HAS COMMUNISM FAILED AS A HISTORICAL PROJECT?

It has often been claimed that the demise of the Soviet Union and similar types of societies is an expression of the historical failure of the attempt to construct viable and effective socialist social formations. Instead, it is suggested that the very character of history has culminated in the development of capitalism and so the aspiration to realise the alternative of communism could not be successful. This perspective is essentially upheld by the work of Archie Brown: “The Rise and Fall of Communism” (Vintage, London 2010). He outlines a history of the creation and decline of the various societies claiming to be socialist and based on the principles of Marx and Lenin. In order to provide a basis for evaluating the various ideas of his book would suggest that the possibility for the development of a genuine transformation of capitalism into what could be defined as an emancipatory alternative type of society requires the mass involvement of the workers in the act of trying to bring about this development. Then it is necessary that the workers and revolutionary party are able to interact in a dynamic manner inn order to create the conditions for the realisation of a society in which it has been possible to undermine the prospect of continuation of forms of exploitation and oppression. The various critics of Marxism claim that this perspective is unrealistic and so the result of the attempt to replace capitalism with democratic socialism must be a failure, and that instead the revolutionary party becomes the most dominant aspect of society and so this means that the result is the development of new forms of subordination of the people to the imperatives of privilege and exploitation. Marx provided the basis to reject this pessimistic view because he suggested that capitalism would result in the possibility of popular discontent that would become transformed in the creation of a different emancipatory type of society. He would suggest that the participatory democracy of the Paris Commune was an example of what could become possible if the people attempted to establish revolutionary regimes. Hence it was the role of class struggle and its possible revolutionary outcome which indicated the potential for the realisation of a society that would end the aspect of domination and subordination that was expressed by the various capitalist type of societies. But the ideas of Kautsky and Lenin seemed to provide an important modification of this perspective because they seemed to emphasise that the role of a revolutionary party was essential if the discontent of the workers were to express the possibility for the transformation of capitalism into an alternative socialist society. But once this approach became a form of orthodoxy it seemed that the party itself represented the primary basis for the prospect of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. This apparently elitist perspective implied that the workers should support the party and the ultimate result of this relationship would be the overthrow of capitalism and the development of the possibility to establish an alternative socialist society. However, the Russian revolution of 1905 seemed to challenge this elitist perspective. This was because it was the popular militancy of the workers who established the revolutionary institutions of the Soviets, which represented a type of participatory democracy which could become the basis of a new and authentic type of socialist society. In this context the elitist approach of Lenin seemed to be inadequate and he had to accept the importance of the role of the soviets. The dynamism of popular struggle seemed to express the possibility of the realisation of a new type of democratic and socialist society in a manner that was apparently more practical and realisable than the elitist perspectives of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin. Trotsky who effectively was independent from both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had the most important political role because he connected most efficiently with the dynamism of mass struggle. However, this situation was transformed in 1917 because the role of socialist political parties became more important. The Menshevik group of Social Democrats had an important role in the Soviet in upholding the domination of the bourgeois provisional government, and so the necessity of the elaboration of a different political perspective by the rival Bolshevik organisation became a political necessity if the workers were to be able to achieve the success of a perspective of revolutionary change. But this very development meant the issue of the relation of the workers to the Bolsheviks became of primary importance. If the Bolsheviks could act in a principled manner and so continue to express the possible revolutionary aspirations of the worker’s then no form of political problem seemed to be generated. However, the contradiction between the dynamics of spontaneous mass action of the workers and the increasing importance of the organised political action of the Bolsheviks seemed to become increasingly important. This aspect was indicated by the apparent fact that the Bolsheviks, via their domination of the Soviets, effectively organised the realisation of the success of the revolutionary process of change. Hence there was always the possibility for the development of a contrasting distinction between the organised role of the revolutionary party when contrasted to the spontaneous activity of the workers. This meant that the party tended to act on behalf of the workers rather than a process of genuine interaction of these two forces. Thus, this situation always had the potential to establish the opposing and distinct interests of party and class. This development could be said to be ultimately realised by the Stalin leadership of the party which increasingly considered socialism to be an aim which was based on the exclusive interests of the elite. But the major problem was that Lenin, whilst being concerned to develop a popular conception of the development of a socialist society, was never able to establish the practical credibility of this perspective. The ultimate result of this theoretical crisis concerning the feasibility of a popular conception of socialism meant that this issue was formally resolved in the pragmatic terms of the justification by Stalin of the view that this socialist objective should become exclusively defined by the perspectives established by the party. It could be argued that Stalinism was the logical continuation of Leninism, but the primary objective of Lenin to create a society based on the involvement of the workers and peasants in its development, was ended. Under the Stalin regime the only active force that had any legitimacy was the role of the party in the organisation of the economy. Formally the aim of socialism was still retained but the aspect of the involvement of the people in the realisation of the objectives of this aim had become effectively rejected. Instead, the workers had to become effective producers and the peasants had to become obedient members of the collective farm. There was no suggestion of any genuine expression of the role of democracy in the development of the economy or society, although in formal terms the promotion of a democratic system was proclaimed in the mid 1930’s. But this development was a farce and in actuality the system was consolidated by the role of dictatorship of the party. Effective knowledge of the views of Marx about the importance of participatory democracy in the organisation of a post-revolutionary society were not really known by the Soviet people, and instead the propaganda of the state identified the primary role of the party with the creation of socialism. Thus, in practical terms the approach of Stalin was a rejection of the emancipatory perspectives of Marx and Lenin. It could be argued that Lenin had established the precedent of the single party regime, but this development was a response to a process of political polarisation and serious economic problems. So, Lenin never rejected the necessity for Soviet democracy in order to establish a genuine revolutionary regime. Instead, the effective development of the single party regime was a response to a situation of political polarisation caused by civil war. Thus, it would be a dogmatic criticism to claim that Lenin created the Stalin regime. Instead, Lenin was increasingly concerned to revive the aspects of participatory Soviet democracy and to develop the capacity of the workers to be able to manage the economy. It could be argued that Lenin failed to achieve the revival of genuine soviet democracy, but the point is that Stalin utilised this failure in order to consolidate and strengthen the one-party regime. Hence, he made a virtue out of necessity, and as a result the political situation became receptive to even the banning of factional groups within the ruling Bolshevik party. But it could be argued that the major aspect of the opportunist elitism of Stalin was the effective rejection of the perspective of international revolution. It was understood that ay successful new revolutionary regime in a different country could become a challenge to the authority of the Stalinist regime. Hence the ideological approach of socialism in one country was adopted that expressed this rejection of the aim of international proletarian revolution. Thus, in all aspects of ideology and practice, Stalinism was the repudiation of the revolutionary traditions of Bolshevism and in that manner the rejection of the approach of Marxism.

Brown describes the important events that led to the development of the revolution of October 1917. He suggests that Lenin always had elitist objectives and that his aim was to establish the domination of the Bolshevik party. The credibility of the regime was based on the fact that the opposition to this regime did not generally have a progressive approach and instead often supported the restoration of some form of the society that had been present under the domination of the Tsar. There is no elaborated mention by Brown of the importance of the aim of the development of soviet democracy and instead it is implied that the aim of soviet power is effectively a justification of the aim to establish the domination of the Bolsheviks. This meant that the commitment to participatory democracy which was outlined in Lenin’s work ‘State and Revolution’ was never seriously realised after the revolution and the demand for the re-establishment of the importance of the role of the Soviets, which was raised by the Kronstadt uprising, was essentially rejected in favour of the assertion of the hegemonic importance of the supremacy of the party. In other words, the perspective that the workers would become a genuine ruling class is considered by Brown to be an illusion and instead Lenin was determined to utilise the state power gained by the Bolsheviks in order to establish a government that ruled on behalf of the workers: “The ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was also a misnomer. The proletariat as a whole could not dictate. It was the Communist party which did this in the name of the proletariat. The party leadership simply assumed that they represented the will of the workers – or, at least, their ‘real will’, if only they recognized where their true interests lay – and substituted itself for the actual proletariat. For a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to be compatible with even a minimal level of democracy, one would have to assume that the proletariat constituted an absolute majority of the population, which in the USSR of the 1920’s was far from being the case….and second, that within the proletariat itself there were no real and persistent differences of opinion, something which has never been true in Russia or anywhere else. The notion of unity of opinion within any working class, however sociologically defined, is scarcely less fanciful than the idea that a universal consensus would be achieved in the communist society of the future.” (p62) In other words the claim that the Bolsheviks expressed the genuine interests of the workers was a perspective that was developed by this party and was not connected to any expression of the democratic accountability of the revolutionary government to the people. The actual situation was that the Bolsheviks claimed to be ruling on behalf of the interests of the workers and peasants, but the credibility of this claim could not be tested by the role of genuine democratic elections. The demise of the Constituent Assembly meant the end of the importance of democracy and instead the effective character of the Bolsheviks was based on what Brown considers to be the questionable claim to be acting in the interests of the workers. Hence it is assumed that the importance of elitism for understanding the political system means that the Bolsheviks could not be considered to be acting in the interests of the workers, and instead they were developing privileged and distinct interests which were connected to the development of a system of the independent supremacy of the party in terms of the character of the post-revolutionary society. But the problem with this view is that it implies the Bolsheviks were essentially motivated essentially by the motive of power and the aspiration to establish their own distinct and independent domination of society. But this understanding cannot explain the connection of ideology to the character of the post-revolutionary society. The point is that whilst it could be suggested that Lenin had elitist attitudes this was because he genuinely considered that the role of the party was important in order to create a socialist society in which the workers will be genuinely liberated from the domination of exploitation within the relations of production. This meant that in a paternalist manner Lenin was suggesting that the party acts to supervise the activity of the workers in order to create a socialist society. In other words there was a contradiction between the creativity of the workers and the aspect of the role of the party in the supervising of this economic activity, as Lenin explains in his article: “The Immediate tasks of the Soviet Government” (Collected Works, volume 27) He comments: “In every socialist revolution, however – and consequently in the socialist revolution in Russia which we began on October 25 1917 – the principal task of the proletariat, and of the poor peasants which it leads, is the positive or constructive work of setting up an extremely intricate and delicate system of new organisational relationships extending to the planned production and distribution of the goods required for the existence of tens of millions of people. Such a revolution can be carried out only if the majority of the population, and primarily the majority of the working people, engage in independent creative work as makers of history. Only if the proletariat and the poor peasants display sufficient class consciousness, devotion to principle, self-sacrifice and perseverance, will the victory of the socialist revolution be assured. By creating a new, Soviet type of state, which gives the working and oppressed people the chance to take an active part in the independent building up of a new society, we solved only a small part of this difficult problem. The principal difficulty lies in the economic sphere, namely the introduction of the strictest and universal accounting and control of the production and distribution of goods, raising the productivity of labour, and socialising production in practice.” (CW27 p241) In other words there is a contradiction between this commitment to participatory democracy in the expression of the character of what are genuine socialist relations of production and the aspect of the successful realisation of efficiency which could suggest the importance of the elite role of the party and management of the economy by experts. Thus, it is the complexity of the practical tasks of economic development which could become contrasted to the aspiration to develop forms of participatory democracy in the relations of production. Hence the Bolsheviks do not have inherently elitist aims in regard to the role of economic activity, but the practical complexity of the attempt to develop production could result in the justification of a situation in which elitist relations develop within industry. In this manner there will be a theory and practice inconsistency. In theory the Bolsheviks are committed to participatory democracy in the organisation of the economy but in practice the situation is developing the primary importance of the role of managers rather than the workers. This development is not consciously advocated by the Bolsheviks, but it has resulted because of the complexities involved in the attempt to organise an efficient economy. One of the problems is that the factory committees were not able to effectively organise the development of production and so their role was replaced by that of the trade unions who became advisors to the increasing creation of a situation of one-man management. Such developments were not consciously wanted by the Bolsheviks, but instead were the result of the complexities of the tasks involved in relation to the necessity to develop efficient forms of production. Indeed, there was increasingly in 1918-19 a situation of the decline of industrial production and the apparent immediate failure of the role of forms of economic democracy. Thus, it was not because of any inherent elitism of the Bolsheviks that led to the introduction of one-man management but instead the failure of the initial attempts to develop forms of participatory economic democracy. However, what was problematical is whether the Bolsheviks considered one man management to be merely an empirical necessity or had become supporters of this approach in the long-term. The failure to resolve this question meant that the economic justification of the subordination of the producers within the relations of production was being established. This development would become consolidated in the context of the creation of the Stalin regime. Therefore, it was important practical economic difficulties that led to the increasing justification of a novel elitist conception of the character of the socialist economy. This development had not been anticipated by the perspectives of Lenin in 1917 which had anticipated the creation of a participatory economic and political democratic type of worker’s state. Instead, it was the urgent tasks of the necessity to develop efficient forms of production which had led to the theoretical and practical modification of the understanding of the character of the socialist economy. This meant that aspects of elitism became important, not because as Brown implies, the Bolsheviks were inherently elitist, but instead because they recognised the problems with participatory forms of economic democracy in relation to the issue of developing efficient forms of production.

Brown outlines the details of the Stalinist consolidation of the aspects of elitism in the development of the Soviet economy and political system: “The dictatorship of the proletariat was also a misnomer. The proletariat as a whole could not dictate. It was the Communist party which did this in the name of the proletariat. The party leadership simply assumed that they represented the will of the workers – or at least their ‘real will’, if only they recognized where their true interests lay – and substituted itself for the actual proletariat. For a dictatorship of the proletariat to be compatible with even a minimal notion of democracy, one would have to assume, first, that the proletariat constituted an absolute majority of the population, which in the USSR of the 1920’s was far from being the case… a and second, that within the proletariat there was no real and persistent differences of opinion, something which has never been true in Russia or anywhere else.”(p62) But he does not consider that there was an alternative represented by the programme of the opposition led by Trotsky which emphasised the importance of the democracy of the producers as the primary basis for the organisation of the economy. He concludes that the development of the increasing authoritarianism of the system was because the possibility to establish a democratic system based on the principles of the participation of the people in its organisation and administration was unrealistic and so could only result in a situation in which the party ruled on behalf of the people but without the aspect of the expression of the genuine democratic accountability of the system. However, it could be suggested that between 1917-28 there was a connection between the role of the party as the government of society and the interests of the workers. One of the major aims of the party in this period was to ensure the workers were able to obtain goods from the peasants because of the encouragement of the production of the agricultural sector. Hence the approach of the government was based on being responsive to the demands of the workers and peasants in this period. Therefore, it could be suggested that in the 1920’s the government could be defined as being an expression of bureaucratic centrism because it did in an elitist manner try to realise the interests of the workers and peasants, but in the terms of the opportunist justification of the theory of socialism in one country and the related emphasis on the aspect of the stabilisation of international capitalism which meant that the possibility of imminent world revolution was not possible. In other words, the system in this period was not defined merely by the interests of the party elite, but instead the party was still receptive to the interests of the workers and peasants. This aspect seemed to undermine the credibility of the criticism of Trotsky which suggested that the bureaucratisation of the Soviet system meant the party was increasingly not concerned with the interests of the workers. Thus, Brown’s view that elitism was an inherent aspect of the system was actually an issue of contention that resulted in the political struggle within the party. The United opposition was trying to uphold the principles of popular democracy and the revival of the importance of the Soviets. But Brown is right to suggest that the defeat of the opposition in the party enabled Stalin to introduce authoritarian domination of his party group over the economy. Thus, he is also correct to suggest that the formal democratic freedoms outlined by the Soviet constitution of 1936 were not an actual expression of the character of the political system. But he concludes that the system should not in any sense be defined as socialist because this does not explain the character of the Stalinist society. However, the problem is that his alternative view that the system should be defined as communist because the communist party has political power is more unsatisfactory. (p76) In other words this definition does not define the character of the economic and social system that is being presided over by the party elite. The domination of the economy by the party has to be explained and defined. Only in this context can the political aspects be connected to this development. This is why the term bureaucratic socialist seems to be appropriate because it refers to the contradictory relationship between the character of the economy and the contrasting ideology utilised in order to justify the extraction of a surplus by the party elite. In contrast Brown’s utilisation of the term communism does not explain the relationship of the economic and political aspects of the system. Indeed, it could be suggested that the conception of communism is false when applied to an understanding of Stalinism because communism refers to the character of a genuinely emancipatory type of society and this could not in any sense be applied to the consolidation of the economic and political power of the Stalinist elite. Instead, we have to understand the character of the system in terms of a contradiction between the ideology and economic and political practices of the system. It could be argued that the influence of the views of Marx are not apparent in the ideology and the practices of the various Stalinist governments. Also, the views of Lenin have been distorted. This is because Lenin’s aim of trying to connect the supremacy of the role of the revolutionary party with a genuine attempt to develop the possibility of socialism has been effectively rejected. Instead, what has become of primary importance is establishing the domination of the party over the economy and society. This situation can only result in the creation of a new bureaucratic and exploitative type of social formation. But it is justified in terms of the ideological role of an elitist form of socialism.

Brown defines the character of Stalinist societies in the following terms. First the domination of an authoritarian and centralised communist party over society. The economic aspect was a state- controlled command economy in which the role of the market had been superseded. It was the monopoly of power of the communist party which had allowed this development to occur. The ideology was that the communist party was promoting the realisation of the objective of communism. But what has to be established is the aspect of the contradiction between theory and practice in that the actual character of economic and political activity could not be said to be an expression of the possibility to realise communism in a genuine manner. Instead, the actual practice was the consolidation of the domination of the party over the economy in order to establish the basis of the possibility to extract a surplus from the producers. Therefore, the utilisation of the term communism in order to define the character of the Stalinist system by Brown means utilising the aspect of ideology in a primary manner when explaining the character of the system. Thus, ideology in some manner explains the economic and political aspects of the Stalinist society. But in actuality there was a contradiction between theory and practice. In practice the character of the economy was based on the subordination of the producers to the aims of the party in order to generate a surplus. But this very development was being ideologically justified in terms of the view that in this manner the material foundations of communism were being created. Thus, the very development of the productive forces was the manner in which the aim of communism was being advanced and realised. Hence given the aspect of the exploitation of the producers in the economic system this contradiction could only be justified in terms of this view that the material basis of communism was being established. Consequently, rather than this aspect being a paradox it was an inherent aspect of the system and was an expression of the assumption that the very subordination of the producers to the state within the relations of production was actually an expression of the character of the process of generating the material conditions of socialism and so creating the possibility to realise communism. But this meant that communism could not actually define the character of the system, contrary to the views of Brown. Instead, this was an illusory objective which is utilised in order to obtain the acceptance of the workers for the actual situation of their subordination within the relations of production. In this manner the aim of communism was both ideologically necessary in order to justify the system, but it could not be genuinely expressed in terms of the unequal character of society. In other words, the supremacy of the communist party was based on the ideology of its promotion of communism but in actuality it could not be established that this type of society was in any genuine manner being developed in a principled and effective manner. Hence the only credible aspect of the view of Brown is that the society was communist because it was based domination of the role of the communist party.

In other words, possibly one of the most important aspects of the approach of Brown is that he suggests the communist party of the Soviet Union was sincerely committed to the realisation of the aim of communism, but this was an expression of an inherently authoritarian perspective because there was no democratic justification of this aim in terms of the aspect of the popular support of the people in regards to the role of genuine elections. However, we can suggest that there was a difference between Marx’s concept of communism when contrasted to that of the Soviet communist party led by Stalin. Marx envisaged a type of emancipatory society in which the producers would have the economic power to be able to organise the economy in terms of their objectives of the realisation of the potential of the workers. It would be possible for anyone to question the policies of the socialist government and so this administration would be accountable to the people in terms of the role of regular elections and the possibility to establish a different government that would be able to realise the aspirations of the people in a more effective manner. The genuine government of the workers would not be able to introduce a perspective that would be able to realise communism in the short-term and instead would have to express the increasing ability to be able to organise society in a protracted period of the process of the genuine administration of the economy by the workers. Only a period of success in which the workers were able to organise production in a popular and effective manner would create the material basis for socialism. Obviously, this perspective is connected to the success of international revolution because the creation of many governments based on the aims of socialism and communism would create the material and political basis for the realisation of this process of transition to a communist society. But in the USSR, there is no aspect of accountability of the government to the workers in terms of the role of genuine elections or the development of the effective influence of the people over the character of the economy. Instead, there is an unaccountable authoritarian government that is able to impose its objectives onto society. The lack of credible elections and the development of a totalitarian type of political system, which is also expressed in the authoritarian character of the economy, means that Marx’s objective of a system of popular democracy is not being expressed in terms of an effective accountability of the government to the people. Hence given this authoritarian situation for explaining the economic and political system the Marxist conception of communism cannot be promoted by the Soviet government in any principled manner. In other words, the aim of communism may have ideological importance for providing a justification for the role of the government, but there a theory and practice inconsistency because the actual policies of the administration cannot in any manner express the realisation of the communism which has been expressed by Marx and Engels. This is not to deny the ideological importance of the objective of communism in order to justify the policies of the Stalinist government, but there is a theory and practice contradiction. In other words, the aim of communism is essentially of a formal character, and the actual aspect of the system is the attempt to consolidate the domination of the party over the role of the producers within the economy. Indeed, communism can have a useful ideological role because it is defined as the long term aim of the party and workers. Hence in the short-term the aspect of state centralisation of the economy can be justified as being a necessary contribution towards the possibility of the realisation of the long-term aim. The domination of the party in terms of the character and role of ideology means that in practice it is able to interpret the aim of socialism on the basis of its own exclusive interests, which are also said to represent the objectives of the workers. In this manner the popular and democratic character of Marx’s understanding of what is meant by socialism and communism is modified in **relatio**n to the narrow interests of upholding the domination of the party. To Brown this development is a logical expression of the very character of the objective of communism. But he provides no effective justification of this assumption and instead this view is a dogmatic expression of what is meant by communism, which denies the emancipatory intentions of the major initial interpretation of this aim made by Marx.

Does the apparently cynical interpretation of communism made by the Stalinist party mean that the leadership did not genuinely believe in this objective? There is nothing to suggest that there is a rejection of the aim of communism because of the apparent contradiction between theory and practice. Instead, the party leadership interpreted the objective of communism in terms of the importance of their dominant role within society. Hence it was being suggested that communism could only be realised in terms of the hegemonic leadership role of the party which was establishing the policies that would result in the development of socialism and so in that manner create the economic and political conditions for the realisation of communism. Hence the very elite role of the party was considered to be compatible with the generation of the material conditions that would enable socialism to be realised, and in that manner create the possibility for continual progress towards the attainment of communism. How then are the aspects of economic exploitation within the relations of production justified? The point is that this aspect is not recognised by the ideology of the party. Instead, the policies of the party are considered to be what is necessary in order to make progress towards socialism and so in that manner enable communism to be realised in the future. In other words, the role of ideology justifies the aspect of the exploitation of the producers within the economy. The effective subordination of the workers within the relations of production is considered to be a necessary aspect of the development of the prospect of socialism and communism. In other words, the dominant role of the party justifies this situation as actually being an expression of a process of advance towards the realisation of these objectives of the creation of an emancipated society. Hence the ideology of the party is the attempt to reconcile the aims of socialism and communism with the domination of the communists over the economy. This standpoint cannot be in any manner an expression of the supposed connection of the party with the genuine aims of communism. Instead, the objective of communism has been modified in an opportunist and empirical manner in order to provide an ideological justification for the development of a new type of elitist society. If communism is considered to be the aim of Marx, then it can be suggested that this objective has been transformed in an empirical manner in order to justify the development of a new type of economic system of the exploitation of the producers. To the party leadership this very aspect of the domination of the producers by the state in the economic system is considered to be an integral aspect of the creation of the material conditions for the realisation of socialism and the possibility of making progress towards communism. The view that the party can only act in terms of the interests of the workers justified this elitist standpoint. In other words, in order to consider the view of Brown credible we would have to accept the standpoint of the Stalinist party that it was genuinely making advances towards the realisation of communism. Thus, there was not a contradiction between the theory and practice of the Stalinist party. Hence the very essence of what is meant by the objective of communism is defined by the approach and policies of Stalin. But the very creation of an exploitative social formation meant that the aim of communism was of a formal character, and what was important was the perpetuation of the subordination of the producers within the economic relations. This meant that the very aim of communism was distorted in a manner in order to justify this situation of the domination of the party elite within the relations of production. To Brown this situation is the logical expression of what is meant by communism. Hence communism is merely the empirical justification of the domination of the party elite. But we would dispute this understanding and instead claim that communism represents the realisation of an emancipatory society that could not in any genuine manner be said to being created in the Soviet Union of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Thus, it is necessary to develop a definition of the USSR which is able in more effective theoretical terms to be able to explain the exploitation of the producers within the economic system. Thus, we can conclude that Brown defines the USSR as communist because he is opposed to this aim.

In other words, Brown essentially defines the character of the USSR as an expression of communism because he defines this aim as a justification for the creation of an authoritarian political regime. But we would suggest that the repressive character of the USSR is the very reason why this society cannot be communist, if we define this objective in terms of the approach of Marx. He would suggest that communism expresses the realisation of the liberation of the people from a situation of the expression of the exploitation of labour which is characteristic of capitalism. Therefore, the development of this possibility cannot be compatible with the role of a regime that is based on the aspect of the domination of society in terms of the interests of an elite. In other words, it is the majority of the people who define the objectives and principles of a communist society in order to realise their liberation from all aspects of the role of the exploitative character of capitalism. This development can only occur in terms of the expression of the highest level of economic and political democracy. Indeed, this principle implies that the people would also have the right to vote for the restoration of capitalism. But the development of a prosperous socialist society based on the involvement of the people in its organisation would presumably mean that there would be a reluctance to support this aim of restoring capitalist society. In other words, the highest levels of participation of the people as producers and citizens should express genuine support for socialism and in this manner create the conditions to achieve the aim of communism. In this context the genuinely principled role of the party should be to advise the people how to develop the democratic character of an authentic socialist society. This means that the domination of society by the role of an elite party would be a contradictory aspect that could only undermine the development of society in a progressive manner in terms of making advances towards the realisation of an emancipatory social formation. Therefore, the domination of society by the party in an authoritarian manner cannot be considered to be an expression of making genuine progress towards the realisation of socialism and the possibility to ultimately establish communism. In other words, it could be suggested that the elitist supremacy of the party within society is actually an anti-communist situation because under these conditions it could not be suggested that advances towards communism are being advanced. Therefore, we could suggest that communism has not failed as an historical project because it has never been possible to realise the political conditions that would make genuine transition towards the successful attainment of this aim. This means that the history of post-capitalist societies has been based on a situation of a theory and practice inconsistency because the theoretical aim of communism has ben undermined by the authoritarian practice of the various Stalinist regimes. It could be argued that this development is only an indication that communism is not a viable historical project. But we would suggest that the very exploitative limitations of capitalism will continue to generate the aspiration for emancipatory change. Therefore, the issue is whether a genuinely democratic relationship between the revolutionary party and the workers can be developed which will facilitate the possibility for the discontent with capitalism to realise a progressive potential for emancipatory change or instead will the unrest of the people be exploited by a Stalinist type party in order to create a new type of exploitative society. However, it also has been suggested that the very failures of Stalinism because of its creation of authoritarian societies means that the very aim of socialism and communism has become discredited. There would seem to be some truth to this claim given the apparent unpopularity of the various socialist parties in the aftermath of the demise of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR. But we would contend that the very limitations of capitalism, such as the generation of mass unemployment, poverty and alienation, mean that the possibility of discontent with capitalism can still create the possibility for the development of support for a revolutionary socialist alternative. This means that the objective of communism cannot be considered to be a definitive historical failure because the very limitations of capitalism means that this aim can continue to be elaborated in the context of the necessity to develop an alternative to the limitations of capitalism.

However, the historical failure of the various Stalinist regimes is an indication that it is not likely that an authoritarian conception of communism can be credible in the present situation. Indeed, the formally communist regime of China is effectively a type of capitalist society. In many countries the various communist parties have reinvented themselves as social democratic type organisations. But the aim of the genuine communism of Marx is only supported by a few very small Trotskyist type parties. Therefore, it would seem that the aim of communism is no longer an aspiration of mass movements and instead it would seem that the character of history has ended with the victory of capitalism. But the continued significance of the exploitative limitations of capitalism will create the conditions for the renewed development of struggles that will pose a challenge to the domination of the present economic system. In this context the issue will become whether the various small Marxist groups can establish a relationship to these emerging mass movements and so be able to establish of the credibility of a perspective of revolutionary change. But this possibility is presently undermined by the often authoritarian and dogmatic character of these small groups, and the aspect of sectarianism which undermines the possibility to create one unified revolutionary party in each country. It is interesting that the various Marxist groups often adopt a perspective that the various possible mass struggles will somehow transform the situation and so create the prospect of revolutionary change. In other words, the groups combine a rejection of the necessity for revolutionary leadership combined with the continued acceptance of sectarianism and the opposition to the development of unity between the various small contending groups. The regressive result of this approach is that the Marxist groups retain an attitude of sectarianism but combine it with the rejection of the importance to develop revolutionary leadership of the various struggles that develop. This situation means that the various groups do not advocate the formation of a united revolutionary communist party that would be able to promote a convincing strategy of change. Thus, it would seem that the various limitations of the socialist parties have meant they themselves have created the situation in which communism has become a failed historical project. However, this would be a premature conclusion to make. This is because capitalism is a limited system based on exploitation and so it cannot realise the potential of the activity of humanity in a genuine manner. This situation means that the aspect of discontent cannot be resolved within capitalism and so the possibility to create an effective revolutionary party is still an objective that can be realised. But in order that this potential can be realised is it necessary to create an organisation that is both practically effective and democratic. This party would have to be able to respond to the aspirations of the workers in an imaginative manner and be able to provide the role of leadership in non-authoritarian terms. There is nothing to suggest at the level of theory that this task is impossible. However, the problem has been in practice, because the various Marxist groups have often become inflexible and dogmatic and so have been unable to respond to the aspirations of the workers in an imaginative manner. Thus, in a paradoxical manner it would seem that the various limitations of the Marxist groups have made communism a failed political project. But the problems of capitalism have not been solved by this aspect, such as the continuation of economic crisis, ecological problems and the alienation generated by an exploitative system. This means the potential to create effective and popular revolutionary parties has not been ended by the importance of the problems involved in relation to the tasks involved in connection to this objective. But if possibilities are to be transformed into actual developments it means that the character of the often elitist and sectarian type groups has to be ended. What is required is the development of organisations that can combine principles with flexibility and so in that manner attempt to connect to the workers in a more effective manner. The point is that the continued limitations of capitalism has not ended discontent within society, but this aspect does not acquire an organised political expression because of the continual problems involved in relation to the often failed attempts to build effective and principled revolutionary parties.

Brown considers that it was Stalinism which defined the character of the communist political project. This conclusion is connected to the fact that it was the importance of the Soviet elite which developed during World War two and the increasing success of the objectives of the communist project as defined by the interests of the role of the Soviet communist party. There were also popular inspired processes of change in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia that seemed to suggest that it was possible to realise social change based on the importance of a mass movement, but in the rest of Eastern Europe the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism was based on the importance of the role of the Soviet red army and its occupation of countries. Thus it is being suggested that there was no general popular support for the expansion of the importance of what Brown describes as communism but it was instead the result of the expansion of the domination of the Soviet Union caused by its military success in the second world war: “The spread of communism throughout east and central Europe in the early post-war years must, then be seen in the context of the military outcome of the second world war, of the vast range of territory conquered by the Soviet army, and of Wester respect for the Soviet contribution to the Allied victory and for the scale of their losses.”(p164) But how can it be suggested that this development expressed the character of communism given that what resulted was the increased domination of the role of an elite ruling class over Eastern Europe. The point is that imperialist expansion could not be considered to be an integral component aspect of communism if the understanding of this aim as being connected to the role of the liberation of society from capitalism is to retain its meaning. Instead, this importance of imperialism in the actions of the Soviet government indicated that its aim was to establish a form of exploitative domination of Eastern Europe in order to promote the realisation of the interests of what is a new type of ruling class. In other words, the objective is to connect the character of the Eastern European economy to the interests of the development of a surplus as a result of this domination by the Soviet state. Indeed, Brown notes that the initial character of the regimes in Eastern Europe was that of coalition governments between the national communist parties and various bourgeois parties. This indicated that the aims of Stalin were not established directly in the immediate post-war period and so the process of change to a Stalinist type system was not inevitable but instead the result of developments in the cold war. The point is that what was important to Stalin was to establish imperialist supremacy over Eastern Europe so that it would be possible to connect the character of their economies to the interests of the Soviet economy. Thus, it might be possible to contemplate the continuation of capitalism in what were termed people’s democracies. Thus, the aims of the Soviet elite were not primarily about the expansion of the role of socialism or communism but instead about the consolidation of its domination of Eastern Europe. The aim was to establish pro-Stalinist regimes that would connect their interests with that of the Stalinist regime of the USSR. In other words, the major issue for Stalin was establishing the domination of the USSR over Eastern Europe and not about the ideological necessity to expand the influence and importance of socialism and communism. This aspect only became important with the intensification of the cold war and the related necessity to consolidate the domination of the Soviet Union over eastern Europe. Only in about 1948 did it become of primary importance to create so-called socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. But the character of these economies was connected to the interests of the extraction of a surplus by the ruling class of the USSR. This development cannot be defined as the expansion of communism if we consider that communism is defined as a type of emancipatory society that aims to liberate the people from all aspects of economic and political oppression. But Brown concludes that: “However, the Soviet imposition of communist regimes on the countries of east-central Europe, with no regard for the wishes of their peoples, was the cause of the division of Europe – and that was the single most important manifestation of what became known as the cold war.”(p178) This comment indicates that the term communism has become nothing more than an expression to describe the authoritarian character of the regimes established by the Soviet elite in Eastern Europe. But this utilisation of the term communist to describe these new societies has to be disputed. There is no genuine expression of revolutionary change, apart from Yugoslavia, that can be utilised in order to describe these post-war developments. Instead, the important role is that of the Soviet elite in creating societies that are connected to its economic and political interests. The aspect of genuinely popular revolutionary change has not occurred and th4e result is that regimes have been created as a result of their acceptance of the domination of the Soviet government. This means that what has resulted is new forms of the Stalinist type system of economy and politics, and this development cannot be described as communist, if we consider that communism is a genuinely progressive and popular notion of a liberated type of society. Instead, the regimes in Eastern Europe are incorporated into the character of the USSR. This would suggest that they became defined as bureaucratic socialist, and so meant that the aims of a new ruling class in the process of the extraction of a surplus is justified in terms of the role of a socialist type of ideology.

In a cautious manner Brown does indicate that developments in Yugoslavia seemed to indicate the development of a more popular form of socialism based on the aspect of increased workers management of the economy: “In principle, social ownership by the workers of their own factories was to replace bureaucratic state ownership and control. Tito introduced a new law to this effect in 1950, and much was made of it, although the state continued to possess most of the functions accorded it by the Soviet style command economy, and the factory managers remained an agent of state control.” (p209) But the point is that this development was very important because it expressed the possibility to create a type of economic activity in which the role of the participatory democracy of the producers had become increasingly important. Hence in a limited yet important manner the expression of a genuine type of socialism was being expressed by this acceptance of a limited form of workers management of the economy. This very development indicated the contradiction between the continuation of the absolute power of the communist party and this expression of a form of limited control of the process of production by the expression of the principles of workers management. Thus, it could be suggested that during the era of Tito Yugoslavia could be defined as a type of degenerated workers state because the social formation in some limited manner had begun to accept the importance of the aspirations of the workers as being an important aspect concerning what constituted the principles of society. But there was a contradiction between the absolute political supremacy of the communist party and the limited expression of workers democracy in the economy. The expression of economic democracy implied that this aspect should be extended to the role of the political. Instead, the elitist domination of society by the party occurred alongside what seemed to be different principles for the organisation of the economy. Thus, it was necessary to develop the popular influence of a perspective of democratic socialism if this contradiction was to be resolved. Brown implies that this development was not realistic, but what could have occurred was the development of a political tendency within the ruling communist party that was able to promote this type of perspective of support for the aim of democratic socialism. But the problem was that this possibility was not realised and instead the system in Yugoslavia stagnated and tendencies to resolve the limitations of the economy in terms of increasing the importance of the market became more influential in the 1970’s and 1980s. It5 could be argued that by the 1980s Yugoslavia was no longer a degenerated workers state and increasing the elite began to justify its regime in terms of the ideology of authoritarian nationalism. The result was the eventual demise of Yugoslavia as a type of workers state and instead this aspect was replaced by a collection of separatist regimes based on the ideology of chauvinist nationalism. But such a development was not inevitable. But the problem was the failure to create the ideological influence of a type of democratic socialism which could have facilitated the transformation of Yugoslavia into becoming a genuine workers state with the aim to realise authentic socialism. But the example of Yugoslavia indicated that the possibility of authentic socialism was not an impossibility.

However, what the developments in Yugoslavia indicated that under favourable political circumstances the possibilities to make progress towards the realisation of genuine socialism was not an unrealistic possibility. Instead, the role of even a limited progressive party could express the potential for the creation of an emancipated society in an effective manner. This development in Yugoslavia was an indication that communism was not a failed historical project because of the elitist and opportunist limitations of Soviet Stalinism and the role of the various communist parties. Also, the popular uprising of the people in Spain during the civil war of the 1930’s indicated that under given circumstances people could respond to a message of the aim of necessity to develop a socialist type of society in order to replace capitalism. Thus, the situation was characterised by what Trotsky described as a crisis of leadership. The frequent development of radical sentiments within the international working class was generally undermined by the role of social democratic and communist parties who acted to oppose the development of the radical potential of any unrest. Hence it was not an inherent superiority of capitalism which ensured the continuation of the system but instead the problems involved in attempting to develop a genuine revolutionary party that could lead a struggle for socialist change. But what was also apparent in the post-war period was the possibility for reformist type parties to introduce welfare states and so modify the character of capitalism in a progressive manner. This was one of the most important reasons why communism was no longer necessary. In a sense it had not failed, but rather seemed to have become irrelevant because it seemed possible to be able to improve the character of capitalism in a progressive reformist manner. But the onset of the period of recession and austerity since the 1980’s has discredited this perspective, nevertheless the result has not been to the advantage of socialist groups because they have remained small and ineffective. Thus, in a popular manner the views of the people of most capitalist societies would seem to have made communism a failed project because this ideological approach has been unable to develop mass support. Instead, it has been the parties that support the continuation of capitalism which have been in the ascendency, even during the prolonged period of the economic crisis of capitalism. Thus, it could be suggested that there is an objective economic necessity to develop the realisation of the socialist and communist alternative to capitalism, but in terms of popular support this aim seems to lack credibility. The lack of influence of the aim of socialism would suggest that even a crisis form of capitalism is able to maintain its domination over society. But it can also be argued that the Stalinist system was in a period of crisis since the end of the leadership of Stalin. The point is that the very character of the society of the USSR was associated with the dominant role of Stalin and so after him it was difficult to re-establish the stability of the regime. However, it was ultimately possible to develop a new regime under the leadership of Khrushchev. The possibility to ensure the stability of the new government was because there was no attempt by the people to try and develop a form of mass unrest that could have generated the necessity for the realisation of a new type of authority. Instead, the system of bureaucratic socialism could be consolidated by the possibility to introduce economic and political changes to make the system more efficient. But the major change was of an ideological character when Khrushchev criticised the regime of Stalin at the twentieth party congress. Brown comments that the ultimate effect of the speech was to undermine the very credibility of the communist regime and so create the conditions for its demise: “In many ways, the breakthrough to a higher level of honesty in Khrushchev’s speech, however incomplete its disclosure of facts and however simplistic its analysis, was the beginning of the end of international communism, but that end was a long time coming.”(p243) This is a dogmatic conclusion because it could be argued that the reputation of the regime actually improved because of this expression of a honest type analysis of the limitations of the regime of Stalin’s cult of the personality. Hence it was the continuation of other problems with the Stalinist social formation which were the major reasons for the ultimate demise of this type of society. The point was that the criticisms of the Stalin administration by Khrushchev indicated the necessity for a higher level of political morality as the basis of the role of the state. The aspect of coercion was seriously decreased and instead the regime recognised the necessity to develop the genuine support of the people for the objective of socialism and communism. It was claimed that the party was seriously concerned to realise communism in the short-term which implied an increase in the prosperity of the people and their involvement in the development of the economy. But there were limits to this process. The role of one-party rule was not seriously questioned and instead it was still being suggested that the objectives of society could only be determined by the influence of the role of the government. Hence what was being suggested was that the authoritarianism of Stalin would be ended and instead the administration would attempt to rule in terms of the consent of the people, which would involve a serious attempt to increase their material prosperity. In other words, the Soviet population was increasing aware of the increased affluence of the people of the major capitalist countries and so there was a political necessity to try and develop a situation in which this type of material prosperity could be realised by the people of the Soviet Union. However, the party elite had a problem because they did not know how to create the economic conditions that would ensure this realisation of general prosperity of the people. Instead, they had been traditionally concerned with the objective of increasing the process of accumulation based on an extraction of a surplus from the workers and peasants. Thus, the development of an effective consumer industry was an enduring problem which was never entirely resolved by the Soviet system. The party elite led by Khrushchev wanted to reconcile the development of the affluence of the people with the overall character of the process of production based on an extraction of a surplus from the workers. But it is questionable whether this objective was realised. Hence the failures of the economy contributed to the overthrow of Khrushchev in 1964. But what this situation indicated was that the bureaucratic economic and political system was inefficient because of the very problem of the authoritarian character of the regime, which meant that the genuine involvement of the people in the development of production could not be possible. But possibly the major challenge to the credibility of the Khrushchev regime was the Hungarian revolution of 1956 which indicated that the people of Eastern Europe were opposed to the Stalinist system because it expressed the aspect of national oppression as an essential aspect of its character. This revolution also suggested that it was possible to develop a regime based on the principles of participatory democracy as an alternative to the authoritarian conception of socialism. Indeed, Brown accepts that the character of the mass struggles in Hungary in 1956 expressed the aspiration to create an alternative and genuine expression of the principles of socialism: “The Hungarian revolution was anti-Soviet but not anti-socialist. It became a national – indeed, nationalist – movement, but its leaders were members of the communist party. There was, however widespread opposition to the kind of Soviet-style communist system which had been constructed under the leadership of Rakosi.” (p288-289) Thus there was no popular aspiration for a return to capitalism, but instead it was suggested that the most principled people in the leadership of the Hungarian communist movement could become the basis to provide the leadership necessary to develop an alternative form of socialism. The workers established organisations of mass democracy which represented the possible basis to express the development of this popular form of socialism. Ultimately the process of revolutionary upheaval was defeated by the intervention of the Soviet red army, but the governments established after the defeat of the mass struggle of 1956 were increasing concerned to realise the material interests of the people. Hence it could be argued that the long-term result of the 1956 developments was the creation of a situation in which the governments of Hungary recognised the necessity to obtain support from the people by making economic progress. Thus, in an indirect manner the influence of mass struggles had an important significance in terms of defining the policies of the post-revolutionary governments. This meant that in some limited manner the aspect of a popular socialism influenced the policies of Stalinism in some circumstances.

In other words, the very aspect of the development of popular discontent in the societies of Eastern Europe in the 1950’s did not indicate the failure of communism as a historical project. Instead in a spontaneous manner the very aim of the mass struggles was to establish the realisation of an alternative and more genuine conception of socialism and communism. The activity of the people in the various struggles was not motivated by the intention to restore the domination of capitalism but instead to establish a genuine and democratic expression of a socialist type of society based on the expression of the involvement of the workers in its development. This was connected to the call to establish the leadership of genuine communists in the leadership of the communist parties of these countries involved in this development of mass discontent. This situation was different to that of the mass discontent of 1989 when the popular aim was to establish regimes based on the role of capitalism. But it could be argued that the vey defeat of the mass struggles of the 1950’s meant that people became increasingly disillusioned with the credibility of the aim of a popular and democratic type of socialism and so became receptive to the prospect of the restoration of capitalism. Hence it was not communism which had failed as a historical project but instead the expression of a false type of socialism. However, this meant that the limitations of authoritarian socialism ultimately meant that the people of these countries with this system ultimately became receptive to the prospect of the restoration of capitalism if that meant the possibility to establish a democratic type of society. Ironically if genuine socialism, and the related potential for movement to communism, had been developed as a result of the popular revolutions in the various countries of Eastern Europe in the 1950’s, it might have been possible to create a different situation that resulted in the generation of a system that would have meant the restoration of capitalism did not develop. It was the contradiction between the aspect of theory and practice which ultimately discredited this supposed socialist system, and so the increasing popular aspiration for principled governments meant that this aspect became combined with the restoration of capitalism. Hence communism was not a failed historical project because its principles and aspects had never been seriously applied in practice by the governments of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Initially people were rejecting the aspect of elitism and repression in the systems of eastern Europe in the name of a genuine type of socialism. If this discontent had successfully resulted in progressive change it may have been possible to revive the very relevance of communism as a genuine expression of the aims of the people to replace capitalism with an authentic type of society based on the principles of solidarity and democratic collectivism. But the defeats of the mass struggles of the people of Eastern Europe in the 1950’s and 1960’s meant that it seemed that the only alternative to Stalinism was the restoration of capitalism, via the involvement of the countries of this system, in its promotion. What seemed to have failed was the role of mass struggles with the aims of the development of genuine democratic socialism. Increasing popular scepticism about this objective meant that it seemed the only realistic possibility for the establishment of a democratic type of society was connected to the development of capitalism in what had been Stalinist social formations.

However, the Cuban revolution of the late 1950’s seemed to indicate a progressive alternative to the bureaucratic decline of the Stalinist societies of Eastern Europe and the USSR. The process of popular mass struggle in Cuba seemed to create a genuinely revolutionary government. However, this understanding became complicated by the increasing relationship of Cuba to the Stalinist system in terms of economic and political cooperation. Ultimately it seemed that the Cuban government adopted the bureaucratic nationalised type economy similar to that of the USSR, and its political system was based on the rejection of a genuine system of democratic elections based on the importance of competing parties. But it seemed the credibility of the system was provided by the principled leadership of Castro and Che Guevara, who seemed to express the integrity of the system. But Brown considers that the influence of what could be considered to be charismatic leadership could not compensate for the ultimate limitations of the socialist system: “The relative economic failure of Cuba is a feature of a system which has greatly reduced inequality but at the expense of shared low living standards for the majority of the population. Some of the problems which Fidel Castro has himself criticised in the Cuban economy are features intrinsic to a communist economic system.” (p311) Thus the competition of departments of governments over the allocation of resources is something that Castro has criticised but it is an aspect that is inherently to the bureaucratic planned economy of Stalinism. However, Brown suggests that despite these types of economic problems the Cuban government is actually sustained by its rivalry with the USA, which it can claim is responsible for the problems of Cuba. Thus, Brown is implying that the economic system of Cuba is not genuinely efficient and so is not able to provide a high material level of renumeration for the people. But when compared to the other countries in Latin America Cuba is able to provide a level of equality and material affluence that is impressive. This is because a genuinely popular revolution in Cuba has resulted in the creation of a regime that in some manner is able to express the economic interests of the people. Thus, it could be argued that what has resulted is the creation of a degenerated workers state or a society in which the interests of the people have been an important concern for the government. In this manner the government of Cuba has been able to be responsive to the material concerns of the people even if it has not allowed itself to be subject to the role of democratic accountability for its actions. Furthermore, the end of the Soviet Union and the lack of its material support for Cuban society has meant that pro-capitalist measures have been introduced into the Cuban economy. This means that it could be argued that Cuba is a society that is undergoing a process of transition to capitalism. Such a development does not indicate the failure of communism, but instead is the result of the unfavourable balance of forces since the demise of the USSR, which has resulted in an end of material support for Cuba. But at its most promising Cuba expressed economic and political aspects in its society that seem to indicate the possibility to realise a genuinely emancipatory type of social formation. There was a sense in which the government of Cuba tried to respond to the aspirations of the people in a serious and credible manner. For example, the ideas of Che Guevara represent a serious attempt to outline the principles of a socialist type of economy, and it could be suggested that was an attempt to introduce them in practice. The ultimate problem for Cuba has been its isolation in Latin America and the opposition of various American governments. But despite these issues it could be suggested that in Cuba the attempt to introduce aspects of the workers management of the economy has been seriously addressed, even if not implemented in general terms. Ultimately the influence of a Stalinist ideology of bureaucratic socialism has undermined the possibility to realise a genuinely democratic socialist society, but nevertheless despite this limitation it can be suggested that the experience of the Cuban revolution has been progressive. What is indicated is that despite serious economic and political problems the aim of socialism is not impractical and instead a principled type of revolutionary leadership can develop a perspective for the realisation of emancipatory change. But ultimately the isolation of Cuba in the contemporary period has meant that an increasingly pro-capitalist approach has been adopted. Thus, it has become questionable whether the gains of the revolutionary process have been upheld in a consistent and principled manner. But despite these problems it can be suggested that the experience of Cuba is a practical manifestation of the view that communism is not a failed historical project. Instead, it represents an aspect of historical experience that indicates that communism is not merely a theoretical idea with no practical importance. In other words, the Cuban revolution has been of ultimate inspiration for the development of the view that communism can be realised in practice. This revolution has created principled revolutionary leaders who have uphold socialism as an important aim. The ultimate failure of the revolutionary regime is not because of the lack of practicality of communism but is instead the result of adverse circumstances.

In other words, it could be suggested that one of the ultimate important aspects of the Cuban revolution was that it indicated the possibility to realise socialism and communism as a practical and feasible possibility. The point is that the overall elitist character of the role of the leadership of the Cuban revolutionary regime did not undermine the expression of the fact that the society being created had authentic aspects of participatory democracy and the accountability of the leadership of the government to the people. Obviously, this aspect was only realised in a limited manner, and so the type of society that was being created could not be a model of what could be considered to be a genuine expression of socialism. Nevertheless, there were important features that in some manner could represent the perspective that socialism was a practical possibility and was not just an expression of a theoretical aim. In this context the Cuban revolution was of immense importance and the ultimate pragmatic regression of this society to become a type of capitalism has not ultimately undermined the historical significance of this development. The aspect of an essentially principled relationship between the people and the party of the revolution enabled the development of a limited form of participatory democracy that enabled the aspirations of the people to be realised in important terms. This development did not mean that all aspects of exploitation in the economic system had been overcome, but in limited terms the people were able to define the character of the objectives of production and so in this manner aspects of the workers management of the economy was realised. Therefore, it would be dogmatic to define the Cuban communist party as being merely the expression of a typical type of Stalinist organisation. Instead, the relationship of the party and working class had a character that was not present in the other countries claiming to be socialist. However, there was an important problem created by the relationship of Cuba to the Soviet Union. This meant that the limitations of the Soviet bureaucracy could not be criticised by the Cuban leaders, and instead they became the most popular exponents of a type of socialism that was based on the ideology of the Soviet Stalinists. Such a situation meant that the American Socialist Workers party were wrong to claim that the Cuban communist party effectively represented the leadership of the development of world revolution. Instead, the close relationship of Cuba to the Soviet Union meant the ideology of Stalinism was adopted as the basis of the justification of the view that Cuba was socialist. Consequently, the economic, political and ideological limitations of the Cuban communist party meant that ultimately it was necessary to advocate a process of radical transformation of society if the limitations of this situation were to be overcome. Whether this development could be achieved by the radical transformation of the Cuban communist party, or by the creation of a new revolutionary party, could not be established in advance. But what was of primary importance was the necessity to develop the increased influence of a perspective of what a genuinely socialist society could be like. This type of programme would mean an emphasis on the realisation of effective workers management of the economy and the possibility of the genuine competition of parties in the political system. But it would also be necessary to emphasise the necessity to transform the character of the Cuban communist party so that it became a genuine consistent revolutionary party. Such an approach could possibly be a programme of the radical reform of society rather than requiring what Trotsky had advocated as a perspective of political revolution. In other words, the popular character of the Cuban revolution had created a government that was in a limited sense accountable to the people. This meant that the perspective of change could have a flexible character which could mean that the aspect of reform of the system became a genuine possibility. But the increasing transformation of the character of Cuba into a form of state capitalism would seem to undermine the validity of this type of political perspective. Most of the gains of the initial Cuban revolutionary regime seem to have been ended. But the example of Cuba as an expression of what genuine socialism could be, and that this could mean that communism was a credible possibility, has not been undermined by these regressive developments. The ultimate legacy of the Cuban revolution is to revive the promise of the October revolution in Russia that communism has become a practical possibility.

In contrast developments in China seem to suggest the opposite conclusions to those established in Cuba. The elitist domination of Chinese society by the Communist party was consistently authoritarian and connected to dogmatic economic policies that led to hardship for the people. This aspect was expressed by the problems associated with the dogmatic economic approach of the ‘Great Leap Forward’, and then the so-called cultural revolution was utilised in order to consolidate Mao’s domination over society. Ultimately these developments caused a response in the Communist party leadership which led to the promotion of the role of capitalism whilst continuing with the dictatorship of the party. China has become one of the most important capitalist countries within the world economy. Indeed, the post-revolutionary history of China would seem to suggest that it is more practical and feasible to accept that Marxism in its Stalinist form is essentially utopian and has to be replaced by a pragmatic acceptance of capitalism. Thus, China would seem to suggest that communism has failed as a historical project and that instead the prospects of economic development have to be connected by a return to the capitalist system. However, it could also be argued that the bureaucratic socialism promoted initially by the Maoist leadership was never really tenable and that this aspect had to be replaced by either a regression to capitalism or the development of genuine socialism. The fact that the leadership of society by the Communist party was never really challenged by the development of a mass popular movement until fairly recently, meant the party could initiate the process of the restoration of capitalism without being opposed by a popular mass movement. What this development indicated is that an authoritarian communist party will always reject the progressive alternative of democratic socialism and instead prefer to preside over the process of the restoration of capitalism. In China this development was facilitated by the fact that socialism seemed to be a system associated with dogmatic Maoism, and the concept of a democratic type of socialism never acquired popular influence. The apparent success of China as an effective capitalist system would seem to contrast with the failures of the authoritarian version of socialism promoted by Mao. But these developments do not express the problems associated with the development of genuine socialist economy, and instead indicate the historical limitations of a particular type of Stalinist economics. Thus, the process of the transformation of post-revolutionary China is the expression of a pragmatic response of the Stalinist leadership to the ultimate problems of bureaucratic socialism. In relation to these developments the workers and peasants have never been consulted about the necessity of this changing approach towards the character of the economy. Instead, the Communist party has always had absolute power, and this has been utilised in order to re-establish the supremacy of capitalism. It cannot be argued that this development is because communism has been shown to be a failure because this objective was never advanced in the China of the period of the ascendency of the Communist party. Instead, bureaucratic socialism was ultimately a failure and it has been replaced with a capitalist economy under the supervision of the continued domination of the Stalinists. These developments indicate that the only manner in which the process of the creation of a stable and genuine socialist system can be realised and consolidated is by the role of a genuine workers revolution and the avoidance of the elitist degeneration of the revolutionary party. But in China the important influence of the Trotskyists was ended by the repression of the Stalinists and the result was the development of a process of change that occurred under the aspect of the domination of the Communist party. The ultimate restoration of capitalism is an indication that political principles are not important to the leaders of the Communist party and that instead all that matters is the consolidation of the absolute power of this organisation. Hence communism has not failed in China and instead what has developed is the logical outcome of the aspect of absolute political power of the role of the Communist party. This situation only indicates that communism will only remain a credible perspective in terms of the development of a political relationship between a genuine revolutionary party and the workers.

It could be suggested that one of the events that led to a serious undermining to transform a Stalinist regime into a genuine expression of the aspiration for democratic socialism was expressed by developments in Czechoslovakia in 1968. There was the development of a situation in which the people of Czechoslovakia could begin to discuss the character of the system and to propose improvements. A genuine possibility developed of the prospect that reform minded members of the leadership if the Communist party could promote the realisation of a more democratic type of society that would mean the end of the role of bureaucratic socialism. But the invasion of the Red Army in 1968 ended the possibility that a process of reform and democratic change would be tolerated by the leadership of the Soviet communist party. This development could only discredit the attempt of the defenders of the Stalinist system to suggest that there support for this type of society was connected to the principles of democracy. Instead, all that had been expressed was that the objective of the maintaining of the domination of the system was not compatible with the development of a situation of the democratic accountability of the system. Hence the military invasion of Czechoslovakia expressed the failure of any serious attempt to transform the system in a democratic and progressive manner. This situation was an expression of the failure of the official form of communism because the Soviet leadership could not tolerate the possibility of the development of a situation in which the system became connected to a process of democratic accountability to the people. Such a failure of the process of reform meant that the effective possibility to develop democratic socialism would require the demise of the domination of the Stalinist regime in the USSR. But the problem was that the very aim of democratic socialism seemed to be discredited by these developments in 1968. It seemed that socialism expressed an authoritarian system and so the only possibility to establish a democratic alternative was in terms of the restoration of capitalism. Hence the leadership of the Soviet Communist party did not anticipate that these actions in 1968 contributed to the ultimate political discrediting of their system and the apparently definitive justification of the view that communism expressed an authoritarian logic. In this context the principles of democracy became fully connected with the role of a capitalist type of economic and political system. However, these developments do not express the definitive justification that communism was a failed historical system because there is a difference between pragmatic policies utilised in order to consolidate the domination of the Stalinist system and the alternative of a genuine expression of democratic socialism, which had been expressed in the process of political radicalisation in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The popular actions of the people expressed the potential for a genuinely progressive and emancipatory type of socialism, but the very defeats of this mass aspiration discredited socialism in a serious manner. It seemed that there was no alternative to bureaucratic socialism because of the very possibility of the Soviet government to dictate the character of economic and political developments. But in the long term these very developments would contribute to the development of the process of the demise of the Stalinist system. Despite the expression of the domination of Stalinism it had be shown to be a system without genuine popular support. The only issue of importance had become when the system would actually be overthrown by the expression of an effective popular will of the people in Eastern Europe and the USSR. In other words, in 1968 bureaucratic socialism had conclusively shown that it had failed as a historical project. But this meant that it was necessary for genuine socialists to try and establish the differences that they had with Stalinism in an effective and popular manner. It could be argued that the apparent failure to develop the distinction between Stalinism and socialism in a popular manner did seem to suggest that the ultimate demise of the Stalinist system represented a failure of the socialist approach. But the ultimate problem was this apparent inability to be able to distinguish between Stalinism and socialism in a manner that could be understood by people in a popular manner.

The ultimate expression of this problematical issue was that the popular struggles of the Polish workers of the 1970’s and 1980’s became interpreted as a mass opposition to the standpoint of socialism. Brown defines the situation in Poland in the following manner: “The challenge in Poland was to a communist state and it was coming from anti-Communist workers. Moreover, the participation of the working class in what became known as the Polish revolution of 1980-81 was vastly greater in absolute numbers, and certainly as a proportion of the population, than the part played by workers in bringing the Bolsheviks to power. The developments in Poland in 1980-81 presented an ideological challenge, as well as a threat to the power of the party, and one which was felt acutely in Moscow.” (p429-430) But the problem with the Solidarity movement was that its challenge to the supremacy of the Stalinist regime became ideologically defined by an emphatic rejection of support for any conception of socialism. Ultimately it became a movement that sponsored the restoration of capitalism. The fact that this approach contradicted the possibility to establish a society based on workers management of the economy was not recognised by the leadership of Solidarity which instead connected the aspect of an authoritarian political system to the expression of the objectives of socialism. In other words, it was understood that the apparent character of socialism was authoritarian and connected to the situation of the absolute domination of the communist party. Thus, it seemed that the restoration of capitalism would not be against the interests of the workers because it would restore political democracy and allow the role of trade unions in order to defend the interests of the workers. Hence the authoritarian limitations of bureaucratic socialism made it seem that the restoration of capitalism was acceptable to the workers because they would have political freedom and the right to organise in trade unions in order to defend their rights. Thus, there was not a popular rejection of socialism by the workers but instead the development of opposition to the authoritarian regime of Stalinism. In order to oppose the possibility of proletarian revolution the Stalinists utilised what was effectively a form of military dictatorship. In this context the demise of this regime was a victory for the workers in creating the possibility to develop a regime based on democratic freedoms. But the leadership of Solidarity betrayed the progressive possibilities to establish a genuinely radical regime by utilising their electoral success in order to create a reactionary pro-capitalist government. Hence a process of counter-revolution occurred after the very realisation of a process of progressive political change. The working-class leadership of Solidarity became pro-capitalist and so betrayed the egalitarian possibilities represented by the popular trade union movement. It could have been possible to realise a genuine proletarian revolution and in that manner create the basis for the development of a popular form of democratic socialism. Instead, the leadership of Solidarity formed a bourgeois government that carried out a process of counterrevolution because this development created a society with greater levels of exploitation and inequality then had occurred under the Stalinist regime. Only a few principled individuals within Solidarity continued to uphold the aims of a genuinely egalitarian society. This reactionary development indicated the necessity to develop an effective revolutionary party that would be able to promote a programme for the realisation of a democratic socialist society. What had occurred indicated that the aspect of the militancy of the workers can become a problematical aspect of mass struggles if it is not connected to increasing the influence of a perspective to create a genuine socialist society. These reactionary developments indicated that Lenin was right to suggest that the spontaneous dynamic of mass struggles cannot overcome the limitations of bourgeois consciousness if the influence of genuine socialist ideas does not interact with the discontent of the workers. The supporters of capitalism, like Thatcher, suggested that these developments indicated that even the aims of socialism are not popular with the workers. But a more satisfactory explanation is that the limitations of Stalinism made it seem that capitalism would promise the realisation of democracy and the possibility of the prospect of the ability of the workers to defend their interests under this economic system. These illusions were not realised and instead the workers were put on the defensive by the development of bourgeois governments that promoted an economic policy of austerity. Hence what had failed was not communism, instead the realisation of genuine communism would have expressed the actual aspirations of the workers In Poland.

In the Soviet Union the government of Gorbachev seem to express a perspective that increasing challenged the credibility of the domination of bureaucratic socialism, but the problem was that this standpoint was not connected to the aim of the consolidation of socialism. Both the radical reformers and the conservatives were united in the apparent rejection of the necessity to improve the socialist system and instead they contemplated the necessity of some form of the restoration of capitalism in order to establish the importance of democratic principles. The objectives of Gorbachev were connected to the necessity to develop a type of social democracy, but it was not apparent what this meant in terms of the character of the bureaucratic socialist economy. But increasing this new perspective became connected to the aim of the restoration of capitalism. Brown defines this policy in the following terms: “The two economic criteria of a communist system – command rather than market economy and state ownership rather than private or mixed ownership – survived longer than democratic centralism and the leading role of the party. But they did not survive unscathed. By the end of 1989, the command economy had ceased to work. The law on the state enterprise of 1987 had devolved power to factory managers, and the state planning committee (Gosplan), the ministry of finance and the branch industrial ministries were losing their ability to control economic enterprises. Furthermore, Gorbachev had in September 1988 abolished most of the economic departments of the central committee, so that the party had essentially lost its ‘leading role’ in the economy. The changes seriously weakened the top tier of command from what Western economists named a ‘command economy’, what in the Soviet Union had been called a planned economy, and which Gorbachev himself, had since 1988…. called a ‘command administrative system.” (p520) In this situation strikes of workers developed which expressed the possibility to promote the possibility of the management of the process of production by the democratic expression of the role of labour. But the problem was that the increased influence of anti-communist ideology seemed to discredit all notions of the possibility of a more democratic type of socialism. In this context the restoration of capitalism was associated with the aspect of the development of economic and political freedom. This standpoint was encouraged by Gorbachev and the opposition movement led by Yeltsin. Thus, there was no significant politician who seriously called for the development of a genuine type of socialism based on workers management of the economy. However, it could also be argued that it was the process of the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe between 1989-91 which seemed to definitively suggest that the association of the conception of socialism with Stalinism meant that the principles of popular change became associated with the aim of establishing the domination of the capitalist system. Thus, it did not seem surprising that in this ideological situation of the association of the aims of socialism with the role of the Stalinist bureaucratic elite that the development of a radical consciousness in favour of change was connected to the rejection of socialism as being an inherent aspect of Stalinism. What had actually failed was Stalinism, but this understanding was connected to the view that this also meant that socialism was an impractical and authoritarian type of perspective that had to be replaced by the development of democracy in association with the restoration of capitalism. The increasing support of major Stalinist politicians for this approach only seemed to indicate that the democratic regeneration of socialism was unrealistic and that instead the only practical and feasible approach was to restore capitalism in connection with the role of a genuine democracy. In other words, the process of change was not based on the increasing importance of the people as an agency of social transformation. Instead, elite groups of the Stalinist ruling elite and various intellectuals were able to establish a dominant role in the process of the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and what became the former Soviet Union.

In other words what had failed was the attempt to reconcile the principles of socialism with the rule of privileged elites. The contradiction between theory and practice meant that the system of bureaucratic socialism was no longer ideologically tenable. This meant that the elites acted to try and maintain their ascendency over society by the promotion of a process of the restoration of capitalism. In the Soviet Union this led to the emphatic justification of the ending of bureaucratic socialism by ardent supporters of capitalism like Yeltsin. But the workers were confused by this situation and lacked the level of class consciousness that would enable them to advocate the realisation of a genuine form of democratic socialism. There were no influential socialist parties that advocated this type of perspective. Instead, the increasing failure of the Gorbachev regime seem to imply a situation of the discrediting of the validity of socialism. This development of serious crisis led to splits in the ruling class and sections of the party considered that they could only maintain the system by increasing the importance of the role of state coercion. The result of this aspect was the military coup of 1991. But this very event only indicated that sections of the elite were suggesting that the system could only be maintained by the development of what was effectively a military dictatorship. There was increasingly the recognition that this situation meant that all that was important was maintaining the power of the most intransigent section of the party and military elite. In other words, the attempt to impose and authoritarian dictatorship was an admission that only the application of state coercion could ensure the continuation of the Stalinist system. Gorbachev’s attempt to try and provide a popular basis for the regime had failed and instead sections of the elite were suggesting that the system could only be maintained by the application of state coercion. This situation of the serious crisis of the system between 1989-91 could have been transformed in a progressive manner if the forces of a genuine Marxist party had been able to emerge. But this development did not occur and so the alternative was represented by the perspective of capitalism being advocated by Yeltsin. The basis of his programme was that communism had failed to construct a prosperous and democratic type of society. Instead, the establishment of capitalism would be accompanied by the development of a democratic political system. In this manner the material interests of the people would be realised in comparison to the economic failures of socialism. This perspective developed popular support and so Yeltsin was able to establish himself as the only credible alternative to the imposition of a military and party dictatorship. It seemed that the choice was between the defenders of authoritarian socialism or a democratic regime based on an economy of capitalism. In this context Gorbachev was unable to establish an alternative and in order to support the defeat of the coup of sections of the party elite he had to accept the realisation of the ascendency of Yeltsin. The economic and political limitations of Stalinism meant that communism was ideologically reduced to the justification of nostalgia about the supposed glory years of the era of Stalin. The aim of an authentic communism, which was based on the role of participatory economic and political democracy, was not expressed in this situation. Many members of the communist party blamed Gorbachev for these developments because of his attempt to liberalise society. But in actuality there was an increasing generation of a situation of economic and political crisis which Gorbachev could not resolve. However, he had the only possible programme to try and maintain bureaucratic socialism which was the promotion of the principles of economic and political democracy. Ultimately it was the very limitations of bureaucratic socialism which meant that Gorbachev’s perspective was not feasible. The system could not be reformed, and so because of the lack of the influence of a genuine socialist perspective the only feasible alternative seemed to be the restoration of capitalism. Defenders of capitalism interpret these developments in terms of the view that the demise of the USSR was an indication of the utopian and impractical character of socialism. But genuine socialism based on the role of participatory democracy had never been realised, even in the Lenin era. The adverse economic and political situation of the USSR meant that the character of the system had to become defined by the attempt to establish the process of accumulation of a surplus based on the exploitation of the workers. Hence there always was a theory and practice inconsistency between the justification of the aim of socialism and the actual reality of the exploitation of the workers and peasants in the process of production. Gorbachev seriously tried to introduce democratic reforms that would make the system more progressive and accountable to the people. But it proved difficult to realise these reforms because of the opposition of the majority of the party elite. In this context the effective reactionary programme of Yeltsin for the restoration of capitalism seemed to be credible because it suggested that the only manner in which progress could occur was by a process of radical change. Thus, the choice seemed to between the justification of a coercive form of bureaucratic socialism or the democratic justification of the restoration of capitalism. In this context the programme of Gorbachev for the renewal of socialism seemed to be increasingly irrelevant. The workers were unable to express an alternative because of their low level of class consciousness and lack of economic and political organisation. In this context the counter-revolution of Yeltsin became increasingly inevitable. The ultimate result was a ruthless imposition of capitalism in terms of the closure of factories and the development of mass unemployment. In other words, the economic policy of Yeltsin was completely reactionary and based on the aim of the intensification of the exploitation of the workers in order to extract surplus value. But the progressive alternative to this regressive development was not the perpetuation of the Stalinist system, even under Gorbachev’s reforming leadership. Instead, it was necessary for the workers to act to end all aspects of exploitation within the relations of production. This development would have to be accompanied by the possibility of a genuinely new revolution which would establish the economic and political supremacy of the role of the workers. In order to establish this possibility, it would be necessary to establish a new and authentic communist party in order to promote this perspective. But instead of this development Yeltsin was able to lead a successful counter-revolution. We can define this development in these terms because the effective restoration of capitalism was not progress and instead was the expression of the imposition of a system that was inferior to bureaucratic socialism. Only the possibility for the workers to create a process of radical change could have represented progress in this context. Therefore, it may have been necessary to defend the continuation of the Gorbachev regime in order to undermine the possibility to establish the success of the Yeltsin counter-revolution. But this defence would have been of a limited character and would actually have been connected to the development of an alternative influence of genuine democratic socialism. Some people have argued that the approach of Gorbachev was about support for the restoration of capitalism, but this perspective has been shown to have been falsified by events. Instead, the most consistent supporter of the restoration of capitalism proved to be Yeltsin. In the last analysis Gorbachev was motivated to defend bureaucratic socialism, whilst accepting a limited role for aspects of capitalist economic activity. This is why Yeltsin had to overthrow the Gorbachev regime in order to create the economic and political conditions for the restoration of capitalism. This analysis does not imply the necessity to provide critical support for Gorbachev, but instead the necessary objective was to revive the influence of a genuine participatory form of socialism. Only in this manner could both Stalinism and the advocates of the restoration of capitalism be opposed. But the lack of credibility of Marxism undermined the possibility to create a new revolutionary party. Instead, it seemed the only progressive option was to support Yeltsin’s opposition to Stalinism. Thus, Yeltsin developed popular support, whilst Gorbachev was increasing isolated and discredited. The communist party was dissolved and not replaced by an authentic socialist alternative type of party. These developments did not mean that the process of the restoration of capitalism was inevitable but it became increasingly likely under the conditions in which the end of the communist party did not result in the creation of genuinely socialist alternative organisation. In this context the restoration of capitalism seemed to have become an inevitability. This development had no progressive features, and instead a reactionary regime was replaced by a government committed to the realisation of the exploitation of labour by capital.

The events in 1989 in Eastern Europe led to the establishment of regimes based on the aim of the promotion of the development of capitalism. These events are described by Brown who considers that the restoration of capitalism was essentially an inevitability in this situation. But the problem was that a popular party promoting the aims of a genuine democracy based on the promotion of the role of democratic socialism did not emerge. The very concept of socialism was associated with the role of the Soviet domination of Hungary, and so the assertion of national independence seemed to be connected to the promotion of the principles of capitalism. In other words, the very objectives of socialism seemed to be associated with Stalinism and so the development of a genuine anti-Stalinist approach was connected to the establishment of a political regime that would promote the role of capitalism. It could be suggested that this type of change seemed to be inevitable under the circumstances of the association of Stalinism with socialism. But in ideological terms the politicians associated the realisation of the independence of Hungary with the establishment of a society that would end the character of the economy as socialist. Therefore, a process of popular revolution based on the mobilisation of a mass mobilisation for progressive change was transformed into a counterrevolution because bureaucratic socialism was replaced with a society based on the interests of capital. This development became the basis for explaining change within the rest of eastern Europe. But what would occur in Poland where there had been the development of a militant mass movement of the workers? Between 1989-91 the role of Solidarity as a political organisation effectively won elections of Poland and in 1991 Lech Walesa was elected President of Poland. Hence Solidarity had a mandate to introduce measures that expressed its popular character such as workers management of the economy. But instead of acting in terms of its role during the early 1980’s, the Solidarity government became the political expression of the process of the restoration of capitalism. Its leaders would argue that this represented the aspirations of its supporters, but in fact it meant that Solidarity was effectively transformed from being a popular trade union into becoming a pro-capitalist party. However, in this situation it was difficult to argue in favour of democratic socialism because of the association of socialism with the repressive role of the Soviet state. But it could be suggested that Solidarity did not have a mandate for this increasingly pro-capitalist trajectory and the people would have supported it if had attempted to promote the realisation of a democratic form of socialism. The point is that Solidarity did not have a mandate for the increasing pro-capitalist approach and instead it could be said to have demoralised its supporters by its reactionary trajectory. It is questionable to claim that there was a popular basis for the restoration of capitalism and instead it could be suggested that the attempt to develop a democratic type of socialism would have had more effective and popular support. But the problem was that there were not many people advocating this necessity of genuine socialism. The Solidarity leadership could suggest in a plausible manner that they were effectively expressing the aims of the people to end the communist system. Thus, anti-communism became associated with the promotion of the restoration of capitalism. In this situation the people were confused about what they supported. They knew that they wanted to end the role of a repressive regime but were unsure whether this meant the restoration of capitalism. Primarily there was a contradiction between what had been the trade union militancy of Solidarity and the promotion by its leadership of a bourgeois regime. But in this situation of political confusion there was no popular expression of a programme of democratic socialism. Instead, the ideological relationship of socialism with Stalinism meant that the process of what became reactionary change was not challenged in a popular manner. What had begun as a popular revolutionary process was transformed into an effective counterrevolution because of the increasing pro-capitalist objectives of the leadership of Solidarity. This meant they rejected their trade union interests and instead transformed what had been a popular mass movement into an agency of counterrevolution.

Why is it necessary to define the ending of the domination of bureaucratic socialism in Poland as an expression of counter-revolution? The reason is that this development was not in any manner the most progressive outcome of political events and instead contradicted the emancipatory potential of Solidarity to create a regime based on workers management of the economy. The popular trade union character of Solidarity meant that it was most logical and principled to utilise what had become a successful process of opposition to the system in order to create an economic system based on workers management of the economy. In this manner it could be suggested that the successful election results between 1989-91 meant that Solidarity effectively had a popular mandate to develop this type of participatory economy. But the influence of the ideology of anti-communism meant that all forms of expression of the aims of socialism were rejected as being associated with the interests of Soviet communism. However, the workers voted for Solidarity because they must have assumed that it would create a democratic type of economic activity that would express their interests. Hence there was actually a mandate for the realisation of what would be the expression of a genuinely popular and egalitarian type of socialism. But the leaders of Solidarity associated socialism with Stalinism and so because of this ideological standpoint meant that they utilised their popular support as a justification to advocate a perspective of the restoration of capitalism. The workers did not have the level of consciousness that could have developed a form of effective opposition to this development. This meant that in an elitist manner the leaders of Solidarity betrayed their working-class origins and instead became the expression of the interests of the restoration of capitalism. What had begun as a genuinely popular revolutionary struggle was transformed into a process of counterrevolution, because the restoration of capitalism was not the progressive outcome that could have resulted from the mass activity of the workers.

Brown outlines the events in east Germany as leading to an inevitable process of unification with West Germany. But it could also be suggested that this was a process that was effectively organised by the government of West Germany and was not necessarily the result of the popular protests of the people of East Germany. Indeed, these developments were supported by the creation of new organisations that effectively argued in favour of the democratic transformation of the character of East Germany. There was no initial demand for unification with West Germany. Instead, this outcome became increasingly likely because the government of West Germany became supportive of this objective. In effect the forces of Stalinism, led by Gorbachev, accepted this development as a preferable outcome when compared to the possibility of the establishment of a popular regime in East Germany. Indeed, the ultimate result was of a reactionary character because the economy of East Germany was totally re-organised in order to realise the requirements of West German capital. This development was not an indication of the failure of communism but instead became the predictable outcome of the fact that the East German Stalinist elite ultimately preferred assimilation with West Germany rather than the alternative of a popular development of genuine socialism. It could also be suggested that East Germany had been one of the most efficient and prosperous of the Stalinist economies. Therefore, the restoration of capitalism did not represent a form of economic improvement for the people of this area. The fact that bourgeois democracy was now applicable in East Germany could not compensate for the fact of the development of economic problems associated with the domination of West German capital over this area. These regressive results were an expression of the fact that the demise of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Germany was not replaced with the realisation of a genuine type of democratic socialism. It could be argued that there was actually popular support for this possible development, but the politicians of East Germany accepted the process of incorporation into West Germany. Brown considers that unification with West Germany became a popular aim of the protest in East Germany, but this perspective is questionable given that the attempt of the demonstrations was to establish democratic government in that state. Instead, it was agreement between the politicians of West and East Germany that resulted in unification on the basis of the expansion of the capitalist system.

In Rumania the overthrow of the repressive Ceausescu dictatorship by the popular struggle of the people seemed to suggest the possibility to establish a democratic regime that would introduce the genuine socialism. But the lack of accountability of the regime that was established meant that instead the process of the restoration of capitalism became promoted. This development disappointed the workers and led to militant miners strikes that expressed genuine opposition to the emerging bourgeois government. But the ultimate failure of these struggles led to the consolidation of an elitist pro-bourgeois government. It is questionable whether this development had genuine democratic support and it would be more feasible to suggest that the aim of a popular form of socialism would have had the support of the people. But it could be argued that possibly the most counter-revolutionary development was the demise of Yugoslavia which had in periods of its history had aspects of being a degenerated workers state because of the promotion of workers management of the economy. The result of the process of regressive change was the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the development of authoritarian states such as Serbia. This meant the politics of reactionary nationalism became dominant and the situation of civil wars. In this context it was not possible to develop the arguments in favour of a democratic unification of Yugoslavia. Indeed, the very aim of socialism seemed to have become discredited because of the importance of the role of rival authoritarian regimes. Hence the importance of the ideology of nationalism ended any formal commitment to the aim of socialism. This aspect was connected to the process of the development of the restoration of capitalism. This situation was an expression of a genuine counter-revolution because all the achievements of the Yugoslavia of Tito were replaced by the role of a collection of rival authoritarian states. In order to establish the support of the workers for this development it was necessary to utilise the role of reactionary forms of popular nationalism. The result was the situation of military conflict between what had become rival states. Hence the demise of bureaucratic socialism in Yugoslavia was a genuine counterrevolution because a society that had expressed forms of genuine economic democracy had become replaced with authoritarian nationalist regimes. This development was an indication that what had failed was not the aim of communism but instead the opportunist degeneration of the political elite in the various republics of the former Yugoslavia had resulted in the justification of the most chauvinist forms of nationalism. The workers were demoralised by these developments and were unable to promote a progressive alternative that could have developed unity between the peoples of what had become contending states. Whilst the emerging ruling classes of the various republics recognised that they could ensure their political supremacy by developing the popular influence of the ideology of chauvinist nationalism. This situation indicated that the process of counter-revolution was the most effective in the former Yugoslavia. The demise of the Yugoslav republic was an indication that the aspects of economic progress associated with what had been the most progressive type of bureaucratic socialism had been ended. Hence the restoration of capitalism was associated with the most regressive forms of populist nationalism. Such a development was an indication that what had occurred was in no sense an expression of progress and the development of a credible alternative to the apparent limitations of bureaucratic communism. The progressive aspects of the Tito regime were ended by these regressive events and what had been in some terms an expression of a model of a possible emancipatory type of society was transformed into its opposite. In other words, the various elites of the new states like Serbia could only recognise that they could maintain their power by upholding a programme of extreme national chauvinism. The aspects of internationalism in the programme of the Yugoslav communist party were ended by this process of political degeneration of the elites that had power after the decline of the importance of the USSR.

Brown concludes that the attempt to create communist societies has proved to be an illusion: “The idea of building communism, a society in which the state would have withered away, turned out to be a dangerous illusion. What was built instead was communism, an oppressive party-state which was authoritarian at best and ruthlessly totalitarian at worst.” (p613-614) This viewpoint implies that there was something problematical about the very aim of communism which contributed to the development of authoritarian party state regimes based on the justification of the role of repression and the denial of the expression of democracy. But the commitment of Marx to a conception of the highest levels of popular democracy as the basis to establish communism was an indication of the contradiction between the role of theory and practice. The development of Stalinism expressed this justification of authoritarianism and the rule of the party elite over society. This type of elitist socialism was the expression of the contradiction between the approach of Marx and the actual practical character of the various regimes claiming to be socialist. Hence the ultimate end of the role of the majority of these bureaucratic socialist regimes did not mean the effective undermining of the credibility of the aim of communism. Instead, what was shown was that elitist regimes claiming to be socialist and building communism are ultimately not durable in economic and political terms. Consequently, it became possible that capitalism would be restored in these countries and this is what occurred. The only manner that communism can become a credible project is that the support of the workers for the realisation of this objective should become popular and as a result the political possibility to achieve this aim should become feasible. It is the continuing limitations of capitalism which indicate that communism is not a utopian aim and instead is the only possible type of society that is more progressive than the present situation of the domination of the present economic system. But it has to be suggested that it would appear that communism is a failed historical project as long as the possibility to create a mass movement in favour of revolutionary change does not realise effective expressions of success. In other words, history has an open-ended character which does not prove that capitalism will remain invincible or that communism is inevitable. Instead, it is the results of the class struggle which can ultimately answer the question as to whether communism has become a failed project. Hence Marxists should attempt to build revolutionary parties that attempt to promote plausible programmes for the transformation of capitalist society into socialism. Only the level of success in relation to this task will enable us to be able to answer the question in a more definite manner concerning the feasibility of communism. However, we have no need to be pessimistic in this context. The continuing of the exploitative limitations of capitalism generates discontent that could become transformed in a conscious manner into the expression of definite forms of opposition to the system. Only the result of this unrest will enable us to establish that capitalism is not an invincible system. Hence the demise of Stalinism, contrary to the views of Brown, does not indicate that communism is a failed project. Instead, the inability of capitalism to resolve its limitations such as the role of exploitation and alienation, indicate that despite the initial failure to create communism, it may be possible that the results of the class struggle in the future could still create communism. Indeed, it could be argued that the very economic development of capitalism means that the chances to achieve a democratic and prosperous communist society have become more favourable. However, this perspective cannot be dogmatic. Only the results of the class struggle will indicate whether communism is possible and so is not a failed historical project.