmes that form part of minimum income schemes. These training activities targeting poor people present a number of features and are based on various principles that are increasingly influenced by neoliberal thought.

### **An education targeting deficits and the redemption of the poor**

Training on personalised minimum income integration programmes can be considered as an education targeting deficits, where it is assumed that impoverished people present a number of training, attitudinal and personal lacks, deficiencies and deficits that hinder their integration into waged society. Therefore, training on these programmes focuses on two aspects: learning professional competencies and skills that will enhance employability (e.g. pre-service training, specific vocational training, courses on how to write a CV, handle job interviews, conduct online job searches and become self-employed) and equipping people with social, personal and attitudinal skills (e.g. courses to improve self-esteem, social skills and emotional intelligence). According to this neoliberal approach, it would appear that what poor people need are courses on self-esteem and emotional intelligence in order to *manage* their exclusion.

However, this training has another key underlying goal: to redeem poor people, because through their participation in these training activities, socially excluded people can prove their willingness to work to the authorities. Thus, participation in training acts as a sorting mechanism to differentiate between poor people who are making an effort and thus deserve to receive economic benefits, and those who do not appear to be trying hard enough and are therefore not deserving of these benefits. This represents a return to the medieval conception of charity, and the distinction between the true poor and the bogus poor.

The right of social citizenship by which all citizens are entitled to a minimum level of subsistence that meets their basic needs is no longer a recognised fundamental right, but has become something that must be earned through effective and demonstrable willingness to participate in integration programmes and training activities.

### **Education, alienation and the humanitarian poverty industry**

The training activities that fall within minimum income schemes in Spain, but also throughout Europe since the Treaty of Lisbon (2000) with its *activation policies*, have helped to alienate poor people by inculcating a series of entirely questionable notions as if they were common sense ideas.

First, it is assumed that the higher the population's level of education, the higher the degree of social equality. These programmes are based on a logic whereby education is seen as a miraculous panacea that could solve the vast majority of social problems if it were extended to all social strata. From this perspective, the solution to the problems of poverty, social inequality, gender-based violence, injustice and racism would essentially be based on training programmes. Other actions aimed at removing the structural conditions that cause these situations would be neither fundamental nor necessary. Thus, the basic assumption is that only more education and training can solve these social issues.

Consequently, job insecurity and unemployment become primarily attributable to the education system, for not providing adequate training, or to the people themselves, for having been unable to acquire the skills required, presenting inappropriate attitudes or not making sufficient effort. However, higher levels of training or an education that is extended to all segments of society will not alone create more just societies. In fact, many of those responsible for the implementation of austerity policies — policies with very severe social costs — have very high educational levels but their political decisions are not aimed at ensuring the welfare of society as a whole. Neither are the quality and quantity of jobs particularly influenced by education and training, but are rather an expression of the power relationship between the world of capital and the world of work.

Second, these training proposals contribute to consolidating the dominance of principles such as competitiveness and individualism as central social values. Integration is transformed into an individual matter of acquiring and accumulating professional skills and abilities accredited by certificates, where people compete against each other with their amassed educational credentials for scarce jobs. According to neoliberal thought, social and economic success awaits those who are most competitive in the labour market, who have accumulated the most educational qualifications and who best understand the needs of the labour market.

This emphasis on the individual nature of the process of social integration and denial of the structural basis of poverty and unemployment underlines the subject's individual responsibility for his or her social situation, transmitting the implicit message that "if you are poor or have an insecure job, it is because you have not tried hard enough or have not taken advantage of the opportunities that society has offered you", blaming the victims for their situation. This paves the way for victimisation, criminalisation and penalisation of the socially excluded: poor people are poor because they are lazy, because they do not try hard enough, or because some of them are criminals. Therefore, the State should reduce benefits aimed at these groups in order to avoid fostering degrading dependence and inaction with respect to their situation, replacing help with punitive and supervisory procedures that provide the poor with a negative incentive to escape from poverty by their own means.

Third, it promotes the poverty industry and the commodification of education. Training for minimum income beneficiaries is seen by neoliberals as a commodity with the potential to generate economic benefits through public funding of private entities responsible for delivering the required training to these people. It is certainly not such a lucrative market niche for the private

sector as public pensions, residential care for the elderly or higher education, but it is sufficiently profitable to encourage numerous private entities, foundations, NGOs and trade unions to participate in the *poverty industry*, some for philanthropic and charitable reasons and others purely for economic benefit.

Between 2011 and 2015, more than 7,000 million euros were spent in Spain on running vocational training activities aimed at promoting the *employability* and *activation* of the unemployed. Why was this money not spent instead on the direct creation of quality jobs of real social value that would enable social integration, or on consolidating a true minimum income network? The answer is that education would then cease to be a mechanism of redemption and punishment for the poor or a business opportunity for the private sector: the market must grow and for this to happen, support from the State is essential, financing the private sector and creating a legislative framework conducive to its success.

With this paper we aim to identify central themes that characterize the neoliberal social policy and how these axes are legitimizing various transformations in the field of Minimum Income schemes, regarding the privatization and commercialization of public social services, an increase in charitable and punitive treatment of marginality or a greater bureaucratization of the work of social services professionals (social workers, educator, etc.). Transformations justified by a certain terminology and rhetoric which, following Samir Amir (2009), can be termed as a *New Humanitarian Discourse*. This discourse includes neoliberal, but also social liberal (Callinicos, 2001), concepts such as *Good Governance* (rationalization and modernization of public administrations), free competition in the framework of *Civil society* and *Combating poverty* as a limited form of social justice.

The imposition of the neoliberal agenda on social issues, far from promoting justice and greater social equality, is contributing to make an increasing number of social sectors more precarious, degradation of public services and professionals working there and replacing citizenship rights guaranteed by the states, by private sector as charitable initiatives. Subordinate sectors of the population suffer more these consequences, excluded from the private market, have to rely on social services of poor quality. It is a process that constitutes a real dispossession of citizenship (Harvey, 2005) by private interests through privatization and commodification of such public social services. In this scenario, even education for the poor can be a profitable niche for private business.

In the next lines, we will focus on critical alternatives to the neoliberalized Minimum Income Schemes. Alternatives that can contribute to more equitable and higher levels of social justice. Instruments of deep social transformation and not just as a means of combating poverty, as the *New Humanitarian Discourse* proposes.

### **Alternatives to the GMI that would help build a more just society**

As has been discussed, social policies aimed at combatting poverty and their associated training activities are not contributing to the development of more just and egalitarian societies, at least not as they are currently designed under the neoliberal order. Rather, they are the expression of class antagonism, represent the interests of the ruling classes and help maintain and reproduce the social order.

In this last section, we will propose a different path to that marked by traditional welfare state policies. This novel, uncharted direction will undoubtedly be extremely complex to implement, and consists of a basic income and guaranteed

employment. Under these proposals, education will break free from the neoliberal principles of human capital and will become open to other ideas and possibilities that give more weight to achieving a more just, more equitable and cohesive society.

### **Guaranteed Employment (GE)**

GE offers a possible means to address the negative effects of neoliberal capitalist policies. This measure was initially proposed by US economist Hyman Minsky in the 1980s, and has been further developed by various international economists and in Spain principally by the economist Eduardo Garzón. GE is based on the idea that although there are few jobs in our societies, there is nevertheless much work to be done.

Article 35 of the Spanish Constitution recognises the right of Spanish citizens to work. GE would require the State to enforce the Constitution and directly create sufficient jobs to employ all people who have been unable to find work in the private sector or traditional public sector, guaranteeing employment for the entire population:

*“It is economically and socially counterproductive for people to remain inactive when they can and want to work and the needs of our citizens and our environment are unmet. These needs are unmet because it is not profitable for the private sector to do so, and/or because the State has not decided to meet them. Such employment would yield economic, social, ecological and cultural benefits for everyone”* (Garzón, 2014).

At present, several economic and social areas (public education, public health, culture, sports, renewable energy) require consolidation. However, new areas must also be created, above all those of an environmental nature, such as services aimed at the reuse and repair of materials and products, optimising the energy efficiency of buildings, etc. It is equally important to remunerate,

recognise and dignify domestic work and jobs that are presently performed on a voluntary basis, distributing such activities fairly among the community. Why not let people who want to work meet such social needs?

These new jobs would have a fixed minimum monthly wage of between €900 and €1,200 gross, with three types of work and remuneration according to qualifications, and would function as a benchmark for the private sector, ensuring that no job was lower paid since the possibility would exist of changing to a better paid GE, thus putting an end to the worst paid jobs. If everyone were assured of a job, nobody could be blackmailed with the threat of dismissal. Moreover, companies would be forced to offer higher salaries in order to attract the most qualified or promising applicants.

The benefits of GE would not only include the production of goods and services, an increase in the GDP and the generation of income and wealth, but also the alleviation of poverty, greater care for the environment, more and better community buildings and social networks, greater social, political and economic stability and the alleviation of social ills derived from unemployment (e.g. physical and mental health problems, domestic violence, drug abuse and crime).

In addition, the economic cost of GE would be lower than that for social protection provisions such as unemployment benefit, family benefit, psychological support, prison services, etc. In fact, it would cost less than the State injects annually into the nationalised sector or what the Spanish State pays each year in interest on public debt, and much less than what it has cost the State to rescue the Spanish banks (Garzón & Guamán, 2015).

## Basic Income

A basic income (BI) is a regular income paid by the State to all citizens as a social right. This proposal initially emerged in the academic world in the work of Van Parijs in the 1980s, and first began to be discussed in Spain in the 1990s, with contributions from Daniel Raventós Panella and José Iglesias Fernández, among others. Over the following decades, it has been gaining public and political ground, and is currently one of the proposals put forward by various social movements such as the 15-M movement, the Baladre platform and the Basic Income Association as well as by some political parties and trade unions. In recent years, several studies have been conducted on the technical and economic viability of the BI in Spain (Arcarons, Domènech, Raventós & Torrens, 2015). And for real basic income experiences, Finland is now conducting an experiment testing a basic income in the period of 2017-2018, with a study population of 2000 persons selected at random and where every participant receives 560€ once a month, unconditionally and without means testing. The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of the basic income, for instance if there are differences in employment rates between those receiving and those not receiving a basic income. Cities like Barcelona, Ontario or Livorno are also planning to test different forms of basic income.

The BI presents the following fundamental characteristics (Raventós Panella, 1999, Iglesias Fernández, 2002): it is *individual* because it is paid to a person rather than to a household, as happens with the GMI. It is *universal* and *unconditional*, being paid to all citizens and is recognised as a right similar to education or health, whereas the GMI is not a universal right since it is aimed solely at groups at risk. Payment of the BI is not conditional upon the individual's means, whereas receipt of the GMI entails an examination of the beneficiaries' economic and employment status, leading to the creation of a complex bureaucratic and administrative system. Lastly, it is *sufficient* to meet

basic social and living needs, paying an amount that would maintain citizens above the poverty line, whereas GMI payments do not rise above the poverty line or render it possible to meet basic social needs; as Negri (1998) has said, the GMI is *salaried poverty*.

The launch of a BI in Spain would help to achieve several goals, including the following (Raventós Panella, 1999; Wright, 2001; Iglesias Fernández, 2002; Standing, 2011):

It would reduce or eliminate all forms of poverty directly related to lack of income since it represents a much more effective redistribution of wealth than that achieved by the GMI, due to its universal nature and its strong basis in the principles of solidarity and mutual support.

It would put an end to stigmatisation, as it is a universal measure aimed at the entire population rather than solely targeting the poor.

It would restore the balance of power between the world of capital and the world of work, by strengthening the social position of workers in labour negotiations. This would facilitate improvements in working conditions and a reduction in job insecurity, as the economic cushion would allow workers the freedom to choose jobs.

It would tend to reduce the underground economy, whereas the GMI, with its emphasis on means testing, encourages unreported employment and an informal economy.

It would also encourage citizen participation, self-government at municipal level, forms of organisation based on cooperation and even participatory

budgeting, whereby citizens are involved in public spending decisions regarding issues that affect the community.

Thus, the BI surpasses the GMI in that it is not limited to subsidising the poor but is rather a tool for social transformation. It can therefore be considered another mechanism within a revolutionary strategy aimed at social transformation (Wright, 2001; Rodríguez Fernández, 2013).

In the context of such proposals, what role can education play in these frameworks for action? What spaces do the basic income and guaranteed employment measures open for education?

### **Education for social transformation and emancipation**

Education within the framework of these measures is far removed from the principles of human capital imposed on it by the business model of the large multinationals, according to which education is seen as professional training and as a subsystem of the productive sector that provides the skills required by the latter.

Large multinational corporations first began to exert a strong influence on the education system in the late 1980s. Since then, their philosophy that education should supply industry and services with workers equipped to meet the demands of modern production has become by far the most important of the functions assigned to education. In social, political, media and even everyday discourse, the primary task of education has become that of supporting business. In fact, in a report on education published in February 1995, the ERT<sup>2</sup> stated that “education should be considered as a service rendered to the economic world”.

By arguing that education should meet social demands, a clearly reductionist interpretation is made of society, placing education — including higher education — and training at the exclusive service of companies and devoting such training to producing the professionals these seek. Education systems are thus incorporated into “industrial projects, being seen as resources for obtaining human capital and creating docile workers” (Apple, 1998, 39).

From this perspective, investment in education and curricula should reflect market requirements and equip students for the labour market. The flexible and versatile worker is now the new educational ideal. The public role of education as a training ground for democracy and democratic citizenship is now seen as a waste of public money, and has been replaced by the view that private enterprise has of the role of education: as a training ground to meet the needs of business.

A new crusade has thus been launched to reconceptualise discourse on the priorities of education so that it can meet the challenges of the new era, and a new rhetoric has emerged on future challenges and scenarios aimed at tailoring education to the demands of the labour market.

The question of employment prevails over the social and political integration of future citizens. Professionalisation is no longer just one among many of the goals of education, but has become the guiding principle for all reforms. With the spread of this dangerous and subtle ideology, there is a real risk of reducing education to the acquisition of skills of use to business, thereby complying with a utilitarianism that prevents young people from taking even a minimal interest in anything that might not be saleable in the labour market (Laval, 2004).

In this neoliberal model, the social function assigned to education is that of supporting economic growth, contributing to the market competitiveness of national industries, educating for work and training for technological development. These economic functions take precedence over socialising for active participation in an aware and committed society, transmitting culture or personal development.

This type of theoretical approach is closely related to the development of teacher-centred education, in which teachers transmit professional techniques, skills and abilities and students acquire them passively, either theoretically or through direct practice of these professional skills. This conception of education clearly separates the roles of the teacher and students and the dimensions of theory and practice, the latter being reduced to mere hands-on application of the former. It is a technical conception of the educational curriculum, in which GMI beneficiaries present deficits and shortcomings identified by professional staff who devise training actions and integration programmes designed to remedy them.

By contrast, the aim of an education for social transformation and emancipation is to convert educational institutions into world leaders as regards the percentage of 18 year olds who are politically and socially involved. From this perspective, the marks obtained for mathematics and science are much less important than the commitment of new generations to maintaining a true democracy and building a more just society for those in most need: the young, the ill, the elderly, the unemployed, the dispossessed, the illiterate, the hungry and the homeless. Furthermore, it has been proposed that those schools which fail to produce politically active and socially useful citizens should have their failure rates published in the newspapers (Wrigley, 2007).

By thus departing from subjection to the business world and the centrality of employability, education is opened to other approaches which permit the introduction of socially relevant content of a counter-hegemonic nature that would serve to reveal the distortions of the dominant ideology, analyse the social utility and potential social effects of education and foster new values on which to build our societies, values other than those promulgated by neoliberal thought and based on mutual support and solidarity.

If the goal is social transformation, education in general and training for socially excluded people in particular must include content that promotes critical reflection on issues that directly affect the people involved in education, both teachers and learners. For example, in order to be truly counter-hegemonic, the professional training delivered as a component of the GMI must examine aspects such as the origin and consequences of precarious employment, the social utility of trades for those receiving training, the privatisation of education and other public services and the origin and role of poverty in our capitalist societies, as well as other issues of significance for participants and socially relevant for the community in which the education takes place.

Educational methodologies and organisation would also assume a different nature, far removed from teacher-centred approaches where teachers design, select and transmit the content, while students passively receive and assimilate it. Instead, teaching methodologies would be based on group interaction, discussion and dialogue in which students acquire a much more active role in planning, implementing and evaluating education. This approach breaks down the separation between expert and student, because teachers learn and learners teach. The methods inherent to this approach include reading circles, *learning communities* (Flecha, 1990), interest centres, action research and *dialogue-based teaching circles* (Freire, 1971). These methodologies seek to include both

the role of social structures and the interests and values of participants, through interaction, discussion and dialogue.

Lastly, the role of the educator differs from that entailed in the presentation and transmission of content, being based rather on the educational traditions of reflective practice and critical emancipation. Under these premises, the work of the educator is no longer a mere technical activity but is instead based on ethical and political reflection in daily professional practice, and the effects and possibilities of this as regards achieving a more just society.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Traditional policies aimed at reducing poverty and their associated training actions fail to provide valid answers to today's social problems. Worse still, the transformations being imposed on welfare states by neoliberal ideology are creating more unequal, more impoverished and less inclusive societies. There is therefore an urgent need to identify alternative discourses and practices that not only represent a departure from neoliberal approaches, but also an improvement over the outdated educational intervention procedures typical of social democratic welfare states.

New routes towards social transformation could include a basic income, guaranteed employment and socio-educational programmes employing a critical emancipation perspective, in which training ceases to be addressed from the standpoint of "education for the poor" to become a genuine "education in committed and transformational citizenship".

These proposals have emerged in response to the fissures, crises and dysfunctions caused by the capitalist system in our societies — poverty, job insecurity and training as human capital; however, they need to go much further

and become tools to fight for social transformation. They cannot serve solely as stopgap solutions for these fissures and dysfunctions. They must form the first step towards an economy of common wellbeing that puts people before the market, humans and the planet before profit.

Neoliberals accuse the alter-globalisation movement of criticising and questioning the present world without proposing feasible alternatives. However, concrete proposals such as these are dismissed as being incompatible with the only possible economic policy. Their faces become stern, and in sententious, condescending tones they clarify that “it’s more complicated than that” (whatever that is). It is always “more complicated” when it is a question of sharing power or the economy, especially if this entails giving up what has been accumulated. This seems to always be the final point to any argument: “Oh yes, what a shame, if only it could be done”, they say, but it is ‘unrealistic’, ‘utopian’ or ‘impossible’ (George, 2004).

However, it should be recognised that the weak point of these proposals is the need to “take power” to carry them out, because all of them are based on the assumption that it is the State or States that must implement and finance them. In order to fully implement these measures, it is necessary to move away from the exclusionary globalisation so destructive of human rights that is being imposed from the top down, and move towards a bottom up globalisation that employs distribution mechanisms, is inclusive and respectful and guarantees all human rights, in every corner of the world.

The problem is that exhortation and persuasion lead nowhere. The wealthy and powerful do not listen and will never voluntarily share what they own. The ruling classes will not renounce their privileges. On the contrary, they always want more. Nothing is ever enough, and throughout the course of human

history, no degree of human suffering has ever managed to make them change their policies or behaviour.

Everyone knows perfectly what *should* or *ought to* be done if the goal truly were to achieve a fairer distribution of income, end hunger and so on. At the end of the day, global economic integration offers enormous possibilities. The present fantastic growth in productivity could very well be used to help more and more people and nations to escape from enforced poverty and to fund an ecological restructuring of wasteland economics in the hitherto welfare states. However, this would entail redirecting the present suicidal race via acceptable social and democratic means and transforming the globalisation of injustice into global equilibrium. The task is not to persuade those who are preventing the achievement of these results that their policies are wrong, but to obtain power, to gain the power to stop them and reverse this frantic race towards collective suicide.

However, this conquest of power should reflect Zapatista ideals: “*We want a world with space for many worlds, a world in which there is room for our world and the worlds of others; we want a world in which we are heard, but as one among many voices*”. In other words, power should be seized collectively, so that it is horizontally redistributed among all groups and decisions are negotiated between those they affect.

This implies that these proposals cannot be more than of the same, as indicated earlier, patches to cover cracks. However, this will entail rethinking how the economy is organised and basing education on principles other than those of capitalism. It is the logic of capitalism itself that is called into question (i.e. a market economy centred on itself or an activity capable of generating maximum

profits resulting in accumulation) as a source of productive activity and thus growth, and which subordinates education to this end.

We certainly do not advocate violence as a means to seize power and achieve rapid and radical change, but rather a transition towards an alternative model of the economy and society that implies a long and sometimes winding road.

Between the extreme stance of “we want paradise now”, which can generate frustration and impotence, and reformist minimalism, there is a whole range of proposals such as those discussed here, which although they may not achieve victory in this economic and ideological war against capitalism, nonetheless represent necessary battles along the way to improving the rights and lives of thousands of people whose level of exploitation leaves them no other alternative, while this “promised paradise” draws gradually closer.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is an abridged version of the book *Entreteniendo a los pobres. Una crítica político-ideológica de las medidas de lucha contra la exclusión social*, 2016, editorial Bomarzo.

<sup>2</sup> The European Round Table of Industrialists is powerful lobby group founded in 1982 that has influenced the decisions of the European Commission

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