COMMUNISM AND DEMOCRACY

The issue of the relationship between communism and democracy is studied by Mike Makin-Waite in his book: “Communism and Democracy” (Lawrence and Wishart: London 2017) He suggests that orthodox communism has generally represented a progressive movement that has expressed: “Over seven decades, and in many countries, communism improved living standards and increased people’s sense of dignity, both directly and indirectly. In government they drove through programmes of modernisation, economic development and industrialisation, and they also supported people across the continents who were working for popular rights and national liberation and the overthrow of imperialist rule. Communists in power established welfare, health care and education provision at levels unavailable in other parts of the developing world. They shaped and fed a range of progressive governments, positive social movements and democratic organisations, giving hundreds of millions the vision and hope of a much better world.” (p13) In other words it is being suggested that the character of communism has ultimately been defined by what are progressive objectives whatever the problems involved in the actual practice of this political movement. The point being suggested is that the character of communism was complex and that it could be based on either the support of the aims of communism or a rejection of these objectives because of elitist priorities: “Communist approaches could take the form of sectarian self-assertion and abrupt impatience with anyone not in support of the ‘line’; but they could also mean patient alliance building, based on genuine interest in and respect for differences of perspective and values. Some communists expressed contempt for communist values and exhibited a preparedness to override them, or to spout them cynically, in bad faith, for short-term tactical reasons; others showed a strong and sustained commitment to the value of democracy, combined with a deep thoughtfulness about its real meaning.” (p14) But the aspect of the complexity of communist attitudes towards democracy was ultimately defined by the interests of the party elite that dominated in the Soviet Union. However it is argued that despite this importance of the ultimate justification of authoritarian elitism by the communist party of the Soviet Union the actual result of the practice of Marxist organisations had democratic possibilities: “In spite of this problem in communist political culture, every decade between 1917 and 1989 saw some communists seeking to ‘recover’ and reapply the democratic content and impulse at the heart of the politics. Through the popular fronts of the 1930’s, to 1968’s Prague Spring, and 1970’s Eurocommunism, the need to promote democratic values and accountability as part of a radical change kept re-emerging and coming through… It was because the construction and maintenance of democratic processes is a necessary precondition for the implementation of socialist principles.” (p21) In other words it is considered that despite important problems the world communist movement did ultimately express the aims of a popular type of democracy. Therefore, the actual opposition of the interests of various elites with the objectives of genuine democracy is being considered as being of less importance when contrasted with the effective promotion of the aims of progressive change by the various official expressions of revolutionary Marxism. The fact that various party elites could only maintain their domination by the denial of the application of the principles of democracy is considered to be of less importance than the actual supposed expression of these values by the practices of the official communist movement despite important bureaucratic limitations. But ultimately Stalinism could not justify the aims of democracy in effective terms because it was opposed to the most genuine expression of this standpoint which was expressed by the creation of genuine socialist societies. It was because the Stalinist elites were effectively against the realisation of socialism which also meant that they rejected the importance of the role of democracy as the basis to establish the political aspects of the social system. But what we have to establish is whether this development was the logical result of the supposed authoritarian character of Marxism and Leninism.

The important issue that has to be addressed is whether the Marxist aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat is a justification of a type of authoritarian elitism. Kautsky seems to have clarified the issues on this matter by suggesting that such a regime would be the ultimate result of the expression of a democratic process of election that would mean a party based on the principles of democracy would become the basis to establish the credibility of the revolutionary regime that was aspiring to realise socialism. But the events of the Russian revolution had a different character when compared to this perspective and seemed to indicate that the role of the Soviets should become the basis of the realisation of a regime that was aiming to introduce socialism. Lenin’s position was that the choice was between the supremacy of the newly elected role of the Constituent Assembly or the role of the Soviets: “His position was that the soviets represented revolutionary proletarian democracy, while the Constituent Assembly was an institution of the old kind of parliamentary democracy – a liberal and bourgeois institution – whose legitimacy could no longer hold now that the proletarian revolution had progressed so much further.”(p100) But the problem with this view was that what was posed was the rivalry of the prospect of the dominant political power of either the Bolsheviks or the Social Revolutionaries. It would require the realisation of a compromise in order to try and reconcile this situation in a democratic manner. Instead, the Constituent Assembly was effectively dissolved which led to the justification of the political supremacy of the Bolsheviks who dominated the Soviets. In order to establish a credible basis for the alliance of the workers and peasants would have meant a reconciliation of the role of the Soviets and Constituent Assembly in terms of the promotion of the formation of a government based on representatives of both institutions. The failure to realise this development led to the effective creation of a one-party regime but this meant that the principles of the expression of genuine democracy in order to sustain the government had been seriously undermined. However, in an elitist manner the Bolsheviks still represented the interests of the workers and peasants because they defended the regime against the possibility of its counter-revolutionary overthrow in the situation of civil war. In other words, these circumstances meant that it was impractical to realise genuine principles of popular democracy in order to sustain the regime because this development would have to be connected to the aspect of political compromise and the establishment of genuine consensus. Instead, the polarised situation meant the ascendency of the revolutionary regime, or a counter-revolutionary alternative was the only possibility, and this aspect was connected to the role of civil war. But what could have been developed was a situation of genuine soviet democracy in which parties contested via the role of elections in order to establish political supremacy. But this development does not seem to have been possible because of the increasing alienation of the workers concerning the objectives of the Bolsheviks: “But as many workers, in actuality, started to move away from active participation in and support for the Bolshevik, a conflict arose….. if the working class were to be allowed to speak and vote freely, they would destroy the proletarian dictatorship. But if the dictatorship were to openly abolish proletarian democracy it would deprive itself of historical legitimacy.” (p104) In other words the situation of the increasing differentiation between party and class meant that there did not seem to be any alternative to the development of the rule of the party on behalf of the class. But it also has to be indicated that the failure of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries to participate in the Soviets meant that the development of one-party rule seems to have been inevitable. Hence it was not the intention of the Bolsheviks to establish this situation and instead it was the result of unfavourable circumstances. Hence it cannot be suggested that both Marxism and Bolshevism was inherently authoritarian and opposed to the application of genuine democratic principles. Instead, one party rule was the outcome of a situation of political polarisation and the failure of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries to contemplate the possibility of the development of a coalition government with the Bolsheviks. But primarily the Bolsheviks had to respond in a pragmatic manner to a complex economic and political situation and the result was the inevitability of the development of one-party rule. It could be argued that the failure of opposition parties to contemplate the possibility of a Soviet coalition government which contributed to this development. Hence it is not credible to suggest that Bolshevism was inherently opposed to the application of genuine democratic principles. Instead, this result was the outcome of adverse economic and political circumstances.

However, it could also be suggested that it was necessary to try and re-establish a genuine democratic type of system once the situation of the polarisation of the period of the civil war was over. But instead, it was considered that the development of the one-party regime was the acceptable expression of a society aiming to create socialism. But this meant that so-called soviet democracy was defined in terms of the accepted absolute supremacy of the Bolsheviks. It was considered that the principled revolutionary objectives of the Bolsheviks were a sufficient basis for the creation of a genuine socialist regime. But this development meant that the aspect of discontent was developed within the Bolsheviks in terms of the creation of the Bukharin, Trotsky and Kamenev factions that opposed the role of the Stalin leadership. However, the ultimate tendency was for the creation and consolidation of a new authoritarian regime that meant that the system was unable to express democratic principles in any effective manner. But this meant that the objectives of revolutionary socialism became associated with authoritarian elitism. Hence it seemed that the credibility of capitalism was established by the apparent anti-democratic character of the Soviet regime. It was only possible to justify this development in terms of the dogmatic claim that Bolshevism had a unique capacity to express the interests of the workers in national and international terms. This contention became connected to the view that socialism was being successfully developed in the USSR. But it could be argued that capitalism was politically superior to this system because it was based on the effective expression of democratic principles of elections and the role of competition between parties. Also, the onset of the Stalin regime made it more difficult to suggest that a genuine revolutionary regime was being created in the Soviet Union. Only the international loyalty of the workers towards the USSR enabled the regime to uphold the view that socialism was being built in a principled manner. However, this very type of ideological defence meant that what was being argued is the view that the apparent revolutionary character of the party meant that it could create a genuine socialist society. But the major problem with this claim was that there was no credible democratic system that could provide justification of this standpoint. Instead, there was an effective absolutist and authoritarian expression of a revolutionary regime, and the formal role of Soviet elections did not seem to be able to uphold the credibility of the view that the system had effective democratic support of the people. Hence the aspect of the domination of a single party meant that it was not possible to express either political support or opposition to the regime by the people. Instead, the vague claim that the party represented the interests of the working class seemed to be sufficient in order to uphold the contention that they were able to adhere to democratic principles. But the effective end of the role of opposition parties undermined any credibility to this claim. Instead, the dominant role of the party was upheld by the aspect of authoritarian political power and this aspect seemed to be sufficient in order to ensure that it was not possible to generate opposition to the regime.

But this situation meant that the defenders of capitalism could suggest that they represented a more democratic system when compared to the socialism of the USSR. Indeed, it could be implied that there was an opposition between the domination of the revolutionary party in the USSR when compared to the competitive electoral system in Western Europe. The various communist parties internationally could only defend the role of the system in the USSR by suggesting that socialism was being created and so this development justified the supreme role of the communist party. But this very defence implied that there was a contradiction between the objective of socialism and the importance of genuine democracy. Hence the supporters of capitalism could contend that they supported a superior political system because it represented authentic democracy when compared to the system in the USSR. The only manner in which this view could be opposed by the various communist parties was to suggest that socialism was being created in the Soviet Union. In other words they had to evade the issue of the apparent lack of democracy in the USSR.

But it could be argued that the most important problem of the communist parties in Western Europe was that they ignored the significance of the political system of bourgeois democracy and instead often advocated ultra-left perspectives of change that were not connected to the defensive challenges of the political situation. However, the authoritarian success of fascism in Germany and Italy meant that the communists had to recognise the importance of the defensive task of defending bourgeois democracy against the authoritarian attempt to replace this type of political system with the role of a reactionary state. This meant the utilisation of a popular front approach from the mid 1930’s: “Communists would now follow a new political formula: they would be democrats, genuinely aligned with all other democrats against the fascists. Communists now once more sought to harness a commitment to democracy to a commitment to replace capitalism, rather than seeing democracy as a bourgeois diversion from that goal.” (p146) But this approach ultimately meant that the task of defending bourgeois democracy became more important than the realisation of the aim of attempting to overcome the domination of capitalism. It is argued by Makin-Waite that there was no contradiction between the defence of bourgeois democracy and the attempt to realise socialism and he contends that: “Making the revolutionary party the best defender of bourgeois democracy would be a base of future progress.”(p146) But in actuality the support for bourgeois democracy became a pretext to reject the necessity of revolutionary struggle to overcome capitalism as indicated by the role of the communist parties in France and Spain between 1936-39. The aim of upholding a popular front approach of defending coalition reformist governments replaced the objective of the attempt to promote the possibility of the realisation of revolutionary transformation of society. Hence the communist parties actually opposed the attempt of the workers in countries like France and Spain to transform militant struggles into a conscious attempt to overcome the domination of capitalism. Hence the principles of democracy became contrasted to the importance of developing militant struggles for revolutionary change. In contrast the Bolsheviks had connected the aspect of democracy to the role of workers soviets and so this meant that there was an advocacy of a perspective of revolutionary change in these terms. Instead of this principled approach the Stalinists utilised the role of democracy in order to uphold the continuation of a system based on capitalism, and so this meant that democracy was connected to the aim of the modification of society rather than trying to advance the prospect of revolutionary change. However, this opportunist standpoint is defended as being an expression of the importance of the development of a strategy to oppose fascism: “This popular front approach was a re-centring, if not a fundamental re-founding of the communist movement. It was now a key tenet that communism needed to incorporate democracy in order to counter fascism, and to pre-empt further reactionary backlashes to the rising power of the working class. Making the revolutionary party the best defender of bourgeois democracy would be a base for further progress.” (p146) However this approach was not successful because the most effective manner in which fascism could be opposed and the importance of democracy strengthened was by the realisation of a perspective of the overthrow of a capitalist system that had become connected to the role of fascist counterrevolution. Instead, the confused attempt to connect the interests of the workers to the defence of bourgeois democracy only led to demoralisation and the undermining of the collective strength of the proletariat. For example, in Spain the genuine possibility to establish socialism as an alterative to the counterrevolutionary problem of fascism was undermined by the reactionary role of the communist party which gave priority to the defence of bourgeois democracy. The communist party actually repressed any left-wing possibility of the generation of the success of a process of revolutionary change by the workers. This opportunist stance did not defend democracy but instead only demoralised the workers and so ultimately contributed to the success of the forces of fascism. However, it is suggested by Makin-Waite that there was no alternative to the defence of bourgeois democracy in Spain, which involved the role of the communist party. But as the writings of George Orwell have indicated there was a different alternative which was that the most effective political basis for opposing fascism in Spain was by the promotion of the possibility of proletarian revolution. Therefore, the role of the Communist parties in Spain was not to defend democracy but instead to uphold the influence of Stalinism by undermining the importance of the other working-class parties. In other words, the actual defence of democracy would have been most effectively advanced by the development of the opposition of the working class in Spain to the defence of capitalism. This perspective would have been part of the process of the struggle against fascism because the interests of fascism and capitalism were identical in this context of the role of the civil war. Makin-Waite vaguely conceives of the importance of the defence of democracy as the basis of opposing fascism, but in actuality this task of defeating counter-revolution could have been most effectively realised by connecting this objective to the aim of opposing capitalism. This was because the defenders of capitalism were effectively the forces of fascism. Only a successful proletarian revolution could have been the most credible basis to connect the objectives of upholding democracy and the successful possibility to establish socialism. Hence in the Spanish civil war the forces of Stalinism were not motivated by a defence of democracy and instead they connected their influence to opposition to any possibility of successful proletarian revolution. Thus, the defeat of fascism was considered to be the ending of the importance of a rival counter-revolutionary force. Only the small organisations of genuine Marxists of the POUM and the anarchists connected the successful realisation of a popular form of democracy with the defeat of fascism. Instead, the Stalinists considered that their primary objective was the defence of bourgeois democracy in opposition to both fascism and the possibility of progressive revolutionary change by the workers. This stance was opposed to the principled objective of establishing a type of socialist democracy as the alternative to fascist counterrevolution. Such an uncritical defence of bourgeois democracy was opposed to the aspirations of many of the workers during the Spanish civil war. But Makin-Waite denes the importance of this aspect of the situation and instead contends: “Spain was seen as the battleground between progress and reaction, between democracy and fascism, and between democracy and the threat of barbarism.” (p149) But these very aspects were actually connected to the issues posed by a potential proletarian revolution in order to most effectively maintain the principles of a popular democracy. The mass mobilisation of the workers during the civil war was an indication of the potential to realise this revolutionary perspective and instead the role of the communist party was an aspect of the process of bourgeois counter-revolution. In this context the priority of the communists was to undermine the militancy of the working class as an important aspect of the development of their influence in terms of the consolidation of a form of bourgeois government. Only in this context did the communists also recognise the importance of defeating the possibility of fascist counterrevolution. Hence it is commentated by Makin-Waite that: “Communists argued that the immediate task was not to bring about a socialist revolution, but to defend the democratic parliamentary republic.” (p149) But this apparent defence of democracy was opposed to the genuine and popular forms of democracy expressed by the mass militant actions of the workers and peasants who were aspiring to develop influence in the economy and society. Hence what was not a priority for the policy of the Stalinists was the defence of democracy but instead about opposing fascism in terms of the upholding of the importance of the bourgeois republic. In this context the mass aspirations of the workers and peasants to establish an anti-capitalist type of society as an alternative to fascist counterrevolution was being opposed in elitist terms. The point is that the defence of the role of democracy was actually connected to the potential to achieve the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in the situation of the intensification of the class struggle. In this context the attempt of the communist party to defend the role of the bourgeois democratic republic did not genuinely express the interests of democracy but was instead about the consolidation of the influence of Stalinism as the basis to ensure its ability to be able to be an important political factor in the situation. The most effective manner in which the interests of a genuine type of democracy could have been realised would have by the successful attainment of the overthrow of fascism and capitalism by the workers and peasants.

What Makin-Waite does not effectively address is the issue of the importance of the political system of democracy under the domination of the capitalist class. In this situation reformist parties have developed which are able to suggest that they can improve the prospects of the workers by the role of parliamentary government. This is the basis for the rejection of the approach of revolutionary politics in order to create the transformation of the social conditions of the people. It could be argued that there were mixed results in this context because the various Labour governments in the UK were a failure, but the Popular Fronts in France and Spain were an indication of the importance of the influence of the working class within society. It is suggested by Makin-Waite that an alternative to both reformism and revolutionary adventurism was elaborated by Gramsci who indicated a long-term strategy of change based on the creation of a counter-hegemony which could challenge the domination of the ruling class: “One of Gramsci’s most important insights was that the dominant classes in society rule through the means of hegemony, and the use both of coercion and strategies to win consent. One aspect of hegemonic rule is the promotion by the dominant classes of their own understanding of how the world works, so that they try to make this the natural common sense of the whole society. The task for the working-class party is construct what might be termed an alternative hegemonic alliance and alternative common sense, so that the working class can emerge from its subaltern position to assume the leadership of the whole of society. This was a very different proposition from either simple electoral politics or notions of revolutionary takeover. Gramsci remained committed to the idea of a transformative social revolution, and was clear that this would require ‘confronting in the final resort the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state’. But he saw that progress towards this goal would involve a long-term ‘war of position’ through intellectual and cultural advance and building up support for radical change, rather than a ‘war of manoeuvre’’, in the form of an uprising. A key task was to understand the significance of molecular social processes for the prosecution of revolutionary strategy over an extended period of time.” (p151) But the problem was that the character of the politics of the various communist parties was dictated by the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR. This meant that there was an uncertain commitment to the aim of proletarian revolution. Furthermore, support for the principles of popular democracy was undermined by the consolidation of political elites who controlled the various communist parties. In this context it was not possible to establish a relationship between the communist parties and the working class based on the expression of the role of popular democracy and support for a genuine strategy of revolutionary change. Instead, the very anti-democratic character of the communist parties was an expression of their opposition to the aim of genuine revolutionary change and instead expressed their subordination to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. But Makin-Waite seems to ignore this problem of the opportunism of the communist parties and instead suggests that they were committed to the defence of bourgeois democracy against the threat of fascist counter-revolution. But the problem was that these parties were opposed to any mass discontent that could facilitate the possibility of revolutionary change. Hence the communist parties opposed the expression of the militant democracy of the workers which could result in the generation of the possibility to end the domination of capitalism. Instead in a dogmatic and rigid manner the communist parties defended bourgeois democracy against the possibility of fascist counterrevolution, but they did not advocate or attempt to realise an alternative of socialist democracy. Instead these Stalinist organisations were actually motivated by an opposition to any possibility of proletarian revolution, as indicated by their role in Spain. It is questionable that this opportunism was an expression of Gramsci’s conception of revolutionary strategy and instead was connected to support for the reactionary political objectives of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR. Hence the role of the Stalinist parties was based on an opposition to the introduction of genuine proletarian democratic societies. Hence the formal defence of bourgeois democracy was not inspired by the expression of democratic values but was instead connected to expressing the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR. The point is that in order to establish a situation of genuine popular democracy it would have been necessary to achieve the successful realisation of proletarian revolution based on the mass mobilisation of the workers and peasants of Europe. But this was the very prospect that was opposed by the Stalinist elite which ultimately preferred to establish opportunist relations with the fascist regime of Germany.

The outbreak of world war meant that this opportunism was no longer tenable. The USSR had to ultimately conduct a war against fascism. But the aim of this struggle was not the liberation of the people of Europe but instead to consolidate the empire of the Stalinist regime. In this context the attempt to realise the role of popular democracy could only mean the liberation of the workers and peasants. This possibility was a realistic perspective in countries like Italy. But Makin-Waite defends the politics of the Italian communist party as resulting in the realisation of a democratic regime that had progressive possibilities. But the point is that a genuinely principled socialist party could have led a struggle that combined the objectives of democracy with the ending of the domination of capitalism. Instead, the Italian communist party upheld a stance of supporting the reintroduction of a regime that upheld the aims of capitalism. In this approach the Italian communists were primarily concerned with the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy than with the requirement of the working class to end the ascendency of capitalism. However, it is argued by Makin-Waite that this approach of the Italian communists was the only realistic approach: “Some on the left maintain that Stalin’s acceptance of a western sphere of interest held things back, and that militants in France and Italy should have pushed for revolution at the end of the war, and organised insurrections. But this is to ignore objective realities and to overestimate the level of support for revolutionary politics in these countries.” (p157) However this comment ignores the importance of the issue of the balance of class forces which could have expressed the possibility for anti-fascist struggles to become transformed into an effective attempt to overcome the domination of capitalism. The point is that people had become receptive to the objective of socialism because of the connection of the capitalist class with the role of fascism. Hence peaceful change could have occurred in countries like France and Spain which would be able to realise a new system of popular democracy. Ultimately Makin-Waite is suggesting that this situation was only able to realise the re-introduction of a bourgeois democratic system and so he implies that the possibility of a socialist type of democracy was not credible or practical. In other words, he effectively connects socialism with the role of the various communist party elites and so implies that the interests of socialism were being upheld by the very acceptance of the re-introduction of regimes based on the role of bourgeois democracy. In other words, the aspect of proletarian revolution had become problematical in this context and so the most progressive task was to develop the influence of the communist party within a regime of bourgeois democracy. Therefore, what is the most realistic task is to try and develop the increased importance of the role of the working class within a capitalist regime. Hence the task of socialism was of an unrealistic character and so the claim that socialism is the only genuine manner in which a democratic regime can be realised is not a feasible objective. Bu this approach ignores the fact that the various communist parties were following the advice of the Soviet communist party not to try to end the domination of capitalism. The actual primary issue was not the reintroduction of bourgeois democracy but instead the expression of a type of politics based on the rejection of the attempt to realise the aim of socialist revolution. In this context the aspect of the role of democracy was connected to the attempt to realise the socialist transformation of society. But Makin-Waite does not seem to make this connection and instead in a pragmatic manner considers that the most progressive task of the various communist parties in the immediate post-war era was to consolidate regimes based on bourgeois democracy. In this context he seems to implicitly deny the connection between the objective of genuine socialism and the development of a system of popular democracy. Instead, he implicitly accepts that socialism can be defined as an authoritarian political system and so it might be more progressive for the communist party to defend a progressive form of bourgeois democracy.

Makin-Waite considers that totalitarianism was an unhelpful concept for understanding the character of the Soviet Union: “But, overall, the concept exaggerated the power of the state and the ability of leaders to prevail, and cast the mass of people as unthinking dupes of the system.” (p164) But it is not outlined how an alternative basis to understand the character of the USSR could be developed. Instead, it is argued in vague terms that a bureaucratic elite is able to dominate society, but it is not established how the people can act in order to realise a system of popular democracy. Indeed, the events of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 are outlined without this being connected to the feasibility of a system of democratic socialism, but we would suggest that this is precisely the possibility that was expressed by the development of popular struggle. The workers spontaneously established councils based on the role of popular democracy, and these could have become the basis of the creation of a genuine type of socialist society. But this aspect is not outlined by Makin-Waite and instead he seems to be more supportive of the popular discontent in Czechoslovakia because it seemed to combine support for a democratic socialism based on a market economy: “For a short, promising, period it seemed that Czechoslovakia would originate a form of socialism that was centred on meeting peoples needs but which also accepted that markets work better than centralised state control for calibrating production to demand, especially in respect of goods for personal consumption.”(p174) But the actual problem was that this development did not clarify the type of political system that would enable this more plausible conception of socialism to be realised. Instead, it was still assumed that the party would be dominant within a democratised system of socialism. But the problem was that it was the hegemonic role of the party which undermined this development. Only the development of a system based on the end of the domination of the communist party could facilitate the realisation of a genuine system of democratic socialism. But this possibility would mean that the workers could be able to facilitate this type of change. However, this is precisely what did not occur and instead the communist party was able to retain a type of elitist leadership that ultimately attempted to introduce what could be described as bureaucratic socialism. In other words, this situation of political crisis did not encourage the workers to act in order to facilitate the realisation of a democratic socialist system. It was still necessary to encourage the development of a revolutionary party that would be able to facilitate the realisation of this possibility. Instead, the communist party in a vague manner argued in favour of what could be defined as market socialism and this perspective did not challenge the domination of the economy by the party elite. The workers were not encouraged to establish effective ascendency within the economy. Instead, the process of change was dominated by the role of the party until the development of the counterrevolution led by the Soviet bureaucracy. But it should also be suggested that the very expression of popular unrest had the potential to be able to promote the development of a democratic form of socialism, and it was this possibility which led to the invasion of the Soviet military forces. It also has to be suggested that these events had a connection with the role of the Paris events which in a limited manner indicated the potential for the workers and students to control the economy.

In other words, the various events in Europe in 1968 indicated the possibility to realise a type of genuine democratic socialism. But this possibility is denied by Makin-Waite who instead considers that these developments ultimately represented the assertion of individualist values that could not facilitate the realisation of the collective values of socialism. He comments that: “The rebellious students of 1968 were against order and deference, and this had a progressive content; it was a stand against arbitrary authority…But it also had an individualist content, and there was a failure to understand the importance of acting collectively, and the value of some measure of collective discipline. The rebellion against the tradition and authority of elders helped dissolve and undo the ties and responsibilities that had shaped and underlain working class progress and culture.” (p182) But the point is that the very individualist values of the dissenters in the era of 1968 could only be realised by progressive social change that would raise the importance of the development of an alternative type of society. This could only be defined as socialism because this would represent the only possible form of a system that is able to represent a situation of the overcoming of the domination of capitalism in progressive terms. Hence the aspects of individualism could only represent an undermining of the attempt to realise emancipatory aims which would require the success of what had to be a type of collective struggle. In other words, a democratic type of socialism could be the only possible progressive alternative to the continued domination of capitalism. But the very confusion of the protestors of 1968 meant that this objective was not supported in explicit terms and instead people knew what they were against but were less sure about what they should advocate as an alternative to capitalism. Hence it was necessary to elaborate the conception of a democratic socialism in order to facilitate an awareness of what could replace the present system in terms of the role of a different type of society. Hence the failure to outline a constructive conception of an alternative meant that protest did not become transformed into becoming a definite perspective of a different type of society. The ultimate result of this situation was the role of confusion about the very aims and objectives of the role of protest. People were sure about what they were against and less certain about what they were supporting as a progressive alternative to capitalism.

But what would a system of democratic socialism be like? It would have to combine a commitment to the democratic organisation of the economy in terms of the role of workers control with support for a system of regular elections on the basis of multi-party competition. Hence it would be entirely possible that people might vote to end the role of democratic socialism, but it is to be hoped that the vey success of this type of system would mean that this development did not occur. Instead, the effectiveness of a revolutionary government in being able to promote the role of system of a participatory economy would mean that the result is that people become enthusiastic supporters of this attempt to construct democratic socialism. They would have an important stake in the possibility of the success of what has become a genuinely participatory type of economy. This development would indicate that bureaucratic socialism is not the only outcome of the attempt to go beyond the limitations of capitalism and that instead the people can effectively act in order to organise in a democratic manner the character and aspects of the economy and society in general. Such a development would inspire support for the promotion of democratic socialism. Indeed Makin-Waite outlines how this possibility occurred in Chile in the early 1970’s when a left-wing government encouraged the development of progressive policies that increased the economic power of the workers within the economy. This was a practical example of how the objectives of a democratic socialism could be realised. This situation was an expression of the success of a democratic form of socialism until this development was ended by the imposition of authoritarian and elitist power of the capitalist class. In other words, the example of Chile was an indication that an elected left-wing government with the active support of the workers can express the possibility and capacity to transform the domination of capitalism into a form of democratic socialism. It was this very development which led to a right-wing coup. However the problem for the perspective of Makin-Waite is that this situation has seemed to have had an exceptional character and it ultimately ended in the successful imposition of the domination of the capitalist class via the role of a military coup. How can the working class ensure that such a development cannot occur in the future? Makin-Waite does not seem to have an definite answer to this question and instead contends that the objective of the realisation of a democratic type of socialism has to be the intention of any genuinely progressive type of socialism: “Eurocommunism was, instead, a kind of revolutionary reformism aimed at the full transformation of society, but accepting and defending a wide range of democratic institutions and practices, including the legitimacy of electoral politics.”(p209) But the very experience of Chile is an indication that this perspective is not sufficient in order to sustain the ascendency of a democratic type of socialism. Instead, it is necessary that the working class collectively acts to ensure their ascendency over the character of the economy combined with the effective control of the state by the revolutionary party in order to undermine the possibility of a reactionary coup. This means that without a successful process of revolutionary change it might still be possible to undermine the realisation of democratic socialism. In other words, the role of democracy is not just about the election of a left-wing government that aims to introduce various reforms to the capitalist system. Instead, democracy has to become the expression of the genuine ascendency of the working class within society that enables it to transform capitalism in a manner that effectively advances the possibility of making progress towards the realisation of socialism. Critics will contend that this approach cannot be realised in democratic terms and instead requires the role of an authoritarian type of government. But we would suggest that the very importance of the expression of popular forms of democracy is that they express a possible dynamic for the development of what could still be defined as a revolutionary form of change. It was the effective rejection of this approach which meant that Eurocommunism could ultimately only adopt a perspective of acceptance of the domination of capitalism as the basis to sustain what had become a reform programme. In other words, this opportunism was because the Eurocommunist approach was always based on the subordination of a revolutionary approach to what was considered to be the realistic standpoint of trying to introduce democratic reforms within capitalist society. Ultimately the very revolutionary aims had to become rejected in order to uphold the credibility of what had become a reformist perspective. The only effective manner in which this process of opportunist adaptation to capitalism can be rejected is by the support of a process of genuine revolutionary change via the dynamism of mass action. But Makin-Waite rejects this conclusion because he considers that the evolutionist approach of Euro-Communism is still a credible basis of change to socialism despite the frequent opportunist interpretations of this approach. Indeed, he does not consider the effective demise of Euro-communism and how this development has effectively undermined any credibility to the type of perspective that was supported by this movement. In other words, he does not consider that the very era of austerity which is an indication of the necessity of the alternative of socialism is also an expression of a situation of the continued decline of the forces that had upheld Euro-communism. Indeed, traditional reformism has regained its influence in this situation because it seems to be the only effective opposition to the domination of capitalism. But this very development raises serious questions about the possibility to revive the influence of what would be a type of progressive democratic socialism. However, the very era of austerity is an indication of the necessity to increase the importance of democratic socialism, but it seems that this task is difficult because of the very prolonged decline of this trend which is connected to the demise of Eurocommunism. The policies of austerity are being imposed on a working class that seems to lack the guidance of the approach of democratic socialism. In other words, the decline of the various forms of reformism has not encouraged the creation of the political importance of democratic socialism. Instead, various forms of discontent with the approach of austerity have a spontaneous character and the result of this situation is the continued decline of the level of class consciousness of the workers. In this situation it is an important task to revive the influence of the approach of democratic socialism. But the very lack of this perspective means that the various struggles that occur have a limited spontaneous character that is unable to establish the importance of an alternative perspective. What is required is the elaboration of a convincing conception of democratic socialism.

But this development is not carried out by Makin-Waite who instead indicates support for various left- wing movements that have emerged over the past fifty years But, we have to tackle the issue of the marginalisation of various left-wing parties that seem to indicate that they lack any popular support for the aim of socialism. Furthermore, it is questionable whether these organisations have been able to develop a perspective of democratic change that will be able to realise a credible form of socialism. It is necessary to indicate that in present terms the role of the political system of democracy seems to uphold the interests of various parties that defend the capitalist system. Indeed, it has been increasingly difficult to even elect various reformist parties into governmental office. Instead, the situation has been characterised by the political success of parties that defend the capitalist system in uncritical terms. It seems that democracy is a system that is to the benefit of the interests of the supporters of the present type of society. The role of activism does not seem to provide a credible basis for the justification of an alternative type of popular democracy that could uphold the aim of the creation of an alternative post-capitalist society. Instead, the various elections that have occurred in the major countries has continued to indicate the political supremacy of the various parties that uphold the interests of capitalism. In this context the role of democracy merely seems to express the aims of upholding the domination of the present economic and political system. But despite these problems Makin-Waite considers that the role of representative democracy can facilitate the possibility for progressive change. He comments: “Radicals need to fully support democratic values, as well as the practice of representation that institutionalise and safeguard them on an enduring basis. ‘Liberal’ institutions such as modern parliaments – although they first emerged as part of establishing bourgeois class rule, and were used to manage and dissipate opposition to it – do not necessarily institutionalise the rule of the few. These forms can – and should – be given new political content, and are themselves a terrain of battle. They are not only a space in which ideas are contested and radical programmes are promoted; they are also an important means through which, with majority democratic support, such programmes could be implemented. The practices and freedoms which representative democracy has promised but not always delivered have a crucial role to play in establishing and sustaining long-term settlements based on equality and solidarity.” (p275) But this possibility has generally never been realised. Instead the actual practice of the present political system within capitalist society has usually resulted in the marginalisation of the forces of left wing politics and it seems that the practice of democracy is able to establish the continued supremacy of parties that uphold the interests of the capitalist system. This problem does not seem to be addressed by Makin-Waite who instead in a vague manner is only able to outline the necessity of radical alliances of popular groups in order to facilitate the possibility of radical change. But he does not address the difficulties involved in trying to realise the success of his perspective. Instead, the aspect of possibility seems to be equated with actuality and so he vaguely considers that progressive political change is inevitable, or at least a genuine possibility. But the actual situation is defined by the marginalisation of radical groups which is connected to the apparent discrediting of the objective of a post-capitalist society. Indeed, the aim of overcoming capitalism seems to express the interests of elites who are not interested in establishing a genuine democratic type of society. Thus, the very connection of the aim of post-capitalism with the aim of communism seems to be problematical. Thus, given the general scepticism about the democratic character of the aim of post-capitalism how can it be possible to overcome this view and establish a conception of society that is able to connect the values of democracy with socialism?

In order to begin with this attempt to justify post-capitalism as being compatible with the role of democracy it is necessary that this issue should not be avoided in terms of the assumption of a society based on the aspect of political harmony. Instead, it should be accepted that there will be differences within the post-capitalist system that can only be progressively resolved by the application of democratic principles. In order to establish the hegemony of the role of the revolutionary party it will be necessary that it should be able to convince the majority of society of the credibility of the aim of trying to realise the development of a post-capitalist society. The lack of democracy in the Soviet Union was because the expression of the objective of trying to realise socialism was based on the imposition of the aims of the party on the people without the expression of this aspect being defined in terms of the role of a genuine democratic system. But in order for this development to occur this would have required the aspect of a situation of a multi-party democracy and the rejection of the aspect of the supreme domination of a single party. In other words, it has to be explicitly suggested that it is not possible to realise a genuine socialist system based on the absolute domination of a single party. Instead, there has to be a situation of actual political competition between parties. It could be suggested that this circumstance of multi-party democracy could mean the restoration of capitalism and the rejection of capitalism in terms of the role of the development of an electoral majority for this possibility. But if the revolutionary government is based on the principles of the genuine participation of the people in the organisation of society it would be an irrational action for this possibility to occur. Instead, people would connect their involvement in the organisation of society with the expression of the attempt to create socialism and so overcome the domination of what had been capitalism. The connection between the role of the revolutionary government and the participation of the people in the organisation of the economy and society would mean that it would be logical for this situation to be expressed in terms of the continual development of majority support for a socialist government in terms of the role of a system of multi-party democracy. In this context it would be irrational for people to vote in favour of the restoration of a capitalist system that could mean the re-development of economic exploitation and the possibility of unemployment and the undermining of the material standards of the people. Therefore, it could be argued that the aspect of democracy should not express a problem for a socialist society that is based on the application of genuine aspects of the participation of the people in its development and organisation.

Hence the actual major problem concerns how to develop support for the aim of socialism in the context of the apparent supremacy of capitalism and the general acceptance of this situation by the majority of the people. In general terms people seem inclined to support parties that defend the interests of capitalism and have only occasionally voted in favour of left-wing parties that advocate radical alternatives to the present system. Indeed, it could be suggested that the expression of the present political system seems to favour the interests of parties that defend the interests of capitalism. The usual result of the electoral system is to confirm the domination of parties that support capitalism and usually the left-wing parties have minority support that means they cannot become a government that is able to advocate the transformation of the character of society. But these problems do not seem to be tackled by Makin-Waite who comments that: “A consistent theme of this book is that those seeking progressive change should embrace the democratic political process, including its ‘familiar liberal sense of a parliamentary-type system, with party pluralism and regular elections’: working within this system where it exists is a necessary condition of socialist success.”(p274) But such a perspective seems to ignore the importance of the fact that the expression of the democratic system in capitalist societies generally seems to uphold the interests of parties that defend the present type of economy and also marginalises the organisations that support a socialist alternative. Therefore, the problem is how to establish a situation in which socialist parties can obtain the majority support of the people. In other words, the usual role of the democratic political system seems to favour the interests of conservative type parties, and this is connected to the often marginalisation of socialist organisations. Therefore, the very aspect of the character of contemporary popular democracy seems to favour the interests of the defenders of the present economic system. This creates a dilemma for the supporters of the aims of revolutionary change because it seems that only elitist and essentially anti-democratic forms of social change can end the domination of capitalism. In other words, the usual expression of the role of democracy within capitalism is actually an expression of the possibility to defend the present system against the possibility for social change.

Makin-Waite summarises his standpoint in the following terms: “Radical’s need to fully support democratic values, as well as the practice of representation that institutionalises and safeguards them on an enduring basis. ‘Liberal’ institutions such as modern parliaments – although they first emerged as part of establishing bourgeois class rule, and were used to manage and dissipate opposition to it – do not necessarily or essentially institutionalise the rule of the few. These forms can - and should – be given new political content, and are themselves a terrain of battle. They are not only a space in which ideas are contested and radical programmes are promoted, they are also an important means through which, with majority democratic support, such programmes could be implemented. The practices and freedoms which representative democracy has promised but not always delivered, have a crucial role to play in establishing and sustaining long-term settlements based on equality and solidarity. For such settlements cannot be realised without a serious working through of the issues and debates that express social differences and choices.” (p275) But the problem with this perspective is that it seems to underestimate the continued ability of the defenders of the present capitalist system to be able to obtain majority electoral support for their standpoint. In this context the advocates of a radical approach continue to be marginalised within the electoral system and are unable to obtain a popular mandate for the implementation of a radical approach. Instead, it has to be understood that the general expression of the role of the democratic system continues to provide support for capitalism. Thus, it seems to be very difficult to develop popular support for a socialist alternative. But it is the very expression of the democratic aspects of capitalism which continue to provide the popular justification for the domination of the present social system. In this context it is a formidable challenge to develop a popular and democratic justification for an alternative to the continuation of capitalism. It is suggested by Makin-Waite that it is necessary to develop the role of forms of popular democracy, but how can this aspect be ineffective if the apparent political supremacy of the parties that defend capitalism cannot be challenged in electoral terms? Thus, the politics of protest is not sufficient to resolve these important problems and this point is accepted by Makin-Waite.

However, he does not seem to effectively suggest how a popular and democratic alternative to the continuation of the capitalist system can be developed. Instead he seems to suggest that progressive change is inevitable if a principled strategy of change is upheld in the following terms: “A long-term ‘war of position’ would succeed in generating popular support for alternative economic, environmental and social settlements…… Developing social movements and new institutions could lead to a series of sharp breaks and ruptures with current systems – or they could work through a culminative series of reforms, blocks and controls, ‘making capitalism human, until maybe, it isn’t capitalism anymore, a progressive project which would perhaps last two hundred years’. Success in this battle would mean recovering, expanding and institutionalising a generous conception of democracy and establishing ecologically sustainable forms of consumption, work and resource management.” (p 281) But how can a movement of protest acquire the social power to be able to transform the character of society? It is this important issue that Makin-Waite does not seem to address. Instead, he does outline the aspects of a process of progressive change but is unable to indicate how this development can occur in popular and democratic terms. Primarily he does not tackle the issue of the continuation of a general situation of acceptance by the people of the role of capitalism. In other words, Marxism has become marginalised in the contemporary era and so its very objectives have become discredited as a result. How can this situation be addressed so that it is able to develop popular support that enables Marxism to be able to advocate a credible strategy for democratic and socialist change? This is the issue that has still to be tackled because unfortunately Makin-Waite has outlined some aspects of the aims of progressive change, but he has not actually outlined how this can be realised in democratic and militant terms. This is the issue that we still have to tackle.

In order to address this question, we have to connect it to the challenges created by the onset of the period of austerity that is supported by the influence of the role of an authoritarian populism. The development of austerity economics and politics is sustained by an appeal to the values of a populist approach that connects the importance of nationalism to the imposition of these policies. In this context the alternative of a socialist internationalism does not seem to be convincing or credible. This point can be indicated by the failure of the Corbyn led Labour party when it had to oppose the authoritarian populism of Boris Johnston. Hence the appeal of a left-wing type of internationalism was easily undermined by the populist appeal to the role of nation and the values of a traditional type of capitalism. It could be suggested that this populist appeal for support of capitalism is always able to undermine the rival standpoint of a socialist internationalism. However, the answer to this problem is not to deny the importance of the approach of developing the international unity of the working class against capitalism but instead it is necessary to connect this perspective to establishing a more effective criticism of the role of nationalism. But this is the very is issue that is avoided by the supporters of socialism. Hence it seems that the principles of democracy are being defended most effectively by the defenders of capitalism who can appeal to the role of populist support for their system as the expression of the elitist limitations of the alternative of socialism. Hence it is necessary to connect the aim of socialism with the genuine expression of democratic aspirations if this populist defence of capitalism is to be more effectively opposed. However, the problem has been that this task has become reduced to supporting the attempt of the Labour party to obtain majority electoral support. In this context various reforms for modifying capitalism become considered to be more important than the attempt to promote the realisation of an alternative capitalist society. The forces of the Marxist left are not able to oppose this development because they generally lack the theoretical basis to uphold and promote a credible conception of socialist change. This means that Marxism is unable to oppose the right-wing trajectory of the Labour party, which is a situation caused by the domination of the Conservatives in relation to British politics. If this development is to be challenged it is necessary that the left wing is able to promote a more credible conception of a socialist alternative. The elaboration of the principles and details of socialism would be important in relation to developing the credibility of left-wing politics and so would be more effective in opposing the increasing reconciliation of the Labour party with the capitalist system. But the problem is that there is presently little support for socialism, which is partly caused by confusion about what is meant by the aim of a socialist society. This aspect is connected to the fact that left wing politics have often become an expression of protest and so no longer based on the articulation of an alternative type of society. In this context the concept of a democratic socialist form of social organisation is no longer the major aspect of left-wing politics which has become reduced to being an expression of protest against various limitations of capitalism. Thus the conception of a democratic and socialist alternative to capitalism has become replaced by the role of protest politics, or the perspective of opposition to various limitations of the present system but without this aspect being connected to the articulation of a socialist or communist alternative type of society. If this limitation is to be overcome it is necessary to elaborate what is meant by the character of a social formation that could replace capitalism. This development would involve outlining what is meant by the democratic participation of the people in the creation of a post-capitalist society. However this task is undermined by the legacy of the history of Stalinism which seems to suggest that socialism is connected to the role of authoritarianism. Hence it is necessary to try and develop a conception of a socialist society that would be connected to the expression of genuine democratic values. Only if such a conception seems to be convincing will support for socialism become increased.

But the most immediate problem is that in the various capitalist societies popular support for the aims of socialism have declined so that it does not seem possible to achieve a situation in which a democratic socialist society can be created. Instead, the role of democracy seems to uphold the continuation of the supremacy of various parties that uphold the interests of a capitalist system. Indeed, in these circumstances various reformist organisations become increasingly right wing and adapt their programmes to the interests of the capitalist system. Hence this situation means that it seems difficult to envisage the possibility of achieving the success of socialism and communism in terms of the application of what would be an expression of genuine democratic aspirations of the people. Instead, the role of democracy seems to confirm the supremacy of the capitalist system and so this means that the parties that uphold the aims of socialism and communism are in a situation of political crisis. This situation is also connected to the demise of the regimes that claimed to be socialist in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Hence it would seem that ascendency of the system of capitalism is no longer contested in popular terms and so this would suggest that this type of society has the democratic support of the people. As a result of these developments the aspect of discontent within society is expressed by the role of single-issue campaigns that do not aspire to achieving a different socialist and communist type of social formation. It would seem that capitalism is effectively vindicated by the democratic approval of the people for the supremacy of this economic and social system. How can the supporters of socialism and communism attempt to establish popular support for their aims in these apparently unfavourable circumstances? In order to begin to address this issue it is necessary that the socialist groups support the various protest movements like the greens in a more energetic and principled and so attempt to create alliances that connect the aims of struggle within capitalism to the task of the attempt to try and change the character of society. But this development means that the socialist groups have to seriously support the aims of the greens as being an expression of the very process of achieving radical change within society. In other words, the attainment of environmental objectives would enhance the possibility to transform capitalism into a more progressive type of society. Therefore, the socialists and communists are not rejecting their ultimate objectives by becoming supporters of the greens. Instead, they are recognising that the political situation has changed and so it has become necessary to support a different type of strategy in order to make progress in terms of the development of the social conditions to realise a post-capitalist society. But it is understood that the very success of this type of protest movement can create the political conditions to re-develop popular interest about the aim of socialism. In this manner, the objective of communism can once again become influential and so acquire democratic credibility. However, this possibility does not resolve the outstanding issue of how to achieve communis but least a process of progress towards the realisation of this aim will be achieved. However, the dogmatism of the various left-wing organisations often undermines the recognition of this type of strategy as the only effective basis to make progress towards the realisation of socialism. Instead, the various groups often prefer an effective situation of sectarian isolation. But the issue of the importance of developing alliances in order to generate the possibility of the realisation of socialism will remain of outstanding importance until this development is actually realised. Only the development of progressive alliances of all of the forces that are critical of aspects of capitalism can facilitate the possibility to develop popular support for socialism and communism. However, it could be argued that organisations like the greens are not sympathetic about these left-wing types of objectives and instead effectively emphasise modifying capitalism rather than trying to change the character of society. This point is valid, but it could be the very influence of the socialist and communist groups that is able to facilitate the possibility that such a mass movement would increasingly express a left-wing type of character. Indeed, it is the aspect of the difficulties involved in achieving the objectives of the greens within society that could possibly result in increasing support for the aim of socialism and communism.

However, it could be suggested that this perspective only seems credible because it ignores the lack of popular and democratic support for the socialist alternative in the present circumstances. The very importance of the ascendency of the era of austerity seems to suggest that the possibility of the realisation of a progressive alternative to capitalism has become unrealistic. This point seems to be confirmed by the continued electoral support of the majority of people in many democratic countries for the imposition of a policy of austerity. However, it could be suggested that this aspect is not because of a genuine support for austerity but is instead the result of the fact that people cannot conceive of an alternative to this development. Hence what has become apparent is the reluctant acceptance by many people of the imposition of austerity. If people, consider that the democratic political system would be able to express an alternative to this present situation it is quite possible that this option would acquire increased support. It is the task of socialist groups to attempt to develop the reasons why an alternative to the present situation is possible and so the imposition of austerity is not an inevitable development. But this means that the aims of socialism have to be connected to the understanding that this approach can be connected to the democratic aspiration of the people to acquire more control over their own economic and social activity. Hence the very aim of socialism has to be defined in terms of the possibility to establish the participation of the people in the organisation of the character and aims of society. If this task could achieve even partial success this aspect would be contrasted to the failure to achieve the economic and political power of the people within capitalism. In other words, the possible dynamic democratic character of socialism would be contrasted to the lack of these aspects within capitalism. The elaboration of this type of approach would not guarantee the development of popular support for socialism but what would be established is the importance of the view that socialism can acquire increased importance with this elaboration of how it can be expressed in democratic terms. It is the view that capitalism is the system that has the most durable democratic support which undermines the credibility of the anti-capitalist alternative and instead seems to suggest that the present system is in the ascendency in an unchallengeable manner. Therefore, it would seem that there is no alternative to trying to establish the importance of the perspective that it is possible to develop the credibility of the democratic reasons why the socialist alternative can acquire the popular support of the people.

Makin-Waite contends that what is required is the necessity to connect the various activist movements to the aim of achieving governmental political power by the left-wing parties. This is the expression of an important perspective but the point that has to be addressed is how can such an alliance be developed given the often continuation of political differences between the objectives of the new social movements when contrasted to the aims of traditional left-wing parties. The point is how can it become possible to develop a common political programme that would connect the role of popular agitation with the attempt to support a perspective for the transformation of society via the role of political power. In this context we would suggest that the aims of ecological conservation and reforms that improve the social conditions of workers can ultimately only be expressed by the role of a socialist party that is aiming to transform capitalism into a different type of society. It is confusion about this point that has led to problems about the elaboration of a credible perspective of political change. Instead, what has occurred is an increasing activist emphasis on the importance of the realisation of reforms via the role of mass struggle. But sometimes the alternative is presented in terms of a sectarian opposition to popular movements of the people and the justification of a perspective of change based on the role of an elite. It is necessary to reject both of these one-sided positions and instead emphasise the importance of the role of revolutionary leadership of mass struggles. But such a development can only be sustained if the Marxist party is sensitive to the aspirations of the people involved in these mass actions. This expression of a type of popular democracy could then become the basis to promote the realisation of effective revolutionary change.

However, such possibilities cannot be realised if the hegemonic role of parties that defend the capitalist system is not undermined, and an alternative connected to the influence of the conception of a democratic socialist society established. It would seem that the potential to realise this possibility is not very favourable given the apparent long-term marginalisation of left-wing parties. This is the most important issue that Makin-Woods does not seem to address. The point is that it is the very historical failure of the countries claiming to have been socialist which has continued to the discrediting of the credibility of the socialist alternative. Indeed, it would seem to be difficult to revive the influence of the socialist approach given the apparent intensification of the domination of capitalism in the conditions of the imposition of austerity. This aspect seems to have been expressed by the increasing marginalisation of the various forces that claim to support some type of conception of the socialist alternative. But the importance of this issue of the declining popular support for socialism seems to be evaded by Makin-Waite when he comments that change can still be realisation in terms of the transformation of the institutions of liberal democracy: “Radicals need to fully support democratic values, as well as the practices of representation that institutionalise and safeguard them on an enduring basis. Liberal institutions such as modern parliaments….do not necessarily or essentially institutionalise the rule of the few. These forms can – and should – be given new political content and are themselves a terrain of battle. They are not only a space in which ideas are contested and radical programmes are promoted; they are also an important means through which, with majority democratic support, such programmes could be implemented. The practices and freedoms of representative democracy has promised but not always delivered have a crucial role to play in establishing and sustaining long-term settlements based on equality and solidarity.” (p274) He does not establish how the present small groups support the aims of genuine socialism can acquire a level of popular political influence that would make this type of change a credible possibility. Instead, a strategy has been outlined without the difficulties involved in its realisation being seriously addressed. What is not discussed is the problem of the present marginal situation of the various socialist parties which would suggest that the strategy being suggested has serious problems concerning the possibility of its realisation. Makin-Waite indicates the necessity of the development of alliances in order to realise the type of perspective he is advocating but the problem is that such a development has become increasingly unfavourable given the contemporary marginalisation of many socialist type parties. What has to be addressed is how to re-establish the popularity of socialist parties, but this is the very issue that is not tackled by Makin-Waite. Instead, he outlines a strategy but does not discuss how to develop favourable political conditions for its realisation. Instead, he has a vague type of optimism which is not connected to a more convincing understanding of how his strategy can become successful. But the major problem is that he does not address how the adoption of populism by right wing forces in the era of austerity has undermined the popularity of a possible socialist alternative. How can socialism be promoted in this apparently unfavourable political situation? How can the popular appeal of nationalism be opposed by a credible conception of socialist internationalism? The problem with the standpoint of Makin-Waite is that he promotes his aims without connecting them to the difficulties and challenges of the present situation which has led to the ascendency of a right- wing form of populism. Instead, he can only vaguely assert the superiority of democratic socialism and yet not tackle the apparent fact that this approach has become marginalised in what seems to be an unfavourable political situation. The result of his one-sided approach is that the standpoint of socialism is reduced to a moral imperative, but it seems to lack practical credibility. Ultimately, he vaguely refers to a more progressive and participatory form of democracy in order to realise progressive change, but he is vague about how this development will be realised. The result of the limitations of his approach is that he has the vague hope of the possibility of progressive change, but he has not established a credible strategy that would enable his objectives to be realised.

But how can the domination of capitalism be opposed given the apparent marginalisation of the forces of socialism and communism? There is not a simple answer to this question because the decline of the forces of left-wing politics has become protracted over a lengthy period of time. This means that the very possibility of the realisation of the success of the forces of democratic socialism has become questionable and a matter of controversy. In this context all that is possible is to outline a strategy of change and to also accept that this perspective may not be realised. But the continuation of the elitism and often authoritarian aspects of the capitalist system indicate the necessity to establish a successful alternative in terms of the role of democratic socialism. However, there is a credibility problem given the marginalisation of the forces of socialism and the apparent strength of the capitalist system. Also, the ecological movement has become the expression of what seems to be a more credible alternative to the continued domination of capitalism. In this context the forces supporting socialism have become small and marginalised. Hence it would seem that the task of socialists is to establish a constructive and principled relationship to the green movement and to attempt to argue in favour of the realisation of an ecologically defined socialist society. In this manner the possibility to develop support for socialism may be created in effective terms and as a result of this green and socialist alliance a progressive mass movement for radical change may be created. It will be the task of the socialists to try and convince the greens of the necessity to support the aim of the transformation of capitalism into a different type of society and so not be content with progressive modification of the present capitalist system. But this progressive alliance if it becomes effective can develop support for the objective of trying to change society in a democratic and popular manner, and so the domination of capitalism will be overcome by the role of this mass movement that is concerned with the major issues that are required in order to change the character of society. But this development can only occur if the greens become convinced of the credibility of the socialist perspective. Hence it is the task of the socialists to try and obtain the support of the greens for the view that the most effective manner in which ecological objectives can be realised is by ending the domination of the capitalist system. But at present this development has not occurred because the socialists do not have a convincing perspective of ecological socialism. Therefore, it is an important task to try and elaborate a more plausible conception of how society can be transformed in terms of the connection of ecological and revolutionary aims. Without this development the green movement will remain content to elaborate its perspective of an ecological society in a manner that ignores the issue of socialism, or at least relegates the question of socialism to that of secondary importance. Hence the Marxists have to intervene in the green movement in order to increase the popular appeal of socialism. But without this development of a green socialism the Marxists will continue to be marginalised and unpopular. Hence any favourable prospects for revolutionary change seem to be connected to the level of success that the Marxists may develop in relation to the role of the greens. However, Marxists seem to be presently reluctant to recognise the importance of this challenge in relation to the issue of becoming political relevant in the present situation. Indeed, it could be argued that they have a politics of consolation that ignores the problems of the present and instead uphold what could be defined as mythical perspectives about the potential to become a revolutionary leadership of the workers. The result of this situation is a dogmatic complacency in relation to the problems posed by the challenges of the present period. However, it is to be emphasised that the perspective outlined does not mean that the socialists passively accept the dominant leadership of the greens. Instead they will be attempting to obtain the support of the greens for a principled programme of green socialism. In this manner a principled unity will be obtained for the development of a mass movement that is of contemporary relevance and is able to respond to the political challenges posed by the present period. But if the Marxists effectively ignore the importance of the greens it is questionable whether they can become relevant in the present period.

In other words, the expression of sectarianism will not be able to uphold the connection of the objectives of communism to the role of democracy in a convincing manner. Instead, only the ability of the Marxists to be able to make progressive alliances will ensure the possibility of progress towards the realisation of the aim of communism in effective terms. But this issue is ignored by Makin-Waite who instead only analyses the history of the relationship of communism to democracy. He does not evaluate the possibility to develop a type of popular democracy as the basis to promote the possibility of the realisation of the aims of socialism and communism. But we have to start with an analysis of the present situation which concerns the unpopularity and marginalisation of the forces of communism and their apparent inability to be able to develop mass support for the realisation of their objective of revolutionary change. It seems that the very expression of the importance of democracy has undermined the possibility to achieve progressive change in terms of the attainment of the objectives of socialism and communism. Instead, the expression of the present democratic system seems to express the hegemony of the supporters of capitalism and the connected marginalisation of the forces of communism. Indeed, the various communist parties seem to be increasing insignificant in this context. But it could be suggested that an alliance of the greens with the communists would begin to end this situation of marginalisation and a lack of support for socialist objectives. But why should the greens want to unite with the apparently secondary forces of socialism? This is an issue that cannot be resolved in simplistic terms. Instead, only the involvement of the socialists within the green movement could begin to establish the importance of the political role of revolutionary communism and so develop the possibility of a stable alliance between the greens and the socialists. But even this development would not automatically result in the democratic transformation of capitalism into socialism. Instead, only a prolonged period of struggle would generate the possibility of the creation of more favourable conditions for changing the character of society. But it has to be emphasised that such a development is not inevitable. It could be quite possible that capitalism continues to achieve the majority support of the people and in this manner the realisation of the aims of socialism are not successful. But this lack of inevitable realisation of the aims of communism does not mean that this approach is ultimately futile. Instead, the connection of the socialists and the greens can create a formidable alliance in the situation in which the capitalist system seems unable to resolve ecological problems. Hence increasing popular support for the aims of a green socialism can be created in these circumstances and so the result can be the promotion of the possibility of progressive change. But if the communists remain sectarian and elitist then this perspective will not be promoted, and the result will be that the capitalist system seems to still be the most important expression of the principles of democracy. Hence the ability of the communists to make alliances for progressive change will determine whether the principles of democracy can become connected to the realisation of revolutionary objectives.

However, it could be argued that there is no logical reason for the greens to make alliances with the small and apparently unpopular forces of revolutionary Marxism. This situation seems to be the apparent expression of the present situation. But the Marxists could attempt to change their own marginalisation by being able to suggest important proposals for the increasing development of the effectiveness of a movement to realise an ecological society. This possibility is based on the attempt to connect the increasing popular aspirations to realise green objectives within society for the aim of achieving a democratic socialist type of society. But it could still be suggested that the greens have no incentives to develop an alliance with what seems to be the marginal forces of the Marxists. But such a problem can be overcome if the Marxists are able to promote imaginative perspectives of ecological and social change that may be able to overcome any present limitations in the approach of the greens. Hence only if the socialists are committed consistently to the aims of ecological change can this possibility of a genuine alliance be created that is based on the unity of green and socialist objectives. Nevertheless, if such an alliance is formed there is no guarantee of success. Only the development of effective political struggle can facilitate the possibility to realise genuinely progressive social change. But this development has to be connected to the electoral success of the left-wing movement, and there is no guarantee of the inevitability of this development. In other words, the green and socialist movement has to be able to indicate that it represents a genuine commitment to the aspirations of a popular type of democracy and that it is superior to various conservative parties in being able to realise the aims of the people. This means that the green socialists have to be able to convince people that there approach is more compatible with the aspirations of the people than the perspectives being promoted by the defenders of capitalism. Therefore, only if the supporters of the greens and socialists can be more successful than the supporters of the present economic system will they be able to convince the majority of the people of the necessity of progressive change. But in present terms the supporters of capitalism have been more successful and as a result have been able to consolidate the domination of the economic system. The struggle to define the character of democracy has been achieved by the defenders of capitalism rather than by the various progressive opponents of the present system. Only when the supporters of progressive change are able to elaborate the reasons for the development of a different and more democratic type of society will it be possible to facilitate change that can result in the creation of a socialist type of society. But the lack of an alliance between the greens and socialist forces is an important problem that undermines this development. Only if this problematical issue is resolved can we even consider that there has been realised a credible possibility to achieve a democratic post-capitalist society.

However, the domination of the forces of a conservative type of social democracy has also undermined the possibility to achieve an effective green socialist alliance. In present terms this opportunist type of social democracy considers that it is in a situation of competition with the greens for influence and in terms of the role of elections. The result of this situation is a disunity of the potential progressive forces, and this means that the political domination of conservative forces can only be consolidated. In this context the system of democracy seems to uphold the ascendency of parties that support the continuation of the capitalist system. Hence the progressive forces have to develop more credible programmes of change that can undermine the supremacy of the pro-capitalist parties within the democratic system. Only if this issue becomes addressed in effective terms can we consider that the role of democracy can be advantageous for the realisation of the interests of the progressive political forces. But at present the character of democracy tends to be in the interests of the supporters of capitalism. Hence, we have to establish political alliances that facilitate a changing situation in which the expression of democracy acquires a more progressive character in terms of increasing popular support for the aims of opposing the domination of capitalism. Only if success is realised in these terms can we begin to suggest that communism is genuinely compatible with the exercise of popular democracy. But there is a present problem in that the activism of both the green and communist movement means that they ignore the importance of long-term objectives such as the character of a post-capitalist society and instead emphasise the potential of mass struggle. But the point is what should be the outcome of popular protest? Is it merely about objecting to aspects of capitalism or should it represent a constructive conception of an alternative type of society? The failure to address these issues in effective terms means that the politics of protest is primarily concerned with opposing aspects of the capitalist system rather than expressing the aims of a democratic socialist type of society in a more effective manner. The limitations of this approach means that the Marxists have an important task in trying to connect the role of mass movements to increasing support for the conception of a democratic post-capitalist society. This aspect should be an important part of the construction of the green and socialist alliance.

However, it is important to suggest that the present expression of the democratic political system continues to benefit the parties that support the capitalist system because of the influence of the dominant bourgeois ideology. Therefore, it is necessary that a counter-hegemonic strategy be developed that is able to uphold the aims of a green socialism in a more effective and popular manner. This means the popularisation of the role of a green socialist society and the connected contrast of this perspective with the present limitations of capitalism. This type of political approach would not necessarily be effective, but it would seem to be the only manner in which the influence of the aim of a green socialist society can be advanced in more popular terms. However, it has to be indicated that there is presently no reason why the more popular green movement should make an alliance with the apparently marginalised forces of the socialists. Thus, it is the tasks of the socialists to outline a programme that connects their aims with environmental objectives in a credible manner and so in these terms indicate the importance of the role of a revolutionary approach for the possible progress of the realisation of environmental aims. In other words, the presently marginalised forces of the Marxists can indicate their relevance in terms of the promotion of a convincing programme of radical change which could facilitate the possibility to realise green objectives. Hence this would mean that a connection between socialism and ecological aims is being established in a principled manner and the result could be a united struggle to achieve what has become a common standpoint. It is also to be suggested that this development would be the most effective manner in which the present marginalisation of the Marxist forces can be overcome and instead the relevance of a revolutionary approach for green objectives is more likely to be effectively established. But it has to be asked why should the greens unite with the present unpopular and marginal forces of Marxism? The answer to this question cannot be resolved in simplistic terms but instead the Marxists have to indicate their relevance to the ability to realise the objectives of the green movement. Hence the Marxists have to convince the greens that they represent the possibility to enhance the potential to realise ecological perspectives in terms of the advocacy of a convincing programme that unites the objectives of the environmental and socialist parties. But even this development would not result in automatic and immediate success. It would require a period of long-term struggle in order to facilitate these types of developments, and it has to be accepted that failure is also a possibility. But despite these problems it could be suggested that there is no alternative to the promotion of this type of perspective. Only the unity of the green and socialist movement can create the potential for the generation of the potential success of the aspects of communism and democracy. Indeed, this perspective is the most important aspect of a programme of struggle and change in the contemporary era of the role of capitalism. But the problem has been that the various Marxist groups continue to advocate vague strategies of change that seem to have little relevance. They do not seem to have the ability to develop perspectives based on the attempt to unite the aspects of democracy and communism as the basis of the promotion of change. Until this dogmatism is overcome the various Marxist parties will continue to be unable to establish credible programmes based on the recognition that the democratic aspect of the present political system has to be the beginning of the development of the possibility of radical change. Instead, they will uphold rigid perspectives that are unable to elaborate a credible perspective that is able to connect the possibilities of the aspects of democracy within the present system to the potential for radical change.