IS MARXISM AUTHORITARIAN?

It has been argued by some commentators that Marxism is authoritarian because it is suggested that the aim of proletarian emancipation and the attempt to realise socialism cannot be achieved in terms of the generation of the role of genuine democracy which would mean the expression of the toleration of different opinions and the possibility of dissent with the views of the dominant forces within society. But the problem with this criticism of Marxism is that the type of society that Marx and Engels admired was that of the Paris Commune which was based on a form of multi-party democracy and they advocated the importance of universal suffrage in order to uphold and generate its legitimacy. Thus in terms of actual empirical experience the type of society that Marx and Engels considered was an expression of the aims of the realisation of the aims of proletarian revolution was one that combined the aspiration to realise social justice alongside the genuine possibility to define this standpoint in a democratic manner that was based on the possibility of dissent and the prospect to oppose the proletarian government in a peaceful manner. However, the critics would suggest that the theory of Marx is an expression of a logic that can only justify the realisation of what is considered to be the conception of socialism by a party elite that understands the process of social and historical development. Thus, Leninism is the expression of the approach of Marxism. But in order to make this claim we have to define Marxism as being reduced to the apparent practices of Leninism, and so reduce the role of the character of Marxism to the practical results of the actions of Bolshevism. But we have no possibility to know what Marx and Engels would have made about the Bolshevik governments, except that is that it would have been most likely that they would have been critical of the various measures that promoted the aims of the party elite at the expense of the interests of the workers and peasants. The point is that the unfavourable circumstances of the October revolution and its aftermath led to the situation in which the regime could only sustain itself by the process of repression and the increasing ability to deny the workers and peasants the level of political freedom that was needed to ensure that they had the possibility to be able to realise some genuine level of initiative and political freedom. Instead of this situation the Bolsheviks came to understand the role of the working class in terms of the problem of being susceptible to the influence of bourgeois ideology which would have meant that under a situation of freedom of political choice would have meant the restoration of a regime based on the interests of capital. Hence the ideology of the Bolsheviks, especially under Stalin, became that the very interests of the working class could not be realised under the situation in which the workers had the possibility for independent political freedom. Instead only the party elite could define the genuine and revolutionary aspirations of the working class. This approach was not in any manner justified by the writings of Marx and Engels. Instead we have to determine whether their various articles and books in some indirect and unintended manner could have upheld some form of authoritarianism. This means outlining the views of some of the critics of Marx and Engels such as Andrzej Walicki in his book: ‘Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom’ (Stanford University Press, California 1995)

The approach of this author is very simple: He says in relation to commentators on Marxism that: “Very few realized that the communist idea of freedom presupposed the total abolition of civil society and the market economy by subjecting social forces to conscious rational control in a totally planned economic system.”(p4) Hence what is being suggested is that one of the major aims of the principles of socialism is totalitarian in terms of the apparent justification of the end of the role of the market economy and the introduction of planning. This view means that he does not accept the possibility that this type of socialism could be introduced in a democratic manner. It could be suggested that the majority of the people in a given society could voluntarily decide that they want to realise socialism in terms of the replacement of the domination of the market in terms of the introduction of the plan. But the author would not accept that this development could not be democratic because what is of concern to him is not the political actions of the majority of the people but instead the fact that the role of the market has been replaced by that of the plan. The possibility that the working class could have aspired to achieve this aim, and has acted to achieve this prospect in terms of the vindication of the role of democratic elections is irrelevant to him because this of no importance compared to the detrimental economic and political effects of the apparent end of the market. Hence what is of importance to the author is the continuation of the integrity of the market if the maintenance of democracy is to be upheld. But this approach is contradictory because it is entirely possible that the majority of the people could democratically decide to undermine or reduce the influence of the market within society. They could indicate by means of elections that their aim is to replace the domination of the market with the role of the plan. Hence in order to provide credibility to the views of the author he would have to explain why the plan has an authoritarian logic. There is no guarantee that this position can be upheld in a definite manner. But there is another problem. The author would also have to outline convincing reasons as to why the domination of the plan can only result in the situation of the denial of the aspect of economic and political freedom which is defined in terms of the expression of individual initiative. But in reply it could be suggested that the most effective manner in which the interests of the individual can be realised is in terms of a situation of social cooperation in which the various individuals within a given enterprise and in society in general act in a cooperative manner in order to fulfil commonly agreed aims and objectives. This situation would be preferable to the continuation of private ownership of the various enterprises which means that the individual owner has the ability to be able to dominate the process of production in order to realise their own narrowly defined economic objectives such as the accumulation of capital. Only in a situation of social ownership has the producer the ability and possibility to be able to be able to define the objectives of the process of production and distribution without the situation of the domination of the imperatives of an omnipotent private entrepreneur. In this manner it could be argued that rather than the situation of authoritarianism being imposed the actual result is the generation of the freedom of the workers to be able to define the objectives and purposes of the process of production in a voluntary and socially coordinated manner. The result of this situation could mean that the surplus profit is utilised in the interests of the workers in general and not for the realisation of the aims of the capitalist owner of the various enterprises.

Obviously, problems could occur, and a party elite develops to the point that it is able to dictate the purposes of the process of production. But the point at dispute is whether this is the result of the planned character of the process of production under workers control or is it instead an expression of distortions and the undermining of the initial objectives of trying to establish a situation of democratic organisation of the economy. The author would suggest that this latter result is inevitable because it is not possible to have an emancipatory alternative to the influence of the role of the market in terms of the character of economic activity. But Marxists would suggest that the development of the domination of a party elite over the character of the economy is because of the problem of the utilisation of the situation of the hegemony of the party in terms of the justification of the generation of authoritarianism. The aim of the overcoming of the domination of the market is not futile but this aim has become distorted because of the monopoly control of society by the increasing influence of the role of the party elite. Such a development does not mean that the only alternative is to accept the importance of the market because this situation is based on the hegemony of different party elites, and as a result the participation of working people within the economy and society is not realised. Thus, the actual problem would seem to be the domination of different types of elites that undermines the possibility to establish the participatory economic democracy based on the realisation of the genuine role of the working class. Marxism is not responsible for this situation, but instead the problem is either based on the continuation of the market or the distortion of the ideals of socialism by a party elite.

The point being made is that the aspirations of Marxism are the realisation of socialism based on the genuine process of emancipation of the working class. In this context the role of the party should be to assist and not dominate this development. The effective subordination of the class to the importance of the party creates a situation in which the attempt to create a genuine socialist society becomes compromised by other objectives such as the perpetuation of the ascendency of the party to a position of control over society. In this context the objective of the self-emancipation of the working class must be undermined and replaced by different intentions such as the perpetuation of the possibility for the party to be able to dictate to society what should be the character of the conception of socialism. But this realisation of so-called socialism from above is not in any genuine manner the expression of the process of the creation of a society defined by the aspirations and objectives of the working class. Instead it is a type of social formation that is defined by other objectives such as the generation of economic activity in terms of the interests of the party elite. To Walicki this situation would be the expression of what is meant by socialism, but we would suggest that this is not socialism because the very principles of the possibility to realise the self-emancipation of the working class has been undermined and so cannot be realised. Walicki contends that such a situation is the logical outcome of the abolition of the market, but this view implies that the role of the market is to achieve the emancipation of society, but he does not outline how this possibility could be realised. Instead he asserts: “The most obvious and visible link between the Marxist conception of freedom and the Bolshevik revolution is the intransigent hostility displayed towards the market. Lenin was more hostile to the capitalist mode of distribution (market exchange) than to capitalism as a mode of production because the latter could assume the form of rationally controlled state capitalism, whilst the former was in his view the epitome of anarchy, uncontrollability and dependence on…quasi-natural spontaneity. To put it briefly, Marx conceived of freedom as conscious, rational control over economic and social forces. The main enemies of such freedom were…the market, freedom would only be realized by rational planning, by liberating people from objective dependence on things and alienated social forces. Hence he was inevitably more hostile to the market than to capitalism as a system of large scale factory production: the capitalist factory was for him a great step forward to rational planning and organisation whilst the market was synonymous with anarchy…”(p5-6) But why should this view result in the justification of a system of coercion and the rule of an elite unless it is considered that the market is an expression of an inherent tendency for the liberation of human beings from forms of domination and control by an elite? But this point is not outlined by Walicki because he instead only assumes the apparent inherent validity of this standpoint. This means that what is not explained is how a system that cannot be consciously and rationally controlled by human activity can become the basis of the ability for the producers to be able to utilise the economy for their own social and material benefit. Walicki’s praise of the market means that he ignores outlining its character in terms of the ability of the forces of capital to dominate and undermine the interests of labour. These very limitations of the capitalist system result in the development of class struggle and the generation of tendencies that promote the possibility to end the domination of the market over the various forms of economic activity. The point is a constructive and plausible view as to why the role of the market becomes the basis of human liberation is not provided by the author, who instead only dogmatically assumes the superiority of the market over all other forms of economic activity. This means that the result of this standpoint is to justify the domination of capital over labour. The point being made is that the market is not a neutral mechanism but is instead the basis on which the unequal social relations of capitalism are upheld and perpetuated. Indeed, this is the very basis of the argument as to why Marx suggested that the role of the market would be superseded within a genuine socialist system based on the hegemony of the producers. But in one sense this emphasis on the role of the market is a diversion from the major reason for the necessity to end the domination of capitalism. This is the actual undermining of the interests of labour within the situation of the character of capitalist relations of production. Hence the primary objective of any genuine socialist system is to realise the emancipation of the role of labour within the process of production, and in that context the issue of the market is entirely secondary. The author seems unable to recognise the importance of this standpoint because to him the major issue is the importance of the market, and he uses this view in order to deny the feasibility of socialism. Such a dogmatic contention cannot explain why it is unrealistic to have a society based on the interests of labour and in which the role of the market would be subordinated accordingly. The implicit basis of the approach of the author is that he cannot envisage the capacity of the working class to be able to define the character of society and in that manner undermine the importance of the market. Instead he can only consider that the party elite would become the dominant social force within that type of society. The party would have an inherent capacity to act on behalf of the workers and so in that elitist manner would be able to define what is a bureaucratic character of society. But we have to ask why is the working class unable to become the effective and major social force within society? Is the major problem with the apparent incapacity of the working class, or is the issue about how the aims and principles of Marxism have been interpreted by the revolutionary elite? In this context the issue is not the supposed elitism of Marxism but is instead about the manner in which Marxism has been interpreted under the given circumstances. Indeed, it could be argued that the actual practices of the party in power have expressed a rejection of the views of both Marx and the Lenin of ‘State and Revolution’. The objective of maintaining the revolutionary party in power has led to the conscious rejection of any conception that the working class has the capacity and ability to be able to define the character of society and the economy. In other words, there is no inherent connection between theory and practice, but instead the expediencies of the situation result in the justification of the denial of the conception of the realisation of socialism via the role of the dynamic agency of the workers. Only the party is considered to be the expression of the ‘historic’ interests of the working class, and this means the justification of the continuation of the effective subordination of the role of labour within the relations of production. In this context the ideas of Kautsky and Lenin as outlined between 1902-1904 become projected onto the actual situation and the working class is considered to be the expression of the influence of a form of bourgeois ideology which does not contribute towards the creation of a socialist society. In this manner the domination of the party over the class is justified and this means that all other parties are banned because they are considered to represent an opportunist influence in relation to the attitudes and actions of the working class. This situation is not justified in relation to the works of Marx because he considered that a multi-party democracy was quite compatible with the possibility to realise and uphold the revolutionary interests of the working class. To Marx democracy is the form of the promotion of the content of socialism, which is itself defined by the ability of the working class to participate in the process of transformation of social relations. Thus the substitutionist conception that a party would rule on behalf of the working class only has credibility for Marx in the sense that such a party would be genuinely accountable to the workers in terms of the principles of democratic accountability as expressed by the role of regular elections and the possibility to establish an alternative form of government. In this context the one-party regime of the USSR would be to Marx a phenomenon that was opposed to the principles of how he would conceive the actual ability of the working class to be able to influence and transform the political situation. Unless the working class is an actual governing class then its ability to define itself as a genuine ruling class must be brought into question. In this context it would be contradictory to suggest that a party has an exclusive ability to be able to define the interests of the working class. Instead this very issue has to be subject to the criteria of the expression of democratic elections and in this manner the workers would be able to establish via the actions of their own initiative what is in their own interests. But implicitly Walicki denies this possibility because he can only envisage a society dominated by the market as the expression of the potential for the realisation of the views of the people. To him socialism is an inherently authoritarian social formation because of the subordination of the role of the market. This view means that it would seem to be impractical to try and develop a situation in which the producers aim to establish their own destiny in terms of the development of the capacity to be able to control the process of economic activity. Instead it would seem that the only viable form of economy is one in which the employer and workers are subject to the imperatives of the process of capital accumulation and the generation of profits in terms of the subordination of economic actors to what are imposed imperatives. Hence the actual expression of authoritarianism is the process of capitalist production in terms of the imposition of the aims of the process of economic activity and this means that the role of the producers is subordinated to imperatives that are apparently established by the omnipotence of economic laws which cannot in any sense be modified or transformed. This situation would seem to be eternal because of the apparent inability to establish an emancipatory alternative in terms of the possibility of the producers to be able to define the character of the process of economic activity. Hence the author is accepting the view that the process of economic activity is defined by laws that cannot in any manner be undermined or transformed by the activity of the producers. In this context the role of the market cannot be transformed and replaced by different objectives that express the interests and aspirations of the workers. The attempt to develop such a possibility can only result in the domination of a party elite that is able to dominate the economy and the process of production via the imposition of a plan. Hence what is being suggested is that capitalism is the realisation of the end of history and so any attempt to go beyond its limitations will result in failure and the establishment of an authoritarian type of society. The very conception of socialism is impractical and the ultimate result of the attempt to realise this aim can only be the generation of the domination of a party elite over society. In other words, the dilemma for all supporters of socialism is that they cannot uphold in a viable manner the possibility to realise a democratic and progressive alternative to the supremacy of the role of the market within society.

But the point that is ignored by this criticism of Marxism is that the issue of the validity of objectives is ultimately decided by the choice of people. The validity of socialism ultimately depends on the ability to obtain mass support for this aim. If socialism cannot become a popular standpoint then it will not be realised despite its possible advantages. In this context it is of vital importance that there are parties that are based on adherence to the ideology of socialism and which aim to obtain support for this aim within the population. If this does not happen then capitalism will continue despite its apparent limitations and the generation of discontent within the population. This situation does not mean that socialism is an unrealistic objective but instead that the attempt to obtain support for it as a political aim has not achieved mass support. However, in such a situation the limitations of capitalism will still be generated such as unemployment and the subordination of labour to the interests of capital within the process of production. In this context the potential for the generation of the potential to realise an alternative will always be apparent within capitalism. In this context it is necessary for Walicki to outline not only the apparent authoritarian limitations of Marxism but to also indicate the superiority of capitalism which means that socialism is an aim that if realised could not overcome the apparent limitations of the present system. Hence it is not sufficient to outline the problems of Marxism he has also to outline why capitalism is a system that cannot be improved upon by the realisation of the objectives of a revolutionary alternative. In this context it is not adequate to indicate the limitations of Marxism if this aspect is not connected to the justification of the superiority of the view that capitalism cannot be replaced in a constructive manner by the objective of socialism. In other words, it is not sufficient to indicate the apparent authoritarianism of Marx, it is also necessary to establish the reasons why capitalism is a system that cannot be replaced in a progressive manner by socialism. In this context it is necessary to justify the domination of labour by capital as something that is required by the logic of economic activity and which has to be expressed by the character of the political system. Hence Marx’s view that the classless society of communism has to be indicated as being inferior to the continuation of capitalism. If this task is not realised then the objections to the views of Marx are essentially of a dogmatic manner.

Walicki contends that Marx had an instrumental attitude towards the character of history and the role of the working class in which the importance of the interests of the workers in the present is subordinated to the realisation of communism in the future: “The habit of conceiving human liberation as a long, cruel historical process in which entire generations have to be ruthlessly sacrificed for the sake of the unfettered development of human beings in the future is perhaps one of the most characteristic, although sometimes conveniently forgotten, features of Marx’s thought. The workers unease about such justification of past and present sufferings could be amply compensated, in Marx’s view by the claim that their class was fulfilling a unique historical mission.”(p16) But this interpretation of Marx’s approach ignores that Marx outlined how the process of the extraction of surplus value from labour by capital is an indication of the importance of the aspiration to oppose this situation in the present. Without the related development of the antagonism between capital and labour the possibility to achieve an emancipatory objective would not be possible. The very exploitative character of the relations of production of capitalism means that the forces of labour continually oppose this situation and so attempt to improve their situation within the present economic relationships. Only the connected attempt to change the balance of class forces between capital and labour can generate the possibility to develop the economic and political conditions that makes revolutionary change to a more progressive system possible. The working class has to make itself the subject of history if the possibility of change is to become feasible. In this manner the workers are not the passive instruments of capital but instead resist this situation of domination by capital within the process of production, and only in this manner will the possibility of the realisation of an alternative to capitalism be achieved. In this manner the importance of historical necessity or the tendencies for the realisation of an alternative within capitalism can only be established in terms of the conscious activity of the working class. If for whatever reason this development does not occur, then capitalism will remain dominant. Hence Walicki caricatures the approach of Marx when he defines it in terms of the expression of the imperatives of historical necessity. Instead this aspect can only indicate the possibilities to transform capitalism if people consciously become supporters of the aim of the realisation of an alternative to the present economic system. This would seem to indicate the importance of a conception of freedom in terms of workers consciously developing support for the aim of communism to replace capitalism. The implicit aspect of this perspective is that there may be reasons why such a development does not occur, and in that manner, capitalism will continue to be dominate. Hence the potential for the realisation of an alternative to the present system ultimately depends on the conscious and voluntary choices made by working people. Hence an implicit assumption is being made that people may not develop the sufficient level of class consciousness that would make the alternative of communism a viable possibility. Hence an implicit if not theorised aspect of the approach of Marx is that history is ultimately open-ended and does not have an inevitable outcome because people have to make a conscious choice between the continuation of capitalism or the alternative of communism. In this context the outcome of the role of class struggle is an important aspect that indicates the possibilities that may occur. In other words, the logical expression of the character of Marx’s emphasis on the role of the class struggle is to accept the possibility of contingent outcomes that undermine the validity of the view that communism is the inevitable alternative to capitalism. In this context Marx is effectively accepting the importance of the principles of freedom of choice within the class struggle. It is of course possible to indicate various comments by Marx that appear to indicate that communism was the inevitable outcome of history, but these do not undermine the importance of the emphasis on the class struggle which must indicate that the outcome of this aspect is contingent on the issue of which class can become dominant in the process of social antagonism. In this context the outcome of historical development is not inevitable because of the uncertainty of the role of class conflict. This means that humans have the freedom to be able to choose their destiny, even if Marx also indicated the reasons why the socialisation of production is also an expression of the favourable possibilities for the realisation of transition to communism. It could be argued that the apparent inability of the working class to be able to achieve a successful alternative to capitalism in an emancipatory manner is an indication that Marxism has been shown to be falsified by the events of history. But it can also be indicated that because of the continuation of the domination of capitalism the possibility of the opposition of labour to this situation is still a perpetual aspect of the situation. However, this does not in and of itself indicate the inevitability of change to a different type of society. Instead people have to make conscious and voluntary choices that they favour the replacement of capitalism with the alternatives of socialism and communism. If these choices are not made, then the present system will continue even if there is discontent within society. Hence the perspective of Marxism is only consistent in terms of the uncertainty of the outcome of class struggle and its relationship to the character of class consciousness. It is quite possible that people may make the choice that capitalism should continue despite its limitations. In this context the dynamics of class struggle have not been able to generate the realisation of the successful development of an alternative. Ultimately the situation of capitalism is based on the importance of the balance of class forces. In this manner the Marxist approach has to be connected to the significance of the anti-authoritarian view that the character of history is related to the conscious choices made by people. Hence principled Marxism should not attempt to impose the realisation of a progressive development regardless of the aspirations of the people. Instead genuine Marxism can only relate itself to the actual views and interests of the working class. It would be a contradiction in terms to try and impose a type of ‘socialism from above’ that had no connection to the perspective and role of ‘socialism from below’.

But Walicki contends that Marxism has an authoritarian impulse to try and impose its views on society, or a disregard for the premises and principles of the role of democracy. This aspect was indicated in terms of the utilisation of political methods in order to change the character of the economic system in an imposed manner: “In order to eliminate the contradiction between democratic political form and undemocratic content it was necessary to extend the democratic principle of popular sovereignty to the economic sphere through subjecting economic relations to collective control. In other words no sphere of life should remain exempt from public regulation, and consequently all legal safeguards of private freedom, freedom from intervention should be abolished.”(p29) Thus, the very erosion of the power of the individual capitalist was defined as being an expression of the undermining of the principles of freedom, or the expression of the logic of authoritarianism. Hence the principles of democratic control of the economy by the producers is considered to be an expression of the undermining of the freedom of the individual capitalist and so the rejection of the very concept of freedom itself. But the point is that this claim has some justification if what has resulted is the creation of a situation in which a state bureaucracy dominates the process of economic activity and so undermines any possibility of the realisation of the aspect of genuine democracy within the relations of production. But this development is not an inevitable result of the situation in which the domination of private capital is ended. The point is that if genuine political democracy is extended to the realm of the economic it will be possible to facilitate the ability of the producers to define the character of the objectives of the process of production and in that manner enable the overcoming of the domination of capital to occur in emancipatory terms. But Walicki obviously considers that such a possibility is not likely to occur and that instead the situation is characterised by the utopian attempt to realise the democracy of the producers and so what occurs is the domination of the bureaucratic state. He is right to suggest that such a situation would not realise democracy and freedom but he is wrong to imply that such a development is inevitable if the influence of the role of private ownership of the means of production is ended. The point at issue is whether the revolutionary process develops in a democratic manner to the extent that the character of the state and the process of economic activity is based on accountability to society. This means that genuine political democracy has to be complemented by economic democracy based on the hegemonic role of the producers. There is nothing to suggest that such a possibility could not occur, and indeed such a development would correspond to Marx’s analysis of the Paris Commune and Lenin’s ‘State and Revolution’.

However Walicki rejects this type of viewpoint because he considers that any attempt to realise the supremacy of the role of labour over the economy as an expression of the demise of freedom which is characterised as the importance of and autonomy of the individual as expressed by the role of the market: “We can see from this how inimical Marx was to liberal values even in the pre-communist stage of his ideological development. He saw no positive value in privacy; his ideal was the total subordination of the private sphere to the public sphere; the extension of the scope of political decisions to all spheres of life and thus to the abolition of the autonomous existence of the economy. He accepted political freedom only on the condition that it was not combined with the rights of man, conceived of as the right of individuals to limit the scope of collective control over them and thus to restrain popular sovereignty.”(p29-30) In other words this criticism of the apparently authoritarian position of Marx is carried out on the basis of the view that the only expression of the principles of political tolerance and individual rights is a situation in which the market economy is being promoted. This means that any other situation such as the extension of nationalisation under the control of the workers can only be an undermining of the principles of freedom which are based on the acceptance of the private ownership of the means of production. In this context not only the approach of Marx, but also any conception of socialism, must be against the aims of freedom because it suggests a situation in which the nationalisation of the economy and the end of the domination of the role of the individual capitalist is the expression of the changing dynamics of the process of economic power. In short, only capitalism is the basis of individual freedom because it upholds the importance of the connection between the role of the individual and the market. Hence any other development such as the increased importance of workers participation in the organisation of the economy must be an expression of the undermining of the principles of freedom. But Marx did not reject the importance of freedom of the individual, rather than the potential of all human beings could be most effectively realised in terms of the end of the domination of the economy by the capitalist class. Instead Walicki associated freedom with the continued importance of the influence of the private capitalist and so he considers that any undermining of this situation is an expression of the justification of authoritarianism. This point is outlined in the following manner: “In order to eliminate the contradiction between democratic political form and undemocratic content it was necessary to extend the principle of popular sovereignty to the economic sphere through subjecting economic relations to collective control. In other words, no sphere of life should remain exempt from public regulation, and, consequently, all legal safeguards of private freedom, freedom from intervention should be abolished.”(p29) But in this criticism of Marx Walicki effectively justified the situation of the exploitation of labour by capital in the name of the freedom of the individual. In actuality it would be possible to realise genuine freedom by the situation in which the ability of labour to end the domination of capital is enhanced and so realised. The point being made is that the freedom of the people is effectively upheld in the most consistent manner when the absolute freedom of individual capitalists to exploit labour is ended and replaced by the ability of the producers to be able to define their situation in the most emancipatory manner. But Walicki is not criticising this situation but is instead critical of the ability of the state to be able to dominate society in the name of the supposed ideals of socialism. But this situation is not socialism and is instead a new form of the exploitation of labour by the generation of the economic power of a new type of ruling class.

But in a dogmatic manner Walicki contends that Marx justified the domination of an authoritarian state and the undermining of the rights of the individual. But the comments from Marx that are utilised to try and justify this view only indicate that Marx had particular criticisms of the apparent contradictions of the emphasis on the importance of the role of the private capitalist to the exclusion of the importance of social classes. This approach does not deny the validity of the principles of individual freedom, but the point is in what manner can this conception of freedom be most consistently realised? The answer of Marx is that it requires social emancipation in terms of the role of the working class in political and economic terms. But such a development would undermine the supremacy of capital and this is what Walicki objects to. This is because he associates freedom with the continuation of the domination of capital, and so Marx’s justification of an alternative to this situation must be defined as being the expression of the principles of authoritarianism. Marx would reject this criticism because he would contend that his analysis of capitalism is an indication that the rights of the working class in terms of the possibility to be able to influence the character of economic activity are not being realised. Walicki would consider that this type of standpoint is unrealistic because he can only envisage the possibility of freedom in terms of the domination of the private ownership of the means of production. This means the criticism of Marx is being defined in terms of the fact that he is not prepared to accept the domination of capital over labour. But in order to provide justification of his position Walicki has to uphold his standpoint as the justification of freedom. However, this actually means upholding capitalism and opposition to socialism. However, in order to provide tenability to this approach the history of Stalinism has to be projected onto the views of Marx and the actual difference between Marx and Stalinism is denied as a result. Indeed, Walicki contends that there is a distinction between the principles of freedom and social progress and this view only indicates that he exclusively identifies freedom with the possibility of capital to dominate the economy. In this context the success of the working class in the class struggle can only be understood as the undermining of the private interests of capital, and this development is considered to be the effective rejection of the principles of freedom. In this manner the success of the working class in the class struggle can only be considered to be a victory of authoritarianism but this conclusion is obscured by projecting such an understanding onto the views of Marx. Unintentionally the connection between Marx and the interests of the working class are accepted by Walicki, but this identification is obscured by considering that Marx is intellectually responsible for this situation. This inconsistency is explained by the fact that Walicki does not want to accept that the development of struggles by workers could result in support for the aims of Marx, instead the workers are portrayed as the unintended agency of the dynamics of a process that could result in the realisation of the end of freedom in terms of the promotion of state control of the economy. It is assumed that such a situation could be avoided if the influence of Marx is replaced with more moderate demands for reform of the system. Hence Marx is defined as being authoritarian because he is a communist demanding the demise of capitalism and its replacement by an alternative economic and political system. This very process of opposition to capitalism is considered to be problematical because only capitalism can realise individual and social freedom. In this context any of the merits of the socialist alternative have to be rejected as being both unrealistic and the expression of an authoritarian impulse to achieve the domination of the state over the economy. Thus, it is assumed in a dogmatic manner that only the system of capitalism can be associated with freedom. It is not possible to achieve a more progressive social formation than capitalism. This means that what Walicki is primarily outlining is the historical justification of capitalism and the rejection of any alternatives. But such a standpoint is elaborated in terms of the defence of freedom as opposed to the limitations of authoritarianism. But what Walicki is promoting is the rejection of the validity of any alternative to capitalism.

However, this criticism does not establish whether Marx upholds a consistent conception of the importance of freedom. But this is because the issue is how to overcome the problem of the exploitation of labour and in this manner establish a classless type of society. Hence, the most important issue is about realising a situation in which the alienating and exploitative domination of capital is replaced by the possibility of the cooperative character of labour being realised in its most emancipatory manner. This development is not anti-democratic because the analysis of the Paris Commune indicates that such a potential is quite compatible with the role of a multi-party democracy that is based on the principles of universal suffrage. The point being made is that it is the character of the political system than ensures the possibility to reconcile the role of economic democracy of the producers with the rejection of any potential for authoritarianism. Indeed, it could be argued that the potential for economic democracy is not tenable if the political system is not genuinely democratic. An authoritarian political system based on the supremacy of a single party would influence the character of the economic process and so result in the domination of the authoritarian state within the relations of production. Hence the important question concerns whether it is possible to ensure that a political party does not acquire absolute power because of the lack of the aspect of democratic accountability in the political process. If the revolutionary parties are subject to an authentic system of acceptance of the limits imposed by multi-party democracy, then then are more likely to facilitate the development of economic democracy based on workers management of the economy. But the Bolsheviks did not seem to understand this standpoint of Marx and instead considered that one party rule was compatible with the principles of economic democracy. But the limitations of the role of the factory committees meant that the supremacy of the single party was translated into the justification of the introduction of one-man management of the economy. This was not an expression of the approach of Marx but was instead an empirical understanding of the urgency of the economic situation caused by the decline of production in a situation of scarcity and the lack of raw materials by which to maintain the ability to create goods. In this context the ability to maintain workers control of production could not be sustained and instead the party reluctantly accepted the apparent necessity to introduce the role of one-man management. This situation was facilitated by a situation of one- party rule in which the Bolsheviks were no longer accountable to the working class and peasants. It could be suggested that Marx would not have supported this development because his political principles were based on the importance of economic and political democracy. Therefore, what he would have thought about the policies of the Bolsheviks cannot be decided in any definite manner. But Walicki considers that the logic of Marx’s approach was authoritarian because of his rejection of the role of the market which expressed economic freedom. If we have an absolute manner in which it could be suggested that the market was connected inherently with a conception of freedom then this criticism could seem to have validity, but what Walicki ignores is the importance of the exploitation of labour by capital and which he was dedicated to overcoming in terms of the realisation of economic and political democracy. In this manner Marx was trying to overcome the limitations of capitalism which undermined the possibility to realise a genuine expression of freedom. In this context we can only contend that Marx was an unintentional exponent of authoritarianism if we consider that his conception and perspective of communism is truly futile and can only result in the domination of an elite. But to make such an evaluation would mean that Marx’s aim of communism is only able to result in a new form of exploitation and so the rejection of the aim of freedom, which is instead only expressed by the role of capitalism. But such a conclusion would make us defenders of the capitalist system and in that manner we would have to conclude that it was the highest type of social formation or a system that was most consistent with the aptitudes of human nature. Instead of this conclusion the approach of Marx was based on the understanding that the forces of labour had the capacity and ability to realise a new type of society that was able to overcome exploitation. In this manner a genuine form of freedom could be realised. This type of society was not compatible with the authoritarianism of one-party rule and was why he was not against multi-party democracy. Thus, he considered that this type of political system could result in the generation of the role of the forces of labour being able to define the character of the economy. In this context the imposition of one-party rule would mean the generation of the role of a powerful state that would impose its imperatives on the producers.

Lenin implicitly rejected this understanding because to him the role of the revolutionary party was to express the historic interests of the working class. Thus, the domination of the party of the workers was the manner in which the aim of socialism and communism was most effectively advanced. In this context the significance of multi-party democracy was not indispensable to the character of the political system and could only be important when the non-revolutionary parties were unable to express a counterrevolutionary role. Instead of this development the role of Soviet democracy was to uphold the importance of the one genuine revolutionary party, and this implied that the role of other parties would only be allowed to function if they did not undermine the realisation of the objectives of the Soviet state. There is nothing in Marx that would express this type of approach and indeed he did not uphold the view that only his followers expressed the exclusive interests of the workers. Instead he was quite prepared to accept that in some manner the supporters of Blanqui and Proudhon could in some sense also express the aspirations of the workers, as was shown by his enthusiastic support for the multi-party democracy of the Paris Commune. What his attitude would have been towards the Bolshevik Soviet government we have no means of deciding. In this sense Kautsky was wrong to claim that Marx would have upheld the role of the Paris Commune and yet rejected the significance of the Soviet government. Instead we have to outline the distinct views of Marx and Lenin and relate them to the different circumstances in which the process of revolutionary change was being advanced. This means that Walicki is wrong to project the approach of the Bolsheviks onto Marx, but Kautsky is also wrong to try and differentiate Marx from the Bolsheviks. These types of historical evaluations cannot be determined by theory that is based on the historical circumstances of 1870 and so could not have anticipated the events of 1917. Instead of making these vague types of predictions we can instead only outline the views of Marx and indicate that to him they represent the classic expression of how the process of proletarian revolution could be advanced and developed. But this does not mean that he would have rejected as valid the different experiences of the revolution of 1917. Instead all that we can do is utilise the principles of Marx in order to make a possible comparison with the events of 1917. But such an evaluation has to be ambiguous and cannot be definitive. We also know that Marx’s recognition of the problem of authoritarianism would have meant that the development of one-party rule in 1917 was not necessarily compatible with his approach, even if we cannot make a definitive evaluation. These comments would seem to imply that conclusions cannot be established and that instead ambiguity is the result, but such indecision can be overcome to the extent that we can only contrast the approach of Marx and the Bolsheviks. In other words, there are different historical circumstances that explain the perspectives of Marx and Lenin. This is not to suggest that Lenin is being untenable when he tries to connect his views with those of Marx, but we can also suggest that this attempted relationship could be considered to be problematical and so not necessarily credible. However, such an evaluation does not mean that Kautsky is right to contend that Lenin’s views are merely a distortion of the views of Marx. The point is that Lenin was trying to apply the perspectives of Marx under conditions that Marx could not have anticipated. In this manner what Lenin was doing was connecting what he considered to be revolutionary Marxism to the specific situation in Russia. This process could be considered to be a creative application of Marxism or a distortion of the views of Marx. What would be decisive in this context is the extent to which it could be suggested that the revolutionary regime of the Bolsheviks was a genuine expression of the aspirations of Marx and Engels. In order to answer this question, we would have to determine to what extent under the difficult conditions the Bolshevik regime was able to facilitate the realisation of the aim of the emancipation of the working class. It would also be necessary to establish the importance of the failure of the international revolution and the corresponding isolation of the Bolsheviks as part of the answering of these questions. In other words, the issue of the importance of the theory of the Bolsheviks has to be connected to the political circumstances which could be considered to have an important role in the apparent distortion and undermining of the Marxist principles of the revolutionary party. In this manner it could be suggested that the attempt to realise the objectives of the party and working class are modified in terms of the difficult social conditions and in that sense the aims of Marxism become transformed into the justification of the continuation of the domination of the party over society. This process is upheld in terms of the apparent connection between Marx and the Bolshevik revolution, but the actual deciding aspect of the ability to answer this question can only be understood in terms of the issue as to whether the working class in alliance with the peasantry is able to genuinely become the class that is able to define the character and objectives of society. In this context the imposition of one-party rule can either be understood as the undermining of this possibility, or alternatively the party can be considered to be the genuine expression of the interests of the working class.

The complexities of this situation meant that it is a simplification to consider that Marx is to blame for any apparent domination of society by the role of the party. Such a development could not have been anticipated by Marx because the very conception of a distortion of the principles of the attempt to create socialism was not something that he discussed or considered. Instead he was concerned to outline the basis in which the realisation of the emancipatory society could be realised, which would mean the combination of political and economic democracy. But obviously such principles would have to be connected to different circumstances. Hence, he could not have anticipated a proletarian revolution in a country of low capitalist development, and so he would be unable to establish how the aims of socialism would be realised under these circumstances. But what he did know was that the objective was the role of the working class in its own process of self-liberation. What did this objective mean in terms of the relationship of party and class? This was the very issue that was not elaborated in any satisfactory detail by Marx. Instead he indicated the vague understanding that the role of the revolutionary party and the working class should be connected in terms of common objectives, but the emphasis was on the self-emancipation of the working class. This standpoint implied that the party was the instrument of the class, but what did this formulation mean in practice? Such an ambiguity was not resolved by the development of the Paris Commune because this had only a brief duration and so could not express the relation of party and class in a definite manner. In contrast the October revolution meant that the importance of the connection of party and class became a defining aspect of the situation and the various issues were resolved in terms of the party being understood as the basis of the realisation of the interests of the class. Marx’s approach did not anticipate such a development and instead he outlined the classic conception of the role of the working class in the revolutionary process in terms of the realisation of self-emancipation. It could be argued that such a perspective was unrealistic, but it was still the primary political basis of the approach of Marx. Hence, in order to consider Marx as authoritarian Walicki has to implicitly suggest that this standpoint was implicitly totalitarian. But such a suggestion is dogmatic because Marx had no aspiration to realise a situation in which the party was dominant over society. Instead his aim was the realisation of genuine freedom in terms of the capacity of the working class to be able to define the character of the objectives of economics and politics. But to Walicki even this approach is authoritarian because it means the end of the market economy. Hence the only form of democracy and rule of the people that he can envisage is a type of society based on the domination of capitalism. In this manner any expression of support for socialism has to be defined as authoritarian even if Marx tries to connect this aim with the role of democracy and the limitation of the power of the state.

Walicki contends that the liberal conception of freedom is based on an emphasis on the importance of individual freedom, the role of the market and opposition to the primary role of conscious control of society. Thus, he effectively argues that only the system of capitalism is consistently compatible with the possibility to realise a valid perspective of the realisation of freedom within society. But this understanding is compatible with the justification that the ability of the forces of capital to exploit labour in terms of the operation of the role of the market is a quite acceptable aspect of the ability to realise the principles of freedom. In this manner the attempt to overcome and change this situation in terms of the creation of a socialist society based on the liberation of the role of labour can only be defined as expressing the rejection of the importance of the principles of freedom. In this manner the objectives of socialism become defined as authoritarian. This means that not only Marx but also all other exponents of socialism are considered to be the apologists of authoritarianism. Hence the issue is not about the specific ideas of Marx being an expression of authoritarianism but instead any support for socialism is considered to have this type of character. Hence only the approach of capitalism can be defined as being an expression of the principles of freedom. This view is connected to the understanding that any type of conscious collective activity is an expression of the undermining of the role of the individual who in a free society should be the primary basis of the character of social relations. Such a defence of capitalism means that Marx’s support for socialism is what defines his approach as being authoritarian. In this context Marx’s understanding of the revolutionary role of the working class is problematical because it is the theoretical basis of his advocacy of socialism. Thus, there is not any acceptable versions of the conception of socialism which cannot be defined as being the expression of an authoritarian logic. Indeed, it could be suggested that even the role of the welfare state is problematical because it is the modification of the ability of the market to function without any restrictions. The only reform of capitalism that becomes acceptable are measures that enable the market to function in a more effective manner. Such a standpoint becomes the justification of the domination of capital over labour in the name of the principles of freedom. In other words what is actually problematical is the aspiration of any form of social justice which may mean the necessity of the intervention of the state in the economy in order to realise these principles. Only the unhindered and absolute domination of the role of the market via the interests of capital can ensure that the principles of freedom are being consistently realised. But this standpoint must imply that the subordination of the role of labour within the process of production is acceptable because of this necessity to uphold the role of freedom. In this context the aim of Marx to liberate labour in order to achieve a classless society is the logic of authoritarianism because it means the undermining of the domination of the market which is based on the supremacy of capital.

Walicki outlines the position of Marx in the following manner: “Marx followed Feuerbach in relating his theory of alienation to humans being, but his own theme was socioeconomic alienation through the social division of labour under conditions of private ownership of the means of production, a process that entered its culminating phase with the development of modern capitalism. He saw the capitalist market as a force created by humans, but alien from them, having as its own quasi-natural laws of the development that opposed and dominated individuals, thwarting their aims instead of being subjected to their conscious control. Thus, humans became enslaved by their own products, by things, even interhuman relations became reified, taking on the appearance of the objective relations between commodities in the process of exchange, completely independent of human will. Thus “commodity fetishism”, or reification, was in Marx’s view, the worst and a peculiarly capitalist, form of alienation.” (p40-41) But the point that is omitted by Walicki is that this situation is connected to the domination of capital over labour. It is the transformation of this economic and social relation that can create the possibility to overcome the influence of alienation within the economy. There is nothing to suggest that Marx’s position is authoritarian because he recognises that this situation of alienation can only be overcome by the process of democratic change in economic and political terms. A development that would means the working-class acts in a revolutionary manner to end the situation of its alienation within the relations of production. There is no reason to suggest that this process of change has to be authoritarian unless it results in the domination of a new party elite, which would be able to utilise its hegemony over the state in order to impose new forms of exploitation within society. But such an outcome is not what Marx anticipates or advocates. Instead he promotes the view that a democratic and accountable type of society can be created as a result of the emancipatory logic of the role of the working class. The workers would have no interest in the creation of a form of authoritarian formation because such a development would actually undermine their ability to be able to determine the character and principles of society. But Walicki obviously considers that this view is unrealistic because to him the overthrow of capitalism can only result in the rule of a new type of elite. Thus, Marx’s approach can only become the become the justification of the domination of the revolutionary organisation. But such a development is not something that Marx would advocate, and it is opposed to his perspectives concerning the emancipatory character of revolutionary change. If it is to be possible that all forms of alienation and exploitation within the relations of production are to be overcome, it is necessary that the working class facilitates this change in a democratic manner. This means that the new type of society is based on the principles of democratic election, the role of multi-parties and the realisation of workers control of production. There is nothing in this perspective that would represent the justification of authoritarianism or totalitarianism. Instead such developments were the result of the complex circumstances related to the October revolution of 1917, and this meant that the perspectives of Marx could not be adhered to for a variety of reasons.

If we argue that authoritarianism is the logical outcome of any attempt to overcome the domination of capital and the market, we are effectively contending that there is no superior historical alternative to the capitalist system. In this sense the aim of socialism becomes impractical and so any attempt to realise it will end in failure and the imposition of new forms of exploitation that are inferior to the dynamism of capitalism. But this justification of capitalism is what is rejected by Marx. He contends that the very revolutionary role of the working class means that it is able to realise a progressive and emancipatory form of society, and in that manner the limitations associated with capitalism can be overcome. In this context the history of the Bolshevik regime in Russia was not the outcome of an impractical theory of Marxism but was instead because of unfavourable circumstances combined with the elitist theories of Bolshevism. Thus, the failure of the October revolution was because it proved difficult to implement the views of Marx, and indeed it could be argued that to some extent Bolshevism was the rejection of the importance of the standpoint of Marx and Engels. Hence it was not impractical to try and establish a society according to the aims of Marxism, and in this manner the very project of the transcendence of capitalism was not proved to be futile and instead it was a failure because of increasingly unfavourable social conditions combined with the development of a situation of bureaucratic regression. In contrast Walicki would suggest that the aim of the overcoming of capitalism was a dogma justified by Marx, and so was a problematical approach that could not be realised in a practical manner. Such a viewpoint is the justification of the view that there cannot be an alternative to the domination of capital and the market. But how then do we explain the continued discontent within society? The point is that the contradictions and limitations of capitalism means that it is still a system that is unable to realise the needs of people and instead discontent still occurs despite the belief that there is no alternative to its domination. This is why there is still continual interest in the ideas of Marx and the aim of socialism has not been made antiquated by the apparent domination of capitalism in historical terms. But to Walicki people should accept the apparent superiority of the present system. On this basis he criticises Marx for justifying an apparently authoritarian alternative to capitalism.

This viewpoint is connected to the rejection of Marx’s approach that freedom represents the development of the ability of humans to exercise conscious control over their social and economic conditions. But the only logical rejection of this standpoint of Marx is to imply that the activity of people is inherently subject to the domination of rigid laws of economics that cannot be transcended. This means that it is not possible to overcome the situation of the superiority of the role of the market, and so the conception of freedom is defined by the acceptance of this apparently inherent aspect of economic activity. But such an understanding is related to a defence of capitalism because it is considered that this is the type of economic system most compatible with the role of the market. In other words, the capital-labour relation becomes defined as being the highest expression of the process of historical and economic development. In this context any attempt to overcome this situation must result in the authoritarian domination of a repressive state, and such an outcome cannot result in a superior expression of the development of the economy. Thus, Walicki disputes Marx’s contention that communism is the rational and superior outcome of the development of the productive forces under capitalism. Instead the very apparent advantages of the present system mean that it is not possible to establish a superior alternative, and so any attempt to realise such a possibility can only result in the domination of a new elite that imposes a coercive type of economic system. It is necessary to point out that Walicki is not opposed to the supremacy of an elite if that means the promotion of the role of a capitalist economy, and so his difference with Marx is ultimately about the apparent superiority of communism when compared to capitalism. The author does not consider that Marx is right to consider communism as the expression of freedom when compared to capitalism and instead freedom as defined as the expression of individual choice and autonomy is expressed in the system of private ownership. Thus, the standpoint of Marx must have a logic that justifies the authoritarian denial of the importance of the principle of freedom. But Marx would suggest from his Paris Manuscripts onwards that the issue of the realisation of freedom is based on the overcoming of the alienated condition of labour that is present in the capitalist system. This means the domination of capital over labour must be overcome and instead the possibility for labour to establish a creative character to the production process has to be established, and it could be argued that the very development of capitalism generates the material potential to realise this possibility. Hence capitalism is a necessary aspect of social development but it is limited by the aspect of the subordination of labour within the production process and so a principled conception of freedom has to have a perspective that labour has to be emancipated if a genuine expression of the liberation of humanity is to be realised. It could be argued that this standpoint is unrealistic, and that labour does not have the capability to successfully achieve the perspective of Marx, but this would still not mean that capitalism was able to establish freedom because of the limitations inherent in the capital-labour relation. In this situation history would have resulted in an impasse and it would mean that an alternative perspective of human liberation would have to be developed. But Marx rejected such pessimism and instead insisted that the character of labour represents the dynamism and capacity to be able to establish a type of society that is superior to capitalism in terms of the consistent expression of the aim of freedom. Only communism based on the supremacy of the role of labour could generate the possibility to realise the freedom of society. In contrast Walicki can only defend the apparent superiority of capitalism in terms of the denial of the importance of the domination of capital over labour and instead he has to implicitly suggest that this situation is the highest expression of freedom in terms of the role of the market and the role of the entrepreneur. Only this situation can result in material benefits for labour despite its subordination within the process of production. But Marx contends that this development can be superseded by the act of the self-emancipation of the working class, which will not be content with the domination of capital in the production process. The very importance of class antagonisms within the capitalist system means that it has an inferior character that can only facilitate but not realise the aim of freedom. The point is that the role of capitalism can only imply the continuation of the subordination of labour within the relations of production and so in this context the consistent possibility of freedom must mean the liberation of labour and the promotion of its ability to be able to define the character and principles of what are transformed relations of production. In this manner the role of the individual is connected to the expression of the social objectives of the collective role of the producers, or the aspect of the individual is reconciled with the collective in terms of adherence and promotion of what have become the common social aims of society.

But Walicki considers that this approach can only undermine the possibility of the realisation of the importance of individual freedom and autonomy: “Let us examine, as briefly as possible, this strange reasoning. Freedom conceived as full, conscious control of people’s collective fate presupposes, of course, the ability to control – that is a public body able to exert effective control over all spheres of the “uncontrollable”, i.e., negative individual freedom. Moreover, the replacement of self-regulating impersonal mechanisms by conscious decisions would severely restrict the scope of individual freedom in the positive sense as well. “For”, said Marx, “it is the association of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of free development and movement of individuals under their control”….This can only mean that dependence on things will be replaced by a situation in which the development and movement of individuals will be controlled by an association, o t put it differently, in which impersonal dependence will be exchanged for total personal dependence on a collective body. It would seem that no genuine liberal could see this as an increase of personal freedom.” (p60) But this criticism is based on the dogmatic assumption that only under the capitalist mode of production can individual freedom be realised. But it could be said in replay that to Marx the very possibility to facilitate the prospect of collective freedom in terms of the prospect of the producers as a collective functioning and dynamic social force means that the basis to increase the ability of the individual to be able to express their potential in the economy. In this manner the contradiction between the individual and the collective that is expressed within capitalism is overcome and instead there is a prospect for the reconciliation of these aspects in terms of the aim of the realisation of the welfare of society. This aspect does not mean that only a coercive state organisation can ensure the compatibility of the role of the individual and the collective. Instead the forces of labour can create an agreed plan that is able to establish the economic aims of society and which provides for goals to be realised in terms of levels of output and the quality of services. In this context there is no necessity for the role of an authoritarian state and instead the situation is defined by the importance of a participatory type of economy which is compatible with the role of a genuine political democracy. In contrast Walicki effectively supports capitalism because of its apparent superior and consistent potential to realise individual autonomy, which he defines as the only genuine expression of freedom. But Marx’s approach connects the role of the individual with the collective in a more consistent manner because there is no longer any contradiction between these two aspects of economic activity, and instead the potential of the individual is genuinely realised in terms of a situation of reconciliation or the connection of the aspirations of the individual with what has been voluntarily decided as the collective aims of society. In this context there is no necessity of a coercive state in order to impose the aspirations of the collective onto the individual. Instead the potential of the individual is mediated by and expressed in terms of its harmonious connection to the collective. In contrast, Walicki is apparently suggesting that such a connection is not feasible and possible. He contends that the approach of Marx is based on a participatory democracy in which the role of the individual is subordinated to that of the collective. Hence the only form of individual freedom is that of absolute individual autonomy in which the aspirations of the individual have priority over any type of collective aims. But this type of society would mean that the interests of the individual capitalist were primary and so the aspirations of the majority of the people in society would be considered to be effectively of a secondary character and with an unfeasible prospect of being realised. In contrast the approach of Marx is about connecting the aspirations of the individual with the cooperative possibilities of society in a harmonious manner and this would mean that the potential of the individual can be achieved in terms of the successful attainment of collective aims. Walicki disputes this contention because of his uncritical support for capitalism as an expression of the aspirations of the individual. This standpoint is based on the assumption that the character of freedom is based on the absolute character of individua autonomy and so in that manner any connection of the role of the individual with the aspect of the collective becomes defined as the justification of authoritarianism. But the very task of Marx was to try and indicate that the individual was connected to the collective in terms of the possibility to realise common aims and objectives. But under capitalism this potential was undermined because of the importance of the role of the individual capitalist who exploits the cooperative character of labour in order to facilitate the process of accumulation. Walicki can suggest that the approach of Marx is authoritarian because it is based on the demise of capitalism and the establishment of an alternative type of economic system. To him such a development can only be the justification of the denial of the interests of the individual but Marx would contend that it has genuinely become possible to express the aspirations of the individual because they have become consistent with the agreed aims of society in terms of the role of a democratically agreed economic plan. To Walicki this has the potential of authoritarianism because it expresses the realisation of the domination of the community over the aspirations and interests of the individual. Hence he criticises Marx in the following terms: “It did not occur to him that the aspirations for freedom as collective self-mastery, as conscious control over the fate of humankind, might create such a concentration of power in which safeguards for individual freedom would be more needed than under the conditions of unfreedom caused by the process of reification and alienation.”(p71) But this criticism rejects any possibility that Marx could have developed a coherent conception of the possibility to realise the aims of individual autonomy in terms of the commonly agreed objectives of society. The point that Marx was making was that the aspirations of the individual could achieve the potential for realisation in terms of the role of an agreed cooperative plan, or the connection of the aspirations of the individual with the necessary socially defined objectives of the economy. Walicki considers this position to be authoritarian because he cannot conceive of any emancipatory alternative to capitalism. In other words, the only genuine manner in which the aims of the individual can be realised is to reject the importance of any collectively agreed objectives. This view is compatible with the justification of the domination of individual capitalists within society.

The criticisms of Marx are summarised in the following manner: “But as long as communism was taken seriously, all communists were convinced that the basic prerequisite of communist liberation was total control over the economy – that is, the replacement of the spontaneous order of the market by conscious planning. And this was to be only the first step toward gaining total control over human collective fate and thus realizing the ideal of freedom as rational collective self-mastery.”(p88) And: “However striving for such control always entails the striving for control over society by a minority that arrogates to itself the right to steer others. If such a minority wants to realize the utopia of “total freedom”, in the sense of total control over the direction of history, it must obviously secure for itself total control over the spheres of social life – not only over the sphere of production, but also over non-productive spheres as well.”(p89) Therefore: “This is precisely the point: monopolistic rule of an single party, guided by a single theory…..this Leninist innovation harmonized perfectly well with Marx’s idea of rational self-determination of the human species through conscious control over man’s self-objectification.”(p89) In other words the very aspiration of conscious control over the character of the economy is being conceived as an expression of an authoritarian logic. But such a view implies that there is no progressive alternative to capitalism because that is the only system that is able to correspond to the principles of freedom via the expression of individual autonomy. Thus, any form of planning is considered to have the logic of facilitating the decline of the importance of the ability of people as individuals to be able to define the character of their economic and political activity. This means that any expression of the role of collective activity is being considered to be the expression of a dynamics that can only result in the coercive domination of society by an authoritarian state. Marx would reject this type of assessment of his views because his aim is to reconcile individual aspirations with collective aims and this can be achieved in terms of the formation of a progressive government and the attainment of the ability of the producers to be able to define the character and objectives of their economic activity. In this context the realisation of an authoritarian government could only undermine the possibility to achieve what are democratically agreed objectives. This is why the Paris Commune, which was based on multi-party democracy, was considered by Marx to be entirely compatible with his objectives of progress being made towards communism. The point was that a revolutionary government that was genuinely accountable to the people in democratic terms was an expression of a situation that was most consistent with the economic and political objectives of Marx. In this context the one party dictatorship of the Stalinist elite would seem to express a situation that was not compatible with this emancipatory perspective.

Walicki contends that it is not possible for Marx to uphold his objectives in a consistent manner because it is not possible to reconcile the role of participatory democracy in political and economic terms with the objectives of a planned economy which implies the controlling role of a state elite. The objectives of productivity and efficiency cannot be upheld by the major influence of the producers who are inherently spontaneous and likely to undermine the realisation of the objectives of a plan. In this context the aims of efficiency via the dominating influence of a state elite will become dominant or else the disorganisation of the role of workers control will result in a process of social decline. Thus, on the basis that workers control of production is considered to be utopian the alternative of a plan decided by the priorities of the government of the state will become primary. The result of this situation can only be authoritarianism. This approach ignores the practical possibility for the producers to be able to define their aims without the dominating role of capital. The assumption being made is that the producers lack the capacity to be able to establish an economy based on their objectives and interests. Instead it is assumed that the only feasible economy which is based on the principles of efficiency and freedom is that of capitalism. The only alternative is for the illusion of workers control of production to become replaced with the domination of a party elite that introduces a plan which is imposed onto the people. Hence the view that socialism is authoritarian is based on the assumption that it is impractical and so can only be expressed in terms of the rule of a bureaucracy. The domination of an elite is not the distortion of socialism but is instead the only manner in which the system can be developed and maintained. In this context the realisation of freedom of the producers is realised most effectively in terms of the role of capitalist system in which the workers can make material and social advances. This is because the workers are considered by Walicki not to have the capacity to be able to organise and administer the economy. The effective choice is between a capitalism that is dynamic and in which the workers can make social progress, or alternatively to be dominated by the role of an undemocratic elite. Marx was unable to recognise this logic to his approach because of his illusions that society could be organised in the participatory manner that had been developed by the Paris Commune. But the only feasible logic of his standpoint was to effectively express the realisation of the domination of a new state elite. However, this criticism is based on the reactionary view that working people will never be able to define the possibility to conceive of the character of society. This is a reactionary approach that was rightly rejected by Marx who expressed the understanding that a society based on the activity and interests of the producers was possible.

Walicki outlines how Engels essentially elaborated the views of Marx, but his philosophical standpoint was based on a conception of the role of necessity in the realisation of freedom which was defined in terms of the role of a planned organised society that was able to develop the productive forces in order to create the material basis of communism. It is concluded that Engels only enhanced the authoritarian potential of Marxism: “The same views were advocated by Engels, but on the whole his unintended contribution to the philosophical underpinning of totalitarianism was even greater for two reasons: his invention of dialectical “materialism”, which transformed Marxism into an all embracing philosophical system containing ready-made answers to all possible questions, and his conception of freedom as the understanding of necessity. The latter proved totalitarian leaders with a dangerously flexible formula by means of which it was possible to justify both extreme voluntarism (that is belief in the omnipotence of those who “correctly understood” the laws of history) and extreme fatalism (a necessary complement in breaking the will to resist through invoking the authority of the inexorable and entirely objective “historical necessity”) But this criticism implies support for a form of voluntarism because any conception of the role of historical necessity could imply that this approach can be utilised in an opportunist and elitist manner by an elite. The point is that Engels considered the philosophical importance of historical necessity was in order to facilitate the realisation of the classless communist society of communism. His aim, like that of Marx, was to achieve the ability of the working class to be able to organise an economy that could overcome the importance of exploitation that had been caused by the capitalist system. Hence the criticism of Walicki seems to suggest the justification of a philosophical approach of voluntarism because any attempt to understand the possible historical laws of reality could imply the justification of the rule of an elite. But Engels was trying to develop and elaborate the relation of the laws of nature and society in order to facilitate the understanding and ability of the working class to realise the emancipatory society of communism. But Walicki can only consider this approach as justification of the domination of an elite: “Indeed possessors of the only correct knowledge of the meaning and laws of history have a right, even a duty, to ignore the opinions of the ignorant majority, if they are in power, they have the right, the duty to realise historical necessity, even against all…..They may of course, admit a mistake in this or that specific matter but they derive from “scientific socialism” the certainty that the course of history is irreversible, that history itself has given their party a mandate to exercise power, and hence under no circumstances can they give up power.”(p205-206) But Engels understanding that his conception of dialectical materialism is the most explanatory basis to understand the relation of nature to society is not inherently authoritarian because he does not deny the importance of intellectual freedom and the possibility to discuss different philosophical views. Instead he is essentially trying to outline the possible tendencies that are creating the conditions in which the realisation of communism becomes a feasible possibility. The very contradictions of capitalism are creating the potential for the feasibility of communism. It is the aspect of planning and organisation within capitalism that is an indication that it is a system that is preparing the basis for communism. It could be argued that Engels approach is rigidly teleological and so is determinist in terms of implying that historical necessity must be inevitably realised in communism. But this theoretical problem does not provide the justification of the rule of an elite. Instead it is entirely possible that the working class in its collective and cooperative character will be able to facilitate the organisation of a classless communist society. In this manner the approach of Engels is entirely compatible with Marx’s conception of communism as the realisation of freedom. Engels was trying to outline the philosophical justification of the development of the view that communism was the realisation of freedom which had been elaborated by Marx. The aspects of determinism in the approach of Engels do not express a reason to deny the connection of Marx and Engels in terms of an elaboration of freedom that was a rejection of an authoritarian conception of communism.