A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TONY CLIFF’S INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE OF LENIN, 1914-24

This article will not attempt to challenge the impressive empirical detail of Tony Cliff’s study of Lenin in his volumes: ‘Lenin volume 2” (Pluto Press, London 1976) and “Lenin volume 3” (Pluto Press, London 1977). Instead, what will be the aim of this analysis of the views of Cliff concerning Lenin will be to suggest possible alternative views concerning the theory and practice of the role of Lenin between 1914-24. The point being generally made will be that the essentially uncritical approach of Cliff is unable to establish the various limitations of Lenin that meant there were problematical aspects to his understanding of the relationship of theory and practice. Primarily this criticism will outline the various limitations of Lenin’s understanding of revolutionary strategy between 1914-17 and his approach to the policies of the Bolshevik government between 1918-24. However, this criticism is not meant to reject the generally principled character of the politics of Lenin but instead to suggest that within the context of the overall approach that he adopted there were sometimes the expression of limitations and problems that have to be established and alternatives suggested. The point is that nobody is infallible, not even a great person like Lenin, but instead there are bound to be aspects of the politics that are being advocated by him in this period that express limitations that are connected to the complex challenges of the political situations that the Bolsheviks had to respond to.

Cliff begins his second volume about Lenin with the elaboration of his response to the development of the first world war. He comments that Lenin’s approach was based on the view that: “The task of the working class was to fight the imperialist war by using the weapon of the class struggle, culminating in civil war.”(p3) This meant that the logical perspective of this approach was an emphasis on revolutionary defeatism, or the defeat of the bourgeoisie of all the countries involved in the first world war as the necessary prelude to the realisation of the possibility of proletarian revolution both nationally and internationally. In this context Cliff quotes without comment Lenin’s rejection of the perspective of the struggle for peace without annexations. In his article ‘Bourgeois Pacifism and Socialist Pacifism’ (Collected Works Volume 23 p177-194) Lenin comments that: “Neither the bourgeois pacifists nor the socialist pacifists realise that without the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois governments, peace now can only be an imperialist peace, a continuation of the imperialist war.”(p192) Thus Lenin underestimates the immediate gains of the realisation of peace and the related end of the imperialist war would be to the working class and the soldiers of the various nations in the military conflict. It would mean the possibility to realise a progressive situation of peace without annexations and the ability of the international working class to bring about this situation would express their capacity to express their political strength and so undermine the prospects of the continuation of capitalism. Cliff supports Lenin’s view that the aim of peace is a rejection of a revolutionary approach in that it is based on the understanding that the class struggle is not the primary objective of this perspective. But in actuality the aim to realise peace in the conditions of inter-imperialist war is the expression of the interests of the international working class and represents the basis to generate the progress of the aim of socialism because the prospect of peace is the manner in which the immediate imperialist aims of the conflicting governments is opposed by the expression of the contrasting interests of the working class who have become organised in an effective international manner in order to struggle for the realisation of peace. Such a possibility can only be to the advantage of the ultimate aim of the prospect of the creation of the victory of socialism. Cliff suggests that Kautsky’s support for peace without annexations indicated his opportunist approach when contrasted with Lenin’s revolutionary defeatism. But the point is that principled Marxists like Trotsky and Martov outlined a more consistent support for the perspective of peace without annexations. But Cliff indicates his criticism of Trotsky’s approach in terms of his comments on the Zimmerwald Manifesto that was essentially written by Trotsky: “The manifesto adopted by the Conference was almost identical with Trotsky’s draft. There was not a word in it about revolutionary defeatism, or turning the imperialist war into a civil war.” (Cliff p13) But the point is that this approach of Trotsky was not some unprincipled accommodation to opportunism when contrasted with Lenin’s more principled approach. Instead, people like Trotsky were trying to suggest what was the most effective manner in which the imperialist war could be ended by the realisation of the objective of peace. This was the immediate aim that could unite the international working class and so attempt to overcome the present situation of national differences. In other words, the aim of revolutionary change via the role of civil war was not on the immediate political agenda. Instead, the interests and increasing aspirations of the workers of the countries involved in the world war was for the realisation of peace. This aim could be outlined in the most principled manner by Marxists in terms of the perspective for the attainment of peace without annexations. If such an aim was obtained by the actions of the international working class, this could create a balance of class forces that was in favour of the prospect of socialism. In contrast the approach of revolutionary defeatism was an expression of an approach that would not seem to be either feasible or valid to the workers. Instead, their immediate aim would be for peace. Hence it was necessary for the Marxists to relate to this situation and in this manner advocate a perspective that could if realised ensure that progress would be made towards the attainment of socialism. In contrast the approach of revolutionary defeatism was an abstract perspective which did not attempt to relate to the aspirations of the workers in favour of peace as an alternative to war. But Cliff defends the approach of Lenin in the following manner: “In his view the conference manifesto should clearly proclaim that the masses were being led astray not only by the capitalists but also by the social chauvinists who mouthed slogans about defending the fatherland in order to further this imperialist war; revolutionary action would be impossible whilst the war lasted, unless socialists were prepared to threaten their own governments with the prospect of defeat – and the defeat of any government in a reactionary war could only serve to hasten the revolution, which was the sole means of achieving a lasting democratic peace settlement.”(Cliff p15) But the problem with this perspective is its rigid dogmatism. What Lenin ignored is that the realisation of a situation of peace without annexations by the effective international political action of the working class would be the immediate manner in which the balance of class forces could be changed in favour of the realisation of the aim of socialism. In contrast the approach of revolutionary defeatism would be perceived as an abstract and dogmatic perspective that would seem to have little relationship to the actual situation of the interests of the international working class in relation to the development of inter-imperialist war.

Lenin outlined his position in the most systematic manner in his article: Socialism and War” (Collected works volume 21 p295-338) He outlines in convincing terms how the character of the first world war is the expression of the role of inter-imperialist conflict and so it should not be the standpoint of principled socialists to support this war in any political manner. But he rejects the perspective of peace without annexations in order to end the inter-imperialist conflict as being an unprincipled approach: “The temper of the masses in favour of peace often expresses the beginning of protest, anger and a realisation of the reactionary nature of the war. It is the duty of all Social Democrats to utilise that temper. They will take a most ardent part in any movement and in any demonstration motivated by that sentiment, but they will not deceive the people with admitting the idea that peace without annexations, without oppression of nations, without plunder, and without the embryo of new wars among the present governments and ruling classes, is possible in the absence of a revolutionary movement. Such deception of the people would mean playing into the hands of the secret diplomacy of the belligerent governments and facilitating their counterrevolutionary plans. Whoever wants a lasting and democratic peace most stand for civil war against the governments and the bourgeoisie.” (Lenin Collected works volume 21 p316) But this perspective in an ambiguous manner indicates that the aim of peace is an important aspect of the struggle against imperialism and military conflict. Hence it would seem that the ultimate objective of the role of revolutionary defeatism is the realisation of peace. But this apparent conclusion would suggest that the aim of peace without annexations is not unprincipled but is instead a genuine demand in relation to the interests of the international working class. Indeed, this conclusion would seem to be implied by Lenin’s view that the aim of the struggle of the working class is to achieve political power in order to establish the conditions for the realisation of peace. Hence Lenin increasingly if still inconsistently is accepting that the aim of peace is a principled demand and that it is based on the advance of the realisation of the interests of the working class. Hence it is not surprising that in 1917 after the bourgeois revolution in Russia the approach of Lenin increasingly omits any mention of the role of civil war in order to achieve peace and instead suggests: “In order to achieve peace (and still more to achieve a really democratic, a really honourable peace), it is necessary that political power be in the hands of the workers and poorest peasants, not the landlords and capitalists.”(p337) This formulation expresses the view that the achievement of the aim of peace without annexations can be most consistently realised in terms of the formation of a Soviet government of the workers and peasants. But this understanding is undermined by the additional view that the Soviet administration should be prepared to conduct war in order to realise this aim of peace: “For these peace terms the Soviet of workers deputies would, in my opinion, agree to wage war against any bourgeois government and against all the bourgeois governments of the world, because this really would be a just war, because all the workers and toilers in all countries would work for its success.”(p338) But this perspective is inconsistent because the conduct of a war in order to realise peace is not a tenable approach. Instead, what would be consistent and more principled would be for the new Soviet government to call upon the workers of the world to strive to end imperialist wars and to establish a situation of peace, and in that manner advance the possibility to realise socialism. In other words, the aim of peace without annexations is the most effective manner in which the interests of the various imperialist powers can be undermined, and the objective of international socialism advanced in a genuine manner. This approach would correspond to the increasing aspiration of the workers of the world to realise an end to the world war. Hence it is the struggle for peace that is most effectively an expression of opposition to the interests of the relationship of capitalism and imperialism. Lenin does not consistently recognise this point and instead still underestimates the progressive potential of the aim of peace. Cliff emphasises the increasing discontent of the workers in Russia during the first world war and seems to suggest that this situation vindicated the revolutionary defeatism of Lenin. But what is not indicated is that this development would have been based on increasing support for the aim of peace. Ultimately the major political problem was that people did not understand what was meant by revolutionary defeatism, or the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. However, in contrast people did understand what was meant by the aim of peace without annexations. This would mean an immediate end to the inter-imperialist war and instead agreement would be made about an honourable peace. In this context the workers would have achieved significant progress and the objectives of the realisation of international socialism would have been advanced. Nevertheless, Lenin does not seem to recognise the apparent credibility of this approach because it seems to prioritise the aim of peace and so underestimate the importance of socialism. But this view is dogmatic because the realisation of peace would represent a significant advance in the progress of the struggle of the international working class. Indeed, it could be argued that only international action would enable the possibility of a progressive peace without annexations to be realised. Hence the potential to realise this objective would require the united action of the workers of the many countries involved in the first world war. Therefore, the achievement of this aspiration of an honourable peace could only mean the progress of the possibility to realise international socialism. In contrast the approach of revolutionary defeatism was abstract and not related to the general aspiration for peace as an alternative to the inter-imperialist conflict. The progressive aspect of the demand for peace was that it would mean not only that the various imperialist powers had to accept the influence of the views of the workers and also that the situation of peace would increase their confidence and willingness to strive to realise socialism. This was the very dynamic of struggle that Lenin seemed to be reluctant to accept. But in practice he began to accept its validity in relation to the perspective adopted for the Russian working class after the success of the 1917 February revolution. The problem of the approach of Lenin between 1914-17 was that it was based on a criticism of the standpoint of Kautsky which was based on support for the perspective of peace without annexations. Hence because of this opposition to Kautsky Lenin could not recognise the principled and progressive character of the demand for peace without annexations. Instead, he rejected this approach because of its supposed centrist and opportunist character and so did not recognise that the overwhelming aspiration of the workers was for the realisation of a situation of peace. In other words, the perspective of revolutionary defeatism had no effective relevance for the workers who could not understand what it meant. But they could recognise the importance of the realisation of peace as an alternative to the actual situation of inter-imperialist conflict. Thus, it was this aspiration that represented the popular aspirations of the people and so meant that the objective of peace without annexations was a credible demand that could express the only basis of resolving the situation of inter-imperialist conflict in a progressive manner. Hence the ability of the workers to realise this demand would be the only credible basis by which the attempt to achieve socialism could be advanced. But Lenin could not recognise this possibility of the attainment of peace as a progressive expression of the ability of the workers to oppose the interests and aims of the various national capitalist classes. Indeed, Cliff confirms the validity of this criticism given that he indicates that the various strike actions of the Russian workers during the war period called for an end to the war. The various spontaneous actions of the workers expressed the aspiration of peace. In contrast the role of revolutionary defeatism was neither understood, nor supported. Instead, the workers of the various countries involved in the conflict expressed their opposition to the actions of the national governments by increasingly supporting the realisation of the aspiration for peace. In this context the majority of principled Marxists had a credible policy in the call for the realisation of the most principled form of peace which was that of peace without annexations. Lenin could not recognise the principled aspect of this demand because he associated it with various opponents such as Kautsky, Trotsky and Martov. Hence his approach was primarily motivated by sectarianism rather than the interests of the international working class. However, Cliff ignores the validity of these points in terms of outlining how the Bolsheviks became involved in the anti-war agitation of the Russian workers. But he does not establish what were the demands of the workers which presumably supported the objective of peace as an alternative to the continuation of inter-imperialist war.

However Cliff attempts to provide theoretical justification for his support of the position of Lenin by suggesting that Lenin’s study of the contemporary character of capitalism as imperialism meant that it had become a reactionary system in which the most powerful imperialist countries dominated the oppressed nations and this development was also related to the antagonism between the various imperialist countries in terms of their rival attempts to establish domination over the activity of the world economy. Cliff concludes that: “Lenin related the economic theories of imperialism to the basic political problems of the epoch, by making economics a guideline for concrete action. The concentration of capital leading to monopolies and the division of the world between the imperialist powers led inevitably to wars. The general imperialist war, by engulfing millions of workers, relentlessly posed the alternatives before the proletariat, not as war and peace, but as imperialist war or civil war against imperialism. Therefore, real internationalism was inevitably rooted in revolutionary struggle against imperialism; no internationalism was compatible with reformism. Monopoly capitalism, by harshly exploiting the colonial peoples, and by pulling all nations into the orbit of the world economy, forced the oppressed nation to fight for its national independence, a fight that was becoming crucial to the fate of world imperialism.” (p61) But the point is that the choice is not between an opportunist form of reformism that adapted to the interests of capitalism and imperialism or alternatively the standpoint of revolutionary defeatism. Instead, the very struggle for peace could acquire a revolutionary significance because this was the most viable manner in which the attempt to end the imperialist war could be realised. The choice was not between revolutionary defeatism or accommodation to the interests of the various imperialist nations. Instead in the context of the imperialist conflict the aspiration of peace could acquire important progressive and revolutionary significance. In other words, this objective of peace without annexations was the basis to end the inter-imperialist war in a progressive manner, and so facilitate the creation of a balance of class forces that could promote the advance of the struggle for socialism. But Lenin rejects this standpoint in a report to the conference of Bolsheviks when he comments: “At the present time, the propaganda of peace unaccompanied by a call for revolutionary mass action can only sow illusions and demoralise the proletariat, for it makes the proletariat believe that the bourgeoisie is humane, and turns it into a plaything in the hands of the secret diplomacy of the belligerent countries. In particular, the idea of a so-called democratic peace being possible without a series of revolutions is profoundly erroneous.” (Collected Works volume 21 p163) But this criticism is a caricature of the perspective of the supporters of the call for peace without annexations. Instead, they are in favour of militant and mass action by the workers in order to realise this approach and so they do not necessarily have any illusions about the political character of the various participants in the inter-imperialist war. Instead, the aim of peace without annexations is considered to be a progressive development in relation to the advance of the possibilities to realise the aim of international socialism. But Lenin considers that the only principled approach is that of revolutionary defeatism. However, in 1917 this stance is modified in relation to the development of the February revolution in Russia. The emphasis is now on the realisation of a soviet government in order to establish the possibility of peace. Effectively the approach of revolutionary defeatism is no longer important and instead the issue of peace is outlined. There is still a vague reference to the possibility of revolutionary war by a Soviet government against the imperialist powers, but this is outlined as a prospect that should not necessarily occur. Hence Lenin has adapted to the position of peace without annexations in a serious manner. He outlines his new approach in the following terms: “Socialist revolution is impossible without a hard revolutionary mass struggle in which many sacrifices have to be made. But we would be inconsistent if we accepted the revolutionary mass struggle and the desire for an immediate end to the war, while at the same time, rejecting immediate socialist revolution! The former without the latter is nil, a hollow sound.” (Collected works volume 23 p159) Hence the perspective that is being promoted during 1917 is for the realisation of proletarian revolution in order to create the conditions for peace. Hence the reference to the necessity of civil war as the basis of a principled defeatist position has been effectively rejected and replaced by a different approach. What is being suggested is that the standpoint of accommodation to the aims of the bourgeois government means the continuation of war. Only a principled approach of opposition to this administration can facilitate the realisation of the objective of the overthrow of the bourgeois government and in that manner establish the basis for the possibility of peace. In other words what is now being promoted is a version of the perspective of peace without annexations. It is necessary to strive to overthrow the bourgeois administration in order to achieve the aim of peace. Only the antagonism of the various bourgeois governments in relation to the formation of a soviet administration could create the possibility of military conflict, but this situation would not be wanted by a genuine revolutionary proletarian government. In other words, changing political circumstances led to important modifications in the position of Lenin. The increasing possibility of the realisation of the supremacy of the Soviets led to changes in his stance concerning the issue of peace. The aspiration for peace became a part of the revolutionary perspectives of the Bolsheviks and so they adopted a position that was similar to that which had been promoted by Trotsky in 1915. However, this modification of Bolshevik policy was never systematically acknowledged and instead the essential mythology of revolutionary defeatism was upheld. Nevertheless, as Cliff outlines, Lenin was still resolutely opposed to any opportunist attempt to support the imperialist war of the Russian government because of the increased influence of the role of the Soviets within society.

Cliff outlines how Lenin developed his perspectives for 1917 in his ‘Letters from Afar’ (Collected works volume 23) The general position that is outlined is that in order to realise a situation of a democratic peace it is necessary to establish a government of the Soviets. There is no mention of the importance of the tactic of revolutionary defeatism and instead opposition to the bourgeois administration means the struggle to realise peace. Cliff reproduces a comment by Lenin that clearly indicates that a principled Soviet government would attempt to realise a policy of an immediate armistice between the presently opposing nations in the inter-imperialist war. Thus, the stance of Lenin is based on the connection of the objective of peace to the prospect of the realisation of a soviet government. In other words, Lenin explicitly connected the policies of the Bolsheviks in 1917 to the struggle for the political power of the working class. Cliff summarises the character of the approach of Lenin in the following terms: “Revolutions tend towards centralism because their aim is the taking of state power, and the state is highly centralised. Hence at the moment of the revolution, more than ever before, a decisive role is played by the leadership in the central direction of the revolutionary forces. The initiative of the revolutionary centralist leadership does not negate democracy; on the contrary, it is its dynamic realization. The great revolutionary leader is great because he expresses the needs of the millions, because the slogans he puts forward, the tactics and strategy he uses, fits the needs of the time.” (p139) But the actual problem of this situation is not recognised by Cliff. In other words, the major problem of the immense authority of the dynamic revolutionary leader is that they become the inherent symbol of the revolutionary process and so the importance of the activity of the masses starts to become obscured or even undermined. This was the problem of the 1917 revolution because increasingly the Bolshevik party led by Lenin became the major essence of the revolutionary process and so the role of the workers became of a secondary character. Such a tension was never resolved because the Soviets became an expression of the role of parties rather than an organisation based on the activity of the workers. Thus, the workers became an instrument of the role of the various parties of the Soviet during 1917. It could be argued that there was no alternative to this situation because only the agency of the parties could ensure that the aspirations of the workers could be realised. Cliff does not recognise the problems of this relationship of party and class because whilst he admits to the potential challenges posed by the unevenness of consciousness in the revolutionary process he considers that the genius of Lenin was expressed by his ability to realise the demands of this complex situation. Thus: “In the months from April to October Lenin demonstrated his strategic and tactical genius. These months demanded the most difficult adjustments in party tactics, as the consciousness of the masses changed more rapidly than ever before, in a very complicated fashion which was full of contradictions. While adapting himself to the immediate situation, Lenin relentlessly subordinated everything to the final aim – the seizure of power by the proletariat. The combination of principled intransigence with tactical adaptation achieved its finest form.” (Cliff p169) Thus: “Throughout all the zigzags in tactics, Lenin’s leitmotif was constant: to raise the level of consciousness and organisation of the working class, to explain to the masses their own interests, to give clear political expression to the feelings and thoughts of the people. He knew how to express the programme of the revolution in a few clear slogans which fitted the dynamic of the struggle and meshed in with the experience and needs of the masses.”(p169) Hence Cliff concludes that: “By drawing ever broader masses of workers, soldiers and peasants into the struggle under the banner of the revolution, by increasing the scope of the party’s influence, by raising the level of self-activity and consciousness of the masses, by constant self-education of the proletariat, the party and the leadership, Bolshevism led the people to victory in October.”(p169) But this apparently harmonious and dynamic relation of party and class does not indicate the possible contradictions of this relationship because the very important point is that the party is not identical to the class. There is always the problem that the party may act in a manner that does not have the mass support of the class and so can become unrepresentative and not responsive to the aspirations of the workers. In important situations Lenin was aware of this problem which is why he always tried to outline in a concise and explanatory manner the tasks of party and class. Thus, he outlined in the most explicit terms that the workers should have no confidence in the bourgeois provisional government and instead should aspire to create an administration based on the dominant political power of the Soviets. This approach has no element of ambiguity or confusion and instead outlines an explanatory objective of both party and class. There is also the rejection of any sectarianism in this approach because he is calling on the existing parties of the Soviet – the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries – to strive to become the leadership of this possible revolutionary process of transformation. Furthermore, Lenin in a flexible and principled manner contends that the original Bolshevik aim of the realisation of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants has become antiquated by actual events. Instead, the hegemony of the Provisional government has meant that the bourgeois revolution has been realised in an orthodox manner. There is no longer any necessity for the worker-peasant alliance in order to accomplish this task. The result of the present situation is the realisation of dual power of the competing authority of the bourgeois government and the soviets. In ‘The Tasks of the Proletariat’ Lenin defines the political situation in the following terms: “The dual power merely expresses a transitional phrase in the revolutions development, when it has gone farther than the ordinary bourgeois-democratic revolution, but has not yet reached a “pure” dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.”(Collected Works volume 24 p61) Therefore the progressive resolution of this dual power situation is to establish the primary importance of a republic of soviets. This approach implies that the Bolsheviks will respect the importance of the democratic functions of the Soviets and so will attempt to obtain a majority in the soviets in order to realise the possibility of the attainment of the political supremacy of the workers and peasants. One of the major policies of a Bolshevik led Soviet will be the promotion of peace: “The Russian revolution of February-March 1917 was the beginning of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. This revolution took the first step toward ending the war; but it requires a second step, namely the transfer of state power to the proletariat, to make the end of the war a certainty. This will be the beginning of a ‘break-through’ on a world-wide scale, a break-through in the front of capitalist interests; and only by breaking through this front can the proletariat sav mankind from the horrors of war and endow it with the blessings of peace.” (p67) Thus the former emphasis on the role of civil war is essentially changed into a perspective of socialism and peace as the expression of the character of a proletarian revolutionary government. What is being indicated is not the necessity of a government of Bolsheviks but instead the necessity of a genuine Soviet administration in order to promote the aims of peace and social progress. In this context the Bolsheviks would provide support to a credible Soviet government led by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. The point is to realise the political potential of the role of the Soviets even if this does not immediately and directly involve the dominant participation of the Bolsheviks. Thus, it would be wrong to suggest that Lenin’s initial aim is for the supreme political power of the Bolsheviks and instead he is flexibly discussing how the Soviets could assume a situation of primary political importance. It is the opportunism of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries that means this approach has to be modified and instead based on an increasing emphasis of Bolshevik supremacy within the Soviets. Obviously it could be suggested that this perspective of Lenin is not sincere and that he is in favour of one party rule even if he does not suggest this aim in this initial perspective. But the point is that the very opportunism of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries meant that the Bolsheviks did not have much choice. Instead in a sense they reacted flexibly to the challenges of the political situation. Thus, Lenin outlined how what was required in order to realise the interests of the workers and peasants was a republic of Soviets. The point he is making is that this development is already being promoted by the aspirations of the people which are expressed by the role of the Soviets. Therefore, it is possible to create a situation in which: “We are usually told that the Russian people are not yet prepared for the “introduction” of the Commune. This was the argument of the serf-owners when they claimed that the peasants were not prepared for emancipation. The Commune, i.e., the Soviets does not “introduce”, does not intend to “introduce”, and must not introduce any reforms which have not absolutely matured both in economic reality and in the minds of the overwhelming majority of the people. The deeper the economic collapse and the crisis produced by the war, the more urgent becomes the need for the most perfect political form, which will facilitate the healing of the terrible wounds inflicted on mankind by the war. The less the organisational experience of the Russian people, the more resolutely must we proceed to organisational development by the people themselves, and not merely by bourgeois politicians and “well-placed” bureaucrats.”(Lenin: ‘Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution’ Collected works 24 p69) Thus Lenin is indicated that his approach in this immediate period after the revolution is not primarily motivated by the objective of the realisation of the political supremacy of the Bolshevik party. Instead, his immediate concern is to facilitate the possibility for the Soviets to be able to exercise the role of a participatory democracy. In this approach it is logical that he is critical of the Soviets for presently accepting a situation of subordination to the domination of the Provisional government, and therefore what he is proposing is that the leadership of the Soviets should attempt to realise the possibility of the assumption of dominant political power. Only in that manner would it be possible to end the involvement of Russia in the first world war and also introduce measures that would be in the interests of the workers and peasants. In other words, Lenin is in this situation providing advice to the present Soviet leadership as to how they should proceed in a principled manner. They should no longer collaborate with the bourgeois Provisional government but instead promote the possibility to establish a new regime based on the interests of the workers and peasants and the realisation of peace. However, there is a dilemma for the Bolsheviks in that they were in a minority within the major Soviets and so could not realise a situation in which they could influence its policy. Primarily they could not establish the possibility for the Soviets to act in a more radical manner. Therefore, the spontaneous discontent of the workers increased and led to many spontaneous actions of opposition to the government. But in a sense the Bolsheviks are in a situation of crisis because they could not act to try and create the possibility for the leadership of the Soviets to act in a more radical manner.

Cliff contends that the increasing influence of the Bolsheviks within the factory committees was the expression of the possibility to overcome the problems of this situation in a progressive manner. He comments: “Because the Bolshevik influence was much greater among the industrial workers than in any other section of society, and because the factory committees were far closer to the rank and file than any other institution at the time, the Bolsheviks used the committees as a lever to influence the other institutions – from workers sections of the Soviets to the Soviet as a whole and the trade unions.”(Cliff p244) Therefore: “The workers movement that started after February, initially mainly by intensive organization accompanied by relatively fragmented conflicts on wages and hours, later developed into far more frequent and bitter strikes. The slogan of workers control became more widespread, and was increasingly put into practice by evictions and even arrests of unpopular factory managers and foremen, and by forcibly keeping open plants which the workers tried to close. Eventually the workers industrial movement grew into the Bolshevik movement for proletarian political power.” (Cliff p245) But the problem with this understanding is that it is assumed that there was a definite strategy to connect the apparent militancy of the workers in terms of the movement for greater industrial democracy to the possibility to realise the hegemony of the Soviets. However this perspective is only outlined by Lenin in the most brief terms in his ‘Resolution on Economic Disorganisation’(Collected works 24 p513-515) He comments that: “Workers control, which the capitalists in a number of conflict cases already accepted, should, by various well-considered measures introduced gradually but without any delay, be developed into full regulation of the production and distribution of goods by the workers.”(p514) But this perspective is dependent on the realisation of Soviet government: “The systematic and effective implementation of all these measures is possible only if all the power in the state passes to the proletarians and semi-proletarians.”(p515) In other words there is no systematic perspective of the development of the role of workers control within capitalism as the basis to facilitate the realisation of the revolutionary political supremacy of the Soviets. Instead, the emphasis is still on the importance of establishing the dominance of the Soviets. There is no recognition of the effective contribution that workers control can provide in establishing an economic alternative to the domination of capital. Instead, workers control is essentially useful in facilitating the possibility of the realisation of the political power of the Soviets. In other words, there is an ambiguous perspective about the relationship of workers control to the prospect of the ascendency of the Soviets into a situation of political hegemony. Cliff glosses over this potential issue and instead assumes an organic relationship of the connection of the role of the factory committees and the perspective of the realisation of the political supremacy of the Soviets. However, in actuality what was to develop was a situation of tension between the authority of the factory committees and the role of the Bolsheviks as the expression of the supremacy of the Soviets after the October revolution. This situation was only resolved by the increasing decline of the importance of the factory committees and the introduction of one-man management. In this context the trade unions emerged to defend the interests of the workers. But Cliff does not accept the problem of the contending forms of authority of the factory committees and the role of the party. Instead, he assumes a situation of harmony rather than contradiction and tension. This dogmatic view is because he can only conceive of the revolutionary role of the party being compatible with the aspirations of the workers. Thus, he cannot envisage any problems accept those that were created by the problems of the post-revolutionary situation. But in actuality it could be argued that these issues began with the failure of the Bolsheviks to adequately establish the importance of the factory committees both for the process of revolutionary change and in relation to the character of the role of the Soviet regime.

In other words, there was a contradictory relationship between the organisations of the workers and the Bolsheviks which it was difficult to resolve. However, Cliff considers that in general terms the Bolsheviks were able to relate to the spirations of the workers in a sympathetic and principled manner, such as being involved in the demonstrations of the July days whilst also disagreeing with the popular demand for the overthrow of the Provisional government. “The Bolshevik Party could not wash its hands of responsibility for the actions of the workers and soldiers. It would rather suffer defeat with them than leave them without leadership, to be slaughtered by the counter-revolutionaries. Thanks to the Bolshevik party taking its place at the head of the movement, the blow struck at the masses by reaction during the July days and after, although considerable was not mortal…. The working class emerged from the struggle more experienced, more mature, more sober.” (Cliff p268) However it could be argued that the person who genuinely emerged with credit from this situation was Trotsky and not the Bolshevik organisation in general. He was closely involved with the spontaneous actions of the workers and attempt to influence events in terms of suggesting the development of an organised demonstration rather than a problematical attempt to seize political power. But Lenin’s ambiguous role in this period was not constructive, but Cliff makes no mention of his actions during this period and instead contends that Lenin was right to conclude that: “Above all, he learned an important lesson from the July days: for the first time he concluded that it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to seize power directly, and in the not too distant future.”(Cliff p272) But this approach was the very serious mistake that Lenin made concerning the lessons from the July days. He comments in his article: ‘On Slogans’: “The present Soviets have failed, have suffered complete defeat, because they are dominated by the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties. At the moment these Soviets…. are at present powerless and helpless against the triumphant and triumphing counter-revolution. The slogan calling for the transfer of power to the Soviets might be construed as a “simple” appeal for the transfer of power to the present Soviets, and to say that, to appeal for it, would now mean deceiving the people.”(Lenin ‘On Slogans’ Collected works volume25 p191-192) In other words the conclusion that was being made was that the opportunist character of the role of the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks meant that the progressive and revolutionary character of the Soviets had been ended. But this was a premature mistake, it would have been more sensible to conclude that what was necessary was to strive to realise a Bolshevik majority within the Soviets. Indeed, the approach of Lenin is confused and ambiguous because he also suggests that the role of the Soviets is not yet over: “Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present Soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we will be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the Soviets. It is not a question of Soviets in general, but of combatting the present counter-revolution and the treachery of the present Soviets.” (p191) But if the Bolsheviks were to create supposedly more revolutionary and principled Soviets they would be considered to be nothing more than the expression of the instrument of this political organisation and so would not be considered to be politically credible by the workers. Hence despite the opportunism of the present Soviet leadership there was not an alternative to the attempt to establish a Bolshevik majority within the existing Soviets and indeed Trotsky carried out this perspective in a brilliant manner. Therefore, the position of Lenin proved to be premature in practice. His conclusion was wrong that: “The present soviets have failed, suffered complete defeat, because they are dominated by the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties…..The Soviets at present are powerless and helpless against the triumphant and triumphing counter-revolution. The slogan calling for the transfer of power to the Soviets might be construed as a “simple” appeal for the transfer of power to the present Soviets, and to say that, to appeal for it, would mean deceiving the people.” (Lenin p191-192) This conclusion would prove to be premature and wrong. Lenin seems to have rejected the possibility that the workers could conclude that the opportunism of the Soviet leadership means that they should vote in favour of a Bolshevik majority within the Soviet. In other words, his position lacks strategic credibility and is based on the rejection of the important political role of the Soviets in favour of an implicit call for a party conception of proletarian revolution. But the problem with this approach is that it does not recognise the continued importance of the Soviets for the working class. In other words, despite the opportunist limitations of the politics of the Soviet leadership the workers still support the role of the Soviets because they considered that these organisations represented their aspirations. Hence, they would not support a party revolution based merely on the role of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, the July days was a spontaneous revolutionary event in order to promote the possibility of the realisation of the power of the Soviet. However, the attempted coup by General Kornilov led Lenin to re-evaluate the importance of the Soviets because the defence of the revolutionary process was carried out by the workers in the name of the Soviet. Therefore, in his article: ‘One of the Fundamental Questions of Revolution’ (Collected works volume 25) Lenin once more considers the revolutionary importance of the role of the Soviets: “The Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants deputies are particularly valuable because they represent a new type of state apparatus, which is immeasurably higher, incomparably more democratic. The SR’s and Mensheviks have done everything, the possible and impossible, to turn the Soviets (particularly the Petrograd Soviet and the All-Russian Soviet, i.e., the Central Executive Committee) into useless talking shops which, under the guise of “control” merely adopted useless resolutions and suggestions which the government shelved with the most polite and kindly smile. The “fresh breeze” of the Kornilov affair, however, which promised a real storm, was enough for all that was musty in the Soviet to blow away for a while, and for the initiative of the revolutionary people to begin expressing itself as something majestic, powerful and invincible.”(Lenin Collected Works volume 25 p373-374) Thus in a cautious manner Lenin acknowledges that despite the opportunist limitations of the leadership of the Soviet this institution is still supported by the workers, even if this viewpoint actually becomes the basis to justify their militant actions. In other words, the problems posed by the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leadership of the Soviet is not sufficient to undermine the development of the popular militancy of the workers who act in their own dynamic terms to assert their interests. Hence the issue that is posed is the necessity to develop genuine revolutionary leadership of the Soviet, but Lenin is apparently not eager to adopt this position and seems to consider that the character of the Soviets is based on accommodation to the opportunism of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. This apparent acceptance of an ambiguous approach by Lenin towards the Soviet means that it is Trotsky who most convincingly understands the necessity to develop the domination of a genuine revolutionary party within this mass organisation. However, despite the possible limitations in the approach of Lenin he has apparently confirmed the view that the Soviets are still the basis of the alternative political and organisational structure that can replace the present domination of the bourgeois government: “Let all sceptics learn from this example from history. Let those who say: “We have no apparatus to replace the old one, which inevitably gravitates towards the defence of the bourgeoisie” be ashamed of themselves. For this apparatus exists. It is the Soviets. Don’t be afraid of the people’s initiative and independence. Put your faith in their revolutionary organisations, and you will see in all realms of state affairs the same strength, majesty and invincibility of the workers as were displayed in their unity and their fury against Kornilov.” (Lenin 25 p374) But in an implicit manner Lenin is actually criticising his recent rejection of the continued importance of the role of the Soviets as the expression of the aspirations of the workers. Instead of this recent apparent rejection of continued importance of the Soviets he now emphasises that only in terms of the role of Soviet democracy is it possible to create a government that is able to express the aims of the development of advance towards the realisation of socialism: “Power to the Soviets – this is the only way to make further progress gradual, peaceful and smooth, keeping perfect pace with the political awareness and resolve of the majority of the people and with their own experience. Power to the Soviets means the complete transfer of the country’s administration and economic control into the hands of the workers and peasants, to whom nobody would dare offer resistance and who, through practice, through their own experience, would soon learn how to distribute the land, products and grain properly.” (Lenin CW 25 p377) But what is not outlined is the relationship of the party to the role of the Soviet in this revolutionary process. This apparent omission is because Lenin is aware that what is of primary importance to the workers is the realisation of the power of the Soviets, and they are uncertain about the relationship of their role with that of the revolutionary party. In other words, the very tasks of the class struggle continued to indicate the importance of popular political institutions like the Soviets and Lenin had to respond to this opinion even if he was often critical of the frequent opportunist role of the leadership of the Soviets. Hence for a period of time his position vacillated between the acceptance and the rejection of the role of the Soviets. But this apparent dilemma was resolved in September when the Bolsheviks achieved an elected majority in the Petrograd Soviet. In other words, the actual development of the class struggle enabled Lenin to achieve strategic clarity. But until this time his position expressed tensions.

Cliff outlines the changes in Lenin’s position that occurred in Bolshevik policy after the defeat of the Kornilov coup including a call on the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leadership to utilise their hegemonic influence within the Soviets in order to form a government. (Cliff p305) But he also outlines how the Menshevik and Social revolutionary rejection of this compromise was the basis of the modification of the policy of the Bolsheviks. Cliff indicates that the Bolsheviks had obtained an electoral majority in the Petrograd by September 1917, and Trotsky became its president. But he makes no mention of the fact that this essentially discredited the previous policy of Lenin which had become ambiguous about the continued importance of the Soviet and had seemed to suggest the necessity of an alternative strategy for the revolutionary process based on the primary role of the party. The point was that these developments vindicated the approach of Trotsky, who became the most influential expression of the possibilities of an increasing revolutionary process. In other words, it was Trotsky who became the essential leader of the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeois government via his connection of the relationship of party and Soviet. Lenin could only marginally influence event in terms of his situation of being in hiding. This did not mean that his position was not important, but it was Trotsky who was the strategic and political genius for the possibility of the success of the revolution in October. Therefore, a connection developed between the contrasting roles of Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin continued to influence the party leadership about the necessity of a revolutionary insurrection whilst Trotsky was the organisational genius of this prospect. Hence there was a genuine dual character of the leadership of the revolutionary transformation of bourgeois society. In a certain sense, Lenin’s major contribution was theoretical. He wrote one of his major works ‘State and Revolution’ about the political character of a post-capitalist social formation.

Tony Cliff suggests that this work was essentially a reply to Kautsky’s views about the character of the post-capitalist state. Kautsky minimised the radical character of the transformation of the bourgeois state in relation to the possibility of socialism. Cliff outlines how Marx had envisaged the necessity to develop the supremacy of a new commune state, or the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to replace the role of the bourgeois state. This was the approach supported by Lenin. However, Cliff seems to be wrong to suggest that this understanding did not represent the aspects of a new socialist society. Cliff comments: “In Lenin’s writings, as in those of Marx before him, there is very little about the future socialist society. Neither Marx nor Lenin were utopian socialists and they believed that socialism could be achieved only through the practical struggle of humanity. To postulate the features of socialism before it could be achieved would be dogmatic, empty play-acting. But both were explicit about on the process of the class struggle against capitalism for socialism.” (Cliff p322) However the point is that what is being suggested is that the initial period of the revolutionary state is an expression of the development of the economic and political conditions for the process of transition to a socialist and then communist society. Indeed, this approach is essentially supported by Cliff when he comments that: “The seizure of political power by the proletariat is only the first step towards the economic construction and cultural revolution that are necessary to achieve real communism.” (Cliff p325) But the problem with this evaluation by Cliff is that it does not evaluate in satisfactory detail the actual premises of Lenin’s understanding of the character of a post-revolutionary social formation. Hence what is not essentially analysed is the overall aspects of Lenin’s understanding of the character of the state as outlined in his ‘State and Revolution’ (Collected works volume 25)

Lenin’s starting point is his criticism of Kautsky’s apparent rejection of the approach of Marx on the issue of the state: “Theoretically, it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is overlooked or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and alienating itself more and more from it”, it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this “alienation”.(p393) But the problem with this criticism is that there seems to be an absolute rejection of the possibility to improve the situation of the workers within the capitalist society and so in that manner generate a process of the change in the balance of class forces within capitalism. Indeed, this development could be the very political basis to establish the possibility of progress towards the realisation of a socialist society. Furthermore, the creation of popular organisations by the workers could express the basis of this progress, and this aspect would be represented in role of the increasing success of the socialist party in a process of elections. This would be the very point made by Kautsky. However, there is a problem in the standpoint of Kautsky in that the socialist party could adapt to the interests of the capitalist system because of its involvement in the electoral process. Therefore, there is the necessity of the continuation of adherence to a Marxist ideology and perspectives by the socialist party. But what is of primary importance, but Lenin does not seem to make this point is that the socialist party should promote a perspective of revolutionary change by means of the generation of the most militant forms of class struggle. Indeed, this development would result in the creation of popular organisations that would express the possibility of the formation of the most democratic and participatory state after the success of the revolutionary process of change. But Lenin does not seem to discuss these aspects apart from suggesting that the objective of the proletarian revolution would be the creation of a situation in which the process of the transcendence of the very role of the state would be advanced: “The proletariat needs the state – this is repeated by all the opportunists….But they “forget” to add that, in the first place, according to Marx, the proletariat needs only a state which is withering away, i.e., a state so constituted that it begins to wither away immediately, and cannot but wither away. And secondly the proletariat needs a “state, i.e., the proletariat organised as a ruling class.”(Lenin 25 p407) What is not recognised is that there may be a contradiction in this approach in that the objective of the withering away of the state may be undermined by the problems involved in the relations of the proletariat as the dominant class and the coercive necessity to oppose the possibility of counterrevolution by the former ruling class: “The proletariat needs state power, a centralised organisation of force, and organisation of violence, both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to lead the enormous mass of the population – the peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians – in the work of organising a socialist economy.”(p409) What is not recognised in this comment is that the very basis of the functioning of a socialist economy may be undermined by the contrasting emphasis on the continued importance of the coercive aspects of the role of the state. The point is that the workers might need the cooperation of the former capitalist class in the organisation of an efficient and functioning socialist economy. In this context the role of consensus and cooperation become more important than the role of state coercion. This also means that democracy has to be the major aspects of the character of the proletarian state and in this manner the aspect of coercion is reduced to actions to oppose any obvious expression of the development of counterrevolution. Indeed, this issue was to become important in the period after the October revolution in relation to the counterrevolutionary opposition of the former bourgeoisie. The problem became that the very necessity of supressing the forces of counterrevolution became the justification of the development of the authoritarian character of the proletarian state but this problem did not seem to be anticipated by Lenin in his ‘State and Revolution’.

But primarily the major theoretical problem is connected to Lenin’s conception of the relationship of the party vanguard to the role of the working class in the aftermath of the success of the revolutionary process. Lenin comments: “By educating the workers party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all working and exploited people without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.”(Lenin CW25 p409) This comment seems to assume that the important role of the vanguard party means that it has a situation of primary leadership and effective domination of the process of the organisation of the socialist society. In this manner the importance of the participation of the people is based on the significance of the primary role of the party in terms of leadership and the manner in which the organisation of the economy and society will be organised in the post-revolutionary social formation. But the problem that is indicated by the formulations of Lenin is that the development of the important and dominant role of the party within the post-revolutionary society seems to suggest that it will have a privileged and elite situation that will enable it to dictate to the workers how the organisation of the social formation is to be realised. The result of this development would imply that a new situation of elitism and domination is being justified in the name of supposed revolutionary principles. Lenin does contend that the proletarian state will be democratic, but this view does not explain how the apparently privileged position of the revolutionary party will be tackled in a manner that creates a genuinely participatory and democratic social formation. The point is that without the situation of the development of an authentic multi-party democracy there will be the development of an unaccountable political system based on the domination of the revolutionary party. Lenin does suggest that the political system of the revolutionary society will be based on the actuality of representative institutions of genuine democracy, but it is not outlined what this means in terms of political practice. The point is that this type of political system is based on the necessity of multi-party democracy, but instead of this recognition of the only democratic character of a revolutionary society, Lenin instead in a vague manner contends: “To develop democracy to the utmost, to find the forms for this development, to test them by practice, and so forth – all this is one of the component tasks of the struggle for the social revolution. Taken separately no kind of democracy will bring socialism. But in actual life democracy will never be “taken separately”, it will be “taken together” with other things, it will exert its influence on economic life as well, will stimulate its transformation; and in turn will be influenced by economic development, and so on.”(Lenin CW25 p457-458) But such a vague conception of the role of democracy is not connected to the importance of the realisation of the principles of consent and agreement in the organisation of the revolutionary social formation and is instead a justification of the role of coercion: “Democracy is a state which recognises the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e., an organisation for the systematic use of force by one class against another, by one section of the population against another.”(p461) In other words Lenin does not seem to accept that the role of democracy means the possibility to create a type of socialist society based on the application of the principles of agreement and consensus. Instead, democracy is merely the basis to establish forms of economic and political domination of the revolutionary party and the workers over society. This possibly problematical approach is justified as the basis to end the domination of capital over labour: “Democracy for the vast majority of the people and suppression by force of, i.e., exclusion from democracy of the exploiters and oppressors of the people – this is the change democracy undergoes during the transition from capitalism to communism.”(Lenin CW25 p467) However the problem with this perspective is that the structures of coercion that are developed to be used against the former capitalist class could always become the basis to be applied against any discontented sections of the workers. But Lenin denies this possible development because a coercive workers state is compatible with the principles of genuine democracy: “It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the rising of slaves, serfs or wage labourers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will start to disappear.” (Lenin CW25 p468) Hence in a vague manner the increasing importance of popular forms of democracy will end the need of a repressive state apparatus. But the problem is that in the transition period before this ultimate objective is realised there is the necessity of a coercive type of proletarian state. But what will ensure that such a state does not become utilised against any discontented workers? Instead of addressing this issue Lenin assumes that the genuinely emancipatory character and purposes of the workers state will resolve these types of issues. Hence, he does not seem to envisage that important economic and political problems will arise that could create tension between the role of the state and the interests of the workers in general. But it was this very issue that was to become important in the history of the Bolshevik state in the period 1918-24. Lenin would have to address these issues despite the apparent assumption of his ‘State and Revolution’ of an essential harmony of interest between the workers and state in the revolutionary society that would emerge out of the process of revolutionary change and the overthrow of capitalism.

Cliff outlines how Lenin attempted to address additional issues not fully tackled in ‘State and Revolution’ in his article: ‘Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?’. Cliff suggests that this pamphlet indicated that Lenin had confidence in the capacity of the workers to be able to organise society in an emancipatory manner: “What confidence Lenin had in the potential power and initiative of the oppressed masses!” (Cliff p 331) But this vague comment does not analyse the important issue of the relationship between party and class in the character of the post-revolutionary society. Does Lenin assume the ascendency of the revolutionary party in a rigid manner or does he suggest a type of participatory democracy in which the workers have the genuine ability to be able to define the economic and political character of society. Or does Lenin actually ignore these issues in favour of a vague conception of the character of a worker’s state? In his article ‘Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? (Lenin Collected Works volume 26 p89-136) it is interesting and significant that Lenin seems to emphasise the perspectives of the Bolsheviks taking state power. He comments: ‘we shall not forget that the question of the Bolsheviks taking full state power is becoming really urgent’ (Lenin CW26 p94-95) This formulation seems to ignore the importance of the role of the Soviets in the revolutionary process. However, in another page in this article Lenin in an eclectic manner does outline the political importance of the role of the Soviets: “The Soviets are a new state apparatus which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants; and this force is not divorced from the people, as was the old standing army, but is very closely bound up with the people. From the military point of view this force is incomparably more powerful than previous forces; from the revolutionary point of view, it cannot be replaced with anything else. Secondly, this apparatus provides a bond with the people, with the majority of the people, so intimate, so indissoluble, so easily verifiable and renewable, that nothing even remotely existed in the previous state apparatus. Thirdly, this apparatus, by virtue of the fact that its personal is elected and subject to recall and the people’s will without any bureaucratic formalities, is far more democratic than any previous apparatus….it provides an organisational form for the vanguard, i.e., for the most class conscious, most energetic and most progressive sections of the oppressed classes, the workers and peasants, and so constitutes an apparatus of which the vanguard of the oppressed classes can elevate, train and lead the entire mass of these classes, which has until now stood completely outside of political life and history…..it makes it possible to combine the advantages of the parliamentary system with those of immediate and direct democracy, i.e., to vest in the peoples elected representatives both legislative and executive functions. Compared with the bourgeois parliamentary system, this is an advance in democracy’s development which is of world-wide historical significance.” (Lenin CW 26 p103-104) This understanding is based on the assumption that the role of the vanguard of the class is to provide leadership and guidance to the rest of the class. It is not established that this vanguard will be in any sense accountable to the views of the class in terms of the principles of accountability and the role of regular elections to the organisations of the Soviets. Hence the approach of Lenin could be said to express the very formulations that could justify the rule of the party elite over the people. In other words, the aspects and principles of a genuine expression of the sovereignty of the workers and peasants is not being indicated and instead the possibility of the absolute political power of the vanguard party is defended and outlined as being justified because only in that manner can the principles and aims of the realisation of socialism be upheld. However, Lenin would deny this interpretation of his approach and suggest that reference to the role of the vanguard in his comments is based on a genuine situation of interaction between the party and class, in which the party is only the most conscious instrument of the aspirations of the class. But this understanding is only indicated in brief and ambiguous terms and instead the ultimate emphasis is about the dominant political power and role of the vanguard. Hence it could be suggested that the actual political role of the Bolshevik government actually corresponded to these elitist formulations. However, in relation to the situation in 1917 we have to interpret Lenin’s approach to mean that the vanguard party via its role in the Soviets will be trying to realise the interests of the workers and peasants in a progressive manner that enhances their influence and role within society. Hence the ultimate interpretation of the views of Lenin is that he is outlining a conception of the benevolent rule of an elite that will be able to promote the realisation of the interests of the workers and peasants. In other words, he does not contemplate the possibility that this very situation of the rule of the vanguard party could result in different interests between the party and the class. Instead, the very revolutionary and principled character of the party will ensure that it acts in terms of the interests of the people. This perspective also implies that one of the aspects of the role of the party will be to facilitate the very ability of the workers and peasants to increasingly act to realise their interests. Therefore, despite the contradictions in the approach of Lenin he is genuinely trying to outline a conception of the creation of an emancipatory society in which the revolutionary character of the party means that it attempts to facilitate the development of the ability of the workers and peasants to realise a socialist society. Hence, we cannot suggest that the problems of bureaucratic elitism of the Bolshevik government between 1918-23 were the result of the formulations of this article. Instead, what is apparent is a tension between the emphasis on the role of the vanguard and the related objectives of the creation of a genuine socialist society based on the activity of the workers and peasants. The difficulties of the 1918-23 situation were to resolve this contradiction in an elitist manner, but the reasons for this development cannot be related to this article of Lenin. Instead in an important sense the aims of this article were rejected in terms of the increasingly pragmatic and elitist character of the Bolshevik administration.

However, it is an important aspect of this article that Lenin outlines a perspective of workers control of the economy. This does not mean that capitalism will be automatically ended but instead that in an important sense the workers will have the ability to supervise the capitalists. If anything, this approach is unrealistic because the capitalists will not accept this situation and so will refuse to co-operate with the new supervisors of the economic system. Instead, it would be more realistic for Lenin to actually how the workers could organise the economy without the role of the capitalists. Hence the very attempt of Lenin to be realistic in his economic perspectives actually indicates a sense of a lack of realism in relation to the actual implications of the realisation of a revolutionary Soviet government. The actual and only credible policy would be to develop the approach of the organisation of the economy by the workers and peasants with the immediate aim of the provision of food and the development of the goods most needed by the people. Hence the attempt of Lenin to outline a cautious economic approach in relation to the formation of a Soviet government actually indicates the expression of a lack of realism and as a result the approach he is suggesting is not feasible. Instead, the aim should be for the development of workers control of the economy without the role of the capitalists, who could still be employed as advisors to the workers, but the reticence of Lenin about ending the ownership of the means of production by the capitalists would be replaced by the development of a situation of a nationalised economy based on the attempt to realise the principles of workers’ control.

In relation to the issue of peace it is interesting that Lenin adopts a peace programme and essentially rejects his previous emphasis on the role of revolutionary defeatism. He comments: “The workers and soldiers will not endure the Kerensky government for a single day, for an extra hour, for they know that the Soviet government will immediately offer all the belligerents a just peace and therefore will in all probability achieve an immediate armistice and a speedy peace.” (p123) In other words the approach that has been adopted is that of the perspective of peace without annexations and the standpoint of revolutionary defeatism is essentially rejected. Lenin has come to be aware that the workers understand the demand for peace but are baffled by the approach of revolutionary defeatism. Hence, he has adopted the peace programme of Trotsky and Martov and makes no mention of the contrasting standpoint of revolutionary defeatism. These types of policy modifications indicate the pragmatism of Lenin and the necessity to respond to the actual opinions of the workers if the aim of revolutionary change is to be advanced and become successful. Cliff makes no mention of the various tensions in the approach of Lenin and instead uncritically supports his approach as being principled. But in actuality Lenin’s greatness was his ability to relate revolutionary principles to an understanding of the demands of the actual situation. Therefore, Lenin came to understand that the people increasingly supported the aims of peace and the formation of a genuine Soviet government. This perspective came to be increasingly important after the defeat of the attempted coup by Kornilov and the development of the Bolshevik majority in the Petrograd Soviet.

Cliff seems to support the aspiration of Lenin to call for the Bolsheviks to take power without the related involvement of the Soviet. He comments: “Reading this correspondence, one is deeply impressed by the persistence and urgency with which Lenin hammered at one and the same theme: the Bolsheviks must seize power.” (Cliff p347) But there was also an equally determined personality in the role of Trotsky who quietly adopted a different approach and recognised the importance of the relation of the party and Soviet if the objective of the realisation of the revolutionary process was to be considered credible and principled. Hence Cliff’s comments about the role of Lenin in 1917 has both aspects of accuracy but it also implicitly ignores the importance of Trotsky in the revolutionary process: “In 1917 Lenin managed to rearm the party and to raise it to meet the needs of the day, because he had immense capital to rely on. He had strong support in the party’s ranks, prepared by the whole history of Bolshevism. Lenin was the founder of the party, and its leader throughout its long hard struggle. The crucible of October furnished the supreme test of his strategy and the calibre of his leadership of the party and class.” (Cliff p379) It has to be noted that Lenin advocated the problematical perspective of supporting a revolutionary insurrection without the related justification of the views of a Congress of Soviets. He argues in relation to the tasks of an insurrection: “To connect this task with the Congress of Soviets, to subordinate it to this Congress, means to be merely playing at insurrection by setting a definite date beforehand by making it easier for the government to prepare troops, by confusing the masses with the illusion that a “resolution” of the Congress of Soviets can solve a task which only the insurrectionary proletariat is capable of solving by force.”(Lenin CW 26 p143-144) Therefore: “It is necessary to fight against constitutional illusions and hopes placed in the Congress of Soviets, to discard the idea that we absolutely “must” wait for it, to concentrate all efforts on explaining to the masses the inevitability of a rising and preparing for it.”(Lenin CW26 p144) Effectively Trotsky ignored this advice and instead led the organisation of the revolution in relation to the holding of the Petrograd Soviet Congress. To have supported the approach of Lenin of supporting a party-based revolution would have been a mistake. Instead, the Bolsheviks had a close relationship to the organisation of the revolution in terms of the importance of the role of the institutions of the Soviet.

It is interesting that one of the first decrees of the Soviet government was the decree in support of the principles of peace without annexations, and for support of negotiations to realise a just peace between the various contending powers of the first world war. (Cliff: Lenin 1917-23 p8) This development was an empirical confirmation that Lenin had rejected the approach of revolutionary defeatism as being essentially impractical. But Cliff does not accept this conclusion and instead seems to consider that Lenin’s peace policy was not in contradiction with his approach of revolutionary defeatism. But the important point is that a Bolshevik administration would not have been feasible without support for the perspective of peace. In this context the issue of any other approach would not have been credible. Therefore, in practice the standpoint of Trotsky was confirmed by actual developments. But the most immediate issue that arose was that of the Constituent Assembly. The elections that were held in early 1918 for this institution led to a majority support for the right-wing Social Revolutionaries. Cliff concludes that: “To consider the Constituent Assembly in isolation from the class struggle was impossible. The interests of the revolution took precedence over the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly.” (Cliff p35) Hence: “Lenin used two arguments to justify the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. The basic one was that the Constituent Assembly was a bourgeois parliament and had become the rallying point for the forces of counterrevolution; the second, that for a number of contingent reasons (the split within the SR’s, the timing of the elections, etc.) the composition of the Constituent Assembly did not adequately reflect the actual balance of class forces.”(Cliff p36) But the problems with this effective dissolving of the Constituent Assembly was to polarise the differences within society because of the apparent rejection by the Soviet government of the democratic aspirations represented by the role of the Constituent Assembly. But Lenin considered that the Soviets were an inherently superior type of political organisation because they represented the interests of working people in the most effective and democratic manner: “To hand over power to the Constituent Assembly would again to be compromising with the malignant bourgeoisie. The Russian Soviets place the interests of the working people far above the interests of a treacherous policy of compromise disguised in a new garb.” (Lenin CW 26 p440) But the issue was not about accepting the domination of the Constituent Assembly at the expense of the role and importance of the Soviets but instead whether it was possible to establish a possible compromise agreement that would recognise the role of both institutions. In actuality neither the representatives of the Soviet or Constituent Assembly were receptive to the possibility of realising this type of resolution of differences and so it could be suggested that the Bolshevik government had no other option than to dissolve the Assembly. However, this should have meant that they should have encouraged the development of a genuine type of Soviet democracy, but it is questionable whether this occurred. Instead, the situation was increasingly receptive to the development of an authoritarian type of single party government. The Left Social Revolutionaries supported the Soviet government for a brief period of time, but ultimately what was created was a single party administration. Hence the polarised situation was not necessarily primarily the problem of the intransigence of the Bolsheviks. Instead, the various parties of the Constituent Assembly had refused to compromise with the leadership of the Soviets. But the result of this polarisation was the effective creation of a single party regime. This development was problematical because it meant the generation of possible authoritarian tendencies within the character of the social formation. In other words, the promotion of the domination of an unaccountable elite was becoming possible because of the effective development of one-party rule. The Bolsheviks would have to exercise cautious leadership is this possibility of authoritarianism was not to be realised.

In other words, the situation was increasingly problematical because the aspect of polarisation between the various parties meant that compromise and the formation of a coalition government of various Soviet parties become increasingly difficult. The only result of this situation was the formation of the rule of the Bolsheviks. However, this meant that it was not possible to establish a credible form of democracy because such a prospect required the development of a situation of multi-party democracy. Hence the effective establishment of the supremacy of the Bolsheviks meant that the tendency had been created for the prospect of the development of an authoritarian political system. But this was not the fault of the Bolsheviks and instead this situation was related to the intransigence of the other political parties. Ultimately the Bolsheviks had no choice than to act as the dominant party because of the necessity to maintain the Soviet system. In other words, the tendency towards the realisation of authoritarianism was the outcome of a situation of political polarisation.

The other major problem was the issue of relations with German imperialism which was inclined to continue the war against the new Russian government. Lenin’s advocacy of the necessity to sign a peace treaty with Germany is supported by Cliff who comments: “With full recognition of the need to retreat in the face of imperialist pressure, he insisted on the necessity of adhering to the internationalist principle of subordinating everything, including the fate of Russia, to the needs of the world revolution.”(Cliff p53-54) Therefore Cliff concludes: “Principled politics combined with ruthlessly clear realism were the decisive traits of Lenin’s behaviour during the Brest affair. He emerged with enormous moral credit from the controversy.” (Cliff p54) However it could be argued that Lenin’s position was more complex than that which is elaborated by Cliff. In actuality Lenin recognises that the Soviet government is carrying out a problematical policy by its acceptance of an adverse treaty with the representatives of German imperialism. Under more favourable circumstances when it could contemplate being able to effectively oppose the demands of the German government a different stance would have been adopted. It is the adverse balance of forces that dictates the policy of accepting the demands of the German government in terms of the signing of an unfavourable treaty. Therefore, Lenin concludes in his article: ‘The Revolutionary Phrase’: “We are accepting an unfavourable treaty and a separate peace knowing that today we are not yet ready for a revolutionary war, that we have to bide our time…. we must wait until we are stronger. Therefore, if there is a chance of obtaining the most unfavourable separate peace, we absolutely must accept it in the interests of the socialist revolution, which is still weak (since the maturing revolution in Germany has not yet come to our help, to the help of the Russians. Only if a separate peace is absolutely impossible shall we have to fight immediately – not because it will be the correct tactics, but because we have no choice…. But as long as we have a choice a separate peace and an extremely unfavourable treaty, because that still will be a hundred times better than the position of Belgium.” (Lenin CW 27 p26-27) Thus there is nothing principled or strategic about the signing of a peace treaty with the German government. Instead, what has occurred is an expression of the adverse military situation of the Soviet administration. It is the problem of an unfavourable balance of class forces that has resulted in the necessity to sign a treaty with the representatives of German imperialism. This policy is not an expression of any aspect of principled international revolutionary tactics but is instead merely motivated by the present adverse situation of the Soviet government. Therefore, Lenin seemed to have been right to suggest that the Bolshevik critics of the treaty are motivated by a form of dogmatic politics that has no relationship to the present adverse balance of class forces. But it necessary to understand that what Lenin advocated in these unfavourable conditions is not meant to be any precedent. In more favourable circumstances the policy of accommodation with the forces of imperialism would be rejected and a more audacious approach would be adopted. This could mean the possibility of military conflict with imperialist armies if this action is in the interests of the promotion of world revolution. In other words, the Brest treaty was forced on the Soviet government because of its problems, and this meant a more adventurous approach could not be adopted. The aspect that is always of primary importance is the interests of the advance of world revolution. But such an aim could not be promoted by a struggle between the Soviet and German government under unfavourable conditions. Hence there was no alternative than to sign a treaty. It is important to understand that Lenin was not trying to establish a precedent. Instead, the treaty was something that had become necessary because of the adverse balance of class forces. In other words, the promotion of the aim of world revolution would have to involve the aspect of pragmatic compromise. But what would be necessary under these circumstances would be to tell the workers that a compromise had become inevitable and that the overall aim of world revolution had not been undermined as a result of this policy. What was still important was the promotion of international class struggle in order to realise socialism. But Cliff does not clearly indicate that the policy of Lenin was dictated by adverse circumstances and that because of the unfavourable balance of class forces various compromises had become inevitable. These pragmatic measures were not meant to undermine the importance of the progress of world revolution. All these types of principled considerations were rejected under the Stalinist bureaucratic regime.

Cliff suggests that the increasingly complex economic problems of the regime meant that it was necessary for Lenin to suggest a reliance on the role of bourgeois specialists in order to develop production and economic efficiency: “All the capitalist measures that Lenin argued for – state capitalism, the employment of bourgeois specialists, one-man management, Taylorism, etc – were necessary in his view, because of the enormous threat facing the proletarian dictatorship in the form of the mass petty bourgeois peasantry.”(Cliff p76) But the point is that this perspective was adopted because of the problems involved in developing effective forms of workers control of production. This issue was primarily caused by the adverse circumstances of the lack of raw materials provided to the workplaces in order to increase the production of products. Instead, there was a general decline in the level of production and the workers were often no longer paid in wages, and this situation was made worse by the development of inflation which meant that wages became worthless. This was a situation of acute economic problems that meant, as Cliff suggests, the introduction of the measure of strict state control of the economy, called war communism, became inevitable: “Despite all the criticism of the policy of war communism, there is no doubt that it was this policy that enabled Soviet Russia to emerge victorious, despite the breakdown of the economy and the excruciating suffering of the workers and peasants. It enabled the Soviet government to mobilize sufficient strength and concentrate the energy of the revolutionary masses on the most vital immediate task.” (Cliff p99) However this conclusion is questionable because war communism meant the application of the principles of economic coercion. Hence it could not be an approach that could be relevant in the long-term and instead was only essentially applicable for the period of the civil war when emergency economic measures became necessary because of the acute economic situation. In general, the important issue was how to motivate the workers to become involved in the process of the development of the economy, and also of how to provide incentives to the peasants in order that they produce food for the consumption of the cities. Thus, war communism could only be of short-term relevance and in the long term it was necessary to establish a more credible and efficient form of productive activity. It could be argued that the Bolsheviks failed to realise an effective economic approach until the New Economic Policy was adopted in 1921. However, in a sense the failures of the Bolsheviks were because of the problems created by the serious character of the economic situation and the fact that the productive resources to create the necessary material goods were lacking. Therefore, Cliff’s apparent assumption that war communism was in some sense a success has to be questioned. Ultimately the problem was how to develop the necessary resources that could enable the production of manufactured goods to be carried out. But this problem was not resolved because of the economic difficulties caused by the civil war and the increasing self-sufficiency of the production of the peasants. Ultimately the Bolsheviks could only resort to the approach of the promotion of the role of the elitist domination of one-man management. But this meant the principles of the workers control by the factory committees became rejected and ended. Instead, the role of the trade unions was to act as the advisors to the managers. In this situation a changeable situation of bureaucratic socialism became increasingly influential. The result of this development meant that the USSR could not be a genuine worker’s state. Instead, it would be more accurate to define it as a degenerated workers state.

However, the initial approach of Lenin was based on the perspective of the importance of the role of the workers and peasants in the construction of a new type of society that would make socialism possible. In his ‘The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government’ (CW27) he comments: “Such a revolution can be successfully carried out only if the majority of the population, and primarily the majority of the working people, engage in independent creative work as makers of history. Only if the proletariat and poor peasants display sufficient class consciousness, devotion to principle, self-sacrifice and perseverance, will the victory of the socialist revolution be assured. By creating a new type of Soviet state, which gives the working and oppressed people the chance to take an active part independent building up of a new society, we solved only part of this difficult problem. The principal difficulty lies in the economic sphere, namely the introduction of the strictest accounting and control of the production and distribution of goods, raising the productivity of labour and socialising production in practice.” (Lenin CW 27 p241) Thus Lenin is aware that only the possibilities of the development of an effective economy that is able to realise the material needs of the people has been established. However, there is a contradiction between the potential developed and the contrasting aspect that this potential has not yet resulted in the increased supply of the material goods required to meet the needs of the people. But he does not seem to be aware that the realisation of the possibilities of the emerging economy require the importance of material incentives in order to encourage the prospect of the most efficient form of production. Lenin is aware that there are important practical and organisational tasks arising out of the character of the present situation but the issue concerns how are they to be realised given the serious problems caused by the complex economic issues that are posed and the additional complications raised by the development of the civil war. Therefore, he defines the tasks posed in the following terms: “The decisive thing is the organisation of the strictest and countrywide accounting and control of production and distribution of goods. And yet, we have not yet introduced accounting and control in those enterprises and in those branches and fields of economy which we taken away from the bourgeoisie; and without this there can be no thought of achieving the second and equally essential material condition for introducing socialism, namely raising the productivity of labour.”(Lenin CW27 p245) But this approach only establishes in terms of principles the aspects for achieving greater economic efficiency, what is not outlined is how these aims will be realised in practice given the difficulties of the present situation, which is expressed primarily in the lack of raw materials in order to create the goods needed by society. In a vague manner Lenin refers to these issues in terms of the objective of increasing the accounting and control of the various enterprises, but this is a principle and what is not outlined is how to realise this objective given the complex difficulties of the economic situation.

Lenin outlines in an ambiguous manner the importance of the utilisation of the role of workers control and the bourgeois specialists but he does not seem to outline how these contrasting aspects can be reconciled in a harmonious and cooperative manner. The problem is that the role of these two aspects for the organisation of production cannot be reconciled in a smooth manner. Instead, it is necessary to compromise and to suggest that workers control should be the basis for the supervision of the bourgeois specialists. But Lenin seems reluctant to suggest this possibility. Therefore, the assumption being made is that the challenges of the present situation will result in the development of the adequate forms of organisation of the production process. But Lenin seems to be reluctant to outline what this could mean in practice. However, despite the various ambiguities in Lenin’s approach his overall emphasis is on the importance of the realisation of the role of worker’s control: “Until workers control has become a fact, until the advanced workers have organised and carried out a victorious and ruthless crusade against the violators of this control, or against those who are careless in matters of control, it will be impossible to pass from the first step (from workers control) to the second step towards socialism, i.e., to pass to workers regulation of production.”(Lenin CW 27 p254-255) But the problematical issues are not merely about discipline and the recognition of the objectives of workers control but instead primarily concerns the question as to whether the workers have the ability to be able to organise production. Hence there is a vital task of the Soviet government which is to promote the realisation of the capacity of the workers to be able to administer the process of economic activity. Lenin does vaguely suggest in relation to these issues that: “Another condition for raising the productivity of labour is, firstly, the raising of the educational and cultural level of the mass of the population……Secondly, a condition for economic revival is the raising of the working people’s discipline, their skill, the effectiveness, the intensity of labour and its better organisation.”(Lenin CW 27 p257-258) Thus Lenin is aware of the challenges posed by the task of developing an effective form of workers control of production, but he does not seem to outline how these problematical issues will be resolved. In other words, Lenin does not outline an approach that is compatible with the principles of worker’s control. Instead, he outlines the possible importance of learning from the various techniques for developing production under capitalism but does not seem to recognise that such methods could undermine the very ability of the workers to organise production in an emancipatory manner. Indeed, the most explicit expression of how production and the economy should be organised is to suggest that it should be based on the role of one man management: “Be that as it may, unquestioning subordination to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry.” (Lenin CW27 p269) What is not explained is how this principle of one-man management is compatible with the role of workers control. If the managers are given the power to dictate to the worker’s this would seem to be the justification of the undermining of any possibility of workers control. Indeed, Lenin justifies this position by talking of the need for the ‘unquestioning obedience’ of the workers to the person given the authority to organise the various enterprises. In this apparently emphatic manner, he seems to deny the necessity of a relationship of accountability of the manager of the enterprise to the trade unions and workers. However, the aspect of the application of the principles of democracy is established in terms of the role of the Soviets which enable the people to politically participate in the organisation of society in general terms. The contradictory principles of authoritarianism and democracy are outlined in the following ambiguous formulation of Lenin concerning the character of society: “ The more resolutely we now have to stand for a ruthlessly firm government, for the dictatorship of individuals in definite processes of work, in definite aspects of purely executive functions, the more varied must be the forms and methods of control from below in order to counteract every shadow of a possibility of distorting the principles of Soviet government, in order tirelessly and repeatedly to weed out bureaucracy.”(Lenin CW 27 p275) Thus in a contradictory manner there is the commitment to support forms of elitism in terms of the organisation of industry which is combined with the democratic role of the Soviets. But the obvious problem is that the effective development of the supremacy of one- party domination within the Soviets could only consolidate and confirm the lack of genuine democracy which requires the role of some form of competition between rival parties. Hence the situation seems to be increasing expressed by the political domination of the Bolsheviks which is combined with the development of one-man management within industry. These aspects can only be limited and so transformed in terms of the expression of the role of a situation of the realisation of accountability to the working class.

But one immediate that arose during 1918 was a crisis within the Bolsheviks. Discontent arose about the fact that Lenin seemed to be compromising the principles of the objective of the realisation of an emancipatory form of socialism. He replied to the criticism of a faction of left-wing Communists led by Bukharin in his pamphlet: ‘Left-wing Childishness’ (CW 27p325-354) Lenin begins his article with a criticism of the rejection of the Brest-Litovsk treaty by the Left Communists. He rejects the claim that this treaty represents a rejection of the principles of the interests of international socialism: “It is precisely in the interests of “strengthening the connection” with international socialism that we are duty bound to defend our socialist fatherland. Those who treat frivolously the defence of the country in which the proletariat has achieved victory are the ones who destroy the connection with international socialism.” (CW27 p332) Hence there is nothing principled about the rejection of the importance of the defence of the Soviet state in the supposed contrasting approach of internationalism and the related justification of conflict with the given opposing imperialist power. Instead, the development of conflict in adverse conditions could only result in the defeat of the Soviet state. In other words, the aspect of tactics is not decided by the role of rigid principles but instead the balance of class forces: “When we gained the right to be proletarian defencists ……..It has become our duty to calculate with the utmost accuracy the different forces involved, to weigh up with the utmost care the chances of our ally (the International proletariat) being able to come to our aid in time. It is in the interests of capital to destroy its enemy (the revolutionary proletariat) bit by bit, before the workers in all countries have united (actually united i.e., by beginning the revolution). It is in our interest to do all that is possible, to take advantage of the slightest opportunity to postpone the decisive battle until the moment (or until after the moment) the revolutionary workers contingents have united in a single great international army.”(Lenin CW27 p332-333) This standpoint would seem to be justified in terms of the adverse balance of class forces and the lack of the development of an effective struggle to realise international socialism which could have become the basis for the prospect of solidarity with the Soviet regime against the opposition of imperialism. However, it is necessary to emphasise that this approach could only be justified in terms of the actual adverse balance of class forces and so should not become a precedent to emphasise the primary importance of the national interests of the Soviet state. Instead, what should always be considered to be of ultimate significance is the interests of the advance of international revolution. Hence an acceptance of a pragmatic acceptance of the limitations posed by an adverse balance of class forces within Europe should not become the basis for the increasing rejection of the continued importance of the aim of international revolution. In other words, Lenin did not consider the possible opportunist implications of his empirical acceptance of the role of the adverse balance of class forces in relation to the international policy of the Soviet government. In this context Bukharin and the Left Communists were not wrong to emphasise that the major priority of the Soviet government should be how to promote the development of the international revolution as an alternative to the acceptance of agreement with German imperialism. They were wrong to reject the necessity of the treaty, but the very importance of this agreement should not be at the expense of the continued attempt to promote the development of international revolution. Thus, the treaty should be considered to be merely an immediate empirical necessity, and not the justification for denying the importance of the role of the Soviet state in the promotion of the role of international class struggle. Lenin would contend that this opportunist prospect was not the objective of the Bolsheviks who were still committed to the aim of the advance of international revolution. But the problem was that the polarisation of the classes in Germany in 1918 meant that the German government could only be stabilised by the Brest-Litovsk treaty. This criticism does not mean the approach of Bukharin was correct and nor was the alternative of Trotsky of neither war nor peace, because this approach underestimated the expansionist aims of German imperialism. But instead, what should have been emphasised was that the Bolsheviks did not agree with a reactionary treaty and that its pragmatic necessity did not mean the treaty was justified. Instead, it was an annexationist measure that would be repudiated at the first opportunity. Ultimately the defeat of German imperialism resolved the dilemmas of the Bolsheviks concerning the treaty. However, an unfortunate precedent had been established with the treaty in that it could be considered that the national aims of a worker’s state should become considered to be the very essence of the aims of the promotion of the possibility of international socialism. This opportunist approach became the basis of the foreign policy of Stalin.

In other words, a possible precedent had been established in that what was being pragmatically justified was the contrasting interests of the national Soviet state when compared to the aim of the promotion of the development of the international revolution. It could be argued that the continuation of the Soviet national society was of primary importance because that was the only manner in which the aim of international revolution could be consolidated and ultimately advanced. But this implied that it could ultimately be envisaged that the very aim of the development of the international revolutionary process could be considered to be of secondary importance when compared to the necessity to consolidate the national Soviet society. Lenin obviously would deny that the justification of this form of opportunism was his intention. But the problem was that the logic of his position could imply that the aim of the defence of the national Soviet state had become a priority. Obviously, the explicit view was that the relationship of the national Soviet state to the aim of international revolution was compatible and not in opposition. But unintentionally the pragmatic emphasis would become the very importance of the defence of the Soviet national state because only in that manner could the interests of international revolution be upheld. So how can this apparent dilemma be resolved in a principled manner? It would seem that the principled basis of an internationalist perspective would be to reject the very prospect of socialism in one country and to suggest that the feasibility of socialism requires the development of international revolution. But paradoxically this very problem was not anticipated and instead the relation of the national Soviet state to the aim of international revolution was being upheld in the context of the treaty with the German government. Hence what would have effectively addressed the criticisms of Bukharin would have been to admit the problems of nationalism and opportunism connected with the role of a Soviet national state and to emphasise even more consistently the necessity of internationalism. But instead of this approach Lenin considered in a dogmatic manner that the diplomatic policies of the Bolsheviks could be nothing more than the expression of internationalist principles. Obviously, the approach of Bukharin was impractical in calling for revolutionary war with Germany, but Bukharin did understand the problem of the contrasting of national interest with the opposing aims of international revolution. The problem with Bukharin’s view was that he did not have a credible understanding of perspectives and strategy, but the alternative of Lenin seemed to justify national opportunism. This expression of problematical polarisation of two inadequate positions meant that a genuine development of what should be meant by principled proletarian internationalism was not elaborated. The result of these theoretical and political limitations meant that an abstract conception of international solidarity became replaced with the doctrine of socialism in one country. Ultimately Lenin had unintentionally provided the basis for this approach with his emphasis on the importance of the survival of the national proletarian state as the basis of the development of international revolution. What was being ignored was that the primary objective should be the very objective of the success of the international class struggle. In this manner the very objectives of the national soviet society should be related to the aims of the international class struggle. But unintentionally Lenin seemed to have adopted a different type of priorities. Hence the continuation of the actual Soviet state acquired absolute priority and so its relationship to the development of the international proletarian revolution could be considered to be ambiguous. Stalin was to resolve these tensions in an opportunist manner in terms of the explicit perspective of socialism in one country. Ironically Bukharin the ardent internationalist of 1918 became the major theoretician of this opportunist approach. It is true that Lenin did not consciously adopt a nationalist standpoint, but it can be suggested that the problems in his perspective prepared the basis for this development. This limitation was understandable because the Soviet state was isolated in 1918, but the ideology of nationalism was being justified as a result of the pragmatic position of Lenin in this period. It was Trotsky, the major supporter of the Soviet national interest, who became the principled supporter of genuine internationalism.

Cliff outlines in impressive terms the difficulties that the Bolsheviks had under adverse social circumstances of trying to create a genuinely participatory form of democracy as the basis of the generation of advance towards the realisation of socialism. He considers the difficult period of the years of the revolution and its aftermath in the following terms: “The magnificent success of the Bolshevik party before the revolution, during the revolution and in the heroic years of the civil war did not mean that its organization on Leninist lines in itself any guarantee for the consolidation of achievements. It was not an organizational key to all the doors of history. The revolutionary party is indispensable, but it is not sufficient for revolutionary advance. Lenin’s genius was that he was again and again, to appeal to the masses, so as to make the party respond to their aspirations and at the same time use the party to raise the level of activity and consciousness of the proletariat. In the final analysis the party remained always subordinated to and dependent on the working class. The party can affect the class only to the extent that its words, its propaganda, produce the desired activity by the class; without working class action the party is impotent.”(Cliff p193-194) But this apparently optimistic characterisation of the era of Lenin is contradicted by contrasting comment: “While the revolution managed to defeat the counterrevolutionary forces by relying on popular support, enthusiasm and sheer will power, it paid for victory with the destruction of the proletariat that had made the revolution while leaving intact the state apparatus built by it. The socialist state of 1917 had become the single party state. The soviets that remained had become a front for bureaucratically controlled Bolshevik power. The party itself changed radically from a working class party to one highly centralist party of officials controlled by the Politburo, the Ogburo and the Secretariat.” (Cliff p204) This latter view seems to be a more accurate assessment of the post-revolutionary situation. However, the issue that becomes important is how did Lenin respond to the situation? One of his most comprehensive attempts to evaluate the character of the Bolshevik regime was carried out in his defence of the revolutionary social formation entitled: “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”. (Lenin CW vol 28) Kautsky had essentially argued that the political character of the revolutionary state was anti-democratic and so it essentially expressed the rule of the party elite rather than the working class. Lenin rejects this evaluation and instead contends that: “Proletarian democracy of which Soviet government is one of the forms, has brought about a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world, for the vast majority of the population, for the exploited and working people.”(Lenin CW28 p246) The result of Soviet democracy is that: “The Soviets are the direct organisation of the working and exploited people themselves, which helps them to organise and administer their own state in every possible way. And in this it is the vanguard of the working and exploited people, the urban proletariat, that enjoys the advantage of being best united by the large enterprises; it is easier for it than for all others to elect and exercise control over those elected. The Soviet form of organisation automatically helps them to unite all working and exploited people around their vanguard, the proletariat.” (Lenin CW28 p247) However it could be suggested that this formulation of the important role of the Soviets ignores the significance of the party which it could be suggested has a domination within the Soviet and so enables it to act on behalf of the workers. In this manner the expression of genuine participation by the workers in the organisation of society is merely a formality. Therefore the following conclusion of Lenin is not credible when he claims: “Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy; Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.”(Lenin cw28 p248) In terms of the potential of the Soviets to be democratic this view is not false, but in actuality the lack of genuine multi-party democracy and elections means that the character of the Soviets is defined by the domination of a single party. In terms of actual practice this single party exercises its authority over the workers. If Lenin had argued that this situation was unavoidable and was an expression of unfavourable political circumstances, his approach would have been more credible. But instead, Lenin asserts the democratic character of what is considered to be an effective and functioning expression of Soviet political activity. In other words, it is this apparent attempt to deny the actual aspects of the political situation that undermines the validity of his standpoint. Lenin is able to indicate the problems of Kautsky’s political perspective, but this analysis does not express the contrasting credibility of his own approach. If Kautsky has illusions that bourgeois democracy will generate the possibility of socialism without the necessity of revolutionary change, Lenin seems to consider that the issue of revolutionary democracy is resolved by the hegemony of the Marxist party. But such a claim is credible only if there are genuinely democratic elections to the Soviets in order to establish the authentic political authority of the revolutionary party. Lenin defends the apparent dogmatism of his standpoint by contending: “The formal democratic point of view is precisely the point of view of the bourgeois democrat who refuses to admit that the interests of the proletariat and of the proletarian class struggle are supreme.” (Lenin CW 28 p268) What does this emphatic view actually mean? Is the importance of democracy being denied in terms of an adherence to the revolutionary interests of the working class? Lenin would presumably reject such a conclusion, but the problem is that the perspective of the importance of a multi-party democracy is not being established in relation to his various formulations about the political character of the role of the Soviets. Lenin contends that the Soviets had a superior political character when compared to the Constituent Assembly. In other words, he criticises Kautsky’s defence of the role of the Constituent Assembly, but the point is this institution was dissolved not because it was opposed directly to the Soviets. Instead, this dissolution was because it challenged the authority of the political domination of the Bolsheviks. The point was to try and establish a situation of genuine multi-party democracy. Whether this task was achieved in terms of the hegemony of the Soviets or Constituent Assembly was actually a secondary issue. What was the necessary objective was to reconcile the formation of a revolutionary state with the actual role of a credible form of a democratic institution’. However, it could be argued that this prospect was undermined by the actions of the Bolsheviks in dissolving the Constituent Assembly. In other words, the task was to try and achieve a situation of compromise between the Constituent Assembly and the role of the Soviets. Only when it was definitely established that such a possibility could not be realised would it become necessary to dissolve the Constituent Assembly. But Kautsky is also wrong to support the political claims of the Constituent Assembly in preference to the role of the Soviet. This means that he is effectively supporting the possibility of bourgeois democratic revolution at the expense of the role of the Soviets. Hence Lenin is right to criticise the opportunist character of the approach of Kautsky. But the fact that there are flaws in the approach of Kautsky does not mean that there are no problems with the approach of Lenin. However, it has to be suggested that the standpoint of Kautsky is opportunist when contrasted to the dogmatism in the approach of Lenin. Kautsky does not recognise that the Constituent Assembly rejected any attempt to establish a compromise with the Soviets, and as a result it became inevitable that there would be a conflict of interest between the two institutions. Nevertheless, the opposition of these two institutions was not actually the major problem. The most important issue was the increasingly development of a situation of one-party rule within the Soviets. This meant that the central task was to revive the role of the genuine democracy of the Soviets. In other words, Lenin was increasingly justifying the development of authoritarian rule of one party, whilst Kautsky had the perspective of the supremacy of the Constituent Assembly which was dominated by the role of reactionary parties. Both these approaches had problems but Kautsky was essentially advocating the demise of the hegemony of the revolutionary government. This perspective was obviously unacceptable to Lenin. What would have been more creditable and principled if Kautsky had outlined measures to promote the continued democratic role of the Soviets. But this was not his perspective given the dogmatism of his view that Russia could not go beyond the limitations of the bourgeois democratic revolution. This problematical view meant that Lenin’s approach was more realistic and based on the more accurate understanding of the character and possibilities of the revolutionary situation. The point was that the Soviets had established their political hegemony and so the character of the political system would be defined by this aspect of their primary importance. In this manner the demand for the supremacy of the Constituent Assembly would amount to the realisation of a counterrevolution against the Soviet regime. However, the Constituent Assembly did express the interests of the peasants via their support for the Social Revolutionary party. Therefore, the issue of the development of an effective proletariat-peasant alliance would imply the realisation of a situation of political agreement between the two major institutions of the political system. But the majority representatives of the Constituent Assembly denied any validity to the Soviet, and so it became inevitable that the Assembly would become dissolved because of its intransigent opposition to the new revolutionary political system. Thus, the actual situation of polarisation ultimately vindicated the approach of Lenin and indicated that Kautsky had been mistaken in his emphasis on blaming the Bolsheviks for the situation of the differences between the Constituent Assembly and the Soviet. In other words, the forces within the Constituent Assembly did not want to cooperate with the Soviet government and so were primarily responsible for the development of a situation of polarisation. Obviously, the prospect of political cooperation between these two institutions would have been preferable but it proved to be impossible to realise.

This situation of polarisation meant that it became necessary to realise the highest level of development of the democracy of the Soviets. However, Lenin does not seem to recognise that this possibility would mean the creation of a situation of multi-party democracy. Instead in an ambiguous manner he contends: “But the state of the Paris Commune type, the Soviet state, openly and frankly tells the people the truth and declares that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants; and by this truth it wins over scores and scores of millions of new citizens who are kept down in any democratic republic, but who are drawn by the Soviets into political life, into democracy, into the administration of the state.”(p303) But this proclamation of the democratic character of the Soviets because of their participatory character does not explain how this aspect is credibly realised given the effective expression of the rule of the one dominant party. There is no multi-party democracy that would express the credibility of this perspective of Lenin. Instead, there is only the assumption that the very progressive character of the Soviets means that they have an inherent democratic character. But such an assumption is questionable given the actuality of the role of the dictatorship of the single revolutionary party. Instead, we have to assume that the Bolsheviks are able to act in terms of the interests of the workers, but this understanding has problematical aspects given the actuality of their absolute domination. In other words, the views of workers who support the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries are not expressed in relation to the actions of the monolithic power of the Bolsheviks.

However possibly the most problematical aspect of the views of Lenin is his justification of war communism. He comments: “The Soviet republic sends into the rural districts detachments of armed workers, primarily the more advanced, from the capitals. These workers carry socialism into the countryside, win over the poor, organise and enlighten them, and help them to supress the resistance of the bourgeoisie.” (Lenin CW 28 p303-304) This perspective is justified in terms of the view that the Soviet government has developed an ally in the role of the poor peasants in opposing the interests of the rich peasants or kulaks. Such an understanding is illusory. It has to be questioned whether the poor peasants voluntarily and enthusiastically supported the approach of war communism, and instead the whole of the peasantry became alienated from the objective of obtaining food by the Soviet government. If incentives had been provided by the Soviet administration this may have been a more effective and efficient manner in order to obtain food from the countryside. The point was that the undermining of the proletariat-peasant alliance as a result of war communism meant that the political ascendency of the Soviet government became questioned in a serious manner. But instead of this recognition of the situation Lenin seemed to have accepted the influence of illusions. He comments: “A year after the proletarian revolution in the capitals, and under its influence and with its assistance, the proletarian revolution began in the remote rural districts, and it has finally consolidated the power of the Soviets and Bolshevism, and has finally proved there is no force in the country that can withstand it.”(Lenin CW 28 p304) He concludes: “Now if the Bolshevik proletariat in the capitals and large industrial centres had not been able to rally the village poor around itself against the rich peasants, this would indeed have proved that Russia was “unripe” for socialist revolution. The peasants would then have remained an “integral whole”, i.e., they would have remained under the economic, political, and moral leadership of the kulaks, the rich, the bourgeoisie, and the revolution would not have passed beyond the limits of a bourgeois democratic revolution.” (Lenin CW 28 p305) But it was instead the harsh character of war communism and the appropriation of food from the peasants that alienated this class from the aims of the Soviet state. These problems indicated the necessity of a different approach if the proletariat-peasant alliance was to be genuinely realised. It could be argued that under the circumstances the Bolsheviks did not have any other option than to promote the role of war communism and the appropriation of grain from the peasants. However, the point is that such an approach was a failure and only succeeded in ensuring the peasants acted against the interests of the Soviet state. But Lenin contends that the Bolsheviks acted in relation to the interests of the peasants in a cooperative manner and so promoted the principles of the equal distribution of the land and in that sense created the conditions for transition to more collective forms of production. However, the validity of this perspective is questionable given the actual situation of the alienation of the peasants in relation to the objectives of the Soviet state. However instead of the recognition of the difficulties of the situation caused by the alienation of the peasants because of the authoritarian character of war communism, Lenin claims: “The nationalisation of the land that has been effected by the proletarian dictatorship has best ensured the carrying through of the bourgeois democratic revolution to its conclusion….In addition….has given the proletarian state the maximum opportunity of passing to socialism in agriculture.”(Lenin CW 28 p316) But these formal decrees do not explain the actual alienation of the majority of the peasants caused by war communism. It could be argued that there was no alternative to the policy of war communism given the present situation, but the point was that the problem was that the approach of the forced collection of grain was not successful. Indeed, Lenin began to re-assess the policy of war communism in his article: “The Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government” (Collected Works 29 p55-88)

Lenin is aware of the discontent of the peasants because of the policy of war communism and the connected role of the expropriation of agricultural products. Lenin understands the popularity within the peasantry of the principles of the free trade of their goods and comments: “The problem is how to approach the peasants in the course of practical work, how to organise the poor and middle peasants so as to be able at every step to combat their gravitation towards the past, their attempts to go back to free trade activities, their constant striving to be “free” producers.”(Lenin CW29 p79-80) Thus Lenin admits that the present policy is increasingly failing and so the necessity of an alternative approach is implicitly recognised. But he is not yet sure what this approach should consist of because he still considers the role of free trade of the goods of the peasants to be an expression of the objectives of capitalism. Therefore, the admission that war communism is increasingly failing, and has led to the discontent of the peasants who are reluctant to provide grain for the cities, is not yet the expression of an acceptance of the necessity of a change of policy even if war communism is being subject to increasing criticism. Lenin seems to clarify the ambiguity in his perspectives about the peasantry in his report to the eight party congress and indicates that it is necessary to have a more sympathetic attitude towards the role of the middle peasantry: “The basic difference in our attitude towards the bourgeoise and the middle peasant – complete expropriation of the bourgeoisie and an alliance with the middle peasant who does not exploit others – this basic line is accepted by everybody in theory. But this line is not consistently followed in practice; the people in the localities have not yet learned to follow it. When after having overthrown the bourgeoisie and consolidated its own power, the proletariat started from various angles to create a new society the question of the middle peasant came to the fore…..it follows that as we approach the problems of communist construction our principal attention must to a certain extent be concentrated precisely on the middle peasant.”(Lenin CW29 p205-206) This emphasis must mean that the issue of how to encourage the middle peasants to become supporters of the Soviet government acquires increasing importance. It will be necessary to develop policies that generate a situation of increasing interaction of the objectives of the Soviet government with the aspirations of the middle peasants. However, the complex economic situation of the middle peasants poses challenges for the revolutionary administration because of the different objectives that this class upholds in terms of an adherence to the role of private production. The situation of the middle peasants is ambiguous: “But when we come up against people like the middle peasant’s we find that they are a class that vacillates. The middle peasant is partly a property owner and partly a working man. He does not exploit other working people. For decades the middle peasant defended his position with the greatest of difficulty, he suffered the exploitation of the landowners and capitalists, he bore everything. Yet he is a property owner. Our attitude towards this vacillating class presents enormous difficulties.” (Lenin CW 29 p206) He concludes: “From the economic point of view, it is obvious that we must help the middle peasant. Theoretically, there is no doubt of this. But because of our habits, our level of culture, the inadequacy of the cultural and technical forces we are in a position to place at the disposal of the rural districts and because of the helpless manner in which we often approach the rural districts, comrades frequently resort to coercion and thus spoil everything.”(Lenin CW29 p207) In other words there is a contradictory emphasis on the necessity for the administrators of the Soviet government to obtain the cooperation of the middle peasants and on the other hand the coercive policy of war communism has not yet been rejected. But Lenin has provided all the necessary reasons why war communism should be ended in terms of the necessity to provide genuine incentives to the middle peasants in order to provide food for the cities. What is being established is that the present policy of war communism is increasingly ineffective and so should logically be replaced by a different economic and political approach with regards to the interests of the peasants. However, the problem is the lack of decisions in the context of increasing criticism concerning how war communism is being implemented. It is implicitly understood that there are problems with war communism concerning the lack of incentives for the peasants to produce food for the cities. Unfortunately, the urgent tasks associated with the necessity to conduct civil war undermined the possibility to develop the required economic policy concerning the role of the peasantry. In other words, there is an implicit understanding that the present approach concerning the peasants is inadequate but the urgent necessities of the situation of civil war means that the required policy changes are not carried out.

Indeed, the indecision in the approach of Lenin is indicated in his article: ‘Economics and Politics’ (CW30) when he comments in a dogmatic manner that: “Peasant farming continues to be petty commodity farming. Here we have an extremely broad and deep-rooted basis for capitalism, a basis on which capitalism persists or arises anew in a bitter struggle against communism. The forms of this struggle are private speculation and profiteering versus state procurement of grain (and other products) and state distribution of products in general.” (Lenin CW 30 p109-110) This understanding seems to be a regression to an intransigent stance that seems to regard the majority of peasants as actual or potential opponents of the economic policy of the Soviet government. The result of this apparent justification of dogmatism is to consider the character of the peasants in the following rigid terms: “The proletariat must separate, demarcate the working peasant from the peasant owner, the peasant workers from the peasant huckster, the peasant who labours from the peasant who profiteers.” (Lenin CW 30 p113) But the point is that the peasant owner is a worker and does not necessarily have a large area of land. Hence the majority of peasants are middle peasants. The dogmatic approach of Lenin means that he essentially considers the peasant owner of land to be an exploiter: “For whoever possesses surplus grain gathered from land belonging to the whole state with the help of implements in which in one way or another is embodied the labour not only of the peasant but also of the worker and so on – whoever possesses a surplus of grain and profiteers in that grain is an exploiter of the hungry worker.”(Lenin CW 30 p114) But this situation only explained a small minority of situations. The majority of peasant farms were essentially family based, and so the issue of the role of the kulaks was exaggerated by the Bolsheviks. Hence what was necessary was a policy that would encourage the peasants to sell their surplus grain products to the workers state, or to obtain the goods of industry in return for the products of the agricultural system. But this was not possible because of the crisis of industry which was unable to create goods in an effective and productive manner. Hence the problem was actually primarily about the failure of industry to be able to create the goods of high quality that would be needed by the peasants in order to generate their increased production of grain. Hence the effective expropriation of the grain of the peasants was because of the failure of industry and the inability to create the manufactured goods that could be useful to the development of the agricultural system. Therefore, the peasants were being blamed for being greedy when the actual problem was the inability to develop an efficient and productive industrial sector.

Lenin considers that the very ability of the peasants to produce surplus grain is an expression of reactionary economic objectives: “For whoever possesses surplus grain gathered from land belonging to the whole state with the help of implements in which in one way or another is embodied the labour not only of the peasant but also of the worker and so on – whoever possesses a surplus of grain and profiteers in that grain is an exploiter of the hungry worker.”(Lenin CW 30 p114) But such a situation is an expression of the actual problems of industry and the failure to create the goods that the peasants could want to acquire in exchange for agricultural products. In this situation of the lack of incentives for exchange the peasants will resort to the hoarding of grain or increase their own consumption. The response of the Soviet state is the coercive policy of war communism and the obtaining of the grain of the peasants by repressive measures. In this situation the peasants will consider that they have no alternative than to deny the supply of grain to the workers if at all possible. There has been an effective demise of genuine economic relations between the city and countryside and so a different policy is needed in order to restore this connection. In this situation of crisis, which means the cities are not obtaining food in effective terms, the necessity of a different economic policy in relation to the peasantry becomes increasingly inevitable. However, Lenin is still reluctant to change the approach towards the peasantry because of adherence to a dogmatic conception of their class character: “Lastly, the peasants, like the petty-bourgeoisie in general occupy a half-way, intermediate position even under the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the one hand, they are a fairly large (and in backward Russia, a vast) mass of working people, united by the common interest of all working people to emancipate themselves from the landowner and capitalist; on the other hand, they are disunited small proprietors, property owners and traders. Such an economic position causes them to vacillate between the proletariat and bourgeoisie.” (Lenin CW30 p116) But this evaluation of the social character of the peasantry should imply that it is necessary for the Bolsheviks to adopt an agricultural policy that is based on the interests of the peasants. In other words, material incentives should be utilised in order to obtain their support for the objectives of the Soviet state. But instead measures of repression are being utilised which can only increase the discontent of the peasants in relation to the objectives of the Soviet state. A policy of encouragement of the peasants should be adopted rather than the utilisation of state coercion in order to obtain food from the agricultural areas. This approach was finally accepted with the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921. Such a policy became inevitable because of the failures of the process of trying to obtain grain from the peasants by the utilisation of coercive measures.

At a party conference on work in the countryside Lenin elaborates his position. In an important sense he moderates his approach and suggests that the present policy is not preferable, but it is the result of the present situation of a serious economic crisis. Thus, the emergency aspect of the approach towards the peasantry is being emphasised: “In the transition period we shall carry out state purchases of grain and requisition grain surpluses. We know that only in this way will we be able to do away with want and hunger. The vast majority of the workers suffer hardship because of the incorrect distribution of grain; to distribute it properly, the peasants must deliver their quotas to the state as assessed, exactly, conscientiously, and without fail. Here Soviet power can make no concessions. This is not a matter of the workers government fighting the peasants, but an issue involving the very existence of socialism, the existence of Soviet power. Today we cannot give the peasants any goods, because there is a shortage of fuel and railway traffic is being held up. We must start with the peasants lending the workers grain at fixed prices, not at profiteering prices, so that the workers can revive production…..But when millions of workers are in question, they do not understand this and the old habits of profiteering gain the upper hand.” (Lenin CW30 p149) But the primary problem has still not been tackled. Why should the peasants provide grain to the government if they are not given an incentive for this activity? Is it the situation that the government is not yet able to provide any goods in exchange for the grain of the peasants? It should have been a priority that the aim of production should be to create industrial goods in order to promote the increased production of the peasants. Was this an impossibility under the circumstances? Lenin essentially maintains that only the approach of war communism, or the forced supply of grain to the cities, is the only basis to revive industry and so create the possibility of more voluntary relations between the city and countryside. But the problem is that this approach is alienating the peasants and so resulting in the hoarding of grain. Lenin maintains that the requisitioning of grain is the only alternative to a situation of the role of free trade. But this is still a dogmatic view because it is not yet recognised that by the utilisation of the approach of free trade the soviet state may obtain more grain by these essentially voluntary measures.

Lenin comments very unconvincingly at the eighth all Russian congress of the Communist party that: “How can we be a party that coerces the peasants – we, a party that is putting into effect the alliance between the working class and the peasantry, a party that tells the peasants that a return to free trading is a return to capitalism and that our requisitioning of surpluses by force is directed against the profiteer and not the working people.”(Lenin CW 30 p184) But the problem is that the peasants do not recognise the distinction between a so-called profiteer and a genuine peasant. The peasants in general want to obtain a good price for their food and they are opposed to the forced expropriation of their products in the name of the interests of the Soviet state. Hence the situation of the general alienation of the peasants is making a different approach in relation to the issue of agriculture a necessity. However, this logical change is presently being rejected because of the apparent connection of free trade with the interests of capitalism. But in actuality this development could actually strengthen the connection between the workers state and the peasants. However, Lenin still considers that the freedom to trade can only be to the benefit of the interests of capitalism as he argues at the seventh all Russian Congress of Soviets: “On the one hand the peasant is working man, who for decades suffered the oppression of the landowner and capitalist…. On the other hand, the peasant is a proprietor. He wants to sell his grain freely, he wants “freedom of trade”, he does not understand that the free sale of grain in a starving country means freedom to profiteer, freedom for the rich to make profits.” (Lenin CW30 p225) Lenin insists that this concession is not possible, and yet he has actually outlined an important reason to implement this measure, which is that it is supported by the overwhelming majority of the peasants. Hence the Soviet state can only be in a coercive relationship to the peasants because it is imposing an economic policy that they do not support. This unsatisfactory situation means that it can only become a matter of time before the Soviet state has to seriously consider the implementation of a policy of the free trade of agricultural goods. Indeed, this policy is logical because it would represent the basis to obtain more food for the cities. Hence the continuation of the approach of war communism is not because it is considered to the satisfactory but instead because there does not seem to be any feasible alternative in the situation of the lack of food being supplied to the cities. However, this temporary approach is unsatisfactory because it is not recognised that the realisation of a free trade in grain would be the basis to begin to resolve these problems. Instead, Lenin refers to an essentially mythical conception of differences within the peasantry that the Soviet state can utilise to its advantage: “Nevertheless, the peasantry of today is disunited; the interests of one section clash with those of another. The peasantry are not united. For one thing, not every peasant has food surpluses. There is no such equality. It is nonsense to say there is. To divide the peasants and win over the non-kulak elements will require a lot of time. It will involve a long struggle, in which we shall employ all our forces, every means at our disposal. But force alone cannot ensure victory, moral means must be employed too.” (Lenin CW 30 p509) But this reference to a policy based on morality is vague and is no substitute for an effective economic approach towards the peasants. Ultimately Lenin can only be postponing the recognition of the necessity to provide genuine incentives for the peasants so that they would become willing to trade with the Soviet state. In other words, the policy of war communism is implicitly considered to be problematical because it has to be based on the expression of coercion towards the peasants in the name of opposing their tendencies towards capitalist practices. Hence the very limitations of this approach would seem to suggest that an alternative approach towards the peasants would become inevitable.

Lenin was also concerned with the issues of the international struggle for socialism. He wrote his book: ‘Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder’ in order to discuss the issues involved in the development of the emerging communist parties. Cliff considers this work in the following terms: “Rarely has such a short work had so powerful and lasting influence on the international labour movement. Its influence could be compared to the Communist Manifesto. It was of enormous importance in creatively developing the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary movement, and it was the last major work Lenin wrote.”(Cliff p230) Cliff outlines how Lenin attempted to relate revolutionary principles to the necessity of compromise and flexibility such as recognition of the necessity of the principled Marxists developing an organisational and political relationship to reformist parties and recognising the importance of participation in bourgeois parliaments. Hence political problems could develop in relation to the promotion of an ultra-left stance that rejected this type of tactical flexibility in the name of revolutionary principles. However, Lenin’s starting point is to relate the political experience of the Russian situation to the international aspects of the process of the revolutionary struggle. But the question that immediately becomes apparent in this context is whether Lenin was aware of the important differences between Russia and the general situation of the international character of the revolutionary process. The point is that Russia was always receptive to the possibility of revolutionary change because of the increasingly discredited character of the Tsarist government. Furthermore, the limitations of the bourgeois Provisional government meant the possibility of proletarian revolution a genuine possibility in 1917. In contrast many countries in Europe were based on stable systems of bourgeois democracy and the influence of revolutionary Marxism was often not important. Only in Germany had a large Marxist party been formed and this organisation became increasingly reformist and so opposed to the objective of proletarian revolution. Thus, the central issue in Europe was how to create influential Marxist parties, and this was a complex task given the prevailing importance and ascendency of reformism. Therefore, did Lenin actually sufficiently appreciate the problems involved in the countries of Europe in relation to the possibility to realise a successful process of revolutionary transformation? In other words, did he outline a credible counter-hegemonic strategy as Gramsci outlined. (Lenin’s ‘Left-Wing Communism, an infantile disorder’ is in his Collected Works volume 31 p21-118.) His starting point is to utilise the example of the Russian revolution and relate its relevance to the situation in Europe. But does this description of the Russian revolution sufficiently appreciate the different situations. In Europe the bourgeoisie had consolidated its rule and was able to politically and ideology dominate the system of capitalism. This meant the workers had to adapt to this situation and so this meant that it seemed that the present system was durable and could not be changed without a complex process of transformation. In contrast the Tsarist system in Russia was increasingly untenable and so revolutionary change was an increasingly possibility. However the emphasis of Lenin is on the crucial and primary importance of the principled Marxist party if change is to be realised: “Only the history of Bolshevism during the entire period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain during the most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.”(Lenin CW 31 p24) This aspect is connected to the importance of a principled strategy that is based on a understanding of the political situation and of the challenges that have to be realised if the success of the struggle against capitalism is to be realised. Or: ‘the correctness of political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct’. (CW 31 p24-25) In other words there has to develop a principled and close relationship between party and class if the possibility of the revolutionary transformation of society is to be realised. But Lenin also mentions that the workers developed the Soviet form of mass organisation in the 1905 revolution which became crucial for the success of the 1917 revolutions. Hence, he outlines that the dynamism of the workers is a crucial aspect of the possibility of the transformation of society. This implies that it is the major task of the revolutionary party to promote the development of popular organisations that will facilitate the ability of the workers to transform society. One of the types of organisation for this purpose is the trade unions, but it has been raised by some supporters of the aim of communism that they are reactionary and so cannot be supported. Lenin admits that the trade unions can become reactionary and therefore support the capitalist system, but they are mass organisations of the workers and have an important role of the defence of their conditions within capitalism and will have an importance in the realisation of the interests of the workers in the Soviet society. But unlike Luxemburg Lenin does not seem to outline a strategy by which the trade unions can become transformed from being primarily defence organisations of the workers under capitalism into the expression of the mass struggle for socialism. Luxemburg outlines the perspective of the mass strike or the development of the militancy of the workers to the point where they become a conscious popular opposition to the capitalist system. But Lenin seems to ignore the importance of this perspective and so does not indicate their possible revolutionary significance. Instead, he is content to indicate the importance of the trade unions for the workers under capitalism and in the revolutionary society of the Soviets. He is more convincing about the limitations of the ultra-left tendency within some communist parties to reject political involvement in bourgeois parliaments. He suggests that this approach does little to contribute to gaining support from the workers for the objective of socialism. Instead, it is necessary to utilise bourgeois parliaments in order to popularise the ideas of socialism within the working class. In other words, the issue is about what are the types of compromise that are principled and so do not undermine the interests of the workers, as opposed to unprincipled compromises that do undermine the possibility to realise socialism. In other words, the task is to promote the possibility for the development of class consciousness of the workers and adherence to a rigid approach in the name of principles may undermine the ability of the party to indicate to the workers the lessons of the class struggle and so in that manner reduce the credibility of a revolutionary approach because of these sectarian rigidities. Thus the Communist party of Britain should not oppose the formation of a Labour government led by opportunists like Henderson and Snowdon, but instead they should support its establishment so that the process of criticism of the role of reformism can become more effective.(Lenin CW 31 p84-86) But unfortunately Lenin does not explain how a small revolutionary organisation like the British communist party can become effective in criticising a Labour government and so overcoming the influence of reformism. Instead there seems to be the assumption that this approach will be successful: He comments: “If we are a party of the revolutionary class and not merely a revolutionary group, and if we want the masses to follow us….we must first help Henderson or Snowdon to beat Lloyd George….second, we must help the majority of the working class by their own experience that we are right, i.e., that the Hendersons and Snowdon’s are good for nothing…..when on the basis of the disappointment of the workers in the Henderson’s it will be possible, with serious chances of success, to overthrow the government of the Henderson’s at once….”(p85-86) This perspective underestimates the complexity of the situation and the extent of the influence of reformism within the British working class. The actual political developments indicated that the small communist party was not able to become a viable revolutionary alternative to the Labour party and instead the influence of reformism remained dominant within the working class. In other words, the communist party was never able to develop itself as a credible alternative to the Labour party because of the loyalty of the workers to this organisation despite its failure to introduce measures of reform until the 1945 administration. Thus, the workers considered that the Labour party was their organisation despite its political limitations and failure to become an effective alternative to the Conservatives in the period before 1945. Hence Lenin underestimates the complexities involved in the possibility of the Communists becoming a genuine alternative to the Labour party. This organisation remained small and increasingly became characterised by its loyalty to the Soviet Union rather than being the expression of the promotion of a valid programme of change. Lenin did not recognise the complex challenges that the Communist party would have in becoming an alternative to the Labour party. Primarily he did not understand that its small size and related lack of political influence would always mean that the Labour party would continue to express the aspirations of the workers despite its frequent failures in government. Hence these failures did not result in increased support for the Communist party as Lenin predicted. But primarily his approach was problematical because he ignored the important relationship of the Independent Labour party to the Labour party. The actual aim of the Communists should have been to promote the possibility of the ILP to try and transform the character of the Labour party in a radical manner. The failure of the ILP in this regard consolidated the increasingly opportunist character of the Labour party in the 1920’s and 1930’s. But the Communist party and the ILP never established a principled relationship which could have developed the possibility to provide the justification for the transformation of the Labour party in a radical manner. Instead, the influence of the trade union leadership meant that the Labour party remained a radical and opportunist organisation. This development was not inevitable but was instead related to the political limitations of the ILP and the Communist party. However, Lenin seems to suggest that a flexible approach of the Communists with regards to the Labour party will somehow increase the influence of the revolutionary party with the working class: “At present, British communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call on them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing” (Lenin CW 31 p88) But this possibility does not necessarily result in increased support for the Communists. Instead, the workers could conclude that it is more logical to support the Labour party and reject the alternative approach of the Communists. The issue that Lenin is not consistently addressing is how to indicate the relevance of the British communists in a situation of the domination of the Labour party within the working class. It would seem logical to support the Labour party as an expression of the possibility of social reforms and progress for the workers rather than to align with the Communists and the presumably more abstract perspective of revolutionary change. In other words, Lenin has not indicated the relevance of the Communists in this situation of the domination of the influence of the Labour party within the working class. The problems of Lenin’s approach mean’s that he can only suggest that the probable failure of the Labour government will increase support for the Communists. But this development did not occur because instead workers disaffected with Labour governments tended to support the Conservative political alternative because of their credible political character. The point was that the Communists never established a popular mass base that could mean that they could represent themselves as a genuine alternative to the Labour party. Indeed, this was the issue that Lenin should have addressed in a more detailed manner rather than exaggerate the influence of the Communists within the working class. Furthermore, he should have been concerned with how to promote the ability of the ILP to become a genuine alternative to the reformist politics of the leadership of the Labour party. However, despite the limitations in the approach of Lenin he does advocate the correct tactic that the British Communist party should attempt to join the Labour party. He is aware that this development could result in the increased influence of the Communist party within the working class. But what is not apparent is what programme should the Communists promote within the Labour party? How can they essentially be loyal members of the Labour party and still advocate a revolutionary approach? Lenin does not seem to address this issue in a detailed manner and instead only assumes that the British communists will act in a principled manner. But in an important sense it is necessary that the communists should advocate a programme for the Labour government to attempt to implement when in office. This programme of action would be important in terms of increasing the influence of the Communists within the working class. However, Lenin does not seem to be interested in this question and instead emphasises reasons to reject the approach of various ultra-left influences within the working class which absolutely reject the affiliation of the Communists to the Labour party. Hence the approach of Lenin is about how to connect revolutionary principles to a pragmatic flexibility concerning the relationship of the Communists to the Labour party. He makes many useful comments in this context but his advice in relation to the programme that should be adopted by the British communists is vague and not elaborated in any important detail. Instead, his standpoint is based on the dogmatic assumption that the limitations of a Labour government should automatically result in increased influence for the Communists. Therefore, the Communists should be concerned with develop a strategy concerned with the role and programme of the Labour party. This is useful advice, but it is questionable whether the British communists consistently developed this perspective consistently in the period between 1920-45. Instead, there approach vacillated between sectarianism and opportunism in relation to the role of the Labour party.

A major controversy developed within the Soviet Communist party about the role of the trade unions. The position of Trotsky was in favour of increasing state control of the role of the trade unions. Lenin advocated the independence of the role of the trade unions, but he was against the position of the so-called workers opposition which was in favour of the development of the role of the trade unions as the expression of the principles of workers’ control. Cliff comments: “The chief defect of the Workers Opposition programme was that it lacked any concrete proposals for ending the economic impasse. Its declaration of confidence in the proletariat, when the latter was so demoralised, was no substitute for a realistic programme of action. The demand for the immediate satisfaction of worker’s needs, for equal wages for all, for free food, clothing was totally unrealistic in a situation of general economic collapse. With the proletariat demoralised and alienated from the party it was absurd to suggest that the immediate objective of this heterogenous group should be the administration of industry. To talk about an All-Russian congress of producers when most of the producers were individualistic peasants, estranged from the dictatorship of the proletariat, was wishful thinking…..In substance the policy of the Workers Opposition could be summed up in one sentence: the unionization of the state…..However, if the proletariat is small and weak, the unionization of the state is a utopian fancy. In terms of positive policies the Workers Opposition had very little to offer.”(Cliff p334) This comment is very dogmatic and refuses to discuss in a non-dogmatic manner the approach of the Workers Opposition Their approach was outlined by Alexandra Kollontai in the article: ‘The Workers Opposition (Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Writings, Allison and Busby, London 1977 p159-200) She contends that the present situation of one-man management is problematical because: “One-man management” is a product of the individualist conception of the bourgeois class. “One man-management” is in principle an unrestricted, isolated, free will of one man disconnected from the collective.”(p160) This comment does not establish the credibility of an alternative but it does indicate the problems of this approach because the principles of the importance of the participation of the workers in the organisation of the process of productive activity are being rejected in favour of this situation of the domination of the management over the organisation of economic activity. Obviously, what is being suggested is that the advice of the trade unions to the management is not considered sufficient or effective enough in order to establish the supremacy of the workers within the productive process. Instead, only the expression of the following principles will be sufficient in order to realise effective workers management of industry: “The working class and its spokesmen…. realise that the new communist aspirations can be obtained only through the collective efforts of the workers themselves. The more the masses are developed in their collective will and common thought, the quicker and more complete will be the realisation of working class aspirations, for it will create a new, homogenous, unified, perfectly arranged communist industry.”(Kollontai p160) Obviously the major objection to this perspective is that it is unrealistic and is not able to address the complex situation of the demoralisation of the working class and the decline in their social cohesion which means that they are unable to organise economic activity in an efficient manner. But Kollontai would suggest that the very answer to these problems is to create a situation in which the initiative of the worker is utilised in the most effective manner in terms of their ability to organise the development of production. She contends that there is a major choice: “Yet there is everywhere one unalterable point – and this is the question: who shall develop the creative powers in the system of economic reconstruction? Shall it be purely class organs, directly connected by vital ties with the industries – that is, shall industrial unions undertake the work of reconstruction – or shall it be left to the Soviet machine which is separated from direct vital industrial activity and is mixed in its composition?”(Kollontai p162) In other words the principles of the necessity of workers management are established in terms of the view that the only alternative is to develop the domination of the role of the Soviet state over the producers in the organisation of the economy. However, this perspective does not establish the capacity of the workers to organise the economy in terms of the expression of their objectives and interests. The point that Lenin would make is that the previous attempts to establish the importance of workers management in terms of the role of the factory committees and trade unions has been a failure. Therefore, the approach of Kollontai seems to ignore the importance of this experience and instead assumes in a dogmatic manner that the workers have the inherent capacity to be able to organise production. But if this was actual situation why would Lenin and the government deny the possibility to allow the role of workers management of production? Kollontai suggests that Lenin and the Bolshevik government have accommodated to an elitist ideology that suggests that only the bourgeois specialists can be the most effective organisers of the process of production. But this reactionary perspective means that the creative role of the workers as the expression of the major organisers of the process of production is being rejected. It is necessary for the party to reject its elitism and instead: “Through the creative powers of the rising class, in the form of the industrial unions, we shall go forward towards reconstruction and the development of the creative forces of the country; towards purification of the party itself from elements foreign to it; towards correction of the activity of the party by going back to democracy, freedom of opinion, and criticism inside the party.”(Kollontai p172) But the problem with this approach is that whilst the ideal premises of the basis for transition to socialism are being outlined, what is not established is the complexity of the conditions that has made the introduction of the bourgeois specialists in the organisation of the economy a necessity. However, Kollontai has established the ideal conditions of the development of an economy that is aiming to realise socialism, which is the necessity of the realisation of effective workers management. The point has been established is that the continued supremacy of the role of the bourgeois specialists can only undermine the realisation of this objective. However, what this means given the important problems of economic organisation and development is that the bourgeois specialists should be under the supervision of organs of workers control. Hence there are two one sided perspectives. The Bolshevik government seems to be suggesting that the workers and their trade unions should essentially obey the bourgeois specialists, whilst the opposition calls for workers management and seems to deny the importance of the role of the managerial experts. Kollontai seems to be right to suggest that the trade unions as organisations of the workers should have the primary role in the organisation of production, but this task should be based on their supervision of the bourgeois specialists. Indeed, Kollontai does not deny the importance of the role of bourgeois specialists but she makes the point that: “No specialist or technician imbued with the routine of the capitalist system of production can ever introduce any new creative motive and vitalising innovation into the fields of labour organisation, in creating and adjusting a communist economy. Here the function belongs to the workers collectives.” (Kollontai p186) The trade unions as the expression of the role of the working class are the logical and necessary instrument of the possibility to develop an effective form of workers management of the economy and in that manner develop the creative capacities to organise and enhance the generation of production. Only workers management is the basis of the generation of the initiative and self-activity of the workers as producers and so in that manner facilitate the creation of the most effective and efficient form of economy. Hence the issue is a choice between: “Instead of a system of bureaucracy the Workers Opposition proposes a system of self-activity for the masses.” (Kollontai p200) It could be argued that this approach is being very optimistic about the possibility of the development of workers management in a situation of acute economic crisis and the related necessity for the bourgeois specialists for the organisation of production. However, the point is that Kollontai and the Workers Opposition have established the most credible conception of a process of participatory socialism based on the primary involvement of the workers in the organisation of production. Hence it is necessary for the Bolshevik leaders to respond to this perspective in a principled manner. They have to indicate that their alternative approach is the most credible manner in which a genuine process of the realisation of socialism can be achieved.

However, it is questionable whether Lenin is concerned in important terms with the views of the Workers Opposition. He is more concerned to address the views of Trotsky and Bukharin concerning the role of the trade unions. One of his major articles is: “The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky’s mistakes” (Lenin Collected Works volume 32 p19-42) In a vague manner Lenin criticises the tendency for bureaucratism and elitism in Trotsky’s apparent denial of the importance of the trade unions. But Lenin does not seem to outline their role in a definite manner apart from vaguely suggesting that they have a role as schools for communism. Therefore, he does not provide any systematic alternative to the views of Kollontai’s ‘Workers Opposition’. Instead, it is only assumed in a vague manner that the trade unions should cooperate with the specialists in the organisation of production. In brief terms he indicates in another article that he is opposed to industrial democracy because: “It may be read as a repudiation of dictatorship and individual authority.” (Lenin CW 32 p82) Thus he cannot envisage the practical credibility of workers management of production because it would express opposition to the authority of the bourgeois specialist. The most precise formulation in his critique of the views of Trotsky and Bukharin on the trade unions is to suggest: “On this last point, as it is presented in Trotsky’s platform pamphlet, the mistake lies in his failure to grasp that the trade unions are a school of technical and administrative management of production….They are a school of unity, solidarity and management and administration where you learn how to protect your interests.”(Lenin CW 32 p96) Therefore the more important views of the Workers Opposition seem to have been ignored. Lenin’s essential and problematical assumption is that the trade unions should learn from the bourgeois specialists how to organise and administer production. They are still considered to have a subordinate role within the economy. In this implicit manner the views of the Workers Opposition are considered to be idealist and unrealistic. There is no suggestion by Lenin that workers control of production is a possibility. All that Lenin indicates in very brief terms at the tenth congress of the Russian Communist Party is that: ‘As for the syndicalist deviation – it is ridiculous’ (Lenin CW 32 p212) This apparently arrogant dismissal of the Workers Opposition makes no serious attempt to discuss their ideas about workers management of the economy. But their ideas are actually vindicated because the failure to develop the importance of workers control of the economy resulted in the ultimate development of bureaucratic control by the state and the managers of the various enterprises. It could be argued that workers control was not realistic, but the point is that this approach was not seriously promoted. There was generally the acceptance of the trade unions as secondary organisations who were expected to accept the imperatives imposed by the management of the various enterprises. Increasingly the conception of the continuing character of the workers state was reduced to the elitist notion of the primary importance of the role of the party within the soviets. It could be argued that workers control was not a feasible possibility in the adverse circumstances of the period 1918-20. But the point was that there was no attempt to realise a process of advance towards the development of this aim in this period. Instead, it became an influential assumption that the bourgeois specialists should have the dominant role within the economy. In this manner it could not be suggested that a genuine worker’s state was being created. Instead, there was a degenerated worker’s state in which the party ruled on behalf of the working class.

Cliff considers that Lenin was right to reject the approach of the Workers Opposition: “The chief defeat of the Workers Opposition programme was that it lacked any concrete proposals for ending the economic impasse. Its declaration of confidence in the proletariat when the latter was demoralised, was no substitute for a realistic programme of action. The demand for the immediate satisfaction of worker’s needs, for equal wages for all, for free food, clothing, etc, was totally unrealistic in a situation of general economic collapse. With the proletariat demoralised and alienated from the party, it was absurd to suggest the immediate objective of this heterogenous group should be the administration of industry……In substance the policy the Workers Opposition advocated could be summed up in one sentence: the unionization of the state…..However, if the proletariat is small and weak, the unionization of the state is a utopian fancy. In terms of positive policy, the Workers Opposition had very little to offer.” (Cliff p334) This dismissive view does not accept the possibility for the Workers Opposition to be able to relate their perspective to the empirical complexity of the situation. They were not complacent about the various difficulties of the adverse social conditions but instead were outlining that these problems should not become the justification of the denial of the necessity to develop the approach of workers control of industry. They had the confidence that the initiative of the workers, with the guidance of the role of the party, could be the basis of the possibility to begin to resolve the problems of the acute economic situation. In contrast Cliff seems to indicate a pessimistic view that relates to the apparent elitism of the Bolsheviks in terms of their rejection of the feasibility of workers control of production. Furthermore, the Workers Opposition was not necessarily rejecting the role of the bourgeois specialist but rather that they should be under the supervision of the trade unions. However, this flexible approach was rejected because the primary role of the party became the defining aspect of the character of the economic and political system.

However, Cliff maintains that Lenin’s position on the trade unions was both flexible and principled: “A balance must be struck between the role of the unions in production and consumption. They should not be turned into appendages of the state. They should retain a measure of autonomy, so as to be able to speak for the workers if need be against the state.” (Cliff p332-333) But this interpretation is problematical because as outlined the actual approach of Lenin was to justify the subordination of the unions to the role of the bourgeois specialists. Hence Lenin comments: “The… point is that “industrial democracy” is a term that lends itself to misinterpretation. It may be read as a repudiation of dictatorship and individual authority.” (Lenin CW 32 p82) In other words the approach of workers control by the trade unions is problematical unless this aspect is essentially subordinated to the authority of the role of the bourgeois specialists. What Lenin seemed to be suggesting is that the role of workers control was actually problematical because it was based on an apparent elevation of the principles of democracy as being primary instead of the authority of management. Bu this is a caricature of this approach because the point is that workers control represented a type of democratic authority that could express the possibility to organise production in terms of the genuine participation of the workers. Lenin apparently could not envisage any merits to this prospect because he could not envisage any feasible alternative to the role of the management of the bourgeois specialists. But in actuality there was a development which was not essentially anticipated by any of the various positions which was that the trade unions would become important advisors of the bourgeois specialists. In that manner the workers did have an involvement in the development of production. Hence ultimately the elitist view of Lenin nor the approach of the Workers Opposition was primarily confirmed by the complex empirical developments. Ultimately the problem became the centralised control of the state apparatus over the economy which undermined the possibility to genuinely realise the initiative of either the trade unions or the role of the bourgeois specialists. Indeed, Cliff concludes that the debate about the trade unions was increasingly irrelevant because of the difficulties of the economy: “The discussion on the role of the trade unions proved irrelevant in practice to the search for new economic policies.” (Cliff p335) But this view is not accurate because what was established was a precedent which was that an elite, either locally or nationally, should be the basis of the organisation of the economy. The principles of popular worker administration of production were rejected as being not feasible. This perspective represented one of the most important of the errors made by Lenin, even if it was understandable given the complex character of a situation of general economic crisis. Cliff refers to the increasing discontent within society in this period of the end of the civil war. He considers that this was because of the serious economic situation and does not relate it to the civil war. But it could be argued that this discontent was because of the increasing domination of the party over society and the lack of the possibility for the workers to influence the development of society. Possibly the genuine realisation of workers control within the economy could have contributed to the continuation of the relations of party and class. Instead, the workers were essentially discontented by the bureaucratisation of society.

Lenin elaborates his views on the Workers Opposition at the tenth party congress in the resolution on the ‘syndicalist and anarchist deviation in our party’. In this resolution it is argued that: “Marxism teaches….that only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist party is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass and the inevitable traditions and relapses of narrow craft unionism or craft prejudices of the proletariat, and of guiding all the united activities of the whole of the proletariat, i.e., of leading it politically and through it, the whole mass of the working people. Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible.” (Lenin CW 32 p246) In other words workers management of the economy is not feasible because it apparently undermines the principles and expression of the primary role of the party to be the vanguard of the workers and in that manner to be the primary agency of the organisation of society. Therefore the conclusion that is outlined is that the important and hegemonic role of the party in the process of the organisation of society is being denied by the apparent syndicalist tendency of Kollontai: “Thus the leading educational and organising role of the party in relation to the trade unions of the proletariat, and of the latter to the semi-petty-bourgeois and even wholly petty-bourgeois masses of working people is completely evaded and eliminated and instead of continuing and correcting the practical work of building new forms of economy already begun by the Soviet state, we get petty-bourgeois-anarchist disruption of this work, which can only lead to the triumph of bourgeois counter-revolution.”(Lenin CW 32 p247) But this criticism does not seriously discuss the actual views of the supporters of workers management in any systematic manner. Instead, all that is outlined is the possible reactionary logic of this standpoint. All that has been indicated is that Lenin’s opposes this aim of workers management because he considers that in some unspecified manner that it will undermine the hegemonic role of the revolutionary party within society. But it could be argued that the possibility of the success of workers management will actually upheld and strengthen the credibility of the party and indicate the superiority of its aim of socialism. Therefore, only in a dogmatic manner can Lenin contend that workers management is somehow opposed to the interests of the role of the revolutionary party. He has not discussed in a serious manner the possible limitations of the approach of workers management. It could be argued that in terms of actual experience the attempt to realise workers control of either the factory committees or the trade unions was a failure. But this development was because of the adverse conditions, but the introduction of the New Economic Policy (to be discussed below) the possibility for a situation of stability could have meant that workers control becoming a feasibility. However, this very possibility was rejected because of the association of this approach with the apparent unacceptable views of the Workers Opposition.

However, the party proved to be flexible in terms of the introduction of the New Economic Policy which enabled the peasants to trade their products. Cliff cannot recognise the necessity of the NEP. Instead, it is an approach which by increasing the ability of the peasants to trade can essentially be of benefit to the rich peasants. Hence he seems to ignore the apparent fact that this situation increased the food that became available to the workers. He defines the views of Lenin about the NEP in the following terms: “For Lenin, NEP did not mean only co-operation between the state sector of the economy and the private sector, but above all competition and struggle between them. Co-operation and struggle were dialectically united: the state should restrict the private sector while protecting and expanding the state sector and not the other way round. The planned state sector should seek to expand and achieve greater control over its rival, the commodity producing private sector, whilst the latter would naturally resist the incursion and strive for more or less normal ‘free’ market production. Lenin saw in NEP a …struggle between capitalism and communism.” (Cliff p351-352) However it could be suggested that this view of Cliff is quite dogmatic. At the tenth party congress of the Russian Communist party Lenin outlines how the necessity of the NEP has become crucial in order to establish genuine economic relations between the Soviet state and the peasants. He accepts that the peasants have become disgruntled under the situation of war communism and so an alternative has to be established. This is expressed by the ability of the peasants to engage in trade. However, there is a problem which is that the Soviet economy presently has nothing to exchange with the peasants, but this issue can temporarily be resolved by the utilisation of the gold available to the Soviet economy in order to obtain products from the West. Lenin indicates that the previous economic approach was flawed by its coercive character: “The peasants want to be shown in practice that the worker who controls the mills and factories – industry – is capable of organising exchange with the peasantry. And, on the other hand, the vastness of our agricultural country with its poor transport system, boundless expanses, varying climate, diverse farming conditions, etc, makes a certain freedom of exchange between local agriculture and local industry, on a local scale, inevitable. In this respect we are very much to blame for having gone too far, we overdid the nationalisation of industry and trade, clamping down on the local exchange of commodities. Was this a mistake? It certainly was.” (Lenin CW 32 p219) Hence it is admitted that there were important problems with war communism and so the standpoint of the NEP would have been a more logical and practical form of economic policy. It is implied that this approach would have been more feasible in the encouragement of the peasants to supply goods to the state. Indeed, this point is emphasised when Lenin also comments that: “But at the same time it is an unquestionable fact that we went further than was theoretically and practically necessary, and this should not be concealed in our agitation and propaganda. We can allow free local exchange to an appreciable extent, without destroying but actually strengthening the political power of the proletariat. How this is to be done, practice will show. I only wish to prove to you that theoretically it is conceivable. The proletariat, wielding state power, can if it has any reserves at all, put them into circulation and thereby satisfy the middle peasant to a certain extent on the basis of local economic exchange.” (Lenin CW 32 p220) He rejects the view that this approach can only facilitate the increased influence of the kulaks and instead it will essentially result in the development of the role of the middle peasant: “The exchange is an incentive, a spur to the peasant. The proprietor will surely make an effort in his own interest when he knows that all his surplus produce will not be taken away from him and that he will only have to pay a tax, which should whenever possible be fixed in advance. The basic thing is to give the small farmer an incentive and spur to toil the soil. We must adapt our state economy to the economy of the middle peasant, which we have not manged to remake in three years, and will not be able to remake in another ten.” (Lenin CW 32 p226-227) Thus it is being suggested that the only credible manner in which relations between the workers and peasants can be developed is to provide the peasants with incentives for them to produce goods for exchange or a credible price. Hence the actual period of the effective coercion of the peasants has only resulted in their discontent and related rejection of the economic objectives of the Soviet state. In other words, it is necessary to provide effective incentives for the peasants to engage in trade with the state and in that manner develop the economic relations of the proletariat and peasantry. Therefore, it is admitted that the coercive and bureaucratic character of war communism was essentially a serious mistake. In other words, the approach of war communism had to be replaced by the more valid approach of the NEP, which it seems to be suggested is the basis of the long-term character of how the development of socialism is to be advanced and ultimately realised.

Thus, the very character of the agricultural system which is increasingly based on the role of the middle peasant, who has replaced in importance the kulak, means that it is possible to establish more equitable relations between the Soviet state and the peasantry. Furthermore the overall ascendency of the Soviet state means that it is possible to allow forms of capitalist economic activity: “Growing capitalism will be under control and supervision, while political power will remain under the hands of the workers state.”(CW32 p298) Therefore the is not necessary to be concerned about the development of capitalism under the context of the NEP: “Commodity exchange and freedom of trade inevitably imply the appearance of capitalists and capitalist relationships. There is no reason to fear this. The workers state has enough resources to keep within the proper bounds and control these relationships, which are useful and necessary in conditions of small-scale production.”(CW32 p385) In other words given the increased importance of the middle peasant, combined with the importance of the economic and political supremacy of the Soviet state, it is possible to ensure that the development of forms of capitalist economic activity are kept within the limitations of the aims of the promotion of socialism. In this manner commodity exchange can actually be encouraged because its character is defined by the objectives of the interests of the workers and peasants and so in that manner something that seems to have a primarily capitalist character can actually be modified and transformed to realise the aim of the advance of progress towards the realisation of socialism. The supply of food to the cities in terms of the role of the NEP can only be to the mutual benefit of the workers and peasants. However Lenin also contends that the character of the workers and peasant is different and so the workers cannot be allowed individual freedom of trade: “These workers say, in fact: the peasant is being favoured, he has been relieved of surplus-grain appropriation, he is allowed his grain surplus for the purpose of exchange; we workers at the bench want the same thing.”(Lenin CW 32 p409) Lenin is correctly aware that the ability of the workers to trade the products they create can only undermine the cooperative character of industrial production, but he does not seem to recognise that the ability to resolve this type of discontent would be resolved in terms of making progress towards the realisation of genuine workers control of production. Lenin is aware that the present situation of economic hardship has led the workers to engage in individual trade of goods, but he has no feasible approach as to how this situation could be changed. However, in a partial sense he understands that the situation can be improved by encouraging the peasants to engage in trade. Thus, the supply of food to the cities would enable the workers to be engaged in production in a more effective manner. But he does not seem to recognise that the only ultimate policy to improve the situation within industry is to generate the development of a system of effective workers management of production.

In other words, Lenin has related his approach to the challenges of social reality with the recognition of the necessity to provide incentives for the peasants to produce for the cities. However, this understanding is not connected to the recognition that the workers would become increasingly motivated to produce more efficiently if they were able to organise and manage the process of production in a more democratic manner. Thus, Lenin has understood the necessity to relate economic policy to the aspirations of the peasants, but paradoxical he has not recognised the importance of this principle in relation to the role of the workers. This contradiction means that the issue of the apparent divergence of the interests of the workers and peasants has not been resolved. Instead, it seems to the workers that the peasants have acquired an ascendency in the economic situation. This issue was ultimately to be resolved in a bureaucratic manner by Stalin’s collectivisation of agriculture. However, the possibility to develop an economy based on participatory socialism was never realised because of the Initial rejection by the Bolsheviks of the views of the Workers opposition. What was necessary was to combine workers management of the economy with the approach of the NEP. But such a combined approach was never developed.

Lenin summarises the approach of the NEP in his article: “The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political education departments” (Collected Works 33 p60-78) Lenin outlines how the possibility of a direct process of transition to communism is not possible or feasible under the conditions prevailing in Russia. Instead, it is necessary to relate to the interests of the peasants and this means that the aim of socialism has to be connected to this aspect. It has not been possible to achieve a direct and short-term perspective of transition to communism. Instead: “The state must learn to trade in such a way that is satisfies the needs of the peasantry, so that the peasantry may satisfy their needs by means of trade.” (Lenin CW33 p72) Therefore all aspects of the tendency to resort to methods of domination in relation to the peasants have to be replaced with the approach of the role of consent. In other words, all attempts to try and realise socialism in an immediate manner proved to be a failure. This point is made in another report when Lenin comments: “BY the spring of 1921 it became evident that we had suffered defeat in our attempt to introduce the socialist principles of production and distribution by “direct assault”, i.e., in the shortest, quickest and most direct way. The political situation in the spring of 1921 revealed to us that on a number of economic issues a retreat to the position of state capitalism, the substitution of “siege” tactics for “direct assault” was inevitable.”(Lenin CW 33 p93) In other words the short-term possibility of transition to socialism proved to be impractical and instead the retreat to the adoption of the NEP was an expression of the understanding that the aim of socialist change would be a more long-term and complex and protracted process. The present situation can be defined as a type of state capitalism which is the expression of the role of forms of capitalism that are under the supervision of the role of the proletarian state. In the manner of this retreat the economic conditions are being created for an advance to socialism in the long-term. However, the problem is that this development is not being connected to the role of workers management of production. Instead, the importance of trade under the NEP conditions is based on the dominating supervisory role of the bourgeois specialists within industry. Thus, the problem is that the character of industry is based on the subordination of the workers within the relations of production, but this can only mean that the imperatives of the process of production are not based on the influence of the industrial producers and instead are defined by the objectives established by the bourgeois specialists. In other words, whilst the NEP is the only feasible approach it does have its limitations.

Lenin tries to address these issues in his article: “The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy” (CW33 p184-198) He comments: “In particular, a free market and capitalism, both subject to state control, are now being permitted and are developing; on the other hand the socialist state enterprises are now being put on a profit basis, i.e., they are being reorganised on commercial lines, which in view of the general cultural backwardness and exhaustion of the country, will to a greater or lesser degree, inevitably give rise to the impression among the masses that there is an antagonism of interest between the management of the different enterprises and the workers employed in them.”(Lenin CW33 p184-185) Indeed Lenin defines this contradiction as the different interests of capital and labour that have emerged in the period of the NEP. In this context of the increasing importance of the profit motive in the organisation and character of the various industrial enterprises the trade unions have an important role in the defence of the interests of the workers: “The transfer of state enterprises to the so-called profit basis is inevitably and inseparably connected with the New Economic Policy; in the near future this is bound to become the predominant, if not the sole, form of state enterprise. In actual fact, this means that with the free market now permitted and developing the state enterprises will be put on a commercial basis. In view of the urgent need to increase the productivity of labour and make every state enterprise pay its way and show a profit…. this circumstance is bound to create a conflict of interests in matters concerning labour conditions between the masses of workers and the directors and managers of the state enterprises, or the government departments in charge of them. Therefore, as regards the socialised enterprises, it is undoubtedly the duty of the trade unions to protect the interests of the working people, to facilitate as far as possible the improvement of their standard of living, and constantly to correct the blunders and excesses of business organisations resulting from bureaucratic distortions of the state apparatus.” (Lenin CW 33 p185-186) But what does this mean in practice? To what extent should the trade unions act to defend the workers as opposed to the management of the enterprise that has been appointed by the Soviet state. Lenin’s answer is that in the economic and political conditions of the workers state the trade union role is that of a conciliator between the workers and managers. He seems to suggest that strikes would not be an appropriate approach for the defence of the workers interests: “Hence, when frictions and disputes arise between individual contingents of the working class and individual departments and organs of the workers state, the task of the trade unions is to facilitate the speediest and smoothest settlement of these disputes to the maximum advantage of the groups of workers they represent, taking care, however, not to prejudice the interests of other groups of workers and the development of the workers state and its economy as a whole; for only this development can lay the material and cultural welfare of the working class. The only correct, sound and expedient method of removing friction and of settling disputes between individual contingents of the working class and the organs of the workers state is for the trade unions to act as mediators, and through their competent bodies either to enter into negotiations with the competent business organisations on the basis of precise demands and proposals formulated by both sides, or appeal to higher state bodies.”(Lenin CW 33 p187) But Lenin does not seem to acknowledge that the development of workers control would be the most effective manner to resolve any grievances of the workers because only in that situation would the workers consider that the given enterprise was an expression of their interests. Instead, he still considers the situation in terms of opposing interests of workers and management. Indeed, he considers that what is necessary is the essential domination of the management over the workplace which he defines in the following terms: “The factory management, usually built up on the principle of one-man responsibility, must have the authority independently to fix and pay out wages, and also distribute rations, working clothes and other supplies on the basis and within the limits of collective agreements concluded with the trade unions; it must enjoy the utmost freedom to manoeuvre, exercise strict control of the actual success in achieved in increasing production, in making the factory pay its way and in increasing profits, and carefully select the most talented and capable administrative personnel, etc.”(Lenin CW33 p189) It is accepted by Lenin that the trade unions will have role in the appointment of the managers of the various enterprises, but they will not have a direct role in the process of management. Instead, it is assumed by Lenin that the manager will have the primary responsibility and influence in the organisation of economic activity. Thus, the trade unions have defensive tasks very similar to their role under capitalism. How this situation of the effective domination of the manager within the process of production will not result in the development of antagonism between the manager and the workers is not explained by Lenin. Instead, he assumes that the trade unions will be able to resolve any issues that may arise. What is apparent is that the major issue that is not being addressed is the possible importance of the role of workers management in order to create a situation of the effective compatibility between the tasks of increasing production and the role of the workers. Without this aspect there will always be a situation of contradictory opposition between the role of the workers and management. This problem can only be resolved by the development of worker’s management, but this is the very approach that is being rejected by Lenin. Instead, he accepts the actuality of these important contradictions within the relations of production. Ultimately the trade unions act to defend the interests of the workers against any unreasonable demands of the managers. But such a situation was contradictory and not satisfactory. Ultimately it was resolved in a pragmatic manner by the trade unions becoming the expression of the interests of the managers. This meant that the workers were essentially subordinated within the relations of production. Such a situation could only be resolved by the end of the influence of the trade unions and the establishment of the domination of the managers within the relations of production. This outcome was not Lenin’s intention, but it was the logical outcome of his approach. The only alternative to this development was to realise the possibility of workers management of the economy. Such a perspective would be considered to be impractical but in actuality it was never attempted to be realised in practice. But the results of the domination of the managers could only be the subordination of the workers within the relations of production. This was not Lenin’s intention, but it was the outcome of his approach. He considered that the managers could act in relation to realising the interests of the workers but such a possibility could only be realised if the managers were genuinely accountable to the role of the trade unions. But instead of this possibility the trade unions effectively had to implement the decisions made by the managers. They had a subordinate role within the process of production. Ultimately this situation would result in the exploitation of the workers within the relations of production. Cliff describes this situation in the following manner: “Any threat by the workers to strike in order to draw attention to grievances was treated as a breach of trade union discipline and punished by exclusion of those responsible from the union which meat automatic dismissal from the factory and inability to obtain another job. In practice, therefore, the trade union representatives and factory committees tended to find themselves cooperating with the managers and the police to maintain discipline among the workers, to prevent strikes and to suppress disturbances.” (Cliff p358) However the problem of the approach of Cliff is that whilst he indicates important problems with the situation of the subordination of the workers to the management he does not outline what could be the possible alternative. Hence, he does not outline the feasibility of workers management of industry as the alternative to the problems created by the autocratic control of the enterprises by their individual managers. It could be argued that the workers lack the knowledge and ability to be able to organise the enterprises in an efficient manager, but this aspect is not a credible argument against workers management but instead indicates the necessity of the role of the advice of the bourgeois specialist. However, it is a problematical situation when the bourgeois specialists dominate the process of production and so dictate to the workers about how they should organise economic activity. But it has to be questionable whether this aspect is an expression of efficiency given the alienation of the workers created by this situation of the re-emergence of hierarchy within the process of production. Instead, what has been consolidated is the possibility for the development of new forms of exploitation of the workers by the managers in relation to the objectives of the Soviet state.

However, the emphasis of Lenin is about the possibility of the success of the NEP. At the eleventh congress of the Russian Communist party, he comments: “Shall we accomplish our immediate task or not? Is this NEP fit for anything or not? If the retreat turns out to be correct tactics, we must link up with the peasant masses while we are in retreat, and subsequently march forward with them a hundred times more slowly, but firmly and unswervingly, in a way that we are really marching forward. Then our cause will be absolutely invincible, and no power on earth can vanish us.” (Lenin CW33 p271) It is interesting that Lenin indicates in a convincing manner that the issue is how to obtain the genuine support of the peasants for the economic aims of the Soviet state. He outlines that the revival of private capitalism has created a problem for the Soviet economy and so the undermining of this development is one of the major challenges for the government. He suggests in a vague manner that what is required is the approach of state capitalism but is unclear about what this precisely represents: “State capitalism is capitalism that we must confine within certain bounds; but we have not yet learnt to confine it within those bounds. That is the whole point. And it rests with us to determine what this state capitalism is to be.”(Lenin CW 33 p279) However in a pessimistic and ambiguous manner he also contends that the proletarian state seems to lack the capacity to be able to organise the economy according to socialist principles: “We have sufficient, quite sufficient political power, we also have sufficient economic resources at our command, but the vanguard of the working class which has been brought to the forefront to directly supervise, to determine the boundaries, to demarcate, to subordinate and be subordinated itself, lacks sufficient ability for it. All that is needed is ability, and that is what we do not have.” (Lenin CW 33 p279) This pessimistic conclusion seems to express a problem of perspectives and upholds the view that the Soviet state lacks the capacity to be able to tackle important economic issues. But then in a contradictory manner he also contends that the Soviet state has the ability to make economic progress based on the importance of the development of the proletariat-peasant alliance. He comments: “We possess political power; we possess a host of economic weapons. If we beat capitalism and create a link with peasant farming we shall become an absolute invincible power. Then the building of socialism will not be the task of that drop in the ocean, called the Communist party, but the task of the entire mass of the working people. Then the rank and file peasants will see that we are helping them and they will follow our lead.” (Lenin CW 33 p285) In other words the approach of Lenin vacillates between ambiguity and confidence about the possibility of the Soviet state establishing a credible alliance of the workers and peasants. But there is the general understanding that in terms of the role of the NEP the most important task is to establish the cooperation of the peasants for the realisation of the economic objectives of the Soviet government. However, he raises important issues about whether the Communists have the culture to facilitate the organisation of a genuinely socialist economy and society: “The economic power in the hands of the proletarian state is quite adequate to ensure the transition to communism. What then is lacking? Obviously, what is lacking is culture among the stratum of Communists who perform administrative functions.” (Lenin CW 33 p288) He suggests that the basis to overcome this problem is to establish effective relations with the role of peasant farming, but this important aspect is not connected with any recognition of the necessity to develop the role and principles of workers management of the economy. The point is that bureaucratic elitism is connected to the privileged role of the party in the organisation of the economy, and so this issue could be tackled in the most effective manner by the promotion of the importance of workers management. Instead, the perspective is that satisfactory organisation of the economy is based on the supply of the necessary industrial goods in exchange for the products of the peasants. (Lenin CW33 p290) There is no mention that the most efficient manner in which this possibility could be established would be as a result of the development of workers management of industry.

Lenin’s perspectives that he outlined in 1923 are expressed in his articles ‘Our Revolution’ and his ‘How We Should Reorganise the Workers and Peasants Inspection’. (CW 33) He replies to the view that Russia does not have the economic, political and cultural aspects necessary to develop a socialist type of society. He comments: “What if the complete hopelessness of the situation, by stimulating the efforts of the workers and peasants tenfold, offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilisation in a different way from that of the West European countries? Has that altered the basic relations between the basic classes of all the countries that are being, or have been drawn into the general course of world history?” (Lenin CW 33 p478) In other words the issue of socialism in one country is raised as a possibility, but Lenin does not definitively support this perspective. Instead, the developments of the international class struggle can only establish whether socialism in one country becomes a practical necessity. But the obvious preference of Lenin is still for the development of international revolution in order to create the most favourable conditions for the realisation of socialism in Russia. Instead of outlining a definitive conclusion he outlines the possibility of socialism in one country in terms of the aspect of a question: “If a definite level of culture is required for the building of socialism (although nobody can say what that definite “level of culture” is, for it differs in every Western European country), why cannot we first begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of culture in a revolutionary way, and then with the aid of the workers and peasants government and the Soviet system proceed to overtake the other nations?”(Lenin CW 33 p478-479) The fact that Lenin outlined the possibility of socialism in one country in terms of a question and related possibility, but not inevitability, indicated that his position was flexible and was related to the actual development of the international class struggle. We can assume that Lenin’s preference was for an international expression of the development of socialism because that possibility would represent the most favourable conditions for the establishment of a socialist society in Russia. But he also did not seem to deny the possibility and credibility of a national expression of the development of socialism. Hence his approach is not that of ‘socialism in one country’ because that is not his perspective and instead he still emphasises the importance of international revolution as the most effective manner in which socialism can be realised. However, he does not deny the validity and feasibility of socialism in one country. Hence his position is not similar to that of Bukharin and Stalin, but neither does he essentially support the Left Opposition of Trotsky.

In his article: “Better Fewer, But Better” Lenin outlines the importance of developing the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate in order to tackle the role of bureaucratism within the state. (Lenin CW p487-497) But whether this organisation would have been effective in its tasks would have been debatable given the increased influence of Stalin within the state apparatus. But this approach also did not tackle the issue of the lack of the role of workers management of the economy, and the fact that the system of democracy required the re-development of a genuine form of Soviet democracy based on there-development of the competition of socialist parties. The point is that it was necessary to regenerate the role of Soviet democracy if the political system was to be genuinely accountable to the people. Instead, the formation of one-party domination meant that this type of democratic government became a questionable possibility. It would have been possible to allow the Mensheviks under the leadership of Martov and the Social Revolutionaries to contest Soviet elections. This development would not have undermined the gains of the October revolution but instead expressed its genuine popular character. But it also was necessary to develop workers management of the economy, only in this manner could it have been possible to establish a form of participatory organisation of the attempt to advance the realisation of socialism. It is argued that this approach was unrealistic, but the role of workers management would have required the role of bourgeois specialists as advisors. However, this advisory role should have not meant that the role of workers management should have been replaced by the domination of the experts, and that instead the only manner in which a genuinely pro-socialist type of economy could have been advanced would have been to develop an effective form of workers management. It has been often suggested that the workers are not able to carry out the functions of the organisation and management of production. We would reject this view and suggest that this approach is the only genuine manner in which a socialist type of economy can be developed.

In conclusion we would suggest that Cliff has written a useful study of Lenin’s politics, but his approach is problematical because of his overall uncritical approach. It is necessary to emphasise that the overall principled merits of the role of Lenin are also influenced by aspects of problematical politics such as his rigid adherence to revolutionary defeatism during world war one and the later effective rejection of the role of workers management of the economy. Lenin did not sufficiently overcome the aspect of elitism in his approach and this made the role of the Workers Opposition of Kollontai necessary and important for defending a revolutionary perspective. But on the issue of the New Economic Policy Lenin indicated his political importance by suggesting a necessary alternative to the limitations of War Communism. Therefore, Lenin was an undoubted revolutionary leader, but he sometimes justified problematical approaches which indicated the importance of the views of people Like Luxemburg, Trotsky and Bukharin. However, without Lenin it is quite obvious that it would have been more difficult to achieve the success of the October revolution. Thus, whatever his limitations he was a genuine and important leader of the struggle for proletarian revolution and the development of international socialism.