

Instead of entrenching the difference between being in and out of work, which is what mainstream welfare tries to do, the Green Party will work to eliminate it altogether.

Green MP Caroline Lucas and welfare reform

In the last Parliament, Green MP Caroline Lucas took a stand against the removal of the link between benefit levels and inflation, the government's welfare reforms, the widespread scapegoating of the poor and disabled, and the myth that welfare and other public spending was the cause of the economic recession. Here are some of her comments:

'As well as being callous and cruel, the bedroom tax is counter-productive.'

'If our priority is fairness, we should be seeking savings from those who can afford it, not penalising the poorest and pushing them into ever more precarious misery.'

'The government's misguided austerity programme is leading to social devastation and is economically illiterate.'

A RADICAL LONG-TERM PLAN TO REFORM THE TAX AND BENEFITS SYSTEM

The Green Party thinks the time has come to reconsider the whole tax and benefits system and to rebuild it from the ground up – a system not built on punishing and isolating people, making them jump through hoops to get hand-outs from the state, but one that goes back to the founding principles of the welfare state, in the belief that, as members of society, we have a shared responsibility for one another's well-being in times of need and a shared commitment to helping others play the most active role they can in our society.

The idea in a nutshell is this. *Scrap* most of the *existing benefits* apart from disability benefits and Housing Benefit. *Abolish* the income tax *personal allowance*. Then pay every woman, man and child legally *resident* in the UK a *guaranteed, non-means-tested income, sufficient to cover basic needs – a Basic Income*. For those who earn, the Basic Income compensates for the loss of the personal allowance.

Children will receive a reduced Basic Income, Child Benefit. Pensioners will receive their Basic Income at a higher level, as a Citizen's Pension.

The advantages are many and we support the principle of a Universal Basic Income because it has the potential to:

- Act as a springboard rather than a safety net; people can take jobs without fear of prosecution for working while on benefits;
- Prevent people falling into absolute poverty rather than trying to help them when they are already there;
- Reward people for all the work that's done outside the formal economy, and most of this work is done by women;
- Encourage more of this unpaid activity, much of which – such as food growing, fixing things that have gone wrong, converting older buildings, protecting the natural environment – is a vital part of a transition to a more sustainable economy;
- Avoid the poverty trap in which an increase in wages leads to a massive loss of benefits;
- Make everyone who earns, however little, a citizen who contributes to society by paying taxes, giving almost everyone a stake – raising the personal allowance takes us in precisely the wrong direction;
- Be simple to administer and easy to understand.

Basic Income would be a massive change to the entire UK tax and benefits system. We recognise that it would *not be practicable or right to carry out that change within a single Parliament*. We are publishing alongside but separate from this manifesto a *detailed set of proposals for a comprehensive Basic Income scheme*. It contains full details of the scheme itself, costings and proposals on how to pay for it, and an initial analysis of how the scheme would affect the net income of different groups.

We would use the forthcoming Parliament to

- *Consult* upon this scheme,
- Have government departments carry out and commission *research* (including research into behavioural changes and how Basic Income would affect those on the lowest incomes and child poverty), and
- Draft appropriate *legislation*, with a view to implementing the full scheme in the following Parliament.