The Holy Crusade to Educate the Poor[i]. A Political critique of Socio-educational Programs Against Poverty[ii]

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a critical analysis of the various hegemonic educational discourses applied to schemes for a minimum income and the social effects that they cause in the field of education and training for groups at social risk. Through consideration of these discourses, it will be determined what role education plays within them, highlighting the principles of employability and the Theory of Human Capital underlying training in minimum income schemes. The paper will shed light to the "poverty business" that training courses for the poor have provided for certain private enterprises. These characteristics have taken the shape of an increasingly prevalent educational discourse that may be termed `the Holy Crusade to Educate the Poor'.

Finally, the paper will argue about the possibilities and limitations of an alternative model for minimum income schemes: The Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Keywords: *Basic Income, Poverty, Adult Education, Social Transformation*

Social Policies Combatting Social Exclusion from Society: Minimum Incomes for Integration

The main socio-educational actions against poverty in countries within the European context are Minimum Incomes for Integration, here termed Guaranteed Minimum Incomes (G.M.I.s). Schemes of this sort emerged at the start of the 1990s thanks to Council Recommendation 92/441 of 24 June 1992, encouraging member States of the European Union (E.U.) to develop programs guaranteeing their citizens a minimum income (European Commission, 2008). Throughout the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century the various countries in the E.U. have gradually rolled out this type of scheme, with considerable heterogeneity in terms of amounts available, requirements, duration, and so forth. These proposals are directed, at least formally, towards combating social exclusion and achieving more cohesive and egalitarian European societies (Malgesini, 2017). They are aimed at those on incomes below the *poverty threshold*, this being taken as 60 percent of the median income in any given zone, region or country. This statistic would indicate that in the EU as a whole 23 percent of the population fell below this threshold in 2016, whilst in Spain the figure was 27.9 percent and in Italy 30 percent. Moreover, the country with the highest poverty rate was Romania with 38.8 percent and that with the lowest Iceland with barely 13 percent. (EUROSTAT, 2018).

Despite the great heterogeneity affecting such minimum income schemes, both in Europe in general and in Spain in particular (Frazer &Marlier, 2016), it is possible to note the presence within them of a common two-fold structure. In the first place, a periodical payment is made, and in the second place, every program to a greater or lesser extent links receipt of this payment to the performance of a range of activities aimed at the social and work integration of the recipient (European Commission, 2008). These activities may take place in

a number of contexts (family, personal, health, educational, workplace or other) following a *Personalised Integration Route-map*, including various commitments by the recipient to take part in and carry out activities proposed by social services (Martínez Virto, 2019). Amongst these, pride of place often goes to completing training courses enhancing employability, because as the 14th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2018) states: "Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market".

It can be said that in exchange for a payment the beneficiary of a G.M.I. accepts an obligation to participate actively in a plan designed by professionals, then agreed with the recipient of this income, aimed at enhancing the person's social inclusion. This route-map is supposed to guide a person in a situation of marginalisation or social exclusion towards integration into "normal society".

It was in the context of the *European Social Model* based on public social welfare systems (Esping-Andersen, 2000) that G.M.I.s first arose. They were social-democratic proposals aimed at favouring the integration of marginalised and impoverished sectors into capitalist society. On the one hand, this was through facilitating access to consumption by means of a guaranteed basic income. On the other, it was through linkage of this financial support to encouragements to join the labour market thanks to participation in educational and training actions intended to provide trade qualification.

The Limitations of Minimum Incomes for Integration

G.M.I.s include among their objectives combating poverty, increasing social

cohesiveness and social protection for citizens. Nevertheless, they suffer from a number of limitations and problems inherent in the way that they function and the theoretical political presuppositions underlying them (Malgesini, 2014). Firstly, it must be noted how limited they are in respect of their coverage of basic social needs. In most European Member States, income support does not appear adequate to tackle the needs of people facing economic problems. For instance, countries such as Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Hungary, Estonia and Romania offer low or *very low* income support (Crepaldi, 2017). It can be argued that social policies for the poor, especially in a period of social emergency and neo-liberal austerity, might better be termed *poor social policies*.

Another critical question relating to these G.M.I. schemes is their stigmatising and bureaucratic nature, because they focus attention on the poor as a group, rather than on all citizens as a whole. The setting up of such minimum income programs brought with it the creation of a whole bureaucratic and administrative structure dedicated to assessing the financial, family and social circumstances of the people who request such support (Raventós Panella, 2007). This assessment is aimed at checking on the resources they hold and their compliance with the requirements demanded for accessing this right to assistance. This implies the use of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 2000) by public authorities, as they intrude into, and judge, the living conditions of applicants. As a result of this bureaucratic labyrinth, it is estimated that around 40%-50% of potentially recipients do not apply for these programs (Bargain, Immervall & Viitamäki, 2012).

A further issue is the tendency to reduce poverty to matters of individual control and responsibility, when in fact the origins of poverty are fundamentally social (Bauman, 2004). The inclusion of an individualised route-map to integration

working from deficit assumptions about people is problematic. By seeking solutions at the individual level, the political and structural nature of poverty and social inequality are denied. From the *Lisbon Treaty* (2000) onwards, European policies for combating exclusion have increasingly been based on the idea of individual activation of single given persons by enhancing their employability and encouraging entrepreneurship (Hermann, 2007). In this neoliberalised strategy for countering unemployment, poverty and precariousness of work, education and training have a central role. As the European Council itself pointed out (2010) in its document *Europe 2020 Strategy*: "*…better educational levels help employability and progress in increasing the employment rate helps to reduce poverty*".

Political Discourse Analysis on Education in Minimum Income Schemes

Training actions are one of the most important measures included in the route-maps for integration developed within G.M.I. programs when encouraging the social insertion of people at risk of exclusion (Scharle, 2018). On these lines, it may be pointed out that training actions inserted into G.M.I. schemes and directed at the group concerned have a number of characteristics and adopt certain principles that have increasingly been influenced by the currently hegemonic neo-liberal way of thinking (Rodríguez Fernández & Themelis, 2021).

However, the process of implementing various social and educational policies worldwide must be understood as the result of the extremely complex relationship between two ways of political reasoning that have been hegemonic in western societies. On the one hand, there is a social-liberal discourse, the heir to the philosophical principles of the Enlightenment, nowadays clearly in retreat, but still retaining some vigour and presence in present-day views and discourse. On the other, there is a neoliberal discourse, currently visibly

dominant (Harvey, 2007; Whyte, 2019). It is in the debates revealing the struggle for hegemony between these two conceptions where it is possible to gain an understanding of most of the transformations taking place in educational and social policies in general, and in particular in socio-educational policies for combating exclusion, such as minimum income schemes.

Educational discourses fighting for hegemony: Social-liberal and Neoliberal discourses on Adult Education

The field of education is in constant discursive dispute for hegemony. In this political struggle for hegemony there is an interaction between the different discourses that populate the field, some are dominant and hegemonic, while others are in a relegated situation. Thus, in this interaction between discourses, different types of relationships are produced: from relations of cooperation and hybridization between discourses, to oppositional and confrontational relationships in those discursive spaces where antagonistic positions exist. The following will outline such complexity, by establishing the dominant discursive lines that make up the field of adult education in social exclusion: the social-liberal discourse and neo-liberal discourse in education. They are rooted in the wider "Illustrated discourse" and they could be considered as different interpretations of the latter.

The social-liberal discourse generates a good part of the educational proposals that govern the political-educational agenda and bases the actions of the main educational agencies and organizations, both international and national. Even so, it is a discourse in crisis, with serious problems in responding to the main problems of our societies, especially since the neoliberal discursive turn that has been taking place since the 1970s (Harvey, 2007).

When describing each of these discourses, I will begin by briefly explaining a

series of *analitic categories* (Subject, History, Society, Education) that will allow us to sketch the discursive horizon of each discourse.

In the Illustrated discourse, according to the principles of the Enlightenment, there is a *subject* endowed with a pre-existing and a universal nature: people are rational, autonomous and free beings. This essential nature (Pinker, 2018) can assume two faces:

- In the social-liberal discourse, people are kind, altruistic and reach fullness by accessing to knowledge and cooperation with others. It is a deeply inherited aspect of the Roussean approaches by which people are "good" by nature and that it is society that perverts and contaminates such nature (Rousseau, 1762). Hence the importance of education -and permanent education- as an element that guarantees the "proper" human development. This feature is the hegemonic one in the enlightened educational discourses and the one defended by the main social and educational institutions that are located in the modern thought.
- However, in the neoliberal narrative, in addition to being rational, autonomous and free, people are competitive, selfish (Rand, 1964), and self-realize in competition and in the possession of material goods. It is a hegemonic conception of the subject in a good part of the current economic policies and it is becoming more and more predominant in the social fabric. From this point of view, competition and struggle between people is what ultimately makes societies progress and advance towards higher levels of economic growth and prosperity.

In the Illustrated discourse, *history* is progressive and the historical process is governed by logic and rationality. Again, it is possible to glimpse here two aspects in this conception of history. On the one hand, the social-liberal one that states that reason, culture and knowledge are the main engines of historical development. On the other hand, the neoliberal conception states that history is driven by a fundamentally economic engine - the laws of the market -, which is explained and theorized by capitalism in its neoliberal globalization form (Norberg, 2003, 2016).

Under the "Illustrated discourse", the *organisation of society* is also governed by the principles of rationality, freedom, and the primacy of the autonomous subject. This organisation can take different shapes depending on the dynamic relation between dominant discourses. In the social-liberal trend, the main agent organizing and regulating society is the public state, which has the responsibility of guaranteeing a series of social, cultural, educational, economic and political participation services that come to be recognized as citizenship rights. This perspective implies the creation and maintenance of a body of public workers and structures that carry out such services and programs. Under this light, citizen and political participation is carried out through the implementation of representative participation mechanisms, in which the citizens delegate decision-making to the representatives and designated elites (technicians, bureaucrats, politicians, intellectuals, etc.).

In the neoliberal discursive horizon, the social organization must respond to the pre-existing characteristics of the neoliberal subject. Then, egalitarian societies with few possibilities of consumption, in which the State intervenes by attenuating inequalities, do not allow the fulfillment of individuals (Hayek, 1944; Friedman, 1962). Therefore, the leading role should fall on private initiative and individual *entrepreneurship* (Schumpeter, 1942). These are the engines that must be in charge of organizing society through customer-consumer relations and the law of supply and demand.

From this discursive conception in both, the social-liberal and neo-liberal rationalities, *education* appears at the very center of the social being regarded as the great cornerstone on which to build citizenry, society and/or a productive workforce. However, starting from this shared premise education can be understood differently: in the case of social-liberal discourse, education is regarded as a fundamental public right, where everyone should have access to it

regardless his/her situation, whereas in the neoliberal trend education is perceived just as another commodity which should be privatized, for instance, in the form of school *vouchers* (Friedman, 1955).

Discursive interaction: Social transformations and hybridisation of discourses

According to authors like Michel Foucault (2009), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1987) or Rosa Buenfil Burgos (1996), the dynamic interaction between the two *political rationalities* described in the previous section can take various forms: co-operation, opposition, mutual adaptation, and others. In any given field it will generate a set of *technologies*, of which programs for minimum incomes can be seen as an example and give rise to a number of *social effects and transformations.*

This inseparable and inter-related complex formed by political rationalities, technologies and their social effects (Mitchell, 2006) is what may be termed *discourse*, understood not just as a speech or the production of a piece of writing, but as a historical social practice with performative effects, both at a social level and in the processes of subjectivation through which people construct themselves as actors.

Applying this analytic structure to the area of training actions in minimum income programs for adults at social risk, we can highlight the following social transformations:

Education as an Individual Investment: The Theory of Human Capital.

If the success of a theory is measured by its popularity and its influence on economic policies, there is no doubt that the theory of Human Capital constitutes one of the most successful theoretical proposals. For most, the very

notion of human capital is today used as a synonym for education or qualification. Hence, the practical proposal of the theory - investing in education as a way to increase productivity - occupies a central place in most equality policies, the reduction of inequalities and economic development, as can be noted in the programs of action promoted by most international organizations such as World Bank (2018), OECD (2007), or UNESCO (2004), for whom education is an essential part of any program of economic improvement and equal opportunities.

Education in schemes of minimum incomes for integration is strongly based on the economic presuppositions of the Human capital ((European Commission, 2016). For this theory, education is an investment of an individual nature redeemable for value in the labour market (Becker, 1964). This theory sees education not just as an enhancement of a person's employability, but as an element directly improving productivity and economic growth, and thus increasing the quality and number of jobs available (Hafer, 2017). From this viewpoint, as seen in the main European strategies and directives for combating poverty and exclusion (Council of the European Union, 2009), the poor should get trained and acquire the knowledge, abilities, and skills required by the system of production. This is supposed to permit enhancement of their employability such that would allow them to become effectively incorporated into the labour market (Muñoz de Bustillo & Bonete, 2009, p. 279). The crucial point in encouraging social and work-place insertion for such people would be to train them in the vocational skills most in demand by the system of production. As the European Commission states in the 2019 Joint Employment Report: "Vocational education and training systems are being reviewed and updated with the goal of improving their labour market relevance…" (European Commission, 2019: 9).

Criticism of the Theory of Human Capital in education takes various shapes. Firstly, it is necessary to debunk the neoliberal idea that sees a direct and mechanical linkage between training, incorporation into the workforce, increased productivity and improvements in working conditions as an outcome of the economic growth generated by better-trained workers (Schultz, 1962). This myth is easily refuted. On the one hand, since present-day societies have the most widely and best trained young people ever, yet unemployment and precariousness of posts held have in no way been reduced in recent years. In fact, working conditions and the number of jobs in a country or a given area within it depend less on training or the education system than on the relative strength of capital and labour. This has been radically altered in favour of capital by neo-liberal policies, especially since the 2008 crisis (Harvey, 2012). On the other hand, according to EUROSTAT in 2020 there is a meagre 1.6% job vacancy rate, i.e. the proportion of total posts that are vacant expressed as a percentage, in the EU-19. In Spain there is an insignificant 0,6%[iii] and structural unemployment levels higher than 20%. In other words, there are no available jobs in Europe. So, what is the point of emphasizing social insertion through vocational training if there are no jobs available? Contrary to the core of the theory of Human capital, higher levels of education do not necessarily correlate with more -and better- job opportunities.

Secondly, in the view of this theory education there is a passive element within the work subsystem, dedicated exclusively to training in skills required by the market. Hence, education is seen in itself, at all levels from primary to higher and further, and whether formal or not, as a preparation for work, relegating instruction in other matters and subjects (philosophical, ethical, and so forth) as less important. Though it is contested terrain due to the still present influence of humanist discourse on education, and particularly in adult education, we can state that there has been a steady tendency towards employability-oriented

policies in the EU Adult education and Social inclusion initiatives. A tendency with a strongly economistic vision of lifelong learning (English & Mayo, 2012). Thirdly, education comes to be seen as a consumer product, with a monetary value in the labour market in the form of better chances of employment for those acquiring it. This view contributes to favouring consumerism in education and the organization of education systems along the lines of market and free competition principles. The idea of *lifelong learning* goes to reinforce this consumerist attitude, in that everybody would be faced with consuming education throughout the whole of life. The public education sector would become just another private business, similar in terms of economic exploitation to the international automobile industry (Hill, 2013).

Finally, the Theory of Human Capital excludes the ideological and structural aspects present in any employment relationship between labour and enterprises. This is because it offers a purely technical and meritocratic view of the link between employee and employer, without taking into account the ideological and structural aspects shaping the terms of contracts and working conditions for jobs (Bowles & Gintis, 1975).

The Theory of Human Capital in socio-educational policies aimed at combating poverty assigns education a crucial role, seeing it as the central element in favouring the social and work integration of individuals. Poverty and social inequality are depicted as problems of society solvable simply with more education, especially those forms most tightly linked to the world of work. From this viewpoint, unemployment and poverty are problems arising either because education does not provide adequate training, or because individuals in situations of social exclusion, with precariousness of employment, and so on, have failed to take proper advantage of the training, educational, and work opportunities presented to them.

A Pedagogy of Deficit and a Redemption of the Poor

Training actions within such minimum income programs may be considered a *paid-agogy*[iv] of deficit, in which the poor are seen as having a number of lacks, shortages, and deficiencies in training, attitude or personality, and the like, making it difficult to integrate them into a wage-earning society. Thus, training in these schemes must concentrate exclusively upon instilling vocational skills and abilities enhancing the employability of these groups. It comprises preparatory training for work, courses of training for specific trades, courses on how to draw up a curriculum vitae, how to succeed in job interviews, how to seek work over the Internet, courses on entrepreneurship and setting up one's own business and a long list of other actions aimed at increasing the employability of the groups involved. Similarly, this same line would include all the various courses intended to provide social and attitudinal skills, such as courses to improve self-esteem, to provide personal skills, emotional intelligence and the like. This is a paternalistic pedagogy, a sort of *moral orthopedic* (Deacon, 2005), set in a context where jobs are scarce and precarious (Standing, 2013), and emphasizing the social insertion of such groups fundamentally through integration into the world of precarious work and sometimes underground and informal economy (Colombino & Narazani, 2013).

Training for these groups has as its declared objective the enhancement of their employability and encouragement of their incorporation into the labour market. However, in reality it fulfils a different function. This is to act as an element redeeming the poor, since their participation in these training actions by the socially excluded is a way for them to demonstrate to society their willingness to integrate. Taking part in training acts as a mechanism allowing a differentiation to be made between the poor who make an effort and deserve to receive some monetary assistance, and the poor who do not show signs of enough effort and thus do not merit any financial help. This effectively goes

back to medieval conceptions of charity where the genuine or deserving poor are contrasted with the false or undeserving poor. Any right to *social citizenship* (Marshall, 1950) under which all citizens have an entitlement to a modicum of economic welfare, ceases to be recognised. Instead, the right to social citizenship becomes something that must be earned by demonstrating a willingness to submit to integrative route-maps and undertake employability training (Gray, 2004).

Training Actions for the Poor as a Form of Alienation

Education envisaged with these aims in mind cannot be seen as a tool facilitating social equality, let alone an instrument aimed at social emancipation and a search for conditions encouraging a just society. Training actions falling within minimum income schemes in Spain, and indeed in the whole of Europe since the Lisbon Treaty of 2000, by developing *activation policies* contribute to the alienation of the poor by inculcating a number of notions as if they were pure common-sense ideas.

Firstly, it is assumed that the higher the level of training achieved by individuals, the greater the level of social equality. The nature of these programs is rooted in the illustrated logic of seeing education as always good in itself, so that the great majority of social problems can be resolved if education can be extended to all strata of society. From this point of view poverty, social inequality and other social ills are problems merely requiring training solutions. There would be no need for any other sort of initiative aimed at removing the structural conditions which might be seen as the origin of the difficulties. Merely providing more education would find solutions for all these social questions (Vally & Spreen, 2012). Tony Blair, the former UK prime minister, put it quite clear: “Education, education and more education” (Walford, 2005).

Hence, precariousness of work and unemployment would be problems fundamentally due to education. Perhaps this does not give suitable training, perhaps individuals lack the necessary skills or appropriate attitudes, or do not make enough effort to benefit from it properly. However, in reality higher levels of training or the extension of education to all strata of society will not necessarily ensure that societies are fairer.

Secondly, such proposals for training contribute to a reinforcement of the predominance of values like competitiveness or individualism as core elements in individual progress and social development in neo-liberal thinking. Integration becomes a matter of a person's acquiring vocational skills or abilities, with people competing with each other for jobs on the basis of their qualifications from training. This accepts the notion of people as *enterprise men* (Foucault, 2009), in which individuals fully develop their nature in free competition with others through investment in themselves as human capital.

This emphasizing of the individual character of the process of social insertion, and avoiding mention of the structural bases that might underlie poverty and unemployment stresses individuals' responsibility for their social situations. It effectively says "If you're poor or you've got precarious work, it's because you haven't put in enough effort or you haven't taken advantage of the opportunities society has offered you". This opens the door to blaming and shaming and punitive treatment of the socially excluded (Wacquant, 2010). The poor are seen as poor because they are idle, because they do not put in enough effort, and because some of them are criminals or delinquents. Thus the State should reduce or eliminate assistance given to these groups, or at the very least replace it with mechanisms for punishment and social control. This notion of the poor and excluded is the flip side of the current neo-liberal model of social success: the *entrepreneur*, a person whose individual effort, in a struggle and in

competition with equals, has been able to interpret and take advantage of the opportunities for triumphing provided by the market.

Thirdly, there is a deepening mercantilization or commodifying of education, and a growing poverty business. Training for those benefiting from minimum incomes, just like other public services, is seen in neo-liberal thinking as one more merchandise with possibilities of generating profits through public funding of private firms entrusted with the provision of the training required for these groups. Doubtless this is not a market niche as lucrative as the pension industry, care homes for the elderly, or higher education. Nevertheless, it is of sufficient interest to have attracted a number of bodies and foundations into the *poverty business*, in the shape of setting up training actions organised through *quasi-market* systems (Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1999). In this framework, public institutions take care of planning and organizing training actions, which are then put into effect by third sector ("not for profit") bodies, training foundations, businesses, trade unions and others through agreements for public financing.

Discursive hybridisation: A *Holy Crusade to Educate the Poor*

Over the last few years, it has been possible to see the complex articulation of a new educational discourse based both on humanistic and on neo-liberal discourse. This is a new line of thinking that has been called a *Holy Crusade for Education* (Rodríguez Fernández, 2016). It is a complicated mixture of declining worldviews rooted in projects from the world-view of the Enlightenment and those of dominant neo-liberal thinking.

In this new discourse, education is seen as something good in itself, as a key tool for combating and eradicating poverty, unemployment and almost all social problems. From this viewpoint, there is no need to address ideological issues or

to question social structures. Merely more and better education would make societies more equal and would enhance social justice[v].

On the other hand, there has also been the emergence of another discursive trend. According to neo-liberal thinking, every public service can be run as a private business and every public service should be driven by the logic of profit through privatization mechanisms. This applies from health care to higher education, from state pensions to social services. Even social attention for the poor can be a profitable niche for private businesses, with many institutions (N.G.O.s, trades unions, universities, private companies, multinational enterprises, and others) attracted to the poverty business.

This *Holy Crusade for Education* discourse holds an extraordinarily hegemonic position because it brings together two powerful trends that are dominant in current debate on social ideology. On the one hand, there is the old humanistic discourse that still considers governments socially responsible for less fortunate citizens, and thus holds that education is a fundamental tool for sorting out social problems. However, this is at the same time a line of thinking with a potentially paternalistic and charitable side, seeing education as redemption for the poor.

On the other hand, there is the neo-liberal discourse that emphasizes the individual, and advocates punishment and social stigma for poor people. This favours commodification or marketization over public services, and sees education as a private business ready for profits to be made from it.

These two discourses intertwine in the *Holy Crusade for Education*. This is "holy" because according to the old humanistic discourse, education is always good, a sort of magical tool that can solve every social problem. For that

reason, it should be extended to everybody and everywhere. The E.U. has expressed this idea with its call for "life-long learning". Similarly, it is a "crusade" because education, rather than being a public right aimed at nurturing critical and autonomous citizens (Apple, 2013), becomes a product of individual consumption assisting people to compete and fight for a job in a globalised world.

In G.M.I. programs, the poor are obliged to attend professional training courses, otherwise they would lose their benefits. This is in the vain hope of finding some employment in a labour market characterised by precariousness of work and with few jobs. G.M.I. programs face an impossible task. In the end, they put the blame for their failures on the participants themselves, suggesting they are responsible for their own situations.

THE UNIVERSAL CITIZEN'S BASIC INCOME AS A TOOL OF COUNTER-HEGEMONIC TRANSFORMATION

Social policies to combat poverty and the training actions incorporated within them, at least in their current configuration shaped by neo-liberal thinking, do not lead to the development of societies that are more just and more egalitarian. They are an expression of class antagonisms and in this way represent the interests of the ruling classes, contributing to maintain and perpetuate the social order.

This final section will put forward an alternative route to that marked by classic State social welfare policies. This is based on political lines of thought and discourses alternative to those at present dominant. They are social discourses that are on the fringe. This is not because history has shown them to be unworkable when offering a response to social needs and problems. Rather, it is because they have been squeezed out by other ways of thinking in the

struggle for predominance in finding answers and a meaning for the surrounding world. In view of the manifest difficulties for liberal thinking in its current neo-liberal guise when it comes to the distribution of wealth and the generation of more cohesive societies (Piketty, 2014; Harvey, 2013), there is a need to seek proposals and measures based on some other set of concepts. One of these proposals is for the implementation of a universal citizen's basic income (B.I.). While recognising it offers no universal panacea (Jensen & Kjeldsen, 2019), we suggest a B.I. provides policy conditions that make the challenging of neo-liberal principles of human capital and employability possible. On its own, B.I. would not confront their hegemony. Rather, B.I. offers itself as a potential means for the opening up of rival educational conceptions and practices that have their intent in the education of a critical and participatory citizenship.

The 'strong' BI model: an anti-capitalist interpretation

A B.I. is a proposal that goes beyond the approaches in G.M.I. schemes. This is because it is not limited to dealing with poverty through hand-outs. It is rather a tool directed towards social change. It consists on a monetary payment made periodically by the State to every citizen as a social right. This proposal first emerged in the academic world in the work of Philippe Van Parijs during the 1980s. In the Spanish context, it began to be debated in the 1990s with contributions by Daniel Raventós Panella (2007) and José Iglesias Fernández (2002), among others, and over following decades gained political and public prominence. Similarly, in the last few years a number of studies have been undertaken into the technical and economic viability of B.I.s in different countries (Standing, 2017). There have also been pilot experiments, the most striking of which was the initiative put in place by the Government of Finland over the period 2017 to 2018 in order to investigate the effects implementation of a basic income system might have in that country[vi].

Due to the growing social, political and intellectual interest on the B.I, it is possible nowadays to make different readings of this proposal. Thus, the B.I. has been theoretically justified from different ideological positions: from positions close to neoliberalism, such as the property-keeping theory of Richard Nozik (1974) or Milton Friedman (1962), to social democratic positions such as the egalitarian liberalism of John Rawls (1995). Against these interpretations, I will defend here an anti-capitalist interpretation of B.I., drawing upon the proposal of 'strong' B.I. by Spanish Marxist and BI advocate José Iglesias (2002).

A 'strong' B.I. has the following fundamental structural characteristics (Iglesias, 2002)[vii]. It is *individual*, as it is granted to a single person, not to a family unit, as happens with G.M.I.s. It is *universal* and *unconditional*, covering all citizens and recognised as a social right. G.M.I.s are not universal rights, as they are directed exclusively towards groups at social risk. Further, a B.I. does not take into account the situation and conditions of the person receiving the payment. G.M.I. schemes involve a valuation of, and check upon, the property and individual situations of their beneficiaries, leading to the creation of a complex bureaucratic and administrative network. It is *sufficient* to cover basic social needs and living expenses, with its amount being fixed above the poverty threshold. G.M.I.s do not offer enough income to rise recipients over the poverty threshold and hence do not permit coverage of basic social needs. According to Antonio Negri (1998), they are no more than *a salary for poverty*, aimed at avoiding social revolt against the structural problem of poverty.

Finally, from the total amount of BI allowed to each citizen, a small percentage can be allotted to a *Basic Income Fund*. This will be devoted to finance collective public goods and local services. At the time of distributing it, all the citizens will have the same right to take part in the debate for such allocation.

The importance of participation responds to the following philosophy: the B.I. is oriented to the satisfaction of people's needs. However, human and social needs are not all resolved at the individual level. Rather, they require the existence of collective goods. Therefore, a central feature of a strong B.I. model would reinforce the provision of these. With this in mind, from the total contributions dedicated to B.I., a portion is dedicated to the satisfaction of collective needs, instead of individual distribution. In this way, the *Basic Income Fund* would respond to two premeditated purposes: (i) to recover the virtues of the use of public goods against the dominant discourse of individualism and (ii) to re-establish the means by which citizenship can democratically participate in resource allocation decisions. Strongly linked to this, it comes the participatory budgeting circles as democratic processes of deliberation and decision-making (Schugurensky, 2017)

Forseen outcomes of a Universal Basic Income

The first outcome offered by a B.I. would be a considerable reduction or total eradication of the forms of poverty directly related to a lack of income (Raventós Panella, 2007). A B.I. scheme proposes a redistribution of wealth going far beyond what is achieved by any G.M.I. program, thanks to its universal nature and because of being soundly inspired by principles of mutual aid and strong solidarity. It is a proposal aimed at all citizens, not a measure directed solely toward the poor, and is hence universal and non-stigmatizing.

The second possibility is that it would contribute to re-establishing a balance of power between capital and labour by strengthening workers' hands when engaged in labour negotiations (Standing, 2013). In this way, it would encourage improvements in working conditions and reduce precariousness, as it would provide a financial safety net allowing workers to choose jobs free of constraint. This should not be the final goal for UBI, but a first movement into

deeper social transformations in other sectors and areas. The idea is not just to improve labour conditions -though this aim is in itself worthy -, but to give rise to new lines (*cracks*, according to John Holloway) of revolution and transformation.

Another of the objectives pursue by the implementation of B.I. would be to stimulate participation by citizens generally and also forms of organization based on co-operative principles (Wright, 2005). A B.I. gives support to municipalism, participation and direct decision-making by citizens by bolstering participatory budgets in which there is discussion of the way in which funds are to be spent and community matters affecting citizens are to be managed. In turn, this favours the development of entrepreneurial initiatives, as it guarantees basic financial support allowing the blossoming of work projects based on co-operative approaches. In the present economic context these face huge difficulties in starting up: uncertainty about future success or failure, possible financial viability or problems in gaining access to funding from the banking sector.

Lastly, BI has the potential to change the public *social imaginary:* the imagining of what is possible. At the moment we are collectively attuned to a neoliberal imaginary (Rizvi, 2017; Whyte, 2019) and a B.I. provides the opportunity to change that hegemonic discourse. The power of B.I. is that it frees people from the compulsion to work for a wage and turn their labour powers to the realisation of social and human needs outside of the market. This is where critical education and radical activism comes in.

Critical citizenry and real political participation

In the Enlightenment discourse, democratic citizen participation is developed through social and political institutions based on the principle of

representativeness. These institutions are understood as products that within political market are chosen by citizens-consumers according to their interests and needs. Then, participation is limited to the individual's ability to choose between the range of products provided by the market. Nowadays, there is a growing discredit of these liberal democratic procedures in relation to their ability to represent the interests of citizenry and as a result of that, levels of political participation are decreasing and abstention is increasing. Actually, the current image of political voting –place a paper with a name written, inside a glass box- cannot be considered a real political act, but a poor substitute mockery.

B.I. emphasizes the need to enhance mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting, that promote direct citizen participation. Participatory budgets foster the development of a critical awareness of citizenship and a more deliberative, educational and democratic political culture (Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007). Under this approach, the 'public' is redefined as a space for everyone, and not merely as a technical space for administrative management.

Education, life-long learning and UBI

In the situation that would be established by a citizen's basic income, the world of education would move away from the principles of human capital, which see almost all education as vocational training and as a subsystem of the organization of production, providing the skills that the latter requires (CEDEFOP, 2018). This theoretical underpinning is tightly linked to expository teaching methods, in which educators transmit vocational techniques, abilities or skills, while trainees acquire them passively, either in a purely theoretical way or in the shape of instrumental direct practice of just those abilities needed for work. This concept of education rigidly delimits the roles of educators and trainees, strictly separating theory from practice, with the latter understood as

mere application of theory as a tool. This is a technical view of the educational syllabus, in which those benefiting from a minimum income for integration are deemed to suffer from deficits and lacks diagnosed by professionals, such as educators, social workers, teachers and the like, who take part in designing training actions and route-maps for social insertion.

By breaking away from submission to the entrepreneurial world and the centrality of employability, education can more easily address other types of approach. In these it would be possible to introduce contents of social relevance and of an anti-hegemonic nature that would serve to unmask the falsehoods and distortions of the predominant ideology. They would allow analysis of the social utility and potential effects upon society of various different sorts of jobs. They would permit the encouragement of other kinds of values upon which to construct societies, differing from those preached by neo-liberal thinking, and based on mutual support and solidarity.

Education in general and training for adults in situations of social exclusion in particular, if it is to address social change, must include a content stimulating critical reflexion upon questions that directly affect those involved in the educational activity, both educators and learners. For example, the vocational training undertaken within G.M.I. subsidy schemes, if it is to be truly anti-hegemonic, would have to incorporate a number of new features. These would include the origins and consequences of precariousness of work, the social utility of the trades for which training is being given, the privatization of education and other public services, the root causes and role of poverty in capitalist societies. They would also comprise other aspects and contents of social relevance for those participating and for the whole community within which the educational action is taking place.

On these lines, it is urgent to re-establish a balance between *use value* and *exchange value* in education and especially adult education (Cascante Fernández, 2018). Thanks to the theories of human capital, the absence of this balance has two unwanted outcomes. Firstly, it downgrades the value of training credentials, as it is more and more necessary to have an ever larger portfolio of qualifications, certificates and diplomas to get even a precarious job. Secondly, it leads education to be considered as no more than a means to get something in exchange, losing track of the real learning or personal satisfaction it may bring, and falling into the vicious circle of educational consumerism. In this way, a citizen's basic income appears as a mechanism of particular power when attempting to reduce the hegemony of ideas based on employability and the mercantilization or commodifying of education.

Additionally, proposals for methods and organization in education would take on a different character in such approaches. They would move away from expository models where a few (the teaching staff) design and select content, and pass it on, whilst the many (the trainees) receive and assimilate it in a more or less passive way. They would emphasize teaching methods based on interactions within groups, on debates and on dialogues. In these, learners acquire a much more active role, both in the delivery of the educational action and in prior planning for it. From this point of view, there is a blurring of separations between expert technicians and trainees, because those who teach, learn, and those who learn, teach. Methodologies suited to this viewpoint comprise reading circles and *learning communities* (Flecha, 2009), participatory budgeting (Schugurensky, 2017; Pinnington, Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007) interest centres, *action-research* procedures (Kemmis and Carr, 1993) or *dialogue education circles* (Freire, 1971). Such methods attempt to include in their development the part played by social structures, along with the interests and values of those participating, by means of interaction, debate and dialogue

about the contents and themes of education, whether its nature is academic, vocational, or both.

As we saw before, the dominant neo-liberal discourse has imposed a narrowed vision on the concept of lifelong learning, emphazising an economistic turn and taking away almost all its rich potentialities for social and personal development (Steiner-Kamsi, 2006). However, it is arguable that with a BI the concept of lifelong learning would move away from that vision and would open up to different interpretations, such as promoting integral development, critical consciousness or just simply for leisure and personal joy.

Conclusions

Classic policies combating poverty and the training actions incorporated within them do not manage to provide valid responses to the social problems existing at this moment in time. Worse still, as shown by numerous international studies (World Social Report, 2020; OXFAM, 2017; Piketty, 2014 & 2019), the changes that the neoliberal ideology is imposing on the Welfare State are causing societies to become increasingly unequal with less solidarity and more impoverishment. In view of this situation, it is urgent to search for alternative discourses and practices that not only break from neo-liberal approaches, but also surpass individualistic socio-educational interventions.

The world crisis of capitalism has furnished an excellent pretext for implementing the neoliberal agenda with greater intensity and in greater depth in social matter, especially with regard to the transformations it proposes for the Welfare State. These changes are being implemented in the E.U., albeit with differing nuances and also diverse manifestations of resistance to them. In this neo-liberal social agenda there is heightened emphasis on individuals' personal responsibilities, and an increased part for initiatives from businesses, charities, or both, to the detriment of public initiatives. There is a reduction in public

social spending, and a growing punitive trend and cutting back on social rights. All these are measures that neo-liberal humanitarian discourse justifies as absolutely essential to "get over the crisis".

As against the self-interested rhetoric of "there is no alternative" imposed by neoliberalism, there is a need to promote discourses and practices running counter to it, and to weigh them in accordance with their possibilities when creating the conditions for greater social justice and equality. On these lines, a B.I. can be seen as one more vector within a complex revolutionary strategy. This would include further actions in other spheres (participation policy, de-growth, eco-feminism, municipalism and the like) that may contribute to social change by means of the gestation of a *new order*, from within the contradictions and cracks of the old *predominant social order* (Holloway, 2010). For it is in the spaces offered by the contradictions of capitalism that radical work begins. In this context, education breaks loose from the centrality of employability and from the neoliberal theories of human capital. It raises the question of the structural nature of current social problems and opens up new perspectives for creating fairer and more cohesive social conditions.

With the predominance of neoliberal policies, the equilibrium between the use value and the exchange value of education has gone out of kilter. The use value of education has come to be measured solely by its exchange value. Moreover, this sacrifice of its use value on the altar of employability is proving futile, since the exchange value of training diminishes endlessly as neo-liberal policies advance: more and more education is needed to obtain worse and worse jobs. A B.I., from the perspective of critical education, would contribute to the objective of balancing the use value and the exchange value of education, giving a social sense to these two values. In addition, a B.I. could be a tool to be used as one means of re-imagining what is possible, a *real utopia* (Wright, 2005), and then

working the realise what is now understood as possible.

In the European Union, in the period from 2015 to 2019 more than 330,000 million euro were spent on vocational training activities intended to enhance *employability* and *activation* among the unemployed. It may be asked why this money was not dedicated to the direct creation of jobs, quality employment of genuine social utility that would permit adequate social integration, strengthening a real safety net of minimum income to respond to the needs of the most precariously placed groups. The answer is that in those circumstances education for the poor would cease to be a mechanism for redemption and punishment for poor folk and would no longer offer the opportunity of business for the private sector. This is an opportunity that attracts N.G.O.s, enterprises, foundations, associations, and other entities. Some are motivated by altruistic and philanthropic values. Other chase financial reward. But, in any case, all of them head together to the call of the poverty industry, the *Holy Crusade to Educate the Poor*.

Notes

[i] I am taking this expression from Marx and Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a *holy alliance* to exorcise this spectre…" (Marx & Engels, 1848: 14).

[ii] This paper is result of my academic stay in the Research Group of *Pedagogies for Social Justice* at the University of South Australia, Adelaide in November 2019. My special thanks to Dr. Grant Banfield and Celina Valente for their highly inspiring recommendations and suggestions. This academic visit was funded by the University of León.

[iii] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/teilm310/default/bar?lang=en

[iv] I am using this expression to highlight the idea that education is a toll, a sort of punishment and redemption for those recipients of Minimum Income Schemes.

[v] It is significant that the 17th European Anti-Poverty Network (2018) held in Brussels in 2018 had the eloquent title of "Let us make education a way out of poverty!"

[vi] For more information on this pilot experiment, see: http://www.kela.fi/web/en/basic-income-objectives-and-implementation

[vii] According to Iglesias, most BI proposals are 'weak' because they do not offer a sufficient amount of money, or because they are not universal or because they imply some kind of conditionality. For instance, the Finland BI pilot was way below the poverty line, and the *Negative Income Tax*

(Friedman, 1962) is aimed at targeted groups. All of them are 'weak' because they do not confront the capitalist system and its unjust social order.

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