**IS ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS CREDIBLE?**

Clive Hamilton has written a book that outlines the arguments in favour of an ecological type of no growth society which is entitled: “Growth Fetish” (Pluto Press: London 2003) His major point is that: “Growth not only fails to make people contented: it also destroys many of the things that do. Growth fosters empty consumerism, degrades the natural environment, weakens social cohesion and corrodes character.” (px) Put the important issue is whether it is possible to establish a different type of growth or is this an unrealistic objective? The starting point of Hamilton is that the issue of poverty has been resolved in western capitalist societies and so the most important problem has become that of the role of the environment. He suggests in controversial terms that the issue of poverty has been resolved in western societies and that the situation is defined by the role of mass affluence: “The dominant characteristic of contemporary society is not deprivation but abundance.” (pxi) This would seem to be a dogmatic perspective in the era of prolonged austerity and the expression of the economic inequality expressed by the role of capitalism. He contends that: “In a world characterised by abundance rather than deprivation, the Left is preoccupied with the distribution of income, insistent that capitalism always leads to greater inequality. This is patently untrue. Since the second world war the distribution of income has at times been more equal and at times less equal…. But the fact is that the great majority who once lived in material deprivation no longer do…..As a society we have the obligation to attempt ceaselessly to eradicate poverty, but why does the Left continue to base its entire philosophy and strategy on the circumstances of the bottom ten percent? This is a philosophy that has more in common with the ethic of Christian charity than of radical social change.” (pxii) But surely the major aspect of radical socialism is to suggest that capitalism creates a type of society based on the aspects of economic domination of the producers and this is the situation that has to be changed in a radical manner. In this context the aspect of poverty is only a secondary expression of a system of economic domination and subordination of the role of the producers. Instead of this understanding Hamilton dogmatically assumes that contemporary society is based on a situation of generalised affluence and that this situation has to be considered in terms of the development of a perspective of credible change. But the issue is not about the level of affluence within society but is instead defined by the limitations created by the aspect of the domination of capital over labour. It is this aspect that has to be transformed in terms of the development of a credible strategy of change. In other words, the problems expressed in the works of Marx about the issues expressed by the domination of capital over labour have not been resolved and instead express the outstanding problems that have to be resolved in terms of achieving the possibility of the realisation of the emancipation of labour. However, Hamilton considers that the standpoint of the left-wing socialists is based on a rejection of the expression of a credible programme of change. He considers that they have a dogmatic standpoint which means: “But the modern left has become much too preoccupied with North-South questions. In railing against globalisation and the pernicious influence of multi-national corporations, it has effectively abandoned all hope of social change at home and vacated domestic political space, allowing it to be occupied by the Right. Whilst ‘anti-globalisation’ protests can be inspirational …the protestors have no coherent strategy for political change, in fact they have no agreed objectives.” (pxiii) But this point is dogmatic and seems to deny the importance of the various perspectives that are adopted by the mass movements. Hence it could be suggested that the anti-globalisation movement has indicated its objective, but it lacks a perspective that would facilitate the possibility to realise it’s aims. In other words, the anti-globalisation movement has often failed to outline in detail’s concerning how to develop a strategy that would facilitate the possibility to realise its approach. Hamilton suggests that there is a basic incompatibility between the two most influential approaches adopted by the anti-capitalist movement which is that on the one hand there is an emphasis on the problems created by the exploitation of labour and on the other hand the issues created by consumerism and materialism: “Both discourses occur on the left, but at best they are discordant and incompatible. One stresses material deprivation, and the other emphasises the excesses of growth and consumption. Failure to reconcile the two has meant political turmoil, manifested by increasingly desperate attempts by modern social democratic parties to hold onto their old working-class constituencies while appealing to the newer middle class progressive constituencies that have evolved out of feminism, environmentalism and concern for human rights and global justice. In these attempts they are failing both groups.” (pxiv) However it could be suggested that the major problem with the social democratic parties is their effective accommodation to the situation of the offensive of capital against labour in a situation of the imposition of the approach of austerity and the failure to promote an alternative to this development. Indeed, this issue is of primary importance in relation to the possibility to develop the importance of an alternative socialist approach. Hence the development of struggle against the imposition of austerity has to be the basis of the process of establishing the possibility of developing an alternative and more progressive type of society. In other words what is required is the development of a programme to facilitate the development of struggle against the attempt to impose the objectives of capital onto society. Without this form of development, it will be possible to impose the aims of the defenders of the present economic system. Hence what is required is a programme of mass struggle that is able to generate forms of activity that will undermine this attempt to impose the aims of capital. Without this possibility it will not be possible to create a situation in which the aims of the labour movement can be established. But these aspects can only be truly defined in terms of the traditional objective of socialism. This would imply the realisation of a different type of social formation in which the workers would be able to realise their interests in terms of the expression of their ability to be able to define the character of the process of economic and political activity.

However, Hamilton seems to reject this approach and instead in a vague manner advocates the realisation of the objectives of eudemonism in a post-growth society: “The new post-growth political philosophy of eudemonism proposes a society in which people can pursue the activities that truly can improve their individual and collective well-being. It is built on the consideration of the evidence for what does and does not contribute to a more contented society.” (pxiv) This is vague perspective that defines the objective as the expression of the development of a social formation that is ethically superior to that of capitalism. It is suggested that what is being suggested is able to reconcile the traditional objectives of the socialist movement with the aims of the green organisations. In this manner the aspiration to realise social and economic equality is no longer based on an emphasis on the importance of the development of the process of production and instead what is important is the establishment of the ability of the people to organise an economy that expresses their interests. The aim is to end the situation in which the people participate in their situation of being exploited and dominated because they support what is defined as the consumer society: “Today, the compulsion to participate in the consumer society is not prompted by material need or political coercion: it is prompted by the belief of the great mass of ordinary people that to find happiness they must be richer, regardless of how wealthy they already are. If ordinary people today are exploited, it is by common consent.” (pxvi) But this comment implies that the major aspect of the process of domination within society is caused by the problematical character of the process of mass consumption rather than the relations of production of the economy. The issue is not the domination of labour by capital but instead the expression of what could be defined as wasteful forms of consumption. Hence the aim of a post-growth society is not expressed by the objective of trying to overcome the domination of capital over labour and is instead about trying to alter the character of the process of consumption and distribution. It is suggested that the domination of capital would be modified but this does not mean that the present system would become changed in a revolutionary manner. Instead what would be realised is a situation in which the present role of capitalism is modified in terms of the objectives of ecological and ethical objectives. But we would suggest that this approach is problematical and ultimately underestimates the problems that the domination of capital generates in terms of the possibility to change society in a progressive manner.

In other words, the primary issue for Hamilton is that of economic growth and not the significance of the relationship between capital and labour. He outlines how the issue of economic growth is the major ideological issue that has justified the systems of both capitalism and what became defined as socialism. But Hamilton suggests that this standpoint has genuinely only been compatible with the standpoint of defence of capitalism: “In practice, growth fetishism has been responsible for a historic transfer of political authority from the state to the private market. If growth is the path to greater national and personal wellbeing, should not those responsible for growth be encouraged at every opportunity? Growth fetishism therefore cedes enormous political power to business, and corporations are never reluctant to argue that, since they are the creators of wealth, it is their interests that should be paramount for governments.”(p17-18) It is suggested by Hamilton that Social democratic governments have increasing supported the growth objectives of Conservative type administrations in the recent period, but this apparent convergence is not because of the primary importance of the aspect of growth and is instead about the adherence to the aim of the defence of the capitalist system. Indeed, this approach has often been connected to support for an austerity type economics. In other words, the convergence of Social Democracy with conservatism is in terms of an agreed objective of the defence of a capitalist economic system. But instead of this understanding Hamilton defines this consensus in terms of support for growth rather than austerity economics: “Growth fetishism and its handmaiden neoliberalism thus undermine democracy. They have eroded democratic practice and democratic awareness in ordinary people. Social democracy is being superseded by a sort of market totalitarianism.” (p21) But this convergence is not created by support for growth in the recent period. Instead, the similarity is caused by the agreement about the defence of austerity and the acceptance of the necessity to undermine the influence of the workers within the economy. In this manner what is of primary importance is the acceptance by governments of the necessity to undermine the influence of the workers within the economy in order to facilitate the development of the level of the profits of the capitalists. This aspect has often been ideologically justified in terms of the aims of the interests of the environment. Hamilton does not seem to recognise that the only basis to change this situation would be the expression of effective forms of mass struggle by the workers which would enable them to be able to develop their influence within the economy and in society in general. Only in this manner would it become possible to establish the importance of objectives that were no longer primarily based on the promotion of the aims of capital accumulation.

However instead of this understanding the emphasis of Hamilton is on the supposed inherent problems created by the role of economic growth: “Considering modern societies obsession with economic growth it is surprising how little attention is paid in public debate and political discourse to the question of whether more economic growth actually increases wellbeing. Perhaps this avoidance is convenient for those that have a stake in the prevailing system: if growth does not improve wellbeing, many of the economic, social and political structures of advanced capitalism cannot be justified. Perhaps ordinary people too have a stake in ignoring the evidence of growth’s effects on wellbeing.” (p22) But surely the major problem is not that of economic growth but instead the character of the economic system in which the process of production occurs. It is the domination of capital over labour which enables the aspect of ecological problems to be developed as an integral aspect of the role of economic growth. In other words, the issue of economic growth is ultimately only a component part of the expression of the economic system that is based on the domination of capital over labour. In this context it could be suggested that a more progressive form of economic growth could be possible that was based on the different development of a situation in which the forces of labour were in the ascendency. But instead of this type of assumption the emphasis of Hamilton is about the problems that are inherent in a situation of economic growth that is an integral aspect of the development of capitalism. However, he does not seem to develop this approach to its conclusion and therefore outline how the material needs of the people could be realised in a system based on a more simplistic type of production process. Instead in a dogmatic manner he only contends that it is necessary to establish an alternative green economy. The issue of the apparent necessity to undermine the expression of the material interests of the people is not being tackled with this one-sided perspective. Instead, the apparent affluence of society is something that will have to be addressed by a society based on an adherence to ecological principles. But this issue is entirely secondary when compared to trying to establish the importance of the problems for the environment created by contemporary capitalism. In this context what is important is to realise a type of society that is able to establish the importance of simple economic and social principles. However, what is ignored by this approach is the problematical fact that the logical expression of this type of society would mean the undermining of the very advances brought about by the modernisation of the economy that has occurred under the capitalist economic system. The point is that capitalism has resulted in some forms of economic progress that it would be dogmatic and foolish to try and undermine in terms of the interests of attempting to develop a more egalitarian form of economy. Instead, the most principled objective would be to try and connect the achievements of capitalism to the development of a socialist society such as the genuine realisation of the cooperative potential of the present type of economy. But Hamilton denies the importance of this type of approach because of his emphasis on the aspect of economic growth as the primary problem created by capitalism. This understanding ignores the fact that if the possibility of economic growth is under the control of the producers it could be expressed in both democratic terms and according to the aims of efficiency and so in this manner this development could be made compatible with the interests of the environment. However, this is the very understanding that seems to be rejected by Hamilton because the primary problem to him is the aspect of economic modernisation. But he does not establish how a hypothetical economy would be able to realise the material needs of the people. Hence in dogmatic terms he seems to reject the very notion that some forms of progress have been realised with the development of a capitalist type of economy. The logical result of this standpoint is that the only principled expression of such an approach would be the development of an agriculture type of economy. But this is only an implicit assumption in his approach because he is generally content to be a critic of the role of capitalism. However, this standpoint is unsatisfactory because any type of modern economy would have to be connected to the progress made in terms of the aspect of the technological advances made under capitalism. But this type of issue is not satisfactorily addressed by Hamilton because he is content to be a critic of capitalism rather than an elaborator of a convincing alternative. Hence, he ultimately upholds the perspective of a post-growth society, but it is not made apparent how this more simplistic type of society would still be able to meet the material needs of the people. (This issue will be analysed in more detail) In other words Hamilton is primarily a critic of capitalism and it is questionable whether he is able to sustain a more credible alternative. In other words, he is a vague critic of the apparent problems created by economic growth under capitalism and so seems to be indifferent to the possibility that economic growth could occur in more progressive forms. Thus, he seems to equate modernisation as being a primary problem that has to be resolved by the development of a more simplistic economy and society. However, this means that he ignores the issue of the possibility of social regression. Hence, he does not seem to accept that hat is required is an alternative form of modernisation of the economy and society. But without such a process of modernisation there will surely be a form of social regression that will mean that the post-capitalist type of society is not an advance. But it is this very important issue that Hamilton seems to ignore because to him the aspect of simplicity is of overwhelming significance and so this means that it has to define the character of the process of historical change.

Hamilton connects his critique of the present system to a rejection of the objectives of a consumer capitalism. This situation is based on a self-delusion because: “It cannot be otherwise, for in creating an identity consumers believe they are living out authentic selves. If they admit that their purchasing decisions are social statements they are admitting that they have are living false lives. Most consumer spending is therefore defensive in character; it must be maintained in order to avoid the realisation that we have no place in society, that we do not fit anywhere and so have no real self.” (p97) But it could be suggested that in some manner, however limited, most consumer goods in some manner express the aim of trying to realise the needs of people. Hence consumer goods actually have a contradictory manner they are both an expression of the aim of making the profits of the companies that produced them and also an aspect of meeting the aims of consumers to be able to achieve their aims and objectives. Hence the result of this situation is not to reduce the amount of consumer goods, which seems to be the approach of Hamilton, but instead to improve their quality and so enhancing their capacity to meet the needs of people. In other words, the major problem is not expressed by the importance of consumer goods but instead the fact that they are subordinated to the expression of the interests of the capitalists. In this manner the actual aspect of the usefulness of consumer goods becomes defined by the aim of the process of the accumulation of capital within the economy. Hence what is required is not the development of a situation of austerity in which the amount of consumer goods is reduced, but instead the bringing about of the demise of the capitalist system. In this manner the aspect of consumerism could be connected to the possibility to realise human needs in a more effective and efficient manner. Hence the problem is not with the aspect of consumerism but is instead the expression of the fact that this situation is subordinated to the continuation of the capitalist system of exploitation within the relations of production. If a different socialist system was established, it would be possible to improve the quality of consumer goods and so enable human needs to be realised in a more effective manner.

But instead of this understanding Hamilton considers that capitalism and its emphasis on consumer goods is inherently wasteful: “Wastefulness is thus essential to sustaining modern consumer capitalism. But it is a new form of waste…..it is waste arising from the fact that physical properties of the goods are not the things being consumed. It is the style, the attitude and the image associated with the product that is consumed. The product itself is redundant.” (p97) This standpoint would seem to represent an exaggerated view because human needs are still being realised despite the limitations of the aspect of the process of the accumulation of capital. Indeed, the capitalist system could not function if it was not able to realise the aims of the consumer. Hence the argument for socialism is not about ending the situation of the role of the consumer goods but is instead about trying to establish a situation in which the amount and quality of consumer goods are increased so that the consumption needs of the people are realised in a more effective manner. Instead of this view the approach of Hamilton seems to suggest that the major problem of a capitalist system concerns the amount and quality of the consumer goods that are being developed. But we would suggest that this is not the most important issue and that instead what is of major significance is the aspect of the domination of the relations of production by the forces of capital. It is the lack of the economic influence of the producers which means that the character of the system is defined by the interests of the capitalists rather than expressing the interests of the workers and the people in general. Hence the central issue is not about the level and quality of consumption but is instead about the limitations generated by the dominant economic power of capital. This issue has to be resolved if a more progressive and egalitarian economic and social system is to be established. Instead Hamilton seems to imply that the aspect of consumption has to be changed so that it becomes of a more modest character. But the problem is not with the quality and character of the role of consumption but instead concerns the character of economic power. It is necessary to transform the economic system so that the aspect of the domination of capital is ended and instead a situation of the democratic organisation of the relations of production is realised.

The problem is not the character of the process of consumption but is instead about the role of the relations of production. In other words what is the most important aspect is the situation of the exploitation of the producers in the interests of the capitalist class that dominate the process of economic activity. This situation means that the producers cannot achieve the possibility to define the aspects of economic activity in terms of the expression of their interests and instead have to accept the dictates of the situation of the primary role of the forces of capital. In this manner the relations of production define the role of the activity of the workers and so this means that the possibility to establish a type of consumption that is able to express their interests is not possible, except in the inadequate terms of having to accept the imposition of the role of the forces of capital. But this aspect seems to be ignored by Hamilton because he considers that the most reactionary role of the relations of production of capitalism is defined by the regressive aspects of the process of consumption and the distribution of the goods that are created by the economic system. But in actuality the aspect of consumption has to express the character of the manner in which the process of production is developed and expressed. In these terms the domination of capital dictates the manner in which consumption is realised. The only basis to create a different system of consumption that is able to achieve ecological aims will be to change the relations of production in terms of the establishment of a system of the democracy of the producers. But this would mean a development of revolutionary change which Hamilton does not seem to support. Instead, his approach is based on an expression of criticism of capitalism because of its disregard for ecological standards but how it would achieve a situation of the transformation of the economic system is not established in convincing terms. In other words, he has many criticisms of the role of capitalism because of its disregard for ecological standards but he does not seem to support consistently the realisation of the only possible alternative of socialism. Instead, he upholds a situation in which the major aspects of the limitations of capitalism are overcome but it is not apparent that this will require the expression of a revolutionary process of change. Instead, he is more convincing in the role of being a critic of capitalism and is less plausible in terms of his vague support for an alternative type of system. In other words, he knows what he is opposed to but is less cogent in terms of the failure to outline credible conception of a socialist type of alternative. The ambiguity in his approach is overcome by his effective support for the radical modification of capitalism and the related justification of a collection of progressive measures that would express this perspective. In other words, he attempts to connect reformism with the realisation of the aim of socialism. This would mean that capitalism is changed in a radical manner but the process of a form of revolution is not necessary in order to achieve this objective. However, this standpoint seems to lack credibility because the various attempts to realise this type of change have never been successfully achieved in the past. Instead, it is necessary to suggest that somehow this approach can be credibly achieved in the present. But how can the domination of capital be overcome without the achievement of the ascendency of the producers in terms of the role of revolutionary change? This important question does not seem to be addressed in plausible terms. Instead, the moral imperative of the objectives of a green socialism are utilised in order to gloss over the important issues raised by his perspective. In other words, the problems of a situation of the rejection of the importance of green objectives implies that majority support for the process of this necessary change will be achieved at an inevitable moment of time in the future. The capitalist system is not sustainable and so this generates the importance of the moral imperative of radical change that will be able to realise ecological and egalitarian objectives. But such a perspective seems to underestimate the importance of the determination of the capitalist class to retain its social power and so undermine the possibility of the attainment of change. These issues will have to be tackled in terms of developing an alternative to the approach of Hamilton.

It is suggested by Hamilton that the most effective manner in which social progress can be realised is in terms of the role of a liberal economy based on the role of the system of private enterprise, but which is able to provide material prosperity for the people. But the point is that this situation is based on the capacity of the workers to be able to organise in order to realise social gains. There is nothing inherent in the capitalist system which means that the people are able to obtain material gains. Instead, it has to be suggested that the combination of the influence of the ideology of forms of socialism combined with the collective role of the workers is the most effective basis that enables the possibility for social progress to be achieved. But in periods of increasing crisis of the present economic system these gains have been undermined by the development of an offensive of the forces of capital in order to undermine the consolidation of the material situation of the workers within capitalism. In this manner the possibility to uphold the interests of the workers requires the development of collective forms of struggle in order to express their capacity to oppose the attempt to undermine their influence within society. Hamilton provides an inconsistent explanation of these developments. On the one hand he suggests that the workers have developed the capacity to be able to express their ability to be able to organise and realise their objectives within capitalism. On the other hand he also considers that the process of the domination of capital over labour has not been ended: “For most workers, the modern economy and labour market provide some degree of autonomy that makes them much less subject to the dictates of the boss than they were in the past….In the West wage slavery belongs to another era. But if oppression is the opposite of liberation, and liberation means a life in which each person can live out their full potential and achieve true autonomy, we remain oppressed.”(p108) This comment is unsatisfactory because of its ambiguity because the issue of exploitation is considered to be in some sense resolved by the attitudes of the workers who no longer consider that they are defined by a situation of the domination of capital over labour. But in actuality it is quite possible for there to be a contradiction between consciousness and the actual situation of the relations of production which is still based on the aspect of the ascendency of the role of capital when contrasted with the subordinated position of the workers. In this manner the limitations of existing consciousness do not define the accuracy of the actual social situation of the relation between the workers and capital. Only the attempt of the forces of labour to overcome the domination of capital will ensure that they will be able to achieve a level of autonomy that enables them to define the character of the economic system. But this is the very issue that is evaded by Hamilton because he seems to suggest in an uncertain manner that the workers have been able to realise genuine gains within the capitalist system, and that this situation could become the basis for the consolidation of the development of a radical form of society. This approach seems to ignore the importance of the offensive of the forces of capital against labour in the last thirty years which has meant the workers have been put on the defensive and many gains realised under capitalism have been ended. Therefore, only the development of a strategy of offensive struggle will enable them to be able to realise the possibility of undermining the development of a process of the offensive of capital against labour, which is exactly the situation that explains the recent historical period. Hamilton considers that the third way of New Labour under the prime minister Tony Blair was an accommodation to the economics and politics of Conservatism and the explicit defence of capitalism, but he does not outline how an alternative to this development could have been created. Instead, the various criticisms of the defensive limitations of the Blair governments are apparently connected to a general acceptance that there was no alternative to the approach of this administration. Thus, what is being suggested is that the New Labour administration should have been a bit more ambitious in trying to end the ascendency of the austerity economics of the Conservative administrations. But there is not a suggestion that the only definite manner in which these objectives could be realised is by the development of effective opposition to the continuation of capitalism. Instead, it is implied that a reform of capitalism would constitute principled politics. But it could be suggested that the very importance of an economic situation characterised by austerity means that capitalism can no longer be reformed in a progressive manner. Instead, only the genuine transformation of the system can imply the possibility of genuine change. But this is the very issue that is avoided by Hamilton.

Indeed Hamilton questions the very credibility of a revolutionary perspective of change by suggesting that the consciousness of the workers is not characterised by a situation of subordination within the relations of production and is instead defined by the aspect of consumption: “In the case of workers questions of identity, social structure and political orientation are now determined more by consumption activities than by production and employment….The spread of affluence and the transition to consumer capitalism has meant that identity now has less to do with one’s work – where one is placed in the production process – and more to do with one’s consumption choices…with the construction of identity through consumption behaviour.”(p149) But this approach would seem to be dogmatic and a denial of the importance that the role of production has to have in any capitalist economy if the possibility to achieve the development of a process of the accumulation of profit is to be realised. However, this emphasis on a different type of capitalism means that Hamilton is able to credibly suggest that the agency of change is no longer primarily the role of the workers who are exploited within a system of industrial capitalism. Instead, it is necessary to recognise new agencies of change: “With the transition to new forms of capitalism, the relationship between ordinary people and corporations has changed dramatically. Where once they responded to the unfair exercise of power by joining trade unions, now they react against perceived exploitation by joining consumer groups and green-peace.” (p150) But this conclusion is surely dogmatic because whilst the types of industrial activity have changed over the recent period it would be an empirical denial of the continued importance of new forms of factory type production. The point is that it is the collective forms of production which means that an expression of the role of industry is still a necessary and vital aspect of any contemporary economy. In this context the factory workers are still an important expression of the possibility of social change. Hence the form of industry may have changed over the recent period, but new forms of industrial production has not ended the role of the factory workers. Instead, there mobilisation is still an important aspect of the development of the possibility of progressive change. In this context the role of organisations like Green Peace has not replaced the importance of the industrial workers but instead it could be suggested that both of these movements can have a crucial role in attempting to realise the process of change. Indeed, Hamilton would accept that it is premature and dogmatic to deny the continued importance of the role of the industrial working class. But his implicit assumption is that the strategy of change has to be modified in terms of the recognition of the economic and social developments that have occurred in the recent period. We would agree with this point but also suggest that the issue of a strategy of change has still to be connected to the issue of the emancipation of the producers from the domination of capital. Hence it is not sufficient for a perspective of change to be primarily based on the aspirations of single-issue campaigns like the green movement. Instead, what is required is the unity of workers and green activists in opposition to the continued domination of capital.

Therefore, an important issue that arises concerns what type of programme would unite the ecological movement with the workers? It would seem that these social forces have different interests and objectives. On the one hand the green activist is defined by the issue of ecological conservation that makes them effectively opposed to many forms of economic development such as the role of industry. Hence it would seem that they would reject the importance of the many forms of occupation of the typical worker. On the other hand, the worker is defined by an acceptance of the latest forms of industry even if they create ecological problems. In this context it would seem to be problematical to try and create unity between two groups with apparently opposing interests. But the point of possible unity is that the issue that can unite the forces of the workers and the greens is that the domination of the capitalist system means that the imperatives of capital are imposed on people in an authoritarian manner and so in the interests of popular democracy it is necessary to strive to transform this situation. Hamilton outlines in a vague manner the objective of a post-work world but he does not outline a strategy that would enable this aim to be realised in a progressive manner. How do we go from a situation in which people generally accept the domination of capital to the possibility of them being able to transform the economy and society in a progressive manner? In other words, Hamilton seems to underestimate the difficulties involved in trying to overcome the present domination of capital which has bee an enduring aspect of the last four hundred years. The workers have accepted the domination of capital and the support for revolutionary parties is very small. Indeed, the very credibility of Marxism seems to be called into question. However, it could be suggested that the prospects for change are now with the emerging forces of the green movement and similar types of organisations. But the important issue is what are the objectives of the ecological parties? Do they merely want to modify the present character of capitalism in terms of the introduction of their aims, or do they aspire to realise a different green socialist society? It could be suggested that at present there is ambiguity about this issue and this aspect is aggravated by the failure of the socialist organisations to be able to establish a principled and definite relationship to the green parties. Instead in a vague manner it is assumed by the socialists that they have an approach that is compatible with the objectives of the greens. However, this situation ultimately seems to be pragmatically resolved by the apparent insignificance of the revolutionary parties and the contrasting important success of the green organisations. The aspect of the decline of the Marxist groups would seem to confirm that the possibility of progressive change is with the green organisations. Therefore, the logical approach of the Marxists should be to join the green groups and attempt to influence them in that manner. But surely this issue should not be expressed in a dogmatic manner and instead it would seem to be necessary to combine the attempt to build independent Marxist parties combined with a critically supportive approach towards the green parties. The aim would be to try and influence the green organisations in terms of attempting to obtain their support for important aspects of the programme of revolutionary socialism. In this manner it may be possible to develop a political approach of genuine green socialism. This development would not necessarily mean an end to the independent role of the Marxist groups but instead they would become independent supporters of the activity of the greens. But it would be accepted by the Marxists that the most credible strategy for the possibility to generate the political possibilities for socialism would be connected to the attempt to develop the importance of green organisations.

Some commentators would suggest that this approach would mean the undermining of the role of the socialist parties and their accommodation to what is the effectively reformist standpoint of the greens. But this problem can be resolved if the Marxist parties continue to attempt to uphold their revolutionary principles within the context of trying to establish the possibilities of a new form of political unity of the radical forces. It could be suggested that the greens will reject this possible development and attempt to maintain their distinctive relationship to the Marxists. This situation could occur, but the task of the Marxists would still seem to be to try and establish a development of some form of political unity with the greens. Indeed, if this possibility is not realised the task of achieving a situation of an alliance of greens and socialists would seem to be seriously undermined. But what is the programme of the socialists in this situation. Could it not be suggested that they could dilute their principles in order to establish agreement with the greens? However this problem can be resolved if the socialists attempt to make an important contribution towards the development of the programme of the Greens. This is the issue that will be addressed in the rest of this article.

But the approach of Hamilton is based on the effective rejection of the aim of socialism and instead the support of the objective of what he defines as a post-growth society: “The transition to a post-growth society will be just as far reaching as the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism or from industrial capitalism to global consumer capitalism. It will fundamentally transform power relationships, social institutions, our relationships to others, our ethical rules, our attitudes to the natural environment and, ultimately, our consciousness.” (p205) But there is a problem with apparently rejecting the definition of socialism as the aim that is necessary in order to go beyond capitalism. Instead, it could be suggested that the post-growth society is ultimately potentially compatible with a type of capitalism based on small scale forms of production. In this manner the domination of monopoly capital will be replaced by a more limited and modest form of capitalism in which the importance of large-scale companies is replaced by that of the creation of a situation based on the relationship between smaller types of enterprise. In other words, the clarity expressed by the aim of socialism as a definite alternative to capitalism has become rejected and instead what is considered to be the possible development is a type of economy that is more responsive to the interests of the environment which could suggest the role of a modified and progressive form of capitalism. In other words, the major problem of the present is not that capitalism is based on the exploitation of what is an alienated form of producer, but instead that it results in the inability to resolve the increasing important ecological problems. Thus, it is being suggested that what is possible is a type of progressive capitalism that is more responsive to the interests of the producers and so as a result becomes more responsive to trying to tackle the issues of ecology. In other words, the politics of class struggle become replaced by the approach of trying to establish a consensus within society that is based on connecting a more modest and progressive form of capitalism to the aim of achieving ecological aims of greater sustainability and the improvement of the environment. In this manner the very importance of ecological aims becomes the basis to effectively reject the perspective of class struggle in order to achieve a genuinely socialist type of society. Instead, what is effectively being suggested is the necessity of a modified capitalism that will be more responsive to the realisation of the aims of sustainability and the interests of the environment.

But Hamilton would reject this criticism and instead claim that his approach is based on the importance of the aspect of radical change that would mean: “A post-growth society will consciously promote the social structures and activities that actually improve individual and community wellbeing. It will aim to provide a social environment in which people can pursue true individuality, rather than the pseudo-individuality that is now obtained through spending on brand names and manufactured lifestyles.” (p209) But this radical rhetoric does not precisely establish the character and level of change that would occur in order to realise the post-growth society. In other words, his approach is quite compatible with the problematical view that it is possible to modify capitalism in terms of the introduction of measures that would achieve this sustainable economy and society. Hence the role of the class struggle is effectively replaced with a more moderate perspective of aching a consensus within society based on the objectives of the post-growth society. But why should the capitalist class agree to change society in these terms? They presently benefit from the present situation despite the aspect of ecological problems. This means that the capitalists will not agree to the necessity to modify capitalism in terms of the introduction of a green economy. Instead, it has to be suggested that only the success of principled class struggle can result in the realisation of a green society, but this would mean that this issue is connected to the achievement of socialism. Indeed, this very point is understood by the capitalist class which is why they are generally opposed to the development of a green economy. They know that there is a general opposition between the principles of ecological progress when contrasted to the interests of the capitalist system. Hence only a definite struggle to realise a socialist alternative can establish the basis to develop an ecologically defined type of economy. But Hamilton rejects the necessity of a strategy of change based on the expression of definite and explicit perspectives of militant struggle. He is aware that the neo-liberal economic and social system is based on a rejection of the aims of ecological change, but he does not connect this understanding to a definite perspective of class struggle.

Indeed, he considers the aim of socialism to have become antiquated and replaced by the importance of eudemonia which is a system dedicated to the achievement of the well-being of people: “in my usage, eudemonism concerns not just a system of ethics but also a political ideology that argues for an organisation of society that promotes the full realisation of human potential through, in the first instance, proper appreciation of the sources of wellbeing. While the programme set forth here would, if taken up, represent a profound challenge to capitalism as we know it, it cannot be characterised as socialist. It reaffirms a necessary role for public ownership, but it does not propose any expropriation of private property. It is however, anti-capitalist in the sense that it argues that society and governments should no longer cede special significance to the objectives or moral claims of the owners of capital.” (p212-213) This perspective is very ambiguous it is an expression of support for various anti-capitalist objectives whilst not being defined by the ultimate aim of the realisation of socialism. This approach is a recipe for the justification of an uncertain and ambiguous perspective of change that cannot provide a definite understanding of the objectives of the process of mass struggle. Instead, the confusion that would be expressed by this approach can only ultimately result in the disorientation of the people and so create an ideological situation in which the defenders of capitalism would be able to realise their aims of being able to defend the present system against a confused form of mass opposition. In contrast the traditional objective of socialism still has the merit of expressing a form of clarity about aims and intentions of mass struggle.

This critical point is indicated by the vague character of the aim of a post-growth society that is preferred to an emphasis on the traditional aim of socialism: “A post-growth society will consciously promote the social structures and activities that actually improve individual and community well- being. It will aim to provide a social environment in which people can pursue true individuality, rather than the pseudo-individuality that is now obtained through spending on brand names and manufactured lifestyles.”(p209) This perspective still seems to gloss over the important issue of the future of capitalism and instead justifies a collection of platitudes that are substituted instead of developing a coherent understanding of the character of what would be a genuine post-capitalist economy and society. Indeed, there is no definite commitment to an economy based on the democratic role of the producers and instead there is vague reference to its progressive character when compared to capitalism. In contrast the merit of the traditional objective of socialism is that it indicates the important necessity of developing and realising an alternative to the present economic system and is also connected to an emphasis on the participatory importance of the producers in the development of the character of this socialist economy. Indeed, it could still be suggested that a post-growth economy could be compatible with a modest form of capitalism that adopted these types of aims. Ultimately the major reason for the progressive character of the post-growth economy is that its introduction would be opposed by the capitalist class that would be against this type of social change. But possibly the most important objection to the conception of the post-growth economy is that it would be opposed to the realisation of the progress and material improvement of the situation of the people that is a crucial aspect of any type of socialism. In other words, the only manner in which a post-growth economy could be effectively introduced would be in terms of the undermining of the possibility to achieve material improvements for the people. Hence the only context in which this type of regressive economy could be achieved would be in terms of the creation of a new form of authoritarian society. Such a development could not be considered to be an expression of social progress and instead can only be considered to be a form of regression and the realisation of a type of society that would actually be inferior to capitalism.

The standpoint of Hamilton is based on the dogmatic assumption that affluence has been realised within contemporary capitalism but there is still the problem of alienation that has to be resolved in terms of the development of an affluent society: “The social basis of discontent in modern society is not so much lack of income; it is loneliness, boredom, depression, alienation, self-doubt and the ill-health that goes with them. ‘Social exclusion’ is not so much exclusion from the structures of production and consumption; it is exclusion from social relationships and modes of understanding that confer acknowledgment, self-worth and meaning. Most of the problems of modern society are not the result of inadequate incomes, they are the result of social structures, ideologies and cultural forms that prevent people from realising their potential and leading satisfactory lives in their communities. A post-growth society will consciously promote the social structures and activities that actually improve individual and community well-being. It will aim to provide a social environment in which people can pursue true individuality, rather than the pseudo-individuality that is now obtained through spending on brand names and manufactured lifestyles.” (p209) This understanding of the character of contemporary society would seem to be very dogmatic in a situation of the imposition of prolonged austerity. In other words, the effective crisis of capitalism has meant that it has been necessary to undermine the material situation of the producers in the interests of the process of capital accumulation. This situation has led to generalised poverty and the imposition of a situation of low wages within the various advanced capitalist societies. It would seem that Hamilton upholds a very dogmatic view in contending that the major problem is that of affluence in a situation in which the material standards of the people are being undermined in order to resolve a serious economic crisis of capitalism. Therefore, one of the major tasks of the people is to maintain their incomes in a situation in which the supporters of capital are trying to reduce the material level of the people in order to resolve what is effectively a crisis of capitalism. But this situation seems to be irrelevant to Hamilton because in dogmatic terms he considers that an important problem with capitalism is that it creates generalised affluence which he associates with material aspirations that he considers to be of a reactionary character because this aspect implies popular support for capitalism. But in actuality people can only uphold their material situation by collectively organising to oppose the imposition of economic and social austerity by the supporters of capital. The situation is defined by the attempt of the forces of capital to effectively reduce the level of wages in the interests of the economic system. In, this context trying to maintain the material interests of the workers is an important political task and is not something that is irrelevant, which seems to be the standpoint of Hamilton. In other words, the approach of Hamilton is not connected to actual developments in the class struggle. The actual situation is characterised by the attempt of capital to impose a regression in the material standards of the workers because of the situation of crisis which necessitates the imposition of austerity. But instead of recognising this situation Hamilton outlines an abstract conception of a prosperous capitalism which seems to have increasingly little relation to the actual situation created by the imposition of austerity. Hence, he differentiates between the problem of the alienation generated by the present economic system from the issue of the imposition of austerity. Instead, he outlines a conception of capitalism which seems to have little relationship to the actual situation of the attempt of the supporters of capitalism to undermine the material standards of the people in the interests of the present economic system.

In other words the major social problems are defined as being about how to create a society based on authentic principles of solidarity rather than being about overcoming the domination of capital over labour: “For the great majority of people in the rich countries the human condition is no longer dominated by an ever present need to provide for survival and to accumulate assets to guard against lean times. The defining struggle is no longer between proletarians and capitalists about how to divide the surplus of the production process; today it is about how to live a genuine life in a social structure that manufactures ‘individuality’ and celebrates superficiality. Once the economic problem had been solved, before history had allowed time for people to decide what to do next, the marketers filled the vacuum of consciousness with their message of consumption. Although most people intuitively understand that their condition is determined above all by a need to find fulfilment in a social environment that puts income before purpose, they act as if nothing was wrong because they know not what else to do. The vision of a post-growth society answers the question of what to do next.” (p210) But the major issue is not the supposed problems created by the very economic dynamism and affluence of capitalism but is instead the outstanding issues are the result of the domination of capital over labour. This situation means that the priorities of the people are secondary when contrasted to the aim of achieving the development of a process of accumulation. If the interests of the people are to be realised it will be necessary to end the domination of capital over labour. But instead of this principled approach Hamilton suggests that the supposed affluence of capitalism has led to the creation of a superficial society based on the aspect of alienation and discontent. But this situation is not what people object to. Instead, they reject the possible development of poverty as a result of the deflationary economics based on the imposition of austerity. Hence what people object to is the undermining of their material standards in the interests of the present economic system. But Hamilton seems to be oblivious to these issues and instead outlines an essentially imaginary conception of the character and aspects of capitalist society that seem to have little relationship to actual reality. The result of this dogmatism is to suggest that the very issue of material prosperity of the people has been resolved by the present system. Therefore, the aspect of opposition to capitalism has to be based on different criteria. But this viewpoint seems to be very dogmatic in the situation of the prolonged imposition of austerity and the undermining of the effectiveness of the forces of labour in terms of the declining influence of the role of the trade unions. However, Hamilton seems to ignore the importance of these issues and instead outlines a dogmatic conception of contemporary capitalism that seems to essentially deny the importance of the prolonged character of austerity and the influence that the crisis of capitalism has in this situation. The point is that the aspect of austerity is connected to the expression of an increasingly problematical system, and this is the reason for the necessity to realise a different socialist alternative. There is an essentially important situation of economic crisis which the defenders of capital cannot resolve and has instead resulted in the imposition of the flawed empirical approach of austerity. The inability to tackle this situation in an effective manner is the very reason why it is necessary to facilitate the possibility to realise a socialist alternative which could begin to tackle the situation of economic crisis in a mor effective manner. Only the end of the domination of capital over labour can result in the development of a situation of economic stability which could mean the improvement of the material situation of the people. But instead of this possibility austerity has become the prolonged expression of a serious crisis of capitalism that cannot be resolved because of the limitations of the present economic system. Indeed, this situation is the major reason why it is necessary to end the domination of capitalism and realise a system of socialism that can connect the end of exploitation within the relations of production to the aim of facilitating the development of the prosperity of the people. Hence the major criticism of contemporary capitalism is that the era of affluence is over and instead it is based on the imposition of austerity and with the resulting undermining of the material conditions of the people. In this manner the major argument for contemporary socialism is in order to end the aspect of austerity and instead create a situation in which prosperity becomes a real possibility because of the organisation of an economy that represents the interests of the people.

However Hamilton outlines different reasons for the achievement of socialism based on what he defines as the realisation of eudemonia or a situation that expresses the wellbeing of the people and the achievement of their potential: “In my usage, eudemonism concerns not just a system of ethics but also a political ideology that argues for an organisation of society that promotes the full realisation of human potential through, in the first instance, proper appreciation of the sources of well-being While the programme set forth here would, if taken up represent a profound challenge to capitalism as we know it, it cannot be characterised as socialist. It reaffirms a necessary role for public ownership, but it does not propose any expropriation of private property. It is, however, anti-capitalist in the sense that it argues that society and governments should no longer cede special significance to the objectives or moral claims of the owners of capital. For the most part, capitalism itself has answered the demands that inspired 19th century socialism – the demand for an end to exploitation at work, for an end to widespread poverty, for social justice and for representative democracy. But attainment of these goals has only brought deeper sources of social unease – manipulation by marketeers, obsessive materialism, environmental degradation, and loneliness.” (p213) In other words it is being suggested that the very economic success of capitalism has resulted in the development of new problems which indicate the necessity of socialism. But would it not be more logical to suggest that it is necessary to continue to improve capitalism so that the various limitations are resolved in the most effective manner in terms of the continuation of what seems to be a superior type of social system. However, in contrast to the ambiguity of the approach of Hamilton we would suggest that capitalism is a system of increasing economic and social crisis and this situation is expressed by the very imposition of the policy of austerity. In other words, there seems to be a contradiction between the attempt to uphold the interests of capital when compared to the possibility to realise the affluence of the people within society. Indeed, the very important argument for socialism is that the capitalist system has entered into a situation of prolonged crisis which has meant that it is increasingly unable to maintain a situation of affluence for the majority of people. Indeed, if it could be suggested that capitalism can genuinely maintain the affluence of the members of society it would seem to be illogical to attempt to realise a different form of society that could prove to be inferior in relation to its capacity to realise the prosperity of the people. However, it is the very crisis of capitalism which has meant that the potential to achieve the affluence of the majority of the members of society is increasingly called into question. In other words, the very major claim for the alternative of socialism is that the capitalist system of production based on the aspect of the exploitation of labour is increasingly unable to realise the prosperity of society. Instead in order to achieve a generalised situation of affluence requires the development of socialism.

However this view is different to that of Hamilton who actually considers that the excessive consumption that occurs within capitalism is an important problem of the system. It is suggested that there are differences with Marxism: “Eudemonism too is motivated by an understanding of the corrosive effects of capitalism on social bonds, but it differs in two respects. First, it attributes this erosion of social bonds not so much to the depredations of the capital-worker relationship but to the social disintegration associated with excessive consumption in the marketing society. Second, the problem of capitalism is not only the disintegration of social bonds but also the loss of self that characterises the marketing society.” (p213) But this approach means that the importance of the character of the relations of production based on the domination of capital over labour is denied and instead what is the primary issue is the apparently problematical aspects of the process of distribution and consumption. In this context it would seem that essentially all the members of society are responsible for the development of problems and so it seems that the issue is to change the character of consumption rather than transform the relations of production. But how can distribution change without the prior modification of the role of the economy? It also has to be suggested that the aspect of consumption will be changed in accordance with the connected developments in the process of production. But this is the very issue that seems to be ignored by Hamilton. Instead, he seems to accept the fashionable view that supposed excessive consumption is the major problem. But the logic of this conclusion is to consider the majority of the people are responsible for the limitations of the present economic system. This would seem to suggest that the people have to change aspects of their activity if progressive change is to occur.

In other words, the central political issue is the instruction of the people in the necessity to develop different forms of consumer activity rather than changing the character of the relations of production. Hence the important objective of striving to transform the economy and society in general becomes denied and instead what is necessary is to modify the consumer behaviour of the people. But this development would not alter the character of the present relations of production which are based on the domination of labour by capital. Only the establishment of the democracy of the producers and the related end of the ascendency of the capitalists would bring about the possibility to develop an alternative form of production. But this is not what is being suggested by Hamilton who instead primarily emphasises the importance of changing the forms of distribution so that it becomes possible to develop a type of consumption that is more modest and an expression of the development of objectives based on the replacement of the importance of growth with the aims established by an altruistic type of social system. In other words, his approach is based on changing the attitudes and practices of people as consumers so that the aims of a system that is primarily based on the interests of the environment can be established. But this approach seems to deny the importance of the necessity to transform the present capital-labour relation if genuine economic and social change is to be realised. What is required is a programme that would encourage the replacement of the present domination of capital with the ascendency of the producers who would then define the character of the economic and social system in terms of the expression of their interests and the aim of establishing an egalitarian type of society. But instead of this approach the emphasis of Hamilton is not about changing the character of the relations of production but instead establishing more modest forms of consumption and the related distribution of goods. However, in order to achieve these types of objectives it is necessary that the relations of production be changed so that the domination of capital is ended and instead the realisation of the ascendency of the workers is established. But it has to be emphasised that the major issues created by capitalism do not express the primary importance of the forms of distribution but instead are connected to the problems created by the domination of capital over labour. This situation has to be transformed by the establishment of the democratic system based on the ascendency of the producers if progressive economic and social objectives are to be convincingly realised.

Hamilton is not necessarily against this approach but his emphasis is on making the economy more simple, modest and accessible so that it is able to met peoples needs in more convincing terms. He comments: “When the economy is cut down to size – the size justified by its contribution to wellbeing – people will feel that their voice counts once again and they will be free to participate in democratic processes at every level, including the international level.” (p217) But this approach is unrealistic. It is instead the increasing of the complexity of the role of the economy which will enable the development of greater efficiency that enables the needs of people to be realised. This does not mean that the character of the economy will become defined by the role of experts because it is quite possible to ensure the aspect of the democratic accountability of the experts to the people. The point is that democratic institutions can be established that will enable the experts to act in accordance with the democratic aspirations of society in general. Indeed, it is possible to establish a situation in which the majority of the people become trained to become experts and so able to organise the management of the economy in popular terms. In this context the aspect of complexity that is involved in the organisation of the economy should not become the pretext to justify new forms of elite domination over society. Instead, the very importance of the role of the experts will be subject to the importance of the application of the principles of democratic accountability.

In other words, any functioning type of economy will still require the importance of the experts. But the central point in this context is that the experts should not become the basis to establish a new privileged class, as occurred in the Soviet Union, but instead the experts should be democratically accountable to the workers. Indeed, it is necessary to develop a situation in which the maximum number of experts are created within the working class. This will be the most effective manner in which it becomes possible to overcome any tendency towards the realisation of elitism. In other words, the experts are accountable to the expression of a situation in which there is genuine democracy of the producers as the basis to organise the economy. The approach of Hamilton is also based on what seems to be the unrealistic objective of what is defined as the expression of a post-growth economy. But without the aspect of growth, it will be difficult to develop an efficient type of economy that is able to achieve increasing levels of productivity and efficiency. Hence what is important is to ensure that the aspect of the commitment to growth does not become the pretext to justify the development of new forms of domination by the managers within the relations of production. Instead, the aspect of growth has to be connected to the continuation of the role of genuine forms of democracy within the process of the organisation of production and distribution. This situation will not mean a justification of economic inefficiency but instead will be the basis of the development of a situation in which the workers are able to create goods in the most effective manner. Indeed, the expression of the democracy of the producers will represent an important incentive for the workers to create the necessary goods in the most efficient manner. Hamilton vaguely outlines the necessity of the shorter working week, but the point is that this development will become practically possible because people will be able to create the goods needed by society in terms of this situation of a decrease in time required for the process of production. Such a possibility will be the result of the fact that the democracy of the producers enables them to utilise their initiative to create the goods needed by society in a more efficient manner. But Hamilton seems to deny the importance of this approach by suggesting in a vague and essentially unpractical manner the necessity of the aim of the development of a post-growth society. However, this is an unrealistic aim. Instead, it would be more credible to suggest that the situation of the democracy of the producers would enable the workers to create the goods that are required in terms of the application of their efficiency and creativity. This aspect need not result in the undermining of ecological considerations because these would be an integral part of the role of the process of production. However, it has to be understood that there is no alternative to the necessity of the role of a complex economy in order to facilitate the possibility to create the goods needed for the functioning of society. But this situation need not be a justification of a situation of domination of an elite over the producers because this aspect would be based on the expression of a democratic situation of workers control over the process of production. Indeed, this is the very aspect that would ensure that the complexities of economic activity can still be under the democratic control of the workers. What is vital is that the possibly complex character of economic activity remain under the supervision of the workers who participate in the development of the process of production. It is this aspect that ensures that the process of production is based on a situation of accountability to the workers involved in its creation.

In contrast Hamilton seems to equate the possibility of a democratic economy with the vague conception of a post-work society. He comments: “The move to a shorter working time would be much more than a workplace policy. It would form the centrepiece of far-reaching social change. In the first place, people would be freed to spend more time with their families, in their communities, and pursuing the activities that they find personally fulfilling. Second, the declining emphasis on paid work would be accompanied by a waning preoccupation with consumption activities and together these would constitute an assault on the role of consumption in constructing identity. Some of the time freed from the compulsion to work and consume could be devoted to education and self-betterment.” (p219) This point would seem to have general validity but it has to be recognised that the process of production still has to be an inevitable aspect of any form of society. Hence an important issue is about how to make the very process of work a more creative type of activity. In other words, the role of work continues to be important because the development of production is necessary in order to create the goods that are required in order to ensure the creation of the goods that are necessary to meet the needs of society. Therefore, instead of the vague and ambitious notion of a post-growth society it would be more relevant to elaborate a conception of how the workers would be able to organise the economy in a democratic and accountable manner. In this sense the issues connected with the aspect of the dominating role of capital could be overcome and yet it would still be possible for the members of society to be able to organise the development of the economy in a democratic manner that enables the possibility to enable the needs of the people to be realised in a genuinely emancipatory manner.

Indeed, ultimately Hamilton seems to accept the necessity of the aspect of economic development in his understanding of the importance of the aim of the democratic regulation of growth: “The growth fetish organises the distribution of power in society today, so regulation of growth to the second order of public and private priorities would inevitably carry with it a restructuring of power. The result would be a more egalitarian society, achieving not so much by redistribution of income but by depriving the wealthy of much of the power and status that attaches to their wealth. In a democratic polity, the exercise of power by those who control capital depends above all on society acceding to the belief that more wealth is essential to greater happiness, for it is this belief that accords capital the pivotal role in social advancement. The structure of society and the practice of government are then framed around the so-called creators of wealth, since they are seen as the creators of happiness. But in a post-growth society class divisions based on differences in wealth and the ability to generate wealth will melt away. In this sense, the post-growth society will for the first time create the possibility of a classless society.” (p236) But this standpoint is ambiguous because it is not established how society could effectively function without the aspect of economic growth. Instead, the ecological objectives of conservation are being defended without a connected understanding of what could be a credible type of progressive economy. Surely what would be important to a post-capitalist society is that the aspect of the necessity of growth in order to realise the material objectives of society would be connected to the expression of the principles of establishing democratic control over the economy by the producers and the understanding of the importance to realise the highest levels of ecological standards. In other words, the very aspect of democratic control of the economy by the workers would enable the possibility to combine increasing levels of productivity with the realisation of genuine ecological objectives. However, it is being implied by Hamilton that only the development of a simple type of economy could realise green aims, but what this assumption does not address is how in such a situation will it be possible to continue to create the material goods in order to realise the needs of society. In other words what is actually relevant is how the issue of economic growth can become understood in terms of the expression of a situation of democratic control by the producers. This development would be the most effective means to uphold the highest levels of ecological standards. This is because the possibility to establish different economic objectives based on the realisation of the needs of the people would mean that an integral aspect of this objective would be the attempt to realise the highest levels of ecological standards. In other words it would be understood that the aspect off democratic control of the economy by the producers could only be upheld by the expression of ecological standards that meant the process of production has to be connected to the realisation of a green socialist type of economy that is still able to meet the needs of society.

However instead of this aim of a green socialist society Hamilton upholds the vague aim of post-growth society that seems to evade the issue of the role of capital: “A society that refused to accept the belief that accumulation of wealth is the source of national progress would rob capital of much of its power. Whereas Marxism calls for the power of capital to be destroyed, eudemonism calls for it to be ignored. This possibility is permitted by the presence of abundance and democracy. The space left by the decline in the influence of business will be filled by those who can facilitate the changes that do contribute to a better society and happier people. Governments will begin to act more directly for the community. The voices of community groups arguing for social justice, environmental protection and liberation will become the mainstream. Social justice and environmental protection will no longer be pursued only to the extent they do not hinder growth, they will be pursued for their contribution to national and community wellbeing.” (p237-238) But it is not possible to ignore the importance of the economic power of capital because this would not mean that the situation of the primary role of this type of process is being undermined and replaced with a different and more progressive type of economic system. Instead, it is necessary to develop a strategy that would be able to mobilise the people in order to undermine the importance of capital and instead establish a more progressive type of economic system. All attempts to fail to tackle the domination of capital over society have failed to establish a different and more progressive type of system. In other words, there cannot be a situation of a co-existence between the role of capital and a different and more green economy. Instead, the realisation of a green economy will require the development of an alternative economic system that is able to overcome the role of the process of capital accumulation that results in ecological problems. Hence the standpoint of Hamilton in calling for the ignoring of the issue of the role of capital represents a political evasion that is not able to establish the importance of a genuine strategy of change that would enable a green economy to be established. Instead, only a genuine commitment to end the domination of capital would mean that it becomes possible to realise a different socialist type of economy that is able to establish a different type of economy based on more progressive principles.

This means that it is necessary to develop a potentially effective strategy to bring about the end of the domination of capital. In contrast Hamilton outlines in an ambiguous manner the role of governments in both upholding the present system and yet also being the possible expression of the advance of the realisation of a strategy of ecological change: “By elevating economic growth to their first priority and adapting the provision of public services to neoliberal principles, governments have become inextricably committed to reinforcing the belief systems and social structures that sustain the growth fetish and consumer capitalism. Government, as the expression of collective interests, must be renewed so that its role is to advance national wellbeing by providing an environment in which individuals and social groups can pursue authentic ways of achieving fulfilment and recognition. The primary function of government in a post-growth society will be to protect, expand and enrich our social, cultural and natural capital. Undoubtedly, the transition to such a society will meet enormous resistance within the structures of governance.” (p238) But given this important opposition to the realisation of progressive ecological change, what is the most effective strategy that will enable these types of green objectives to be realised? This issue does not seem to be addressed by Hamilton. But we have to start from a situation in which the influence of green parties and organisations is still an expression of a minority opinion within most societies. Hence it does not seem that the aims of the ecological movement will be realised in a short-term period. Instead, the major issue is how to transform what is still a minority opinion into becoming an expression of a viewpoint that is able to genuinely bring about the realisation of a society that is compatible with the realisation of green objectives. But this is the very issue that does not seem to be addressed by Hamilton. Instead, he ultimately rejects discussion of the complex problems involved in developing a type of society that would be committed to the realisation of green objectives. Thus, there is a problem in terms of the lack of a strategy of change in his approach. Instead, he only outlines what are the ecological problems within a capitalist type of society and how they could be resolved by a form of green post-capitalism.

But there are also problems involved in his conception of a post-growth society which he defines in the following terms: “Instead of higher incomes, the central objective of a post-growth society is to provide opportunities for human fulfilment and self-realisation. Pursuit of well-being – which for may will require abandonment of the money obsession and rejection of the pursuit of identity through consumption – would allow for the emergence of authentic (rather than manufactured individuality and the flowering of human potential. This potential has many forms and will bring many surprises, but it will offer greater opportunity for intellectual and cultural growth and the ability to understand ourselves as we evolve through life. It will allow us to begin to understand what is actually worthwhile and fulfilling, as opposed to what advertisers and the marketing society tell us will give us meaningful lives.” (p240) But this vague understanding of a post-growth society does not discuss what is the relationship of capitalism to this new social formation and also does not address the issue of whether a form of socialism is what is being advocated. In other words, this is a vague perspective that does not indicate the ultimate character of the post-capitalist society. Is this type of society essentially a radical modification of capitalism or does it ultimately express the realisation of the aim of socialism? It has to be suggested that without elaboration of clarity concerning these issues the understanding of the post-capitalist society does not express a definite type of understanding. Instead, it is still a vague conception that ultimately implies that capitalism can be changed in accordance with the realisation of ecological objectives. Indeed, this form of ambiguity would seem to be the problem with the approach of most of the green parties. In contrast to this vague perspective, we would suggest that the ambiguity of the aim of post-capitalism be replaced by an adherence to the traditional aim of socialism. The perspective of socialism still has the merit of indicating the necessity to develop a new type of social and economic system if the various limitations of capitalism are to be progressively resolved. In this manner the aim is not the utopian ideal of post-growth but instead the issue of growth is brought under the control of the producers who are instead able to connect the issue of growth to the realisation of ecological standards. Only the establishment of a system of genuine economic democracy will a situation of post-capitalism or socialism be realised, and in this manner, it will be possible to realise the objectives of society.

In other words, the conception of post-growth society is a perspective that is unrealistic. Instead of justifying this unobtainable aim it would be more progressive and realistic to try and establish a situation in which the issue of growth in order to increase the material wealth of society is brought under the control of the role of the producers. This situation will also mean that it is possible to realise ecological objectives in a manner that is based on this development of the increased efficiency and productivity of the economy. But instead, the standpoint of post-capitalism as elaborated by Hamilton seems to ignore the importance of these issues. Indeed, it would seem that all that is being suggested is a limited and green modification of the present system of capitalism. Hence instead of this ambiguity we would suggest that the aim of a green socialist society is what should be realised and developed. Such a possibility would mean that the combined aspects of the overcoming of the exploitative domination of capital is combined with the objective of trying to establish a society that expresses the intention to establish a progressive resolution of environmental issues. Instead of this type of clarity we would suggest that the perspective of Hamilton for a post-growth society ignores the importance of developing a precise understanding of the aim of socialism. Only this commitment to an alternative to capitalism can genuinely begin to establish what could be the basis of a society that could overcome the ecological problems created by capitalism. But instead of this type of clarity Hamilton ambiguously outlines the arguments for a post-capitalist society that is evades the importance of the relations of economic and political power that have to be resolved if genuinely progressive change is to occur.

However, Hamilton could reply and suggest that his conception of a post-capitalist society is more able to provide the basis to tackle ecological problems when contrasted with the traditional conceptions of socialism. But the problem is that if a regime is established that is not definitely committed to ending the domination of capitalism, then the result is that the problems associated with the issue of ecology will not be resolved. Instead, the very continuation of capitalism means that there will be important economic reasons why ecological problems are still important. In other words, the objective of Hamilton that implies that post-capitalism does not overcome the domination of capitalism means that the problems connected with ecological issues will not be resolved despite the apparent progressive intentions of what is a left-wing government. Therefore, the ambiguous approach of Hamilton does not outline a convincing strategy that would mean the possibility is created in which a government has the required level of economic and political influence that would enable a genuinely green economy to be created. Hence there is no alternative to the necessity to overcome the domination of capital. Consequently, Hamilton does not elaborate a feasible type of strategy that would result in the realisation of his aim of a post-capitalist society. But he does not seem to consider that this is a problem because of the assumption that people can almost inevitably become supportive of the aim of achieving this progressive type of society. But how does this optimism tackle the apparent issue of the continued supremacy of the various parties that support the capitalist system and so are proponents of increasing growth and expansion? In contrast the various green organisations are still marginal and so are unable to influence the situation in terms of achieving the development of a possibility to change the character of society in accordance with their objectives. In other words whilst the greens have become increasingly popular over the recent period it is still apparent that they are unable to influence the situation in a manner that would enable their aims to be realised in an effective manner. However, it could be suggested that the situation would be improved if the various social democratic parties became adherents to the aims of the greens in a more consistent manner. This development would involve the elaboration of a green socialist conception of society. Hence this situation would enable a green and socialist alliance to be created that could become the basis to challenge the inability of capitalism to resolve ecological issues. Obviously, this development would not involve the possibility of progressive change and instead it would mean that the Greens and Socialists would have to develop more convincing reasons why people should support their objectives. However, this more favourable situation would mean that the prospects of change to a more ecological type of society would have achieved progress. But there is not inevitable reason why the standpoint they advocate will be realised. Instead, the character of development is connected to whether popular support for the green-socialist alliance is able to realise a process of change. It could be argued that at present this perspective is optimistic because people support either orthodox parties that uncritically support capitalism or tend to adhere to right wing populist alternatives. The vey marginalisation of the left wing and green forces seems to result in the rejection of optimism about the possibility to achieve a post-growth society. In other words, the left- wing parties and the greens have still to develop a convincing alliance that would aim to influence people in a more effective manner in order to facilitate the realisation of what have become common objectives. However, it could be suggested that the present marginalisation of the socialist organisations seems to undermine the possibility of this type of development. Instead on the one hand the greens represent an important expression of an alternative, but the various socialist forces seem to be increasingly unimportant. In this context it is difficult to create an alliance based on support for the realisation of a post-capitalist society.

However, there is another problem. The various green organisations are essentially protest movements within the present capitalist system. Their effective priority is not the establishment of a post-capitalist society. Instead, this aim is essentially only supported by a few intellectuals like Hamilton and the various small socialist groups. Hence there has to be a process of successful ideological struggle which could result in the green organisations becoming more consistent supporters of a post-capitalist society and so no longer primarily defined by their expression of protest about the rejection of ecological objectives within capitalism. The influence of socialism would be to ensure that the greens became adherents of the post-capitalist society. But instead of discussion of these issues Hamilton seems to make the dogmatic assumption that capitalism is becoming favourably inclined towards the realisation of a process of transition to a post-capitalist society. It would be more realistic and credible to try and outline the difficulties involved that presently undermine the realisation of this development. An initial beginning is for Marxists to try and influence the green organisations to become genuine and consistent supporters of a post-capitalist society rather than primarily being a protest movement concerning aspects of capitalism. But this would mean that the present dogmatic adherence to a vague conception of socialism by the Marxist parties would have to be seriously modified and instead they would have to incorporate aspects of the conception of a post-capitalist society within their approach. In this manner they would be able to influence the green organisations in a more convincing manner. Hence the aim of socialism would have to be modified and related to the various conceptions of post-capitalism that have been developed by people like Hamilton. In other words what would then be developed would be a conception of socialism that would be influenced by various ecologically defined aims. This theoretical development would not necessarily mean that the socialist forces adopt an uncritical attitude towards the green organisations but instead they would suggest that the ambiguous aim of post-capitalism only acquires theoretical consistency and a principled character when it is connected to the perspective of socialism. What is being suggested is the essential merging of the aims of post-capitalism and socialism. In this manner the traditional proponents of socialism are able to promote a conception of this objective which seems to be relevant because it is related to the approach of post-capitalism. This development does not mean a dilution of the aim of socialism but instead it has been elaborated so that it seems to be relevant to people who traditionally seem to have been sceptical about an objective which seems to have been associated with the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism.

However why should the increasingly successful green forces make an alliance with what seems to be the increasingly unpopular and marginalised socialist parties? There, is no obvious answer to this difficult question. But we would suggest that it is the very development of a green socialist approach that would make the approach of Marxism seem important to people who have become sceptical about the standpoint of revolutionary socialism. However even if a Marxist and green alliance is created there is no dogmatic reason why its aims should be realised. Instead, this issue can only be resolved in terms of the possibility to achieve support for the objectives of post-capitalism. In a society that is increasingly based on the ascendency of parties that support capitalism this possibility will be difficult to realise. However there does not seem to be any alternative if the aim of a post-capitalist society is to be realised. But the point is that the character of history is not based on the realisation of the approach of historical certainties. Instead, only the development of the capacity to realise post-capitalism will ensure that this approach is successful. In this context the aspect of victory is not certain but nor is the prospect of an uncontested character of capitalism. Instead, the very possibility that capitalism can be challenged by the standpoint of post-capitalism means that change is something that can be realised if sufficient amounts of people become adherents to this standpoint. However, success in this context will be difficult because the defenders of capitalism have become successful in the attempt to oppose the possibility of radical change. But this situation does not seem to be part of the approach of Hamilton who instead considers the development of post-capitalism to be an inevitable development. But instead of this form of dogmatic optimism we would suggest that the process of radical change is difficult to realise. Indeed, the various left wing and green parties have not been able to go beyond the politics of protest about aspects of capitalism. Therefore, they still have to develop a strategy of change that would enable society to be transformed in terms of the aims of post-capitalism.

An important aspect of this development is that the green parties have to be transformed from their present expression of being parties of protest to more consistent supporters of a post-capitalist society. In this context the ideas of people like Hamilton can have an important role in trying to achieve support for the objectives of post-capitalism. But we would also suggest that post-capitalism is a conception of effective support for the aim of democratic socialism. Hence it is still necessary to develop support for this objective. However, it will be suggested that people tend to be adherents of the type of protest movement that has been articulated by Hamilton. They are not interested in the aim of the transformation of society and instead only want to modify it in terms of the vague approach of post-capitalism. This is why a successful process of ideological change has to occur which would genuinely connect the aim of post-capitalism with a perspective of radical transformation of society. Hence post-capitalism is more than an expression of reform and is instead about creating a different type of society with different principles. Such a development would mean that the influence of Marxism would become important, and in this manner a genuine green and socialist alliance would be developed. But at present the approach of post-capitalism merely expresses a form of protest about the disregard for the environment by the capitalist system. However, it is problematical whether this type of approach can realise credible progressive change. This is precisely why the role of socialist is of importance in order to provide greater clarity to the approach of post-capitalism and so connect this objective to the genuine transformation of society in terms of the attainment of the aim of a green socialism. But without this development the greens will remain a form of protest about aspects of capitalism and its disregard for the interests of the environment. Hamilton does not discuss these issues because of his dogmatic assumption that post-capitalism is essentially an inevitable possibility. In contrast we would suggest that the issue of strategy is of immense importance if the greens and socialists are to make advances towards achieving the aim of a post-capitalist society.

However, despite these problems in the approach of Hamilton we can suggest that his conception of post-capitalism does provide important reasons why the capitalist system has to be replaced with a more progressive alternative. But we would suggest that this objective is most consistently expressed and possibly realised in terms of the genuine development of a type of green socialism or the end to the domination of capital within society. Therefore, it is necessary to be critical of the various ambiguities in the conception of post-capitalism and instead suggest that the objectives of Hamilton can be most effectively expressed and realised in the possibility of a green socialist society. However, the present marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism seem to imply that this approach is not credible. This is why we would have to be concerned with the issue of how to develop the influence of revolutionary Marxism so that it is able to advocate a credible programme of post-capitalism, which is essentially an aim compatible with the aim of a green socialism. However, Hamilton would suggest that post-capitalism is not socialism. But this reluctance is possibly because of the apparent connection of the aim of socialism with the role of Stalinism. But we would suggest that the standpoint of genuine socialism is compatible with the democratic character of the post-capitalist society being advocated by Hamilton. In this manner democratic socialism is essentially a different term for the most principled form of post-capitalism. This is why it can be suggested that ultimately the approach of Hamilton and revolutionary Marxism are compatible.