Traditional notions of working for a living and the right to full employment are being challenged by automation and artificial intelligence on one front and financialisation on the other. This situation requires us to consider the diminishing role of waged work in how we value human activity and ultimately how we organize economically and politically. With the hegemonic domination of finance in the globalised economy (Bjerg 2014; Lapavitsas 2014), waged work as the primary means of generating sufficient income for everyday people has become increasingly precarious (Standing 2011; Weeks 2011). The ability of transnational corporations to set up supply and manufacturing chains in countries with extremely low wage levels and weak labour rights is driving down wages globally (Harvey 2005; Kunkel 2014). Work is not working for people; it is often a tool of big business and political ideologues to marginalise and discipline populations with the threat of unemployment and fear of abject poverty (Gorz 2011). We are confronted with more and more structural social exclusion resulting in rampant and escalating inequality (Dorling 2015; Sassen 2014). At the same time exponential growth in automation and artificial intelligence has rendered many jobs obsolete and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Increased automation in the world of waged work is rapidly shifting post-industrial societies towards deindustrialization of human labor. This trend towards deindustrialization and the shrinking availability of real jobs raises the issue of de-linking income from waged work, with the potential to decommodify human labor (Srnicek and Williams 2015). How we value what we do and how what we do contributes to social well-being cannot be reduced to economic rationalization neoliberal style.

We are undergoing an accelerating technological and digital revolution (Dyer-Witheford 1999). What we need now is a social emancipatory revolution to transform how we think about citizenship and entitlements to a sustainable way of living as a human and citizenship right. In a nutshell, we need strategies for de-commodifying human labour so all people have a chance to thrive. For New Zealand, as in many other polities, this requires de-linking waged work from income in an economy where unemployment is already a permanent structural fixture (Kelsey 2015b:207, 310). A Universal Basic Income (UBI) can engender social equality in a substantive and sustainable way for New Zealanders (Ackerman, Alstott, and Van Parijs 2006; Ackerman et al. 2006; Groot, van der Veen, and Groot 2000; Manning 2016; Raventós 2007; Tomlinson 2001). It will bring about transformations in how we view ourselves and others that will restore and grow a sense of community and social participation that has been decimated by neoliberal individualism (Dardot and Laval 2014; Lordon 2014).
The UBI is an emancipatory project that has the potential to loosen and eventually discard the shackles of extreme capitalism to transform New Zealand society for the betterment of all (Mays, Marston, and Tomlinson 2016). People can then be liberated from a life model that is determined solely by market transactions and only valued in narrowly defined economic categories.

This very brief paper highlights the situation in New Zealand in the context of economic globalisation, specifically the spectre of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA). The TPPA was signed in Auckland in February this year by Ministers from all twelve countries that negotiated the controversial deal. Worldwide media covered the event as thousands of people took to the streets in Auckland in peaceful protests against the New Zealand government signing their democratic rights away to foreign corporations. New Zealand is a small country with a small population; old boy’s networks tend to dominate policy discussions behind the scenes and unduly influence options presented to the public, as is clearly the case with the TPPA (Kelsey 2015c). Although the secret negotiations and now signing of this agreement has generated significant public opposition, it has not been enough to deter the New Zealand government from proceeding with great gusto. The deal is being presented to the New Zealand people by the government and corporate owned media as a fait accompli. A long-standing tactic of neoliberal ideologues is to manipulate and confound the public in a process of ‘crashing through’ or the ‘blitzkrieg’ approach (Kelsey 1993, 2015b). The idea is to bamboozle public and political opposition by inundating them with last minute information overload and accelerated political processes to reduce the time and capacity for opposition to policies to be effective. The TPPA is an escalation and intensification of fundamentalist market ideology and secretive undemocratic political strategies that are a dangerous threat to the future social and economic well-being of New Zealanders (Kelsey 2013, 2015a; Selwyn and Miyamura 2013). The TPPA is the latest example of the domination of New Zealand policy options by a small group of financial elites and political ideologues that care not a whit for transparency or public accountability in their relentless program to achieve New Zealand Inc.

There is increasing public outrage that neoliberal ideologues and financial elites are attempting to manipulate and dominate the policy options available to the New Zealand people. New Zealanders from all walks of life are mobilising to protest against the negative effects of the TPPA on health issues, the further privatisation of the commons and environmental degradation (Terry 2016). Through such opposition and dissent people can also become re-politicised and regain a sense of solidarity and community that overcomes the alienation and social exclusion that many experience in the present social and political climes (Bleiker 2008; Della Porta 2015). It is a matter of framing the terms of the debate and public discourse; something that has been somewhat problematic due to the corporate media that trumpets the glories of the market society and the TPPA at every available opportunity. Qualitative changes in social and economic aspirations are necessary to turn the tide against neoliberalism. Like any paradigm change there is a need for raising public awareness and for finding sustainable, humane solutions to economic and social problems. If we do not plan for the obsolescence of many jobs through automation in the future and the potential for job losses and mega-neoliberalism when the TPPA comes into effect, then social inequality and poverty is likely to become even more severe than at present.

The main problems that the introduction of UBI to New Zealand will have to contend with are both structural and matters of social perception about the moral virtues of work and the evils of unemployment. There is likely to be a concerted effort on the part of the big business fraternity to scuttle any plans for a UBI. The same people who have advocated for the TPPA are likely to be opposed to a UBI in New Zealand. That is nothing new and can be potentially overcome by creative
campaigning by UBI advocates and anti-TPPA activists throughout New Zealand. The New Zealand people have succeeded in the past in transforming the political landscape. In 1993 New Zealand introduced Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) as an electoral system. Some very influential, powerful political and economic elites vehemently campaigned against this proposed change, but the people of New Zealand made it clear through a referendum that they wanted a fairer and more representative electoral system. Just as the New Zealand people finally won the day in the reform of the electoral system with the introduction of MMP, New Zealanders can collectively have their say about a UBI and their rejection of the TPPA by voting the current government out in the next general election in 2017.

New Zealand has a unique constitutional structure in that we only have a single house of Parliament, a weak Bill of Rights and for neoliberal market fundamentalists and influential rednecks, ongoing issues about recognizing the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti is a foundational document that is part of the New Zealand constitutional framework; it upholds Crown obligations and responsibilities to consult in partnership with Maori, our indigenous people. The TPPA is a back door way for the current government to abdicate its responsibilities under Te Tiriti. Foreign states and foreign corporations which have no obligations under Te Tiriti ultimately decide the provisions of the TPPA that New Zealand must adhere to (Carwyn Jones and Kelsey 2016). There are multiple issues with the TPPA regarding the status of Te Tiriti that Carwyn, et al. (2016) have detailed that show the current government has no political will to protect Maori under the TPPA. Since New Zealand has a unicameral parliament it is possible to pass legislation relatively quickly when political will is present; a Parliamentary majority is all that is necessary (Wilson 2015). This can be a blessing or a curse depending on the legislation and the political program of the incumbent government. Now that New Zealand has signed the TPPA a Parliamentary vote is not necessarily required, depending on whether the current government thinks the Labour Party will support the agreement. Wilson (2015) highlights that Executive power in New Zealand’s constitutional arrangements has very few real checks and balances when a government has majority support in Parliament. She describes New Zealand’s political processes under our ‘skeletal and fragile’ constitutional arrangements as ‘pragmatic’ and notes that New Zealander’s have not historically shown any interest in further formalizing them. For Maori it is quite a different story; if Te Tiriti was included in a formal constitution then that would be a check on the political power of the Executive and Parliament. Then the government would be compelled to protect Maori under the TPPA or face a legal challenge through the Courts that Maori would most likely win. It is a matter of disgrace and odious that the current government has not upheld their responsibilities in the TTPA in genuine partnership with Maori under Te Tiriti.

For the future implementation of a UBI the pragmatic nature of New Zealand’s political structure could be beneficial if a government is elected that has the political will to implement a UBI program. Although Maori have been denied their full status under the TPPA, which is abominable, a UBI will help Maori who are suffering disproportionately from poverty and social inequality in New Zealand society. Basic Income New Zealand (BINZ) proposes an introductory national UBI program for New Zealanders (Manning 2016). It is possible and affordable now to implement a national program that can relieve child poverty through a $25 weekly payment for every child under the age of eighteen; then expand the program over several years to a more complete UBI for adults. Introducing the proposed UBI for children is less likely to face strong opposition as most people accept that taking care of children and alleviating child poverty is a priority for any society. As the payments would be universal for every child, the system does not exclude any family regardless of their income, be it high or low. This amount is not going to be enough to help with issues like housing shortages,
overcrowded substandard housing and high rental costs. Clearly any partial UBI needs to be implemented along with policies that address affordable housing, one of the main costs for New Zealanders, especially those on low incomes. The Green party is campaigning with a policy to build more state housing and in effect, ‘temporarily’ de-corporatise Housing New Zealand. They propose to reinvest money that Housing New Zealand has been paying out to the government in dividends and taxes into building more affordable homes to alleviate the housing crisis (Donald 2016). The Greens are also campaigning on reversing the sales of state houses by the government (Greens 2016; Johnson 2016).

Recently the Green Party and the Labour Party signed a Memorandum of Understanding that they would co-operate, consult and coordinate on policy (Labour Party and Green Party 2016). This strategy is to prepare for the next general election in 2017 with the goal of forming a majority government that can address social inequality and environmental protection. Closer cooperation between these two parties that represent the more progressive side of the New Zealand political spectrum is good news for the chances of promoting UBI in New Zealand. The Labour Party has already discussed a UBI as a future policy option for greater income security at the ‘Future of Work’ conference earlier this year (Coelho 2016). They are considering a limited trial UBI in a town or region to investigate a UBI as a way forward for New Zealand to tackle the changing circumstances we face as a society. One of the biggest challenges over the next year for UBI advocates is to raise public awareness and liaise with other social and political organisations campaigning for a change of government that will support a UBI. If a Labour/Greens majority coalition becomes the new government in 2017, then the TPPA is likely to make enacting progressive policies more problematic. Just when it seems that New Zealand is on the cusp of seriously testing a UBI as a policy for income stability, we are also faced with the awful prospect that foreign corporations could make remedying social inequality even more difficult. Under the TPPA transnational corporations can challenge government policies they think get in the way of their profits through Investor-State Dispute Settlement provisions (ISDS). Jane Kelsey has been tireless in her trenchant criticisms of the TPPA and the pseudo-legal ISDS, raising the profile of the debate nationally along with many other academics and civil society activists. She argues that the TPPA is not a ‘done deal’ as the current National government would have the public believe. The TPPA has yet to be ratified by other major players, the United States (US) and Japan in particular. There is still nearly 2 years to go before all the processes to finalise the TPPA are completed, possibly longer. Much can happen between now and then, particularly on the US front. At the moment it looks like it may not pass through the US Congress. Activists in public rights organisations in the US think that any US presidential candidate that supports the TPPA pre-election in the US has little chance of being elected due to the high levels of public opposition to the TPPA. What presidential candidates say before they are elected and what they do afterwards, once they have secured power, can be quite a different story. Even so, opposition to the TPPA in the US is gaining momentum with some Republicans reversing their positions to oppose the deal. For New Zealanders it is imperative that the campaigns and protests about the TPPA continue to put pressure on all their political parties before the 2017 general election. New Zealanders cannot rely on the TPPA being rejected by the US Congress, which would be the end of the TPPA, although that would be the optimal outcome.

Ultimately the TPPA and measures for social protection to reduce inequality are not compatible. The primary social inequality issues that have consistently received media attention over the past two years in New Zealand are the housing crisis (Howden-Chapman 2015), escalating child poverty (Hancock 2015; Simpson et al. 2015) and the continuing increase in social and income inequality (Dalziel et al. 2014; Selwyn and Miyamura 2013). These are not quick fix problems; they will take a
great deal of political will and real shifts in policy away from market imperatives to resolve. These issues cannot be improved through technological fixes; they are issues that need political will and significant resources made available to turn the situation around. Changes in policy paradigms will be needed to redistribute social wealth. Now that the Labour Party is seriously considering the potential of UBI, BINZ is well prepared to contribute to the discussion and put forward the proposal for a national UBI for children. The issue is not really about money; it is about wealth distribution that encompasses far more than narrow economic parameters. It is about a sustainable way of living, about sustainable social justice and intergenerational equity. It is about choosing to equitably distribute and organise our abundant human and natural resources to make New Zealand a thriving, ecologically sound society that values human life. It is about how we manage these resources to restore and maintain community that truly supports life aspirations of everyone; that waged work does not define who we are or what we are capable of. With the impending threat of the TPPA and the mobilisation of large numbers of New Zealanders to protest against it being imposed upon them, the time is right to really push for a national public discussion of the UBI before the 2017 election. BINZ has formulated a workable model for a gradual introduction of a UBI. By highlighting the threat of the TPPA we can clearly see what we have to lose by implementing this noxious agreement domestically and what we can gain by introducing a UBI in New Zealand.

REFERENCES


