IS IT POSSIBLE TO CREATE A POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY PARTY?

In the contemporary situation it seems to be very difficult if not impossible to establish the popularity and importance of a Marxist party. There seems to be a situation of sectarian rivalry between many small Marxist groups and none of them seem to be capable of establishing the popular influence of a revolutionary socialist approach. In the distant past there seemed to be more favourable circumstances for the development of a genuine socialist party. The Independent Labour party of the early twentieth century established a significant popular appeal, and it was able to establish the influence of the ideas of a popular socialism. This development was connected to the role of its leader Keir Hardie who had a reputation for being a principled and genuine advocate of the ideas of socialism. But in an important sense the decline of socialism started with the untimely death of Keir Hardie in 1914. He had been a principled and ardent opponent of the first world war because it was against the interests of the international working class, but in the period after the leadership of Keir Hardie the Labour party accepted an opportunist approach of support for the first world war, and as a result a precedent was accepted in which the Labour party accepted the importance of the objectives of capitalism. In other words, pragmatism came to define the character of the Labour party and the contrasting approach of principled socialism was marginalised. The result of this development meant that the politics of opportunism and reformism acquired an ideological hegemony that has never been seriously challenged. As an expression of this situation the Socialist Party of Great Britain was established around 1900, but it has always been marginal and never been able to become a popular organisation with genuine influence within the working class. It seems that the approach of forms of Marxism seem to have been inherently unpopular when compared with the alternatives of the pragmatic claims of reformism to be able to modify the character of capitalism in progressive terms. For example, the Labour party became popular and its credibility was based on the apparent favourable prospect that it could acquire sufficient support in order to become a government as a result of general elections. In contrast the forces of Marxism seemed to be undermined by the importance of sectarian divisions and the initial socialist party led by Hyndman underwent many splits before a principled leadership was formed. This party seemed to be irrelevant when compared to the increasing popularity and electoral success of the Labour party. However, the connection of the Labour party to the role of the ILP seemed to suggest that this relationship could mean that the Labour party would be influenced to act in a radical manner. But the increasing decline of the ILP meant that this possibility was not realised. Instead, the popular influence of the ILP decline and ultimately it became an insignificant group without any influence in the 1930’s. A possibility to establish the importance of a radical type of socialism had not been realised. However, it seemed that this problem was not serious because the October revolution in Russia had led to the formation of a communist party in the UK. This party seemed to develop importance in terms of its influence within the Labour party and its ability to become the leadership of some trade union struggles. But the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian revolution led to the creation of an authoritarian communist party in the UK, and the result was that this organisation was not able to promote a principled perspective for revolutionary change. By the mid 1930’s the influence of the popular front approach meant that the Communist party was essentially advocating the formation of a political alliance that would include so-called progressive supporters of the conservative party. But ultimately the Communist party was discredited by the Nazi-Soviet pact which meant that it adopted a policy of reconciliation with fascism. The eventual adoption of support for what had become defined as an anti-fascist war after the German invasion of the USSR only indicated the lack of an independent stance by the Communist party of the UK. These developments indicated that this type of unprincipled communist party could not become a genuinely principled party of the British working class. But the problem was that the ILP had seriously declined in the 1930’s. It no longer seemed to be able to promote a socialist perspective in an effective manner. But it seemed that an alternative was possible in terms of the emergence of a united Revolutionary Communist party based on the ideas of Trotskyism. However, the possibility of the development of the popular influence of this party became undermined by the splits that occurred and so led to the creation of competing groups. This combined problem of small groups supporting sectarian politics has never been resolved.

The major reason for the failure to overcome the limitations of this situation was that each particular group seemed to ignore the difficulties of the situation and instead suggested in a dogmatic manner that its apparently principled character would mean that it would become a popular party of the workers. But in general terms this perspective has never been realised. Instead, the Marxist groups have had a marginal influence on politics and instead the Labour party has remained the organisation that most class-conscious workers support. However, this issue of the apparent failure to become popular and important does not seem to have been addressed by the various Marxist groups. Primarily they have not recognised that the development of a united and democratic revolutionary party would immensely contribute to the establishment of a situation of enhanced political credibility. It has been the sectarian competition between the rival groups which must have been one of the most important reasons why people do not consider the role of the revolutionary party to be either credible or effective. Instead, people can only observe the expression of a collection of what seem to be authoritarian type organisations that are supported by fanatical and dogmatic followers. If a person does not join a given organisation they can only be alienated by its authoritarian character, and lack of the practices of democracy. Indeed, many of the organisations have become infamous for being based on the personal leadership of various authoritarian individuals who are opposed to the exercise of genuine democracy as the basis to express the character of their parties. Only the fanatical character of the membership of the various Marxist parties is prepared to tolerate this situation but the ultimate result of this situation is that a credible revolutionary organisation has not been created. In temporary situations the various groups have acquired influence in the events of the class struggle, as with MIlitant in relation to the role of the anti-poll tax movement, but this very progress was undermined by the development of a power struggle in the leadership of this group. In other words, the elitist and authoritarian character of the Marxist groups has meant that the very role of revolutionary types of organisation have become increasing criticised. Instead, it seems to many activists that they can promote the possibility to realise the objectives of their particular struggles without the necessity of the role of a revolutionary party. But the general failure of these movements to achieve their aims would still suggest that the importance of revolutionary organisation could still be important. But the problem is that these groups have become increasingly smaller and insignificant. In this context it would seem that there Is an important problem of radical socialist politics that does not seem to be resolved. The result of this situation is that there is spontaneous unrest with capitalism but that is not connected to the conscious aim of socialism which can potentially be promoted by the role of the revolutionary party. This means that despite popular movements of opposition to aspects of capitalism the system is not being challenged in an effective manner. Indeed, organisations like the Socialist Workers Party, often adapt to the role of these mass movements in an uncritical manner. But the ultimate result of this opportunism is only to contribute to the influence of the view that the role of revolutionary parties is not necessary. Instead, it seems in the present period that the activists have become the most important agency of the possibility to realise progressive change. Indeed, the perspective that what is important is to overcome the limitations of the present system without the necessity of revolutionary change seems to imply that Marxism is irrelevant. The very connection of reformism with activism seems to imply that the approach of revolutionary Marxism belongs to an era that has been replaced with the importance of struggles to change aspects of the present capitalist system. In other words, the approach of reformism is no longer connected to political passivity and the conception of determinist change and is instead related to dynamic forms of mass action. Instead, it seems that Marxism is the expression of political passivity because of the assumption that capitalism will generate favourable conditions of transition to socialism.

But it could be argued that the major problem for revolutionary Marxism is not the aspect of limitations concerning the issue of social change but instead the competition between the various groups that results in the justification of sectarianism and the rejection of the development of cooperative relations between the different groups. This situation means that people are often confused by this situation and so are not convinced by the arguments in favour of revolutionary change. If there was one single revolutionary group people would have a better chance of being able to evaluate the reasons why progressive and radical change should occur within capitalist society. But because of the competition between rival groups, it seems that this aspect is what defines their character rather than the objective of overcoming capitalism and replacing this system with socialism. In this situation it seems to be more practical and feasible to support the Labour party because that organisation has a genuine possibility to become a government and so be able to introduce measures that improve the situation of the people. This popular reluctance of people to join the Marxist groups means that they consist of small groups of dedicated people, and to people outside these organisations the members of the revolutionary parties seem to be fanatics that are unable to relate to the aspirations of most of the population of society. As a result of this situation the aim of socialism seems to be an irrelevance that has little relationship to the immediate concerns of most of the population. Furthermore, the credibility of the Labour party is sometimes undermined by the activities of the revolutionary groups that join it, and so in an overall sense the interests of progressive social change do not seem to be advanced by the activity of these Marxist organisations. It could also be suggested that the political concerns of the revolutionary groups seem to be an irrelevance for most people. For example, who is interested in the history of the Fourth International? The question of attitudes concerning the various congresses of the organisations claiming to be the Fourth International are not of interest to most people. Instead, the splits in the various groups claiming to be the Fourth International merely seems to indicate the importance of sectarianism and intolerance in defining their activities. But this problematical history does not prevent various groups from proclaiming that they are the authentic Fourth International that has opposed the unprincipled politics of other rival organisations. However, this confusing history only seems to provide justification for the more moderate role of the reformist parties that seem to express the aspect of tolerance and openness in convincing terms. In other words, the sectarian limitations of the groups claiming to be revolutionary Marxist suggests that the aspect of tolerance and openness is defined by the more moderate and reformist character of the social democratic parties. In this context it seems logical for most people to join these organisations because they are more likely to be based on the principles of tolerance and flexibility. Nevertheless, these problems do not prevent revolutionary groups to continually insist that they are different to the sectarian and authoritarian organisations, but such claims do not seem credible because these supposedly democratic parties seem to also manifest the influence of intolerance and lack of democracy. In most situations the groups are dominated by an elite leadership that does not genuinely allow open discussion of its policies. Often the result of any extended process of discussion is the formation of factions that ultimately create new and rival parties. Hence the sectarian character of revolutionary Marxism is also characterised by a process of fragmentation and the continual development of new groups claiming to be the essence of the principles of genuine socialism. This means that it is effectively impossible to create a united and democratic revolutionary party that is able to make an attempt to provide a common opposition to the forces of reformism and Stalinism. The various groups try to deny the problems that are created by this situation of rivalry and splits by suggesting that at some moment in the future their particular politics will be vindicated by events in the class struggle. However, such developments never occur, and instead the situation is characterised by the perpetual rivalry of the small groups. It is not surprising that most left-wing minded people consider it more practical and effective to become involved in various forms of mass struggles in order to change aspects of society by the possible success of these activities.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties of the situation could it be concluded that the prospect of achieving a situation of unity of the presently competing revolutionary groups is impossible? The problem has been that nobody has seriously attempted to realise this perspective. Instead, the approach of most groups has been to outline a perspective that they consider that at some moment in the future people will begin to support. In other words, developments in the class struggle will resolve this issue of the necessity to establish the role of the revolutionary party. But the problem is that class struggle can occur without in any manner automatically resulting in the creation of the conditions to develop a popular Marxist party. Indeed, it is possible for spontaneous mass struggle to occur that poses the necessity for the revolutionary transformation of society without any related development of the role of a genuine Marxist party. Instead, what is more typical is that the influence of Social Democracy or Stalinism has acted to ensure that mass struggles do not acquire possible revolutionary aspects. But in the contemporary era the role of single-issue campaigns has become the expression of the radical dynamics of mass struggle. In this context the activity of the revolutionary parties becomes to essentially support these movements, and so the very issue of genuine radical change is reduced to achieving the success of protest struggles. This development means the various revolutionary parties no longer advocate a distinctive programme of change and instead they become the most militant supporters of the radical movements. Such a situation means that the groups often become merely the expression of the aims of various mass movements and the objective of socialism is obscured in these terms. In other words, there does not seem to be an alternative to either the limitations of sectarianism or opportunism. It does not seem possible to articulate the aim of socialism in a manner that is both principled and flexible. Increasingly in the present situation the various Marxist groups become the most ardent and enthusiastic advocates of mass struggle. But this very development actually seems to indicate that the role of the Marxist party has become irrelevant. It seems to be more practical and feasible to essentially become the most ardent supporters and participants in the various mass struggles. In other words, it seems that the very actions of many of the Marxist groups has made themselves apparently irrelevant in relation to the aim of changing society, which has become reduced to the success of the single-issue campaign. Only the groups with the most sectarian orientation still proclaim in dogmatic terms the necessity of the importance of the role of the revolutionary party. These developments seem to express the decreasing importance of the Marxist group. However, it could be suggested that the Marxist party is still an important necessity because of the very fact that the capitalism system has not been transformed into socialism. But the problem with this standpoint is that there is declining support for this perspective and instead it has become more popular to advocate the role of militant struggle in order to achieve limited changes to capitalism. The popular demonstrations that accompany the role of single-issue campaigns would seem to suggest that this type of politics is more directly effective when compared to the apparently vague perspective of socialism. But these mass actions cannot transform the character of capitalism in a radical manner and so the reasons for socialist change have not become transcended by the development of militant mass movements. Instead, what is necessary is to connect the mass actions of the present with support for the ultimate aim of socialist change. The failure to establish these types of connections means that ultimately problems are created for the various mass movements of protest. This is because it is difficult to transform the character of capitalism based on the role of militant mass actions. Instead, the very dynamics of the capitalist system ensure that the aims of the mass movements of protest become diluted into an acceptance of the logic of the economy. There is no effective alternative to the aim of transforming the character of society. But the problem is that there is not mass support for this objective. The failures of the various revolutionary parties seem to suggest that these issues will not be quickly resolved.

What is the reason for the limitations of the various Marxist organisations? Before the second world war a perspective for the popular change of society had been established by guild socialists like G.D.H. Cole who outlined the reasons why workers management of the economy should be an objective of the political movement aiming to realise socialism. But this approach was not adopted by the labour movement which had an emphasis on the importance of parliamentary change as the basis to realise reforms that would improve the situation of the workers. Then the creation of communist parties emphasised in an authoritarian manner the necessity for the ascendency of the role of the revolutionary party as the basis to create socialism. In contrast the Labour party was interested in the realisation of reforms in order to make gradual progress for the people in terms of the ultimate possibility to attain socialism. These developments meant that the most participatory and democratic perspective for socialism was not adopted and instead revolutionary aspirations seemed to be expressed by the elitist role of the communist party. This situation seemed to suggest that despite its reformist limitations the Labour party had the most credible perspective for achieving genuine and effective gains for the workers. In this context the practical character of the role of the Labour party seemed to be confirmed by the support of the trade unions. But in contrast the revolutionary approach of the Communist party seemed to be discredited by its association with the increasingly authoritarian character of the Soviet Union. This organisation did not seem to be a genuine advocate of a democratic form of socialism. In this context the hopes for the realisation of socialism were associated with the Independent Labour party which seemed to be a radical influence with a genuine aim of the ending of the domination of capitalism. But the problem was that the ILP made the serious error of leaving the Labour party and so becoming political irrelevant. It essentially became a socialist sect that lacked popular support. The ILP vaguely considered the possibility of fusion with the Communist party but was discouraged from this possibility because of the increasingly authoritarian character of this organisation. But the ILP became increasingly politically irrelevant and its possibility to promote the ideas of a democratic socialism was undermined by this situation. Eventually the ILP effectively disbanded. The supporters of guild socialism stayed in the Labour party, but they became increasingly reformist and right wing, and so as a result of these developments there was effectively nobody promoting the ideas of democratic socialism in an effective manner. Only the small Trotskyist groups advocated a type of participatory socialism, and they acquired some support during world war two. However, the cohesion of Trotskyism was increasingly undermined by differences within its leadership concerning the class character of the Soviet Union. The ultimate result of this situation was to create a collection of small groups based on the aspect of authoritarian leadership. This meant that the basis to promote a type of popular and participatory socialism was ultimately advocated by small groups of intellectuals such as the Institute of Workers Control. However, the people behind this organisation had no intention to attempt to form a new party. Instead, they joined the Labour party and limited their political activity to producing theoretical reasons for the validity of the aim of industrial democracy. Thus, by the 1970’s the aims of revolutionary socialism were expressed by a collection of rival Trotskyist groups. There was no genuine expression of the democratic participation of the members in these organisations and instead their character was defined by the importance of their leaders. This situation was an indication that the demise of the ILP was an expression of a serious crisis of revolutionary socialism which had not been resolved by the 1970’s. However, two organisations emerged that could possibly create constructive political developments. They were Workers Power and Socialist Organiser. Both of these groups were based on a higher level of democracy and the leaderships of these organisations seemed to be more accountable to the members. There was an opportunity for the unification of these groups, and this development did briefly occur. But ultimately the distinct interests of what were rival leaders undermined the possibility to establish the success of this unification, and the result was a split into two bitterly opposed groups. The prospects to create an effective revolutionary party had been seriously undermined. However, both groups have made important contributions to Marxist theory, especially Workers Power with its analysis of the history of Stalinism.

In other words, the organisational necessity to maintain the supremacy of the various leaderships of the distinct organisations undermined the realisation of the possibility of any united development of a single revolutionary party. Furthermore, the character of the three main organisations, Militant, the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Revolutionary Party, was essentially authoritarian. Indeed, it could be argued that the bureaucratic character of these organisations seemed to undermine the credibility of the objective to create a popular and democratic revolutionary party. Ultimately the problem of the authoritarian character of these three major groups would mean that splits would occur, or they would essentially decline like the SWP. The ultimate result of these developments is that there is not a genuinely effective or popular revolutionary Marxist party. Ironically possibly the most successful group is the organisation led by Alan Woods which split with Militant. Therefore, the only conclusion that seems to be possible from these developments is that it is impossible to create an effective and revolutionary party. Indeed, the recent leadership of the Labour party by Jeremy Corbyn would seem to suggest that people with left wing ideas would be better served by becoming members of this organisation. It seems that the lack of success in relation to the objective of creating a popular and effective Marxist party means that people with socialist aims should attempt to realise their objectives without the necessity of attempting to develop independent revolutionary organisations. But despite these problems we would suggest that without the role of an effective Marxist party the attempt to advance the aim of socialism would be seriously undermined. This understanding Is primarily based on the recognition that the Labour party is not a principled and consistent advocate of the attainment of the objectives of socialism. Indeed, this conclusion is confirmed by the recent election of a right-wing leader who is primarily interested in reforming capitalism than advancing the realisation of the objective of socialism. This observation does not mean that Marxists should reject the possibility of work in the Labour party as inherently unprincipled, but this aspect does not mean rejecting the importance to create an independent revolutionary party. The major aim of this party should be to promote the aims for socialism in an effective and popular manner. In other words, the continuing limitations of capitalism means that the possibility to create a mass party advocating socialism is still credible and realistic. But the development of an effective revolutionary party has been undermined by the combined problems of authoritarianism and dogmatism. Indeed, these aspects are interconnected because the major political role of unaccountable leaders is to justify the aim of socialism without relating this aspect to the empirical complexities of the character of capitalism. It is significant that the group that has made the major theoretical contributions is the one led by Alan Woods which has emerged as an alternative to the dogmatism of the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers party. But the organisation led by Woods is not interested in trying to unite the various parties and instead aspires to create its own international group. These developments means that sectarianism characterises the forces of potential revolutionary Marxism. The various parties have their own distinct history and interests and are characterised by bitter opposition to the other organisations. Thus, it would seem to be impossible to create a united revolutionary party. But we would reject this pessimism and instead suggest that it is possible to advocate a perspective that could create the conditions for the unification of the various forces of revolutionary Marxism into a united party.

The initial and major aspect of a united revolutionary party is the understanding that because capitalism is a global system it has to be overthrown and transformed by the role of an international revolutionary process. This means the development of an international programme of class struggle in order to realise this possibility. It is interesting that groups like Workers Power have outlined perspectives for world revolution that could represent a contribution to this task. But what has not been established in a satisfactory manner by any of the Marxist groups that outline a programme of international revolutionary change is the importance of the reasons why the domination of capital has been maintained despite the occasional possibilities to undermine this aspect because of the role of mass struggle. In this context it is necessary to develop a more perceptive understanding of why revolutionary Marxism has not been to establish a popular influence in the present situation. There is an issue of the credibility of Marxism which has not been tackled by the various groups because of their assertion of a generally dogmatic and confident perspective of the possibilities for social change. This aspect is connected to the complete failure of the Marxist groups to tackle the issue of what Gramsci defined as the ideological hegemony of the defenders of capitalism. The issue of the marginalisation of Marxism is not being tacked because of the advocacy of a dogmatic and confident perspective of revolutionary change that does not actually tackle the complexities of the class struggle. Instead in hypothetical terms the various groups outline a perspective that assumes that people will automatically support these programmes and so become the basis for revolutionary change in what is assumed to be a short-term period. This dogmatic approach vastly underestimates the importance of the complexities involved in developing successful class struggle, and so these various action programmes lack credibility. The problem of the present marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism are effectively ignored and instead dogmatic assumptions about inevitable revolutionary change are justified. In other words, the various action programmes would be less dogmatic and more constructive if they attempted to honestly tackle the present marginalisation and isolation of their group and so propose credible measures by which this isolation could begin to be tackled. This development would involve elaborating objectives about how to make progress concerning the unification of the different Marxist groups. In this context it would be necessary to establish the importance of the role of democracy as the basis of the organisation of what would become a united party. But what would possible be of immediate importance is the elaboration of some brief but important principles of how the aim of the unity of the different groups can be achieved. We would suggest that the following points may be helpful in this context.

Firstly, that capitalism is a global system that requires the successful development of international socialist revolution in order to be overcome and replaced by an emancipatory alternative. Secondly, the achievement of the creation of a united and international Marxist party that would be able to advocate the realisation of socialism in an active manner. Thirdly, the elaboration of a programme of class struggle which is not dogmatic and based on the assumption of inevitable success but instead tackles the problems of this issue such as the importance of the ideological hegemony of capital. Fourthly, the recognition of the role of the aspect of oppression and the necessity to develop a policy that would aim to resolve this problem in an emancipatory manner. Fifthly, the advocacy of a convincing conception of the socialist alternative to capitalism which would include the justification of the importance of a system of democracy of the producers as being a central aspect of this approach. If definite progress was made concerning these five aims, it could be said that a credible programme of change had been elaborated. But it has to be accepted that this type of programme has not yet been developed. Instead, the various groups outline perspectives that attempt to evade the issue of the importance of the difficulties involved in the attempt to realise socialism. This means that what are outlined are a collection of demands and the very important issue of the present lack of influence of the Marxist groups is evaded. Instead, it is assumed that people will support the programmes being promoted by the groups and so the issue of the present problem of the lack of influence of the Marxist groups is the very issue that is not being tackled in a serious manner.

In other words, the very issue of the lack of popularity and importance of the various Marxist groups is the very problem that is not being analysed in a serious manner. Instead, they assume in a dogmatic manner that the development of various forms of mass struggle will also result in the increased influence of their organisation. In this manner it is being suggested that the very dynamics of the class struggle will resolve the issue of the possibility to develop the influence and importance of the given socialist party. But in terms of actual events this perspective is not realised. However, the activists of the struggles prefer to support the various pressure groups established in order to promote the realisation of the limited objectives of the given protest. Indeed, this is the very point the objectives of protest have replaced the aim of socialism as the strategic aspect of the role of popular movements. In other words, the objective of revolutionary change seems to have little relationship to the aims of the various protest movements. The result of these developments means that the various Marxist groups tend to adapt to the role of these protest movements and merely become an expression of the aspect of this popular militancy. Alternatively, some Marxist groups may adopt a sectarian stance and so refuse to support these mass actions, but this means that these parties seem to be utterly irrelevant in relation to the role of these protest struggles. It does not seem possible for the Marxist organisations to combine a flexible and committed support for the various mass actions combined with the promotion of an independent perspective for the necessity of socialism. Instead, either opportunism or sectarianism seem to explain the limitations of the political approach of the Marxist groups. In these circumstances the organisation that seems to have been most successful is that led by Alan Woods which has promoted a long-term approach of orientation towards the Labour party. However, they tend to be a propaganda organisation that does not seem able to advocate a credible strategy of mass struggle in order to facilitate the possibility of socialism. In contrast what have been the most important parties of the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist party seem to have undergone a long process of decline caused by the general promotion of sectarianism by both groups. These organisations seem to lack the principles of democracy which would enable the membership of these parties to be able to practice the principles of genuine involvement in the decision-making process of these groups. Whilst Workers Power (Red Flag) and the Alliance for Workers Liberty are more democratic, but they are also characterised by a dogmatism that means they seem unable to understand the complexities involved in the attempt to establish socialism. Instead, they consider that the application of the principles of the democratic involvement of the members in decision making and the importance of a revolutionary programme will be sufficient to ultimately result in their particular organisation becoming a mass organisation. In other words, the very aspect of the difficulties involved in developing popular and effective revolutionary parties is being ignored by these various organisations. But the starting point for the development of the credibility of these groups should be the issue of the complexities involved in relation to the attempt to establish a popular and influential revolutionary party. Indeed, it can be argued that there has been a long-term process of the decline of the importance of the left-wing groups caused by the various developments in the class struggle. This aspect is connected to the apparent success of the capitalist class in relation to its ability to defeat the militancy of the workers. An important ideological aspect of this development is to discredit the perspective that radical change is feasible. It is important to understand that when there was a development of militant mass struggle, as with the miner’s strike of 1984-85 and the anti-poll tax movement there was also an increased influence of the left-wing groups like Militant. But with the consolidation of the domination of capitalism it seemed that the very possibility of radical change had seriously undermined and the result was to discredit the credibility of the revolutionary perspectives of the various left-wing groups. But the serious challenge of these developments does not seem to be addressed by the Marxist organisations, and instead they seem to promote revolutionary programmes of action without connecting them to the actual complexities of the given economic and political situation. The result of this dogmatism is that the various groups seem to have become increasingly irrelevant.

But the important problem of this situation of the apparent insignificance of the various left-wing groups is that they do not seem to recognise the problems associated with this continual decline in their importance. There is no elaboration of how to overcome the marginalisation of the revolutionary forces. For example, Red Flag continue to outline action programmes which suggest that in the sort-term future they will be able to mobilise the workers on the basis of a collection of radical objectives. Whilst in a vague manner the SWP consider that the various protest struggles concerning aspects of capitalism will somehow create the conditions that will establish their popular influence within these mass movements. But to the various protestors it seems that the issue of the role of a revolutionary party is an irrelevance because it is the mass movements of opposition to aspects of capitalism which seem to have become the essential agency of change within contemporary capitalism. Given the influence of this viewpoint the importance of the various revolutionary parties continues to decline. Instead, what seems to be of practical contemporary importance is the activity of various mass struggles about ecology or opposition to imperialism. But these problematical issues are not understood by the various groups which continue to promote activism or their particular programmes without in any sense being able to understand the problem of their marginalisation. Indeed, the various political trends of the present seem to suggest that the most important and effective political parties are those that uncritically support the continuation of the capitalist system. The serious character of this situation would suggest that the era of revolutionary Marxism has ended and is instead being replaced by the uncontested supremacy of capitalism. But it would be wrong to make this conclusion. Capitalism is a system that is based on the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital. This means that the workers can never be content with the present economic system. The possible result of this situation is that it is possible for a revolutionary party to emerge that is able to articulate the potential aspirations of the workers for a more emancipatory type of society. But the very problem of sectarianism means that instead of this progressive development the situation is characterised by a confusing collection of small groups that seem to be unable to outline an alternative to capitalism in imaginative and plausible terms. Indeed, the groups do not recognise that to most people they do not seem to be a convincing expression of the objectives of an alternative emancipatory society. What is needed is the unity of these small groups on the basis of an accessible programme for change and the elaboration of what would seem to be a credible conception of an alternative type of society. But the problem is that the different organisations do not consider that the aim of unity is actually an obligation because the realisation of this development would contribute immensely to the possible expression of a credible revolutionary party. The point is that the members of the various groups would put their obligations to the workers above the narrow sectarian concerns of their particular organisations. In these terms the morale of the members of the various groups would be immensely developed by the creation of a unified revolutionary party and it would be able to promote its politics with a sense of greater confidence and belief that it has become possible to end the domination of capitalism. But these advantages connected with the creation of a single unified revolutionary party do not seem to be realised because the conservative inertia of the situation of the present competition of rival groups does not seem to be capable of being overcome. Hence all that seems possible is to outline the various principles and policies that would constitute the character of a genuine revolutionary party.

We would suggest the following principles and policies of a genuine revolutionary party. Firstly, the role of a democratic leadership that is genuinely accountable to its members in terms of the principle of the importance of regular elections in order to establish leaders who are responsive to the membership. There must be no absolutism in terms of autocratic leaders who are not held to account for their actions and views by the membership of the party. Secondly, the development of a programme in which the aim of world socialist revolution is the primary aim. The understanding of the role of the national forms of the class struggle should be interpreted in terms of the relationship of this aspect to the task of world revolution. Thirdly the elaboration of demands which can facilitate the realisation of the aim of the overthrow of national and international capitalism. In this context the importance of establishing workers management of the economy would be one of the most prominent aims. Fourthly, support for the demands of the oppressed such as women, black people and gays and lesbians. Fifth, outline a conception of socialism that is connected to ecological issues. Sixth, outline a collection of reforms that can be achievable within capitalism, such as proportional representation and a shorter working week. Sixth, elaborate a programme of social change that we demand that reformist parties like the Labour party should introduce. Seventh, campaign for a policy of the general strike of the trade unions in order to undermine the strength of bourgeois governments. Whether the general strike should be promoted when there is a Labour government would depend on the character of this administration. Eighth, strive to achieve the unity of the forces of Marxism on the basis of the principles of the programme outlined above. Nineth, establish a democratic type of revolutionary party in which the members would have the absolute right to articulate their views and be able to disagree with the leaders of the party. Tenth, strive to re-establish the fourth international founded by Trotsky in terms of the above principles. We understand that the possibility to achieve world socialism will be immensely advanced by the formation of one single revolutionary international that is able to unite in order to promote the aims of socialism. It will be suggested that these proposals are difficult to achieve. This is a perfectly valid point, but it does not mean that these objectives are too complex or demanding. Instead, they express the minimum basis of the process of the creation of a world revolutionary party. It could be suggested that these objectives are possibly too demanding or ambitious and so cannot be realised. This is a valid point which is why it is necessary to accept the flexibility of compromise in terms of the process of discussion about what constitutes a principled international party. But we would suggest that there is a limit to which the various demands can be diluted. For example, we would suggest that the conception of socialism in one country is unprincipled and would if applied in a rigid manner mean the undermining of the principles of the importance of world revolution. But within the context of the principles established it is necessary to have the maximum possible discussion about how to interpret and realise them. In this sense it is possible that factions and tendencies be allowed to emerge in order to promote a particular perspective. But we would suggest that with the development of a democratic party it is not necessary for splits to occur. Instead, differences can be discussed within the one united organisation. However, we would not agree with the development of a rotating leadership because of the lack of cohesion this a create. If a leadership is subject to regular election and has proved to be a capable and efficient leadership, there is no reason why it should not be vindicated in terms of being confirmed by the members as the long- term leaders of the revolutionary party. However, the leaders should confirm by their continual contributions to theory and practice why they deserve to be re-elected to these positions by the members. Hence the leaders should not rely on the sentimentality of the members in order to continue in their positions. Instead, they should indicate in theory and practice why they still deserve to be the leaders. But if the leaders are voted out of office, they should accept the decision of the members and not act in a sectarian manner in order to create new parties. The history of the Fourth International has been characterised by the problem of the ambitions of various leaders which has undermined the possibility to develop one united organisation. Indeed, it could be argued that this is the major reason why a credible united party has not developed. Instead, it is necessary that people connect their ambitious in a more principled manner to the interests of the development of what should be a single revolutionary party. If this criteria is adopted the process of the development of a united international revolutionary group will be immensely advanced.

The general point being made is that it is feasible to create one united revolutionary party because of the possibility to develop one principled programme of revolutionary change and the connected conception of a socialist society. This means an elaboration of the possibility to mobilise the workers in terms of radical objectives that advance the prospect of the realisation of a socialist alternative to capitalism. But what a credible programme will also include is an understanding of the difficulties and problems that undermine the possibility to realise the success of this revolutionary perspective. This understanding will include a genuine discussion of the credibility problem of the small size of the various Marxist groups and how it seems that the various parties of the establishment have created what seems to be an uncontested supremacy. Discussion of this issue is the very aspect that has been traditionally ignored by the various Marxists groups which have instead emphasised the possibilities to realise change in an over-confident manner. Instead, a part of a credible revolutionary programme will be an analysis of the reasons why it is difficult to replace capitalism with the alternative of socialism. In other words, an important limitation of the various Marxist groups has been the promotion of a programme of revolutionary change that fails to address the issues that can undermine the realisation of this perspective. But this is the very reason why many people are not convinced of the seriousness of the various revolutionary groups because they seem to have a consciousness of fantasy that does not tackle the very issues that undermine the possibility of radical change. Thus, people might be persuaded to join a socialist organisation that actually admitted to the importance of the difficulties involved in trying to realise a programme of revolutionary change. This is because that they would know that this group is serious about trying to tackle the difficulties involved in the attempt to realise revolutionary change. But it is the very ideological dogmatism of the groups which means that they develop a membership of uncritical fanatical supporters who do not question the rigid politics of the organisation. It seems significant that none of the various Marxist parties seem to accept that it is a difficult and complex task to try and overcome the domination of capitalism and establish socialism. Instead, they seem to promote an approach based on what seems to be complacent optimism that seems to have little genuine relationship to social reality. The result of this characteristic is that the parties have members who are uncritical supporters of the aims of the organisation and so the dogmatic limitations of the various groups is not seriously questioned. Indeed, the main concern of the groups seems to be to maintain an ascendency over rival socialist organisations rather than being primarily concerned with how to realise the objective of socialism.

But how is a credible revolutionary party to be created given that the various organisations seem to be characterised by the role of people with fanatical beliefs? What is of crucial importance is that people emerge who recognise the importance of the difficulties involved in trying to realise the aim of socialism. This means that these people would recognise that the importance of tackling the problem of how to achieve revolutionary change is more important than dogmatic loyalty to a given party. But how can these people begin to advocate a more credible revolutionary perspective without creating one more rival type of socialist party? This question is difficult to answer and it may be ultimately necessary to accept the approach that the founding of a more credible type of socialist party becomes unavoidable. However, this group would be characterised by the fact that it is based on the acceptance of the urgent need to tackle the issues involved in how to achieve socialism in a manner that is more convincing when contrasted to the approach of the more dogmatic revolutionary parties of the past. Indeed, its appeal to people would be based on the fact that it is prepared to discuss the issues and problems involved in the attempt to realise socialism in a more serious manner than the rival left wing parties. It is possible that such a party would become popular because there seems to be an increasing dissatisfaction with the various authoritarian and dogmatic type of left-wing organisations. But the ultimate issue is whether this party would be genuinely democratic and so is based on the accountable character of its leadership to the members. If this aspect is actually realised it could be possible to develop a principled socialist party that was superior to most of the organisations of the past. Such a development would not mean that such a party would become instantly popular and so able to express itself as a genuine leader of the people in the attempt to realise socialism. Instead, it would have to be understood that the prospect of this party being able to become a credible leader of the process of the creation of the political conditions for socialism might have a long-term character and indeed ultimate failure in this regard is always possible. But the creation of a democratic party for socialism would also become a pole of attraction for all the discontented people within society and so would express the possibility to become a mass party with popular support. It has been the sectarian rivalry of what are authoritarian types of revolutionary organisations which has been the major reason why any people are not convinced of the validity of the aims of socialism. Instead, if a credible democratic party did emerge that was based on the aims of people that would convince many people of the principled and emancipatory character of the aims of socialism. But how will it be possible for the authoritarian character of the revolutionary groups to become transformed and so unite and form a new and effectively democratic socialist party? This issue is the very complexity that has not been resolved in the very history of revolutionary groups. The history of Social democracy and Stalinism has been about increasing bureaucratisation and this aspect has been replicated by the generally authoritarian character of the Trotskyist groups. These developments have meant that the principles of democratic socialist organisation have been seriously undermined by the actual practices of the history of the left-wing parties. There does not seem to be any prospect to overcome and resolve these limitations. But what is required is that a group of people recognise the importance of the issue of the failure to establish a democratic socialist party and so try to provide proposals to begin to tackle this problem. These people should establish an organisation with the aim to promote the possibility to create a popular democratic socialist party. They should agitate with the members of the various groups in terms of the promotion of this perspective. It will be suggested that this approach is bound to fail because of the present sectarian and bureaucratic character of the various groups. But the point is that without this attempt to generate support for a democratic revolutionary party nobody will know if this aim could be realised. This development should occur alongside the promotion of a principled revolutionary programme of change. In other words, the programme of the unity group would seem to be more credible and principled than the various perspectives of the sectarian organisations. Hence the aim of unity would become of political importance because such a development would enable the creation of a party which had a superior programme when contrasted to those of the various sectarian groups. Thus, the aspect of the promotion of the new party for the unity of socialists is more than a sentimental aspiration for the unification of the various groups, it is instead primarily about the necessity to develop a credible organisation that is able to advocate a programme for the development of the class struggle and the connection of this aspect to the process of the realisation of socialism. It will be suggested that this is the very approach of all present revolutionary groups and so what is being advocated does not represent a change to this situation. But an aspect of the new revolutionary party will be to call for the unity of the various left-wing groups in terms of the development of support for a new and principled programme for revolutionary change. This programme will be superior to the previous programmes of the left-wing groups because it will attempt to tackle the issues as to why revolutionary change has not occurred in a more credible manner. Thus, a programme of action demands will not ignore the issues of the economic and ideological domination of the capitalist class and will not ignore the importance of the role of the various establishment political parties. In this manner the complex issues of the class struggle will be discussed in a more convincing manner than in the past, and the very failure of the revolutionary organisations to become mass parties will be analysed in a more serious manner than in the past. The development of this type of programme will not automatically establish the possibility to resolve the crisis of the revolutionary party but it will make a contribution towards understanding the challenges of the present situation.

So, what are the general principles and aspects of a credible and principled revolutionary programme? Firstly, it is necessary to accept that capitalism has proved to be a durable system that it is difficult to overcome by the role of revolutionary struggle. Indeed, the various parties of the workers which had radical objective have increasingly adapted to the situation of the ascendency of capital over labour. But the alternative revolutionary type parties that have emerged have not been able to establish an effective revolutionary perspective of social change and indeed these groups have failed to become popular organisations. It seems that it is not possible to end the domination of capital over labour because of these problems. But we would reject this conclusion as being pessimistic and not accurate and instead suggest that as long as the domination of capital over labour continues the possibility of the discontent of the workers is always likely to occur. Hence the aim of the revolutionary party is to transform this discontent into becoming the active expression of the aim of the creation of a new emancipatory society. In this context we would suggest that an important aim is to obtain the support of the trade unions for the objective of establishing workers management of the economy within capitalism as a prelude to transition to a socialist type of production. This approach means that we would aim to facilitate the possibility that the reformist parties of the workers become supporters of this perspective and so no longer primarily act to uphold the capitalist system. But in order that this perspective of change becomes credible we would suggest that it is necessary to develop a popular and democratic revolutionary party of the workers that can agitate in order to achieve this perspective. We would also suggest that the strikes of the workers become increasing defined by this objective of workers management of the economy. In other words, we would suggest that the very aspect of the dynamics of class struggle become increasingly influenced by this type of perspective. However, the very ability to achieve the importance of this approach is undermined by the present inability to establish a credible and popular revolutionary party. This is why we suggest that the various revolutionary groups should unite in order to promote this perspective. But it is recognised that the role of bourgeois ideology acts to undermine the possible development of collective class action. Hence it is an important task of the revolutionary party to oppose the influence of bourgeois ideology, or to act to develop the counter-hegemonic influence of the left-wing standpoint. This is the very task that has generally been ignored by the Marxist groups which have considered that it is sufficient to advocate a programme of action. However, what is possibly most important is that the Marxist organisations make propaganda in favour of socialism. It is necessary to develop the popular influence of the view that the realisation of the aim of socialism should be the primary objective of class struggle. In this context the various demands to develop the militant activity of the workers should be connected to advancing the achievement of socialism. Hence workers management should be the expression of a process of transition towards the realisation of this objective. It will be argued by the defenders of capitalism that what is being proposed is not in accordance with the democratic procedures and principles established by the role of elections. But the point is that nobody voted for the domination of capital over labour, and yet this aspect defines the character of the economic and political system. Therefore, it Is not undemocratic for people to express by the role of mass action for the realisation of an alternative in terms of the establishment of workers management of the economy. This development will be related to the role of a political system in which there is political freedom for parties to organise including parties that support capitalism. In this context there will be the possibility for people to vote in favour of the restoration of capitalism, but we can be confident that a system based on the active economic and political participation of the people would not vote in favour of this possibility.

However, one of the most important aspects that undermines the realisation of this perspective is the failure to establish a credible revolutionary party. Hence it is necessary to tackle this issue in more detail. It is necessary to outline in more detailed terms the problems associated with the present role of the various revolutionary organisations. The major issue is that the various Marxist groups have become used to their situation of insignificance. They have adopted a routine based on the assumption that they have become of secondary importance when compared to the various reformist parties or the role of the development of forms of mass popular protest. This situation has meant that the groups have essentially become supporters of mass action and so tend to ignore the continued necessity to advocate the aims of socialism. This development can be expressed by the increasing pragmatic politics of the Socialist Workers party. Other parties have tended to adapt to the continued importance of the Labour party and so have tended to accept the necessity of the entryist tactic. But this means the possibility to advocate independent politics is undermined by this development and the very concept of the revolutionary party becomes reduced to a conspiratorial expression of politics that undermines the possibility to argue in an open manner for a genuine revolutionary perspective. In other words, there is a general crisis of revolutionary politics which has to be resolved. What is ultimately required is the creation of a single revolutionary party which can ultimately become popular in genuine terms. But the present sectarianism of the major groups seems to undermine the possibility that this situation can be improved in a principled manner. However, despite the adverse circumstances it is necessary that even the smallest of groups should advocate the possibility of principled unity, as outlined in this article. It could be argued that the objective of unity as outlined by a small group is bound to be ignored, but this would be a pessimistic conclusion to reach. Instead, ideas can become important regardless of their origin because of the credibility of their nature. In this manner it seems to be common sense to advocate the unification of the various presently contending groups in a single organisation. Indeed, it could be suggested that possibly the members of these groups do aspire to develop this type of unity. The incentive for this development would be that a single group would be able to promote the ideas of socialism in a more credible and accessible manner. In these terms it would be possible to establish an expression of socialism that was not being undermined by the aspect of sectarian rivalry between the various groups. However, the problem in relation to this prospect is the influence of the sectarian competition of the revolutionary organisations. There seems to be no possible resolution of this problem given the importance of the aspect of traditional rivalry between the groups. But it also has to be suggested that nobody has advocated a programme of unity because of the very ideological influence of sectarianism. Thus, it could be suggested in optimistic terms that this situation could be resolved if the idea of unity became popular within the various groups. Indeed, the appeal of unity may become influential given the continuing decline of the different political organisations. However, there is nothing inevitable about this development, but what we do know is that the continual sectarian division of the groups will mean there decline and the failure to build a credible revolutionary party.

But let’s assume that a united revolutionary party can be created, does this mean that it can become popular and credible? There Is no automatic answer to this question. The point is that the prospects of a revolutionary party is established by its structure, politics and whether people can genuinely participate in its development. It has been the lack of these aspects which explain the very failure of the various Marxist groups. Furthermore, even if we consider that a genuine revolutionary party can be created in terms of its programme and the involvement of its members in its decision-making process this would not result in becoming popular and influential. However, there is also the problem of the present political system which tends to favour the interests of the established parties, but it could be argued that the central problem is the inability of the revolutionary party to win seats in local and national elections. Hence it seems that the revolutionary party is inherently unpopular and is not able to represent the people in a democratic manner. In contrast the established parties, such as the Conservative party and Labour party have become accustomed to winning seats in elections and it seems that this situation is not likely to be challenged by the intervention of a new party. Traditionally the various Marxist groups have increasingly ignored the importance of elections and have tended to concentrate on industrial struggles and the related attempt to obtain the support of workers for the aims of the organisation. But this approach often only seems to confirm the marginal importance of the Marxist parties and they fail to overcome their marginal political significance. However, this development only seems to confirm that the Marxist groups have secondary political importance. But possibly the most problematical aspect of this situation is that the revolutionary parties justify their marginal influence in terms of becoming organisations of protest and activism, which implicitly suggests that they have effectively rejected any aspirations to lead a process of revolutionary struggle in order to transform society. There seems to be no effective basis to overcome this situation of marginalisation and increased insignificance. But it could be suggested that the very worst aspect of this situation is the failure to acknowledge these problems and instead the various parties become used to this lack of popular influence. In other words, the Marxist parties seem to recognise that they have become irrelevant. But it could also be suggested that policies can be developed in order to promote the generation of the popularity of the Marxist organisations. This would involve the elaboration of a perspective to defend the gains of the workers in the context of an offensive of capital and bourgeois governments to undermine these advances. Such a defensive approach would then become the basis to propose reforms such as the genuine development of the eight-hour day and the right of people to belong to a trade union. But ultimately the revolutionary party would outline the connection of this role of what has been defensive struggle in order to develop the necessity of a more offensive perspective of opposing the domination of capital. However, such a perspective is not possible or credible if the Marxist party has not become more important and influential within society. This prospect is connected to the unification of the various Marxist groups within one united organisation. Therefore, it could be suggested that the issue of the lack of credibility of Marxism is a problem created by the aspect of the divisions between the organisations which has led to this situation of the rivalry of what are often very small groups. In other words, the ultimate reason why the various groups do not become the expression of the role of a popular revolutionary party is because of their own responsibility in terms of the failure to create what could potentially become a credible revolutionary organisation. In this context the issue of the lack of support of the workers for the revolutionary project is not a problem because of this historic failure to create a credible revolutionary party. It is the Marxists themselves who have the major responsibility for the inability to establish what could be a credible party that is able to appeal for support of the workers. Hence the often unenthusiastic response of the workers to the Marxist organisations is because the Marxists have not been able to create a united and democratic political party. This means that we do not know how the workers would respond if there was effectively one political organisation that was appealing for their support. Thus, we can only vaguely predict the response of the workers to the role of a united and effective revolutionary party because this development has not been realised in the contemporary era. In other words, it has not been the attitudes of the workers which has led to the general failure of the revolutionary parties, but instead it has been the sectarian practices of the various groups which has resulted in the lack of success of revolutionary Marxism. There does not seem to be any immediate possibility that this situation will be overcome, and so we can only make predictions about how progress in this context can be realised. The major reason for the failure to create a popular revolutionary party is because of the regressive effect of the sectarianism of the various organisations. This situation means that we cannot empirically establish whether a popular revolutionary party can be created because of these sectarian failures. Instead, all that we can do is to try and establish the potential of a united and democratic type of revolutionary party. This task will be the aspect of the rest of the article. But we have to emphasise that there is no perspective that success can be inevitably realised in these terms.

A serious type of revolutionary party would be concerned to express the aspect of discontent that people have because of the role of exploitation established by the capital-labour relation. The aim of Marxists will be to enhance the possibility for workers to act in a collective manner in order to undermine the domination of capital within the relations of production. This will mean the struggle to achieve a shorter working week and the ability of the trade unions to be able to supervise the economic process. Ultimately the intention is to advance the possibility to establish workers management of the various forms of economic activity. In these principled terms a relationship between the workers and the revolutionary party is established. But the Marxists are also aware of the increasing importance of various protest struggles like the ecology movement, and so they will become involved in these activities with the objective to promote the view that the realisation of green aspirations ultimately implies the undermining of the domination of capital over labour. Thus, with regards to these protest movements, the revolutionary party acts to transform what is a protest against aspects of capitalism into becoming a conscious and purposive attempt to advance the process of the undermining of the domination of capital and the related increased influence of the workers and oppressed groups in the organisation of society. In this context an ideological struggle is conducted against the view that the various forms of protest are an adequate expression of opposition to the system and instead the party consistently expresses the view that protest should become transformed into a conscious struggle to end the domination of capital within society. However, the party does not abstain from being involved in these protest movements because of their limitations but instead attempts to transform into becoming an expression of conscious opposition to the domination of capital. In other words, the principled role of the revolutionary party will be confirmed by the fact that in the present situation of crisis and austerity the capitalist class and its political parties are reluctant to make concessions to the aims of the various mass movements of protest. The Marxists will make the point to the participants of the mass struggles that the present situation of capitalism is not conducive to the realisation of reforms. Instead, the prospect to realise improvements to the system is connected to the successful achievement of the transformation of society as the most progressive outcome of the various mass struggles. However, Marxists will not be able to relate to the mass movements if they are still divided into a collection of rival small parties. Instead, they should unite on a principled basis in order to advocate a revolutionary strategy of change in a more effective manner. The requirements of the class struggle should confirm to the Marxist groups the necessity for principled unity if they are to be able to promote a strategy for change in the most effective manner. It is the continuation of the divisions of the groups into rival small groups which discredits the very plausibility of the revolutionary approach. In other words, the possibility to establish a constructive relationship between party and class is undermined by the division of the revolutionary forces into small groups. It is the sectarian rivalries of the Marxist groups which acts to undermine the development of the class struggle because this situation undermines the possibility for the creation of a creative and dynamic relationship between party and class. In other words, it is not the apparent passivity of the workers which is the major problem in relation to the development of the class struggle but instead the organisational and political limitations of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. Therefore, if a united Marxist party was created it would immensely facilitate its possibility to become popular because people would recognise that it was able to relate to the movements of the workers in a more dynamic and effective manner. This type of party would seem to be more serious and effective and so it would attract more popular support. Thus, the development of one revolutionary party would enable this organisation to be able to relate to the workers in a more effective manner in terms of the creation of an interaction between the party and class with regards to the role of struggles. But if in contrast there is a rivalry between opposing sectarian groups this type of relationship is immensely more difficult to achieve. In other words, the possibility of the interaction of party and class is facilitated by the end of the sectarian tensions between rival groups. This more favourable political situation allows the one revolutionary party to be able to dedicate its activities to developing a principled relationship with the workers. Hence it is not surprising that because of the divisions between rival Trotskyist groups they have failed to promote the realisation of an effective relation of party and class.

One of the most important issues that a united revolutionary party would have to address would be the ideological hegemony of the capitalist system which enables its domination to be perpetuated. But this very aspect has been neglected by the various Trotskyist organisations which have instead emphasised the importance of programmes for the development of the class struggle. However, the process of ideological struggle is constructive because it is based on the justification of the aim of socialism in a popular manner and this means that the importance of the elaboration of an alternative to capitalism is connected to the very tasks of developing the influence of revolutionary Marxism. Thus, if the elaboration of what is meant by socialism is indicated in a dogmatic manner it will be very difficult to develop the influence of the role of the Marxist party. But unfortunately, the Marxist groups have often defined socialism in the most brief and rigid terms that means it seems to be an unconvincing alternative to capitalism. In other words, the capitalist system seems to be superior because it is at least functioning despite its limitations of inequality and exploitation, and so its practical feasibility seems to be more efficient when compared to the hypothetical character of the elaboration of the aim of socialism. Indeed, some groups make no attempt to outline what is meant by socialism because they instead concentrate on the elaboration of a programme of mobilisation of the workers against capitalism. But the point is what is this mobilisation about? The answer to this question is that it is about socialism and so it is necessary to outline a conception of this aim in what should be convincing detail. However, even if the aim of socialism is outlined in satisfactory terms that will not necessarily overcome the ideological hegemony of capitalism. The capitalist system has the practical advantage of functioning in the present and so it seems to be the obvious superior system. Indeed, this view is influential, and it explains the fact that most people accept the functioning of capitalism as the only feasible basis of economic activity. This means that Marxists have to popularise Marx’s conception of the exploitation of labour by capital and so suggest that there is a progressive alternative in terms of the possibility for the workers to organise the economy in terms of their interests. However, in relation to this task the Marxist groups have often failed to outline a convincing conception of what constitutes a socialist economy and instead in a pragmatic manner they have emphasised the importance of mass mobilisation of the workers against the present economic system. But this activist approach does not challenge the ideological hegemony of capital and so because of their very political limitations the Marxist groups fail to outline an analysis of how and why capitalism can be changed into socialism. Hence the theoretical limitations of the Marxist groups means that they contribute to the development of their own insignificance.

Obviously if the Marxist organisations resolved these problems in a satisfactory manner this would not automatically result in the possibility to become credible parties of the workers. But the point is that there is a relationship between theory and practice that the Marxist groups do not seem to have sufficiently recognised. The crucial aspect that is not apparently understood is that it is necessary to promote the transformation of the defensive struggles of the workers which are based on an acceptance of capitalism into becoming a more offensive attempt to establish a different type of society. This means a programme of change has to be outlined in convincing terms and connected to the development of a conception of what is meant by socialism. The point is that people will not strive to realise an alternative type of society if this very aim is only outlined in a brief manner. Indeed, this issue is not established by Marx in convincing terms, who only in a vague manner suggested that the Paris Commune was the expression of a different classless society. Therefore, we have to outline what is meant by socialism in detailed terms, and as revolutionary Marxists strive to develop the support of the workers for this objective. Indeed, this aspect would be the most important aspect for challenging the ideological hegemony of the capitalist system because what would be emphasised is that there is a superior alternative to this exploitative type of economy. But instead of this type of theoretical based approach the general standpoint of the various Marxist groups has been based on the importance of activism and developing the mobilisation of the workers against capitalism. However, the problem with this activist approach is that the ultimate importance of the aim of socialism becomes obscure and instead there is an emphasis on the role of class struggle as effectively an end in itself. Thus, the various revolutionary Marxist groups become known for their emphasis on the role of mass action and the actual importance of the objective of socialism becomes obscured as a result. There are also some groups that emphasise the aim of socialism at the expense of the importance of mass action, but these are in a minority. But possibly the major limitation of the Marxist groups is that they often ignore the aspect of bourgeois ideological hegemony because of their emphasis on the transforming role of mass action. The point is that it is necessary to establish an interaction of party and class in relation to the development of struggles, but increasingly the process of mass action has occurred without the influence of the various Marxist parties. Therefore, the very importance of the spontaneous aspect of mass movements has not led to any development of support for the aim of socialism. Instead, it becomes accepted in popular terms that the aims of the various popular struggles are limited to achieving its objectives within capitalism. Indeed, it seems in the context of this ideological situation that the very role of revolutionary Marxism is completely irrelevant in relation to the issue of achieving what are defined as the immediate objectives of the mass movements. However, the Marxist groups themselves adapt to this situation and so make no propaganda in favour of socialism and instead emphasise various demands in order to generate the possibility of the victory of the mass struggles. Therefore, the very limited and opportunist role of many of the Marxist groups would seem to suggest that they have become politically irrelevant apart from acting as support groups for the various struggles. This opportunist process of adaptation to the mass movements can be overcome in the most effective manner by the serious elaboration of the objective of socialism as the ultimate realisation of the role of popular struggles. But it is necessary to emphasise that this criticism is not meant as a rejection of the importance of mass action, but instead to suggest that this development should be connected to a credible conception of an ultimate socialist objective. Obviously, most forms of popular activity cannot result in socialism, but what should become the aim of mass movements is to make progress towards the realisation of this objective. But such a development will only occur if the Marxist groups have outlined what is meant by socialism in convincing and credible terms. Obviously, the development of this connection between mass struggles and the aim of socialism will not occur in the short-term, and instead can only be the result of the successful ideological intervention of the Marxist party in the class struggle. But there is not any inevitable aspect to this possibility, and it Is entirely feasible that the revolutionary organisation may fail in this attempt to develop the influence of the aim of socialism. But this lack of success should not result in defeatism and instead the Marxists should persist in the attempt to increase the popularity of the aim of socialism. However, it could be suggested that the Marxist organisations have often considered that socialism is an inaccessible and difficult aim to promote and instead have emphasised the importance of the immediate objectives of the various struggles. But the ultimate result of this opportunism is to suggest that the very role of the Marxist groups is irrelevant in relation to the immediate needs of developing the success of the various mass actions. In other words, the very credibility of the Marxist parties depends on connecting the aims of mass struggles with the objective of socialism, even if this connection is often considered to be irrelevant. Thus, the actual emphasis on activism has ultimately undermined the apparent necessity and importance of the Marxist groups, and actually the result is a situation of political crisis because they seemed to have established their own irrelevancy in relation to the demands of mass struggle.

There does not seem to be any satisfactory political basis to resolve these problems in a principled and effective manner. The very demands of supporting mass struggles seems to establish the political irrelevance of the Marxist group. But it could be suggested that the reason for this development is that the aim of socialism as the outcome of the role of mass struggle has become considered to be an irrelevance, but the very expression of a principled approach would indicate its continued relevance. The point is that if the importance of socialism as the ultimate aim of mass struggle becomes either diluted or ignored, then the very Marxist parties effectively adopt a reformist standpoint. This means that the only manner in which they can remain principled is to continue to promote the importance of the aim of socialism as the most desired outcome of the role of mass struggle. Such an approach in order to be credible means conceiving of the character of socialism in the most plausible manner. It is the fact that socialism is the most progressive and desirable outcome of mass action which establishes its continuing importance. This is why the principles of socialism have to become related to the expression of the very dynamics of mass struggle. Indeed, this very approach indicates the difference between the Marxist group and reformist parties. The latter accept the continuation of capitalism and so have become indifferent to the theoretical task of elaborating what is meant by an alternative type of society. Thus, a major reason for the role of the Marxist party is that only this type of organisation is still seriously motivated by the importance of the aim of socialism. Therefore, if this party remains small and unpopular it will be difficult to promote the realisation of the objectives of socialism given the accommodation of reformism to the capitalist system. But this understanding does not mean that it is not principled for Marxists to join reformist parties in order to promote the aim of socialism. Indeed, it may be progressive to support reformist governments because they may introduce measures that realise the class interests of the workers. But this issue has to be conceived in flexible terms because it would be unprincipled to support a reactionary type of reformist government. In the present period most reformist administrations have accepted the logic of capital in the most uncritical manner and so have justified policies that can be defined as an expression of the interests of the present economic system. Therefore, it is necessary for Marxists to establish this development and to outline why the only principled possibility is expressed by the revolutionary transformation of capitalism into socialism. It has often been suggested that this approach is both sectarian and unrealistic. But we would contend that in a situation of increasing economic crisis and the imposition of austerity politics that the issues have become apparent in relation to the application of the principles of socialism. The only progressive resolution of these problems is established by the progress of the workers in the class struggle. In this context it is necessary for Marxists to connect this aspect to the importance of the only genuinely progressive outcome of these developments which is the socialist transformation of society. This approach does not mean ignoring the immediate importance of trying to develop the success of the defensive struggles of the workers, but under a situation of the crisis of capitalism these limited victories could be undermined by the problems of the economy. Hence it is necessary to try and establish popular support for the perspective of transforming defensive struggles into an offensive aspiration to realise socialism. But the possibility for this type of development means that the aim of socialism should be outlined in the most credible and popular manner. It has been failures in this context which has contributed to the continuing marginalisation of the Marxist groups. Instead, these parties have been content to justify themselves as activist organisations that are essentially concerned with developing mass struggles. This has meant that the groups themselves have not connected the various mass actions with the aim of socialism. But this very opportunism has contributed to what could be considered to be the increasing irrelevance of the various Marxist groups. It will require the elaboration of the aim of socialism in order to oppose this apparent acceptance of the irrelevance of the Marxist groups.

But it could be suggested that we have still not resolved the issue of the apparent insignificance and marginalisation of the presently small socialist groups. How can they overcome these problems in order to create a genuinely popular revolutionary party? It is necessary to address this issue by initially establishing that there is no inevitable prospect of the successful creation of a revolutionary party. The fact that Lenin and Trotsky created the Bolsheviks who carried out a process of proletarian revolution does not mean that this development will be emulated in the future. Instead, it is quite possible that the apparent failure to overcome the problem of the lack of the role of popular and effective revolutionary parties will not be resolved and capitalism will continue to be the dominant social system. But it is this very lack of dogmatic belief in the inevitable success of socialism which should create a sense of urgency about the task concerning the issue of the necessity to create a revolutionary organisation. In other words, whilst it is true that capitalism will not be inevitably replaced with socialism, it is also true that this is not an invincible system and the development of a genuine and popular revolutionary party can represent an immense contribution concerning the possibility to end the domination of capitalism. Hence with this understanding of the potential importance of the role of the revolutionary party should motivate the development of the attempt to create this type of organisation. However, it has been the sectarian motivations of the leaders of the present collection of groups which has undermined the possibility to develop a united socialist organisation. The members of the various Marxist organisations have been based on a sectarian mistrust of the other groups which seems to preclude the possibility that a united party can be created. If the influence of this sectarian approach continues then it is entirely feasible that a unified revolutionary organisation will not be created. The role of a conservative and sectarian ideology could seriously undermine any effort to create a united party. But it Is the very lack of confidence in a sense of historical progress concerning a development of a singular revolutionary organisation that means that the effort to begin this process of unification has to start to occur in a serious and consistent manner. It is the very fact that this approach may not be successful that indicates that the attempt to realise this aim has to be promoted in a serious and determined manner. But it is quite possible that this approach will not be successful. But the results of failure will be serious because what is implied is that capitalism will continue to be dominant because it is not a system that will be undermined by the development of an effective revolutionary opposition. The point being made is that the various leaderships of the Marxist groups put the sectarian interests of their organisations above what should be considered to be obligations to the class struggle. There seems to be no expression of obligations to the workers which would imply the necessity to act in a non-sectarian manner in order to generate the possibility to create a unified arty. In this situation there seems to be no alternative than for various groups of Marxists to try and promote the formation of a united party. Obviously, there is no prospect of inevitable success in regard to this aim, but this should not be a discouragement to the attempt to realise what would be a significant development in relation to making progress towards the possibility of the success of international socialism. If one or two groups agreed to unify this could become an important precedent in relation to the prospect of the creating a united revolutionary party. Obviously, there is no possibility of inevitable success but if a process of unification could be established then this could create the conditions for the development of a new united party to be more than a good idea. But the present problem is that there is no organised expression of this objective by any of the major groups. Instead, the sectarian fragmentation of the potential forces of an effective revolutionary Marxism means that the concept of a revolutionary party seems to be merely a formality rather than being expressed in terms of the development of an organisation that can relate to the class struggle in a meaningful manner. What is urgently needed is that one group attempts to promote the possibility of unity in a serious and effective manner. This means the undermining of the present sectarian concerns of the various groups.

It could be argued that this attempt to unite the various contending Marxist groups is an unrealistic possibility because of the important influence of sectarianism. Many of the organisations still claim that they represent exclusively the interests of the workers and so uphold the aims of socialism in the most consistent and principled manner. But none of these groups has developed an effective influence within the working class and so these claims to be the most principled expression of the aims of socialism would seem to be problematical. Instead, what is obvious is that the creation of a united and democratic socialist party would be able to make an effective attempt to develop the support of the workers for what would be the expression of an agreed and uniform conception of a perspective of revolutionary change. This would mean that there would be credibility to the claim of this organisation to be the most principled expression of the historic interests of the workers and the objective of socialism. But if differences between contending political groups was the continued expression of the political situation this would imply that there was no agreement about a perspective for change and the character of the aim of socialism. This confusion could only undermine the possibility to establish the importance of the role of a definitive expression of a revolutionary party. Indeed, it is the aspect of sectarian rivalry which acts to undermine the credibility of the socialist perspective and it seems that this aspect of competition between the different groups seems to be more important than making progress in the class struggle. Furthermore, this situation means that there is no agreement between the different groups about what would constitute a principled strategy for change. Indeed, it seems that the various Marxist parties are increasingly unable to promote what could be considered to be a feasible perspective for changing society. Instead, some of the organisations are more concerned with maintaining orthodoxy and are content to outline their latest version of Trotsky’s transitional programme, as with the various perspectives of Red Flag. (Workers Power) Other groups tend to be content to adapt to the latest forms of mass action and so become essentially uncritical supporters of the latest manifestation of protest struggles. What this means is that the very importance of the role of the Marxist party for promoting the possible development of revolutionary consciousness of the workers is undermined by this apparent justification of dogmatism instead of a more precise understanding of the class struggle and the challenges that it has created. In these rigid terms it seems that it has become almost impossible to develop the possibility to create a popular and credible revolutionary party.

However, if we outline the problems involved in the creation of a revolutionary party in the most serious and precise manner, we may begin to establish at least in theory what is necessary in order to resolve these problems. Primarily it is necessary to reject the increasingly authoritarian model of the process of party building and instead advocate the principles of the maximum utilisation of inner party democracy as the basis to organise the development of revolutionary organisations. This aspect may involve the necessity of revolving party leaderships in order to try and avoid the formation of elitist cliques that dominate the various organisations. In this context there has to be the maximum expression of inner party democracy in relation to the development of the polices and programme of the organisation. In order to be credible, the programme of the party should recognise the complex difficulties involved in the attempt to realise the success of the class struggle. If the party has these aspects, there are no guarantees that it will become popular. Ultimately this issue of the popularity of the party depends on the development of class struggle, and this aspect cannot be predicted in advance. But at least a genuinely revolutionary party will be able to advocate a feasible and principled programme for change. Ultimately this is what defines the importance of the party. Whether these aspects result in the creation of a successful organisation that can lead a struggle for power cannot be determined in advance of these developments. But until the sectarian strife of the present is resolved it will not be possible to facilitate the basis of the conditions to create effective revolutionary parties.

In other words, we cannot predict that a popular revolutionary party can be created that is able to lead a successful struggle for revolutionary change. Instead, all that we can try to outline are the aspects that can facilitate this possible development. However, it could be suggested that the era of class struggle is coming to an end. Therefore, the potential to develop a popular revolutionary party has been undermined. But the exploitation and alienation generated by capitalist relations of production has not been overcome. This means the reasons to develop Marxist parties has not been ended by developments within the present social system. Hence it is the sectarian divisions between the rival groups undermine the possibility to create a unified and popular revolutionary party. It is the limitations of the Marxist parties that is the major problem undermining the potential to develop an effective Marxist organisation. If we can overcome the sectarian divisions of the rival Marxist groups, then the prospect to create a popular party becomes a potentiality. Obviously if this development occurs there is no guarantee that a mass Marxist organisation will be developed. The workers may still be reluctant to support this united group. But at least the situation will become more advantageous to the potential for the working class to begin to support what has become the uncontested party of Marxism.