**Considering the Future Alternatives to Capitalism**

It is argued by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in ‘Inventing the Future’ (Verso< London 2016) that an alternative to capitalism is possible based on the potential of the role of the contemporary forms of technology that would establish the prospect of a new type of emancipatory society. They contend that: “Many of the demands of the left – for less work, for an end to scarcity, for economic democracy, for the production of socially useful goods, and for the liberation of humanity – are materially more achievable than at any other point of history.”(p2) But despite this potential the actual situation is defended by the consolidation of the hegemony of capitalism and the weakening of the forces of potential opposition such as the decline of the level of effectiveness of organised labour. In this context: “Neoliberalism has held sway for decades, and social democracy exists largely as an object of nostalgia. As crisis gather force and speed, politics withers and retreats. In this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been cancelled.” (p3) They suggest that an alternative in terms of the role of folk politics has proved to be unsatisfactory in relation to the task of achieving progressive change. In other words: “Rather than undertake the difficult labour of expanding and consolidating gains, this form of politics has focused on building bunkers to resist the encroachments of global neoliberalism. In so doing, it has become a politics of defence, incapable of articulating or building a new world. For any movement that struggles to escape neoliberalism and build something better, these folk political approaches are insufficient. In their place, this book sets out an alternative politics – one that seeks to take back control over our future and to foster the ambition for a world more modern than capitalism will allow. The utopian potentials inherent in twenty first century technology cannot remain bound to a parochial capitalist imagination; they must be liberated by an ambitious left alternative. Neoliberalism has failed, social democracy is impossible, and only an alternative vision can bring about universal prosperity and emancipation. Articulating and achieving this better world is the fundamental task of the left today.” (p3) This comment indicates that what is being suggested is a different and superior perspective of change if the possibility of a new emancipatory society is to be realised. Unlike most contemporary strategies for the transformation of society there is no uncritical acceptance of the apparent potential of the various forms of opposition to capitalism. Instead, it is assumed that these movements have been inadequate in relation to their attempts to create a different and emancipatory type of society. Therefore, a new approach is needed if the prospect of progressive change is to be realised. What is required is the formulation of a new strategy if the possibilities for the overcoming of capitalism and its replacement by a new type of emancipatory society is to be realised. In an important sense this perspective has to be considered to be a necessary criticism of the role of the actual forms of opposition to capitalism. It has to be accepted that they have not achieved the aim of the overcoming of the domination of the present system and the realisation of an alternative type of society. Therefore, it is necessary to suggest that there is a problem in regard to the various strategies of change of the existing types of opposition to the present system. But what we will have to assess is whether the authors are able to outline a genuinely alternative and more convincing strategy of change. The point is that it is possible to make criticism of the popular movements of the present and yet fail to establish a genuine strategy for the successful realisation of the transformation of society. In other words, it is not sufficient to make criticisms of the limitations of the various mass movements, but to instead try to establish how these issues can be resolved and tackled in terms of the indication of the genuine superiority of a different strategy of change. The point being made is that it is not adequate to make criticism of the various movements critical of capitalism it is also necessary to outline an alternative political approach, in relation to the task of the realising progressive change, which is credible and is able to tackle the challenges posed by the present domination of neo-liberalism and capitalism.

However, it is necessary to also suggest that a promising beginning is outlined by the authors in that they recognise that the activist character of the contemporary mass movements is not sufficient in order to realise genuine transformation of society. They comment that the various campaigns are characterised by the lack of coherent objectives: “When demands can be discerned at all, they usually fail to articulate anything substantial. They are often nothing more than empty slogans – as meaningful as calling for world peace. In more recent struggles, the very ideas of making demands has been questioned. The Occupy movement infamously struggled to articulate meaningful goals, worried that anything too substantial would be decisive.” (p7) Therefore unlike most commentaries the authors are aware that the various mass movements of protest are undermined by this aspect being what characterises the objectives of the given struggles. In other words, these struggles have some idea of what they are against but are unable to articulate what they support. It could also be argued that this as aspect is characterised by the failure to outline a perspective of a conception of a socialist alternative to capitalism. Therefore, instead what is characteristic is a movement of protest concerning aspects of the present system, but this is not elaborated into becoming a more constructive expression of support for a socialist type of alternative. The various mass movements know what they are against but are vague about what they support. Indeed, this aspect of their approach is made into an issue of apparent merit rather than being recognised as a disadvantage of their politics. Therefore, as the authors outline the result is that political protest becomes an end in itself and the result can only be of limited importance because: “Protests can build connections, encourage hope and remind people of their power. Yet beyond these transient feelings, politics still demands the exercise of that power, lest these affective bonds go to waste. If we will not act after one of the largest crises of capitalism, then when?” (p7) But it is also necessary to indicate that criticism of the various activist movements is not sufficient. Instead, this criticism will only become of relevant importance if it is connected to the elaboration of a strategy of change. The point is that the various movements of opposition to capitalism indicate a potential for the generation of support for an alternative to this system. Hence what is required is not just criticism of the limitations of the present forms of mass struggle but instead the elaboration of what could constitute their logical development into becoming forms of genuine alternatives to the continued domination of capitalism. Therefore, it is not sufficient for the authors to be critics of the limitations of the various activist movements in relation to their apparently lack of strategic objectives concerning the issue of the transformation of capitalism into a different type of society. Instead, it is necessary to outline in systematic terms that would facilitate the development of these struggles into becoming a conscious and explicit attempt to realise an alternative to capitalism. Therefore, it seems to be a negative approach to merely define the character of various mass struggles as being of a futile character. But the authors insist: “What can we conclude from all of this? The recent cycle of struggles has to be identified as one of overarching failure, despite a multitude of small-scale succusses and movements of large-scale mobilisation. The question that any analysis of the left today must grapple with is simply: what has gone wrong?.......The recent weakness of the left cannot be simply chalked up to increased state and capitalist repression: an honest reckoning must accept that problems lie within the left.”(p9) This point may not be invalid, but then the issue becomes whether the authors can outline a perspective that goes beyond criticism of the politics of the movement of the progressive and left wing forces. It is quite possible to establish many limitations of the various types of left-wing struggles, but the issue that then becomes relevant can this criticism become genuinely constructive in terms of the elaboration of a convincing basis for the development of a strategy of change. In this context it will be necessary to try and establish that the understanding of the limitations of folk politics is actually useful. If folk politics is what characterises an important aspect of the role of contemporary oppositional forms of politics is it actually constructive to dismiss its importance and to instead define it as being of a utopian and impractical character. Would it not be more constructive to try and connect folk politics to the role of a more effective and necessary type of political struggle. This is the issue that has to be centrally addressed.

The point being made is that can we ignore the importance of folk politics despite its possible limitations because of an emphasis on the role of the specific and local instead of the general and global. The issue that has to be addressed is that most struggles seem to express a folk dimension in this manner of the importance of the aspirations of communities or particular organisations that seem to be created by the domination and exploitation expressed by the role of global capitalism. If the problem seems to be the imposition of global imperatives onto the activity of specific communities, or groups of people, it seems that the resolution of these problems is the assertion of the importance of the role of the particular at the expense of the general. It is the very universal and global character of capitalism which seems to be the problem in relation to the generation of a situation of the domination and exploitation of the various local communities. Hence it would seem to be logical that the only manner in which these issues can be addressed in an egalitarian manner is to assert the importance of the autonomy of the role of the local. But there is a problem with this perspective that is indicated by the authors which is that the activity of the specific community or group of people is unable to overcome the domination of the global and universal. In this context: “The classic images of universal emancipation and global change have been transformed into a prioritisation of the suffering of the particular and the authenticity of the local. As a result, any process of constructing a universal politics is rejected from the outset.” (p11) Thus we have the paradoxical situation in that what seems to be of relevance is the issues that motivate the struggles of specific groups of people or local communities but the possibility to resolve these issues in a progressive manner requires the development of global forms of political activity. This problem means that whilst most struggles will initially have local and specific characteristics they have to become a more universal type of activity if success is to be realised: “Folk politics is a necessary component of any successful political project, but it can only be a starting point…..Folk political thinking can be perfectly adapted to….projects aimed solely at resistance, movements organised around local issues, and small scale projects Political movements based upon keeping a hospital open….are all admirable, but they are importantly different from movements trying to challenge neoliberal capitalism. The idea that one organisation, tactic or strategy applies equally well to any sort of struggle is one of the most pervasive and damaging beliefs among today’s left. Strategic reflection – on means and ends, enemies and allies – is necessary before approaching any political project. Given the nature of global capitalism, any postcapitalist project will require an ambitious, abstract, mediated, complex and global approach – one that folk-political approaches are incapable of providing.” (p12) But this development of an internationalist type of approach with regards to perspectives of change seems to be very difficult given the often localised and national based approach of most forms of struggle and protest. Indeed, it could be suggested that most forms of opposition to various aspects of the domination of capitalism will initially have a localised character. Hence the task is to develop the reasons why the very success of the localised aspects of a particular form of discontent requires the development of a more international approach. But this must mean that it is necessary to appeal to the very interests of the aspect of the local and national and so be able to outline how the logical expression of this character requires a process of the successful realisation of the role of the global. In these terms, the authors do not seem to be able to identify how the interests of the local requires its global expression in emancipatory terms. Instead, they outline this point as a moral or ethical imperative: “By emphasising and remaining at the level of the immediate, folk politics lacks the tools to transform neoliberalism into something else. While folk politics can undoubtedly make important interventions in local struggles, we deceive ourselves when we think these are turning the tide against global capitalism. They represent, at best, temporary respite against its onslaught. The project of this book is to begin outlining an alternative – a way for the left to navigate from the local to the global, and synthesise the particular with the universal.” (p12-13) But the most credible aspect of the development of an internationalist approach concerning the issue of social emancipation is not to emphasise the apparent inability of the role of national and specific forms of struggle. The point is that the question of success of struggles in national terms cannot be defined in advance of their development. In other words, we cannot rule out the possibility of the limited victory of disputes with a national dimension. But the prospect of the ultimate realisation of the overcoming of the domination of capital requires the realisation of success in an international manner. However, it still has to be emphasised that this very development may have a national form in terms of the uneven success of various struggles in national terms. It will be the victory of these national struggles that will generate the possibility of the international attempt to overcome the domination of global capital. This view of the continued uneven aspect of the revolutionary process does not undermine a commitment to an internationalist revolutionary perspective. Instead, we are merely trying to emphasise that the very character of the class struggle will continue to have specific and national dimensions even in the era of effective globalised capitalism. There is still an importance to the role of the nation state, even in the period of global capitalism, which means that the development of opposition to the system may acquire national aspects. However, the primary political aspect of the role of the forces of revolutionary change is to try and promote the development of global change. The national aspect of the revolutionary process should not become the justification of the rejection of an internationalist political perspective. In this context the realisation of socialism in one country is still an unrealistic prospect. Hence, the aspect of uneven development in political terms should be to connect any successful revolutionary struggle with the continued international tasks to overcome the domination of global capital. The point is that any limited national revolutionary process cannot be ultimately successful, even in the most developed national economies, because of the continuation of the supremacy of global capital. Therefore, the authors are right to emphasise the strategic importance of international revolutionary change. However, there is an element of dogmatism in this approach because they do not seem to acknowledge the uneven character of politics. This aspect means that national revolutions may still be significant even in the era of a globalised capitalism. We cannot deny the aspect of national political traditions or the continued importance of the role of national forms of the class struggle. Therefore, instead of defending a vague conception of global revolution we still have to allow for the continued importance of the role of the national aspect of the process of social change. But the aim of any successful revolutionary regime will be the encouragement of the realisation of the international overcoming of the domination of global capital, because ultimately a national form of revolutionary regime cannot successfully create an emancipatory form of society in the conditions of the continuation of the supremacy of the capitalist system. However, it has to be suggested that this perspective has not changed since the era of Lenin and Trotsky. There may have been important structural changes in the character of capitalism, such as the modification of its imperialist character, but the international aspects of the revolutionary perspective are still important because this approach is connected to an accurate understanding of the features of what is a global economic system. Thus, the major limitation of folk politics, which is not systematically established by the authors, is its reformist character and the rejection of an international revolutionary perspective. The reformist approach suggests that limited national political change is both possible and feasible, and that will generate a process of transition to socialism. This approach has been discredited by the events of contemporary history, but it has not resulted in increasing support for a revolutionary alternative. Indeed, this very point has been illustrated by the development of folk politics as the contemporary form of reformism, or the view that the struggles of organised groups will ultimately result in the changing character of capitalist society into a more progressive type of system. Hence folk politics combines a form of activism with illusions in the possibility of the reform of society via the success of the various types of localised struggle. This aspect indicates that a genuine internationalist alternative approach requires the promotion of a revolutionary perspective as opposed to the nationalism and reformism of folk politics. But it is debatable whether the authors make this point in a systematic and convincing manner.

What has been emphasised are the limitations of folk politics in strategic terms because it ultimately does not suggest the replacement of capitalism with an emancipatory alternative type of society but instead proposes various modifications of the existing economic system: “In this process, folk politics often reduces politics to an ethical and individual struggle. There is a tendency sometimes to imagine that we simply need ‘good’ capitalists or a ‘responsible’ capitalism…..Considered in all these ways, folk politics appears to make global capitalism small enough to be thinkable – and at the same time to articulate how to act upon this restricted image of capitalism. By contrast…folk political tendencies are mistaken. If complexity presently outstrips humanity’s capacities to think and control, there are presently two options: one is to reduce complexity down to a human scale; the other is to expand human capacities. We endorse the latter position. Any postcapitalist project will necessarily require……..mechanisms of collective control to be able to marshal complex phenomena for the betterment of humanity.” (p15-16) But what does this perspective mean in terms of the issue of the character of society. On the one hand it is being suggested that the limited objectives of the post-capitalist movement are inadequate because they do not amount to the effective transformation of the character of society in emancipatory terms. But on the other hand, the issue of what would be the result of the struggles of a post-capitalist character is not being indicated in a coherent manner. The point is that the question of whether socialism is still a credible aim in the conditions of contemporary capitalism has to be outlined as being either of an outmoded character or instead having continued importance. If the former conclusion is reached, then it has to be outlined what type of society is being advocated. In other words, there is something ambiguous about the aim of post-capitalism that has to be clarified. We will have to discuss if this ambiguity is resolved in terms of the establishment of a definite objective of the aim of the various mass movements of struggle within capitalism. We would argue that socialism is still of relevance because it expresses despite some vagueness concerning its character what is a definite societal alternative to capitalism.

Indeed, this point is important because the authors major criticism of the various forms of folk politics is its vagueness concerning its aims and conception of what would constitute an alternative type of society that should replace capitalism. It is indicated that this problem is defined in terms of a failure to establish the credibility and effectiveness of a hegemonic project of change: “The legacy of these social movements was therefore two-sided. The ideas, values and new ideas articulated by them had a significant impact on a global level; the dissemination of feminist, anti-racist, gay rights and anti-bureaucratic demands remains their strongest achievement. …..Simultaneously, however, an inability or lack of desire to turn the more radical sides of these projects into hegemonic ones also had important consequences for the period of destabilisation that followed. While capable of generating an array or new and powerful ideas of human freedom, the new social movements were unable to replace the faltering social democratic order.” (p19) But this problem was because the development of activism became considered to be an end in itself. The role of activism was what motivated the various forms of protest struggle and so the objective was not the transformation of the character of society. This meant that the issue of the type of society that would be the possible result of these popular struggles was considered to be an irrelevance. Therefore, the basis to overcome these limitations was to develop support for a strategy for the realisation of revolutionary change and the achievement of socialism. Hence it is not sufficient to be primarily critics of the post-capitalist groups instead we have to outline how their objectives requires the realisation of an alternative type of socialist society. Hence it is the fact that activism has become an end in itself creates important political problems. The authors support this conclusion, but do they adequately outline how this limitation can be overcome? In other words, it is not sufficient to be critics of the various post-capitalist movements we instead have to either reject their importance, or else outline how they can most effectively realise their objectives with the realisation of an alternative socialist type of society. But the authors seem to have an indecisive stance in relation to this issue, and instead imply that a more effective type of post-capitalist politics is necessary. But who will be the agency of this type of improved form of political activity? The decline of the influence of the role of the workers is mentioned in terms of the effective end of the period of the importance of social democracy and its replacement with the neo-liberal society, but who will replace the workers as the major agency of social change? To the authors the major issue is not the question of the character of the agency of change but instead the limitations of the perspectives of the various protest movements that have emerged within society. However, it could be suggested that this problem is because the various forces of mass struggle are not related to potentially more effective agencies of change such as the workers. Hence the primary question is the possible secondary role of the mass protest movements in relation to their connection to the structures of the economic and political character of society. This means that it is the very marginalisation of the oppressed groups which has led to the movements of opposition to the system, but this also means that they are of limited effectiveness in terms of the possibility to develop genuine forms of change to the system. It is also possible that problematical tactics of struggle can be adopted that do not result in effective changes to the character of society. The authors outline how the Occupy movement became a popular form of struggle in America but that the application of its principles of direct and popular democracy were unable to sustain an effective form of organisation able to achieve its objectives. Indeed, the very impractical character of its form of struggle meant that it could not realise its aims. The authors outline the problems of this activist movement in the following terms: “The immediate question that must be asked of any prefigurative politics is therefore: “how can it be expanded and scaled up?......In any case the, the difficult task of traversing from the particular to the universal, from the local to the global, from the temporary to the permanent is elided by wishful thinking. The strategic imperatives to expand, extend and universalise are left unfulfilled.” (p35) The authors suggest that the major problem is the localised character of struggles like that of the Occupy movement, but surely the ultimate problem is the lack of generalised support for this form of direct action. How can it become possible to develop popular forms of support for these types of occupation and direct struggle? The point is that the problematical aspect is not necessarily the type of tactic of militant action that has been adopted, but instead that such a development remains without any popular influence and support within the wider public. In other words, the actual issue is to create forms of mass movements of struggle that are also concerned to genuinely transform the balance of class forces within society by the effective promotion of support for their activity within society. But instead of this criticism the authors seemed more concern to criticise the apparent ineffectiveness of what are limited forms of struggle, but surely the issue is not about the character of mass action but instead the failure to generalise it in terms of the failure to increase support within society for the militant activity being developed by the protestors. The lack of solidarity action is what generally means that the various struggles of opposition to aspects of capitalism do not seem to succeed. This means that the problem is not with the folk politics of the various protests but instead the failure to develop convincing and effective strategies of change. But this problem is because of the effective rejection of the importance of the aim of socialism. It is support for this objective that would provide the basis for the development of the aspect of purpose to the forms of action being developed. Instead, the very aspect of struggle becomes an end in itself which means that this actually means the character of the activity lacks purpose. It would be the acceptance of the aim of socialism that would provide the various struggles with a sense of clarity and purpose. The authors criticise the problems connected with the activism of the various movements of dissent and vaguely suggest the necessity of a more coherent and consistent political perspective. But this is just suggested in terms of consistent opposition to global capitalism. But in order to make this aim constructive it has to be connected to the only genuine alternative to capitalism which is socialism. Thus, the major problem is not with the possible limitations of the activist movements but instead that they have a collection of vague aims that are not an expression of the necessity to realise a definite alternative to the domination of capitalism.

But the view of the authors is that the very role of struggle is considered to be problematical and so is not a genuine alternative to the apparent progress represented by the era of the role of social democracy. They comment: “Whilst nostalgia for a lost past is clearly not an adequate response, neither is today’s glorification of resistance. Resistance always means resistance against another active force. In other words, it is a defensive and reactive gesture, rather than an active movement. We do not resist a new world into being, we resist in the name of an old world. The contemporary emphasis on resistance therefore belies a defensive stance towards the encroachments of contemporary capitalism. Trade unions, for instance, position themselves as resisting neoliberalism with demands to ‘save out health service’ or ‘stop austerity’, but these demands simply reveal a conservative disposition at the heart of the movement. According to these demands, the best one can hope for is small impediments in the face of a predatory capitalism. We can only struggle to keep what we already have, as limited and crisis ridden as it may be…… In many circle’s resistance has come to be glorified, obscuring the conservative nature of such a stance behind the veil of radical rhetoric. Resistance is seen to be all that is possible, while constructive projects are nothing but a dream. While it can be important in some circumstances, in the task of building a new world, resistance is futile.” (p47) While it can be suggested that some movements emphasise the role of resistance at the expense of the importance of long-term objectives it also has to be suggested that the very possibility of progressive change has to depend on the development of the aspect of resistance to the objectives of the defenders of the capitalist system. Without the aspect of resistance, it is not possible to envisage the feasibility of the transformation of society in emancipatory terms. But the issue that is of crucial importance is what are the aims of the advocates of the role of resistance. Do they merely aim to maintain the present situation in a conservative manner, or do they instead aim to utilise the role of resistance in order to facilitate the possibility of progressive change and the realisation of an emancipatory type of society? In this context the character of resistance can have a contradictory character, but without its development it is not possible to envisage the realisation of a situation that would realise the interests of the exploited and oppressed sections of society. Hence a progressive perspective should not reject the role of resistance as being essentially futile but instead be based on the connection of resistance to the development of a popular challenge to the capitalist system. Without resistance the prospect of change is unlikely to occur. Therefore, left wing groups should aim to develop a perspective that attempts to realise the potential of resistance to bring about genuine change. In this context the problem has been that the role of resistance has become considered to be an end in itself and the issue of the transformation of society has become considered to be irrelevant. But the necessary response to this situation is not to reject the role of resistance as being unnecessary or of secondary importance but to instead develop a strategy that can indicate the potential of resistance to achieve the transformation of society. The authors make an important point when they outline how folk politics has emphasised the role of resistance at the level of local communities and they rightly suggest that this is an inadequate strategy in relation to the possibility of the realisation of genuine progressive change. Despite the one-sidedness in their criticism of folk politics they do make the important point that: “The numerous protests and marches and occupations typically operate without any sense of strategy, simply acting as dispersed and independent blips of resistance. There is far too little thought given to how to combine these various actions, and how they might function together to collectively build a better world. Instead, we are left with actions that sometimes succeed but which rarely………..contributes to medium and long term goals.” (p49) This criticism seems valid, but it essentially indicates that what is necessary is to connect the various local and specific forms of popular struggle with ambitious objectives in national and international terms. In other words, the problem is not the lack of credibility or the aspect of impracticality in a given type of struggle but instead that the participants in the mass action may not recognise that in order to realise their objectives in a consistent manner requires the transformation of the character of society. Therefore, whilst the impetus to the development of struggle may be the influence of folk politics it will be necessary to overcome the ideological limitations of this approach and so recognise that the role of protest and action is not sufficient in order to consistently realise the objectives of the movement. Instead, it is necessary to develop a perspective of the importance of the transformation of society. Therefore, the ultimate problem of folk politics is not a practical issue of its apparent lack of effectiveness with regards to the various forms of opposition to the objectives of the defenders of capitalism but is instead about the various limitations of the character of the strategy that is being adopted with regards to the struggles. In most instances the participants of folk politics still believe that they can obtain the acceptance of their aims by the institutions of government and economic activity. But the defenders of the system have to try to defeat the popular movements of struggle because this enables the domination of capitalism to be consolidated. It is this aspect which indicates that folk politics can only genuinely achieve its objectives by the transformation of society. In other words, we can reject the contention of the authors that the problem is the overall lack of feasibility of folk politics. The actual issue of feasibility depends on the type of strategy that is adopted, and the level of popular support for a given form of struggle. Hence, we cannot determine in advance that folk politics is inherently flawed, but instead the success of its objectives is connected to the practical credibility of its programme of action. This aspect is also related to whether the various forms of folk politics acquire an effective level of unity and so can combine in order to achieve their aims in the most convincing manner. But we should also indicate that the important role of the working class has not been superseded by the increasing significance of folk politics. The character of the capitalist economy is still based on the significance of labour. Therefore, the task is to try to connect the aspirations of labour and the adherents of forms of folk politics in terms of a common programme for the change of society. In other words, it could be argued that the failure to achieve this type of unity is an important reason why the possibility to establish effective opposition to the imperatives of the present system is not established. Thus, the contemporary importance of the aspect of folk politics would actually seem to suggest additional reasons why the prospect for the transformation of society has become more favourable. But often this potential is changed into its opposite because of the lack of influence of a perspective of progressive change within the various folk groups and the working class. Consequently, it would be wrong to dogmatically suggest that folk politics are inherently limited and so cannot promote a perspective of emancipation. Instead, folk politics tend to be limited and lacking in ambition because of the lack of influence of the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism. Therefore, it can be suggested that the major problem is not an inherent lack of ineffectiveness of folk politics, but instead this issue arises because of the failure to develop a strategy that can promote the possibility of genuine social change. The point is that folk politics has arisen as an expression of the character and interests of various forms of discontent with the domination of capitalism. Therefore, it would seem to be both logical and principled to connect the role of folk politics with the possibility to develop popular support of opposition to capitalism. It may be dogmatically claimed that this perspective suggests a rejection of the important economic and political role of the workers. But this criticism would not be plausible if the objective of the development of this understanding is to outline how to elaborate an effective strategy for changing the character of society. Some dogmatists would suggest that this approach represents a denial of the primary role of the workers in the attempt to transform society. But we would reject this criticism and instead suggest that the possibility of change is connected to the understanding of the importance of contemporary developments within society. In this manner the issue of the connection of folk politics to the aspirations of the workers has become important because of the very developments that have occurred within society. To deny the importance of this perspective is not to affirm the revolutionary role of the workers but instead to justify dogmatism.

However, the authors would deny the contemporary importance of folk politics because they consider that it is inherently an expression of particular and localised forms of opposition to capitalism which cannot achieve effective results: “Capitalism is an aggressively expansive universal, from which efforts to segregate a space of autonomy are bound to fail. With-drawl, resistance, localism and autonomous spaces represent a defensive game against an uncompromising and incessantly encroaching capitalism. Moreover, particularisms can easily coexist with capitalist universalism…The much lamented capacity of capitalism to incorporate resistance more often than not simply reveals that particularisms are, in themselves, incapable of competing against a universalism. Indeed, given neoliberalism inherently expansionary nature, only an alternative expansionary and inclusive universal of some kind will be able to combat and supersede capitalism on a global scale…..An ambitious leftist politics cannot be satisfied with measures to defend localities. It must seek instead to construct a new future-orientated politics capable of challenging capitalism at the largest scales. It must unmask the pseudo-universality of capitalist social relations and recapture the meaning of the future.” (p70) This point is generally correct and principled, but the point is that various forms of mass struggle of opposition to capitalism will assume a localised character in their initial aspects. Hence the aim is to connect the various forms of opposition to capitalism in increasingly international terms. The point is that the different types of activist movements will have specific aims in their initial forms of expression, and so will aim to oppose capitalism in localised and particular terms. Hence the role of the forces of revolutionary Marxism is to outline a conception of the realisation of the aims of these movements in terms of the development of their united action in national and international terms. It will not be the leaders of these activist organisations that will advocate an international strategy, and so it is the task of the forces of Marxism to promote the importance of this approach in relation to the attempt to realise the aims of the given activist movements. In other words, if the parties of Marxism acquire an important role in relation to the role of the various forms of protest they can as a result be able to generate the increasing influence of an internationalist approach that aims to challenge the domination of global capitalism. Hence there is nothing necessary futile about the activity of the activist movements. Instead, the issue as to whether they can become successful depends on the prospects of the success of the struggle for the realisation of the international transformation of capitalism into socialism. However, it can be suggested that without these protest movements the prospect for the success of the attempt at revolutionary change will be less feasible. Instead, it could be suggested that such activity can be the basis to promote the more important and possibly more effective actions of the trade unions and workers. The point is that because of the success of the very neo-liberal offensive of capital against labour, the workers have often been put onto the defensive and the result has been a decline of the recent significance of the struggles of the trade unions. But instead of this aspect there has been the important development of folk politics. Therefore, the obvious and logical task would seem to be to connect the role of the recent role of folk politics with the still more important possibility of the development of the collective action of the workers. This point is not made in order to deny the importance of folk politics but instead to suggest that it cannot become the primary basis of change. Indeed, it could be suggested that the present character of folk politics is based on an acceptance of capitalism, and so the aim is to modify aspects of the economic system rather than achieve its transformation. Therefore, the role of Marxists is to provide a feasible perspective that can generate support with the various forms of folk politics for the aim of the revolutionary transformation of society. In other words, the development of folk politics does not mean that the development of the influence of left-wing politics is a futile task. Instead, what has occurred is a form of opposition to aspects of capitalism which could become revolutionary if the influence of Marxism becomes important. However, the aims of the various forms of folk politics can only acquire feasible realisation in relation to the development of an alliance of these groups with the more important collective power of the working class. Presently this type of alliance has not occurred, and it is this lack of unity which means that the development of the contemporary potential for progressive change is not established. Instead, the forces of reaction seem to be more powerful and coherent given the inability of the various types of discontent to become united in terms of support for a commonly agreed perspective about the aim of the transformation of society. Indeed, this is the outstanding issue of importance rather than the apparently inherently ineffective character of folk politics.

However, the authors are right to suggest that it would be wrong for the various movements of opposition to global capitalism to reject the importance of modernity. Instead, it is necessary to develop a conception of an alternative and more progressive conception of modernity that can represent the possibility for the achievement of the emancipation of humanity from the various limitations of the present forms of exploitation that are being generated by the domination of capitalism. The authors also make the important point that various conceptions of inevitable progress that tend towards the realisation of humanity have been shown to be problematical and instead what has occurred is the durability of the capitalist version of modernity. They also make the important point that in order to develop support for the aim of the achievement of a progressive alternative to capitalism it is necessary to elaborate more convincing conceptions of what this type of alternative society could be like. It is also outlined in important terms that a defensive stance of opposition to aspects of capitalism is not adequate in terms of the promotion of an alternative to the present system. Instead, the aspect of defence of gains made by the people has to be connected to a conception of a type of society that could genuinely replace the present domination of capitalism. This means the elaboration of a convincing form of the universal character of a type of progressive society that could replace the present domination of global society. But in outlining the character of this alternative they are essentially vague. They suggest that what is important is: “And in a globalised world, where different peoples necessarily co-exist, it means building systems in common despite the plurality of the ways of life.” (p78) This point may have validity in terms of connecting the importance of diversity with the generation of common objectives in connection to the aim of the creation of a different and progressive type of society, but such a perspective is still vague. It would not be dogmatic to suggest that the diversity of different nationalities and cultural traditions still has to be connected to the realisation of the only effective form of societal alternative to capitalism which is a socialist type of society, or the expression of the only genuine form of human emancipation. The point is that socialism aims to end the domination of capital over labour and so create a different and emancipatory type of society. But this point does not seem to be accepted by the authors, but instead they replace the definite perspective of socialism with a vague conception of a progressive alternative to the domination of neo-liberalism. Instead of socialism they introduce the vague perspective of the aim of a post-capitalist society. But this understanding only indicates what we are against, and so does not outline what we should support. Instead, the continuing importance of the aim of socialism is that it expresses the conception of a genuine alternative to capitalism and we can outline what this objective is in terms of a variety of ideas. But the general merit of socialism is that it indicates the importance of what a society would be like if it was no longer based on the capital-labour relation. In contrast the term post-capitalism is characterised by an inherent vagueness that is unable to establish what this type of society would be like. Therefore, even though it is possible to be dogmatic about what constitutes the character of socialism, this is still a conception that provides the basis for the elaboration of the most convincing alternatives to capitalism. This point cannot be established in terms of the vague conception of post-capitalism.

The importance of this criticism is indicated in relation to the over-generalised character of the definition of the post-capitalist aims of the authors. What is being suggested is the significance of a different conception of humanity and the necessity to realise its progressive possibilities. They suggest: “It means liberating ourselves from the decrepit economic image of humanity that capitalist modernity has installed, and inventing a new humanity. Emancipation, under this vision would therefore mean increasing the capacity of humanity to act according to whatever its desires might become. And universal emancipation would be the maximal extension of this goal to the entirety of our species.” (p83) In other words a concept of freedom would be connected to the objectives of freedom, which would mean transcending the limitations of an economic system based on waged labour and capital accumulation. This would be a post-capitalist society, but for some unexplained reason it is not possible for the authors to define this objective as the realisation of socialism. But if the objective is the overcoming of the role of capitalism because of its exploitative limitations it would seem that socialism is the logical outcome of this process of transcendence. However, there is an element of ambiguity in relation to this perspective because of the very reluctance to define the alternative as the objective of socialism. Instead, post-capitalism is considered to be the aim of the successful realisation of opposition to the present system. But how would such a type of society differ from that of socialism? Presumably the dynamics of capitalism would be replaced by a mode of production based on different principles and the perspective of post-capitalism does not seem to establish the importance of this objective in definite terms. Instead, the concept of socialism indicates the significance of a different type of society with new economic principles. If it is considered that workers management of the economy is the major aim that is being suggested as an alternative to the economic system of capitalism it would seem that such a society would be considered to have a socialist character. Indeed, it is the lack of this aspect which meant that the various Stalinist type of societies could not be considered to be genuine expressions of socialism. In other words, post-capitalism implies that it is necessary to go beyond the limitations of capitalism, but what does this mean in precise terms? In contrast the objective of socialism suggests in explicit terms that our aim is to replace capitalism with a different economic and political system. What is being suggested is that the domination of the present capitalist system is problematical and that an alternative is required if the aim of liberation of humanity from aspects of exploitation and subordination is to be overcome. In contrast what is meant by post-capitalism? As argued this aim only has relevance and significance if what is being suggested is a different type of society based on principles that are not in any manner similar to that which occurred within capitalism. It was the failure to establish this situation which meant that the USSR did not become a genuine alternative socialist type of society. Hence socialism is what indicates in the most coherent and consistent terms that it is a different and more progressive society than capitalism. In contrast post-capitalism is a vague term that does not define its character in precise terms. Primarily such a definition does not indicate what are its differences to capitalism. Is such a society a new mode of production based on the influence of the workers and peasants, or instead merely a modification of aspects of capitalism? Indeed, the concept of post-capitalism becomes the basis to justify the utopian conception of a post-work world. This is an unrealistic conception because work is needed in order to create the goods that humans need in order to realise their material and cultural objectives. Instead, it would be more realistic and progressive to suggest that we need to develop non-alienating forms of work, or work that enables humans to realise their cultural and social needs and potential. The problems involved in the character of work under capitalism does not mean that what is required is a post-work world. Such an aim is either vague or else is totally unrealistic. Instead, what is required is the development of a situation in which the role of work is able to contribute to the cultural and material requirements of people.

The authors outline how technological development is creating a persistent problem of unemployment, and the increased importance of a precariat based on the role of temporary and unskilled work. It is outlined how the significance of surplus labour is utilised in order to enforce the discipline of the capitalists over those in work. In order to overcome these problems, the perspective that is being adopted is that of the realisation of a post-work society. But the issue of the role of work within a post-capitalist society cannot be defined in advance of the creation of this type of social formation and the issues it will have to tackle in relation to the establishment of a connection between economic activity and the realisation of the needs of society. But however, this issue is understood it has to be suggested that a post-work society is not an adequate description of a possible alternative to capitalism. Instead, what we have to suggest is that a post-capitalist society will be based on the ending of the imperatives of capital accumulation and instead the establishment of different forms of principles for the expression of the character of productive and economic activity. The aim is to establish a changed situation in which the role of the process of production will occur, and this will mean an end to the previous domination of capital over the various aspects of economic activity. Only in this context can the question of a so-called post-work society be addressed in any meaningful manner.

However, whilst allowing for the importance of these qualifications to the aim of the realisation of a post-work world the objective for the realisation of automation of the economy seems to be a necessary aspiration when considering the issue of the character of the post-capitalist social formation. The authors contend: “Our first demand is for a fully automated economy. Using the latest technological developments, such an economy would aim to liberate humanity from the drudgery of work whilst simultaneously producing increasing amounts of wealth……With automation…machines can increasingly produce all necessary goods and services, whilst also releasing humanity from the effort of producing them. For this reason, we argue that the tendencies towards automation and the replacement of human labour should be enthusiastically accelerated and targeted as a political project of the left. This is a project that takes an existing capitalist tendency and seeks to push it beyond the acceptable parameters of capitalist social relations.” (p109) But what this comment does not establish in precise terms is that the possibility to realise this potential and automation and technology within capitalism requires a struggle to realise the development of workers control, and then workers management of the economy within capitalism. There has to be a change in the balance of economic power within capitalism that enables the producers to create a situation in which the domination of the dynamics of capital accumulation become replaced by different objectives established by the increasing influence of the role of the producers. In this manner automation can become changed from being an important aspect of capital accumulation and instead could express the development of the ability of the workers to be able to define the objectives of the character of economic activity. Therefore, only the success of the class struggle can change the character of automation so that it is no longer primarily about the realisation of the objectives of capital accumulation. In this context what is required is the consistent development of the trade unions so that their present primary objective of establishing agreement with the employers is replaced with the aim of the establishment of workers management of the economy. However, the successful realisation of this approach means that the present opportunist objectives of the leaders of the trade unions be replaced with a more militant approach based on the increased influence of the role of the rank and file. But the possibility to establish this situation would also mean that the importance of revolutionary Marxism would have to be generated so that the influence of a perspective of workers management would become to be considered to be both credible and important. But instead of such an approach the authors seem to suggest that it should be an expression of an inherent tendency within capitalism to be able to establish a post-work economy. The point is that under capitalism the possibilities for generalised automation will not be realised because of the importance of the role of cheap labour. Only under a different type of society can a generalised automated economy be established. It is also in these terms that automation can become a genuine expression of the realisation of human need instead of the interests of capital accumulation. Therefore, the issue of automation has to become an aspect of a perspective of revolutionary change. But it is the importance of this point which is not sufficiently and consistently supported by the approach of the authors. Instead in a vague manner they imply that the tendency for automation under capitalism can become the basis of a process of inexorable transition to the role of automation in a post-capitalist economy. But the important point is that automation can either be an expression of the imperatives of capital accumulation within a capitalist economy or alternatively can become the basis of the organising principles of a post-capitalist form of economy. Which development occurs will depend on the level of effectiveness of the workers to be able to define the character of economic activity in opposition to the aims and objectives of the interests of capital. If the workers are in a subordinated position, then the character of automation will be to improve the level of efficiency related to the role of capital in the process of the extraction of a surplus from the workers. But if there is a change in the balance of class forces this will result in the possibility for the workers to be able to utilise the aspect of automation in their interests, such as the connection of this aspect of productive activity with the possibility to shorten the working week and to develop the control of the producers over the role of economic activity. The point is that these developments will not be an automatic outcome of the logic of the economic process but instead will be the result of the success of the workers in the class struggle. It is also quite possible that automation will be utilised in order to consolidate the domination of capital over labour in terms of development of a situation in which the role of technology becomes the basis to establish conditions of work that favour the interests of the employers rather than the workers. Therefore, it requires the role of the activity of the workers in order to try and establish a situation in which the workers are able to dictate the purposes and role of technology. In other words what is required is the realisation of workers management within the capitalist economy. However, this situation will be inherently unstable unless this situation is consolidated by the development of progress towards the possible establishment of the replacement of capitalism with a different socialist type of society. But this aim requires the success of class struggle that will be based on the influence of a genuine revolutionary perspective. Thus, it could be suggested that the possibility to utilise technology in the interests of the workers requires the important role of revolutionary leadership. But the authors do not seem to recognise the importance of this aspect if progressive economic changes are to be realised and consolidated.

The authors also outline the reasons for the role of a basic income. They suggest that a Universal Basic Income (UBI) requires: “In demanding a UBI, therefore three factors must be articulated in order to make it meaningful: it must provide a sufficient amount of income to live on; it must be universal, provided to everyone unconditionally, and it must be a supplement to the welfare state rather than a replacement for it.”(p119) If there is a basic income and so the necessity of the role of work is reduced then this actually increases the economic power of the workers. They would have more freedom to choose the type of work they want and so could reject having to do unpleasant and low paid employment. But if the balance of economic power is changed by the introduction of the basic income, why would the capitalists and pro-bourgeois governments agree to its implementation? The answer to this question is important and seems to be neglected by the authors. But the point is that only an effective militant strategy of class struggle could result in the introduction of a basic income. However, this development would require the important influence of the role of a revolutionary perspective that was based on the possibility of a socialist party to be able to develop popular support for this aim of a basic income within the working class. The authors seem to suggest that the major opposition to the realisation of a basic income is the influence of the role of the work ethic. Hence it is the working class that will oppose the aim of a basic income. But surely it is the capitalists and conservative type governments that will reject the basic income as being unfeasible in relation to the necessity for work to occur in the situation of wages being defined by the views of employers. Hence the issue of the realisation of the basic income depends on the success of the role of class struggle. But this development requires the role of a revolutionary party. However, the importance of this type of organisation is something that is not mentioned by the authors. But what is outlined is the necessity of a counter-hegemonic strategy that is not connected to the aspect of the conscious intervention of the role of class and party but is instead related to the realisation of various tendencies within the capitalist economy. Therefore, an aspect of determinism replaces an emphasis on the role of a subjective factor for understanding the possibility of change.

Instead of parties and the working class there is an indication of the role of the subordinated within society to be able to transform society: “A counter-hegemonic project enables marginal and oppressed groups to transform the balance of power in a society and bring about a new common sense. To abjure hegemony therefore implies an abandonment of the basic idea of winning and exercising power, and to effectively give up on the primary terrain of political struggle……A counter-hegemonic project will therefore seek to overturn an existing set of alliances, common sense, and rule by consent in order to install a new hegemony. Such a project will seek to build the social conditions from which a new post-work world can emerge and will require an expansive approach that goes beyond the temporary and local measures of folk politics. It requires mobilisation across different social groups, which means linking together a diversity of individual interests into a common desire for a post-work society” (p133) But this perspective of counter-hegemony does not sufficiently establish what is the objective of the role of mass struggle against global capitalism. The point is that a post-capitalist perspective is vague in terms of what is implied in relation to ultimate strategic objectives. In other words, is the aim the realisation of a different socialist type of society, or instead the establishment of important modifications to the character of capitalism? The point is that a hegemonic type project seems to imply the importance of the struggle for the realisation of a new type of social power, or what could be defined as a different socialist type of society. However, the authors seem reluctant to make this conclusion and instead seem satisfied to accept the apparent ambiguities that are connected to the aim of post-capitalist society.

The authors vaguely suggest the necessity to reject the limitations of neo-liberalism and to instead relate political perspectives to the ambitious approach of utopianism in terms of the elaboration of a counter-hegemonic strategy, but fail to outline what this means in precise terms: “This hegemonic strategy is therefore necessary to any project to transform society and the economy. And in many senses, hegemonic politics is the antitheses to folk politics. It seeks to persuade and influence, rather then presuming spontaneous politicisation, it works on multiple scales, rather than just the tangible and local, it sets out to achieve forms of social power that are long lasting, rather than temporary……A counter-hegemonic strategy would include efforts to transform the common sense of society, revive a utopian social imagination, rethink the possibilities of economics, and eventually repurpose technological and economic infrastructures. None of these steps are sufficient, but they are examples in which concrete action can be taken to build the social and material conditions for a post-work world. They prepare the ground for a moment when transformative change can occur backed by a mass movement.” (p153) But how will it be possible to develop this type of popular support that will make the possibility for the success of the counter-hegemonic project? The problem is that the forces of change are generally marginalised by the very aspect of the influence of bourgeois ideology and the common-sense acceptance of the continuation of the capitalist system. Hence the formation of a mass movement is not a spontaneous development caused by the importance of the limitations of capitalism. Instead, it requires the generation of successful ideological struggle for the possibility of the development of support for radical alternatives, and this prospect is by no means an automatic expression of the limitations of capitalism. Indeed, it is quite possible that the forces for progressive change remain marginalised and ineffective. In this manner the capitalist system will continue despite its important contradictions. Therefore, the authors modify this initial optimism about the possibility for radical change and instead discuss the challenges and problems associated with the issue of the realisation of sucess.

Thus, it is not surprising that the authors reject the role of the industrial working class as an agency of change: “The power of the global working class is today severely compromised, and a return to past strength seems unlikely. As it stands today, the classical revolutionary subject no longer exists, there is only a diverse array of partly overlapping interests and divergent experiences. However, we might question the idea that the industrial working class was ever in a position to transform the world – today’s situation is not so different from the early years of the labour movement. First, the image of worker unity has always been more of an aspirational vision than an achieved reality. From its origins, the proletariat was riven by divisions…. The tendency to unity was always a limited phenomenon, and these differences persist today, exacerbated under conditions of globalised division of labour. Perhaps more fundamentally, if deindustrialisation (the automation of manufacturing) is a necessary stage along the path towards a postcapitalist society, then the industrial working class could never have been the agent of change. Its existence was predicated upon economic conditions that would have to be eliminated in the transition to post-capitalism. If deindustrialisation is required for the transition to post-capitalism, then the industrial working class was inevitably going to lose its power in the process – fragmenting and falling apart, just as we have seen in recent decades.”(p157-158) But in reply to this view, even if we accept the importance of economic changes that has generated decreasing importance of the role of the industrial working class within the contemporary economy, it can still be argued that it has continued importance, and is most likely to be organised into influential trade unions. Therefore, any project for the transformation of society would still have to be connected to the continuing importance of the collective role of the industrial workers, even if we accept that this class has to establish allies for the possibility of progressive social change in the other groups that have been of significance in the contemporary economy. But the major problem is the lack of influence of the role of the various revolutionary Marxist groups which means that the standpoint of the aim of socialism has become marginalised within contemporary society. This means that there is no effective expression of the importance of the aim of the transformation of capitalist society into socialism. Thus, any discontent within the working class, and the other subordinated groups within society, is not likely to become developed into a conscious opposition to capitalism. The crisis of revolutionary organisation means that any discontent is not likely to become a conscious support for the aim of socialism within the exploited and oppressed groups within society.

However, we can also suggest that the traditional primary role of the industrial worker within the character of the capitalist economy has become increasingly modified by the growing significance of the white-collar worker who is involved within various forms of modern technology. Therefore, the aim of Marxists should be to try and develop the political basis for the unity of these two subordinated groups within capitalism in favour of socialism. Paradoxically, in some countries the discontent of various sections of the industrial working class has had a right-wing populist and nationalist character, whilst sections of the white-collar workers have been radicalised in left wing terms. This development only indicates the necessity for the generation of the possibility of unity of these two sections of the working class in terms of the creation of support for a progressive programme of social change. But it could be suggested that the major failure of the Marxist groups is the inability to come to terms with the changes within contemporary capitalism and so they fail to develop this type of principled and relevant perspective for the promotion of social change. The result of this situation is that the discontent of the workers often has a populist expression and so facilitates the domination of right- wing forces in the government of various contemporary capitalist societies. In this context the Marxist parties are ineffective and unable to promote a convincing and credible perspective of the possibility for the revolutionary transformation of society. This situation would not necessarily indicate the demise of the possible revolutionary role of the working class, but instead that such a potential is not likely to be realised given the present populist consciousness and related acceptance of the continuation of capitalism by many sections of the workers. If this situation is not changed then the possibility of progressive change is not likely to occur. But this is the challenge for Marxists, which is to promote a credible programme of change that can result in increasing support for this objective. Therefore, the crisis of working-class politics is actually an expression of the crisis caused by the lack of influence of the role of Marxist parties. It is this aspect that results in the frequent questioning of the role of the working class.

But the authors consider that the character of the political situation is caused by the apparent lack of an agency of change. They comment: “The fragmentation of traditional groups of resistance and revolt and the generalised decomposition of the working class means that the task today must be to knit together a new collective ‘we’. There is no pre-existing group that would embody universal interests or constitute the necessary vanguard of this transformative project – not the industrial worker, not the intellectual labourer and not the lumpen proletariat. How, then, to compose a people in the light of the fragmentation of the proletariat?” (p158) If this analysis was effectively correct it would seem that there was no credible subject of change. But it is argued that the dynamics of the various struggles of discontent with aspects of society can overcome the limitations of the fragmented character of folk politics and instead establish common and popular objectives of what becomes a post-capitalist movement: “Populism thus involves a continued negotiation of differences and particularisms, seeking to establish a common language and programme in spite of any centrifugal forces. The difference between a populist movement and folk-political approaches lies in the stance towards differences: whereas the former seeks to build a common language and project, the latter prefers difference to express themselves as differences and to avoid any universalising function.”(p160) But this analysis does not establish that the common programme being advocated by the folk political movement could still be essentially about the realisation of limited reformist type change to the capitalist system. Instead, it requires the influence of Marxism to be able to promote a principled and feasible perspective of the aim of socialism. Without this influence the populist movement is likely to be influenced by right wing objectives related to the role of the nation, and indeed this development has been the generalised result of the increased development of the importance of various forms of populism. Hence in answer to the above questions raised about the role of the industrial working class we would suggest that there is still no effective and principled alternative to the necessity to develop the important role of the working class as an agency of progressive social change. Indeed, the very failure to realise this perspective has meant that the workers can become supporters of a right-wing form of populism that can facilitate the development of authoritarian and nationalist regimes as the basis to defend global capitalism. Hence, we would suggest that a left-wing form of populism is a not a plausible and feasible perspective. Instead, it is still necessary to develop the influence of a contemporary form of the aim of socialism in order to unite various social groups against capitalism.

But the authors insist that this approach is realistic in terms of the development of what they vaguely define as a red-green coalition. Furthermore, they relate this approach to the aim of a post-work society, which can become the united response of various sections of the workers and other subordinated groups within capitalism: “The mobilisation of people around anti-work politics would require articulating a populism in such a way that a variety of struggles for social justice and human emancipation could see their interests being expressed in the movement.”(p160) But given the vague character of this objective, it would seem to be a problematical basis for the development of united struggles against capitalism. Furthermore, the issue of the problems involved in trying to establish the influence of socialist objectives has not been tackled in a satisfactory manner. Indeed, this aim is rejected in terms of what is considered to be the importance of the post-work society. However, we would suggest most importantly the character of a post-capitalist society cannot be resolved in advance of the realisation of this aim. Instead, it would only be the attainment of this aim that would enable the popular and democratic discussion to develop about how to construct an emancipatory alternative to capitalism. In this manner the concept of post-work would become an issue to be discussed rather than a dogma to be imposed regardless of the social circumstances. The authors correctly suggest that it is necessary for a genuine movement of opposition to capitalism to have an objective of their alternative to the present system, but they define this perspective dogmatically in terms of the aim of a post-work society.

It is also argued controversially that only the aim of a post-work society can unite various diverse oppressed groups against capitalism: “In the end, while the post-work project demands that centrality be given to class, it is not sufficient to mobilise only on the basis of class interests. A broad spectrum of society needs to be brought together as an active and transforming force. It is to this need that populism responds…. A populist movement also needs to act in and through a series of organisations as well as aiming to achieve the overturning of the neo-liberal common sense and create a new one in its place. It must seek to build hegemonic forms of power, in all their diverse forms, both inside and outside the state.” (p162) In a certain sense this view is a truism, it is obviously important to try and unite the various exploited and oppressed groups within society in terms of a common objective of the transformation of society. But can this unity be achieved by the vague aim of a post-work society? Would, it still not be relevant to suggest that the aim that is being considered as necessary and emancipatory is still socialism? This outlines in definite terms what could be a principled alternative to capitalism, but the issue of what would constitute this type of society would be the result of a process of discussion and democratic agreement about the character and content of the social replacement about the present system. In this context the aim of a post-work society is a dogmatic conception that does not allow for the variety of the complex aspects of the features of the character of a participatory and emancipatory alternative to capitalism. Indeed, it could be suggested that it would require a democratic process of discussion and consultation of the members of society in order to establish what should be the major features of a post-capitalist society. But in this context an important objective would be about how to overcome the domination of capitalism in the most effective manner. However, it could be suggested that this is the very issue that is not being discussed effectively by the authors because instead what is being assumed is the possibility to achieve an alternative to capitalism in non-problematical terms. But in actuality it is the very difficult and complex character of this task which results in the undermining of the development of the popular support for this revolutionary perspective of change. Indeed, it could be suggested that there is not any contemporary credible support for an alternative, and instead the situation is characterised by the occasional emergence of various forms of protest movements that have limited objectives. Hence it cannot be suggested that the forces for the post-work society are being generated in any significant manner. There is the various suggestion of the authors about the necessity to overcome the domination of neo-liberal common sense, but this important observation is not connected to a credible perspective about how to realise this objective. This problem is connected to the continual issue of the failure to develop support for alternatives to capitalism. Therefore, the actual primary task concerns how to develop a mass movement for genuine emancipatory change. It is necessary to have a staring point in relation to perspectives based on a credible analysis of the present situation. But instead of this approach there is instead the justification of various illusions about the credibility of the post-work society and assumptions about how to realise it.

In other words, it is assumed that the identification of the various limitations of the major forms of protest will indicate a superior strategic alternative. Hence it is suggested that: “For folk politics, organisation has meant a fetishistic attachment to localist and horizontalist approaches that often undermine the construction of an expansive counter-hegemonic project. Yet this organisational fetishism is one of the most detrimental aspects of recent leftish thought: the belief that if only the proper form of organisation is developed political success will follow. Folk politics is guilty of this, but the same holds for orthodox positions as well – the range of miracle cures advanced for the decline of the left’s powers has included trade unions, vanguards, affinity groups and political parties. In most cases these organisational forms are advocated without regard for the different strategic terrains they face. Folk politics, for example, takes a particular organisational form and attempts to transpose it across the entire social and political field.” (p162) But the only apparent alternative to these various limitations is to vaguely support the role of a diverse collection of organisations in the process of trying to establish the possibility of change. But what is most important is the issue of the role of a strategy that could establish this unity of the diverse groups and then provide the basis for the prospect of the realisation of progressive change within society. Instead, there is the vague indication of the necessity of the unity of diverse groups and the support of an alternative conception of society: “The simple point to be made against organisational fetishism is that a political project requires a division of labour. There are a variety of essential tasks to be carried out in a successful political movement…. No single political movement is sufficient for performing all of these roles and bringing about large scale political change. We therefore do not seek to promote any single organisational form as the ideal means of embodying transformational vectors. Every successful movement has been the result not of a single organisational type, but of a broad ecology of organisations. These have operated, in a more or less coordinated way, to carry out the division of labour necessary for political change. In the process of transformation leaders will arise, but there is no vanguard party, only mobile vanguard functions. An ecology of organisations means a pluralism of forces, able to positively feedback on their comparative strengths. It requires mobilisation under a common vision of an alternative world, rather than loose and pragmatic alliances. And it entails developing an array of broadly compatible organisations.” (p163) But can such a collection of diverse groups achieve this type of programmatic unity? Indeed, the authors accept that there has been a situation of the problem of the differences created by the tensions between the role of the spontaneous and organisation in relation to the role of mass movements. They comment that: “The divisions between spontaneous uprisings and organisational longevity, short-term desires and long-term strategy have split what should be a broadly consistent project for building a post-work world. Organisational diversity should be combined with broad populist unity.” (p163) Hence it would seem that the only credible basis to achieve agreement about objectives and the role of strategy is to create a united organisation that would be able to articulate this common approach. In other words, there is no credible substitute for the creation of a vanguard revolutionary party that would be able to try and unite the various forms of mass struggle around common objectives of change. Therefore, the acceptance of diversity of organisations has ultimately to be subordinated to the recognition of the necessity of the leadership of a hegemonic political type party. Only in this manner will it be possible to achieve a credible level of organisational efficiency that enables an effective struggle for progressive change to develop. This development should not imply the necessity of an authoritarian form of domination but instead the utilisation of democratic principles in order to establish the authority of a type of leadership that has the support of a diverse collection of groups. In this manner cohesive organisation is combined with democracy in order to generate the possible effective development of collective struggle in order to try and realise progressive change.

But instead of this coherent perspective of the importance of the role of a vanguard party the authors instead suggest that what is required is the role of a collection of organisations acting together in terms of the promotion of a perspective of emancipation. They suggest that there is no hegemonic organisational form of the process of struggle against capitalism and that this type of diversity need not mean that the coherence of the opposition to the aims of bourgeois governments need not be undermined, and instead such pluralism is an important aspect of the process of creating a popular and effective opposition to the objectives of the role of neo-liberalism. But what is important in this ambiguous approach is the recognition of the necessity of the role of organic intellectuals who can develop the ideas to sustain the various popular movements of opposition to the system. Hence it is understood that the importance of ideology and its development is crucial if the credibility of the forms of popular opposition are to go beyond the limitations of merely rejecting the domination of neo-liberalism and instead try to outline the reasons why people should support a feasible type of alternative to the capitalist system. The authors also outline the importance of the role of the trade unions in relation to developing the possibility of progressive change, but this understanding is based on the rigid view that the unions should recognise the importance of the aim of a post-work society. It is not explained why the unions would become supporters of this vague aim that seems to imply the increasing irrelevance of the role of labour in the process of productive activity. But when this objective is connected to the reduction of hours in the working week, job sharing and a basic income this aim seems to have indicated that it is related to the possible aspirations of labour and is not merely a dogmatic assertion of what a post-capitalist society should be like. But what is noticeably lacking in this perspective is a recognition of the importance of the development of workers control as a prelude towards the realisation of an alternative type of economy. Instead, they impose a collection of demands concerning the character of a post-capitalist society and do not recognise the necessity of a strategy by which these demands can be realised. However, in more constructive terms the authors do recognise the importance of political parties for the generation of the possibilities for progressive political change, but this understanding is not connected to support for recognising the importance of the role of revolutionary parties that would facilitate the development of the conditions for the effective transformation of the character of society. Instead in a generalised manner they call for the progressive parties to interact with community organisations to facilitate the possibility of progressive change, and vaguely conclude that: “In the end, parties still hold significant political power, and the struggle over their future should not be abandoned to reactionary forces.”(p169) But this comment merely indicates the necessity to try and oppose the role of parties becoming the basis of a conservative type support for the capitalist system, and this essentially defensive approach does not indicate the possible dynamic role of parties in relation to the generation of the prospects for realising progressive forms of change.

In other words, there is the elaboration of a conception of change that is essentially vague and does not outline the strategic importance of the role of workers, trade unions and political parties in detailed terms. Instead, it is concluded that: “A post-work world will not emerge out of the benevolence of capitalists, the inevitable tendencies of the economy or the necessity of crisis…. the power of the left needs to be rebuilt before a post-work society can become a meaningful strategic option. This will involve a broad counter-hegemonic project that seeks to overturn neoliberal common sense and to rearticulate new understandings of ‘modernisation’, ‘work’ and ‘freedom’. This will necessarily be a populist project that mobilises a broad swathe of society and that, whilst being anchored in class interests, nevertheless remains irreducible to them. It will use a full spectrum approach to organisations that seeks to use different organisational advantages in combination – not according to a pragmatism of loose alliances, but under the aegis of a vision for a better world. And these organisation and masses will have to identify and secure new points of leverage in the circuits of capitalism, with its increasingly barren workplaces.” (p174) But this understanding merely outlines some of the pre-conditions for progressive change to be realised in terms of the development of the influence of oppositional mass movements. Ultimately the problem is with the perspective of the objective of a post-work society. Not only does this seem to be a vague and even unrealistic objective, it also does not establish what is genuinely emancipatory about a type of post-capitalist society, which is that the workers will be able to define the objectives and aims of their own productive activity. They quite rightly suggest the importance of a counter-hegemonic project that consistently goes beyond the defensive limitations of the majority of the mass struggles of the situation that is apparent under the capitalist system. But the problem is that this approach is defined in terms of the essentially vague and ambiguous aim of the post-work society. But the major contradiction of this aim is that it does not seriously suggest an end to the role of work within an emancipated type of society: “This does not mean that a post-work society would simply be a realm of play. Rather, in such a society, the labour that remains will no longer be imposed upon us by an external force – by an employer or by the imperatives of survival. Work will become driven by our own desires, instead of by demands from outside. Against the austerity of conservative forces…the demand for a post-work world revels in the liberation of desire, abundance and freedom.” (P176-177) Thus the actual primary aspect of the so-called post-work world is for the realisation of non-alienated conditions for the role of labour, which means that the workers and producers are able to establish a meaningful level of control over their forms of economic activity. Hence the aim of workers management of the economy is an important objective in relation to the possibility to create a genuine emancipatory type of society. The major task of the post-capitalist economy will be to ensure that the people in positions of responsibility do not become the basis for the formation of a new ruling class that supports the exploitation of labour within the process of production. But this approach is not sufficiently and consistently outlined by the authors, instead the emphasis on the objective conditions for a post-capitalist society are utilised in a technological determinist manner in order to gloss over the importance of the role of the development of democratic forms of the organisation of society in economic and political terms.

However possibly the most problematical aspect of the perspective of the authors is the rejection of the importance of the role of leadership because of its possible relationship to the justification of forms of economic and political domination. They contend: “Instead, hegemonic politics works to reorient existing tendencies, desires, opinions and beliefs…It is in this sense that hegemonic politics involves ‘leadership’ – not in the sense of individual leaders, but in the sense of changing the conditions which determine the trajectory of societies, by transforming the means by which subjectivities and desires are articulated and formed. This is politics, pure and simple.” (p198) But this unrealistic criticism of the role of individual leaders does not actually establish how to make leaders accountable to the people. Indeed, this is one of the most important tasks of the post-capitalist society. It is necessary to establish effective and democratic forms of accountability of leaders to the people who have elected them, and in this manner oppose any possible of the emergence of a bureaucratic elite who dominate society. Only the realisation of the highest levels of genuine democracy can ensure that the ultimate result of the creation of a post-capitalist society is not the emergence of a new type of social exploitation and domination. However, despite these criticisms the authors have outlined an important perspective concerning the character of a post-capitalist type of society. The various limitations in their approach should not undermine the recognition of the importance of their study of the character and aspects of the aims concerning a post-capitalist society which any principled progressive and revolutionary movement should support.