IS THE APPROACH OF ANTI-BOLSHEVIK COMMUNISM A GENUINE ALTERNATIVE?

Paul Mattick has outlined his conception of a revolutionary alternative to the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky in his: “Anti-Bolshevik Communism” (Merlin Press, Milton Keynes 2007) He outlines in terms of an historical analysis what could be considered to be conception of a form of revolutionary Marxism which is critical of the theory and practice of Bolshevism. In other words, his view is that the approach of the Bolsheviks under Lenin had to result in the authoritarian regime of Stalin, and so it is necessary to outline a different conception of Marxism which would be more compatible with the standpoint of Marx and Engels. We would accept that this type of standpoint is quite credible but question whether it is able to define the approach of Lenin in a non-dogmatic manner. The point is that Lenin outlined his genuinely emancipatory conception of an alternative type of society in his work: ‘The State and Revolution’ which implied that the working class could become the major expression of the organisation of society in a popular and democratic manner. But obviously the problems of a situation of crisis after the Russian revolution meant that the regime could only maintain itself in an empirical manner which meant that the democratic and socialist principles of the Bolsheviks became compromised. The point is to what extent did this development represent the logical expression of what could be understood to be the elitist character of Bolshevism, or was this situation the result of the serious empirical problems of a situation connected to the develop of civil war and the challenges posed by the necessity to establish a successfully functioning economy? In other words what is not in dispute is that the Bolshevik regime acquired increasingly elitist and authoritarian functions but was this development an expression of the complex challenges posed by a serious economic situation, or was this situation the logical outcome of the elitist character of the theory of Leninism? In other words what is not in dispute that the ultimate outcome of the Bolshevik regime was that it became elitist and authoritarian but to what extent was this a logical outcome of an elitist character or was it instead the expression of the problems of a complex situation?

Mattick considers that there is only one particular strategy by which an emancipatory conception of socialism can be realised. He comments: “By itself, the workers self-initiative and self-organisation offers no guarantee for their emancipation. It has to be realised and maintained through the abolition of the capital-labour relationship in production, through a council system, which destroys the social class divisions and prevents the rise of new ones based on the control of production and distribution by the national state.” (pxi) But the problem with this perspective is that it is inherently dogmatic and not connected to the problems posed by the attempt to establish a credible revolutionary regime in conditions of economic and political crisis. It was the very aspect of class struggle which meant that the possibility to consolidate the supremacy of the Soviets required the expression of the development of a revolutionary regime which had authoritarian aspects. Hence the complexity of the situation after the October revolution meant that it was not possible to establish a situation of political consensus which could enable the development of a successful and functioning form of Soviet democracy. Instead, authoritarian measures had to be introduced in order to uphold the supremacy of the revolutionary regime. Furthermore, in a situation of economic crisis and political polarisation it was difficult to develop the role of a functioning soviet democracy. Instead, it seemed that in order to maintain the supremacy of revolutionary regimes that it was necessary to establish what could be defined as an authoritarian political system. However, the contradictory aspects of this situation are not recognised by Mattick. Instead he concludes that there was a logical relationship between the theory and practice of the Bolsheviks: “The revolutions which succeeded, first of all, in Russia and China, were not proletarian revolutions in the Marxist sense, leading to the ‘association of free and equal producers’, but state capitalist revolutions, which were objectively unable to issue into socialism. Marxism served here as a mere ideology to justify the rise of modified capitalist systems, which were no longer determined by market competition but controlled by way of the authoritarian state. Based on the peasantry, but designed with accelerated industrialisation to create an industrial proletariat, they were ready to abolish the traditional bourgeoise but not capital as a social relationship.” (pxi) But we would suggest that the outcome of the development of a systematic authoritarian regime that introduced aspects of exploitation within the economy was because of the complex situation which made it difficult to develop what could be defined as a genuine and credible conception of socialism. This point was expressed by the fact that even when consolidating his authoritarian regime Stalin still had to justify this development in terms of the ideology of socialism. Hence Stalin was implicitly aware that a contradiction between theory and practice had begun to be expressed in terms of the increasingly elitist and authoritarian character of the Bolshevik regime. In contrast Mattick is implying that the development of state capitalism was the logical outcome of the authoritarian and elitist character of the Bolshevik regime. But surely if the Bolsheviks were nothing more than elitists who distorted the objectives of Marxism, this aspect would be expressed in their theory? But instead of this aspect it could be suggested that under Stalin the expression of elitist economics and politics was defined in terms of the aims of socialism. But why would an inherently capitalist regime be so concerned to justify a socialist standpoint? Would it not be more credible to claim that what was being constructed was a contradictory society based on the role of what could be defined as a type of bureaucratic socialism? This would mean that the very aspects of economic exploitation and the subordination of the workers and peasants to a new elite was being justified as the necessary aspect of how socialism would be developed and consolidated. Obviously, this was not genuine socialism which could only be based on ending the importance of all aspects of economic domination and subordination, but instead the was a contradiction between theory and practice. This was because a new social formation based on a dominating ruling class was being justified as the expression of an emancipatory society that was creating the progressive system of socialism. Hence there was a contradiction between theory and practice. But these types of contradiction are not present in the standpoint of Mattick because he rejects the importance of the aspect of the ideological justification of the bureaucratic system. But the important point is that the ruling elite could only justify their domination in terms of the claim that they were leading the process of the creation of a socialist society. This standpoint is not illogical if we consider that it is based on the conception of a type of socialism that is made compatible with the political supremacy of the party elite. In contrast the perspective that state capitalism was being developed in the Soviet Union, which is being elaborated by Mattick, implicitly accepts that the contradiction between social practice and ideology is a necessary aspect of the system. But why should a state capitalist ruling class claim to be building socialism? This ideology of socialism is only logical and credible if it could be suggested that what is not occurring is a new form of capitalism but instead in an elitist manner a caricature of genuine socialism is actually being established. The nationalisation of the economy under the control of the party is an indication that it is possible to describe this economy as socialist, even if we would reject the suggestion that this development is a genuine expression of the creation of this type of society. Instead, the ideology of Marxism and socialism is being utilised in order to justify the view that the party elite does in some principled manner express the class interests of the workers and peasants. But the actual situation means that this ideology is false. However, without this type of ideology the party would not be able to uphold its domination of society in credible terms. It has to propagate the ideology of socialism in order to contend that the party is expressing the interests of the workers and peasants. The role of ideological illusion is the only manner by which the party is able to explain its supremacy within society and to claim that it is the logical outcome of the revolutionary process of 1917. But Mattick seems to gloss over the aspect of ideology and instead in a dogmatic manner contend that the development of state capitalist regimes is somehow compatible with an ideology that suggests that socialism was created in the USSR. However, we have to ask why would a state capitalist regime continue to insist that it is developing socialism? This contradiction can only be resolved if we understand that the objective of socialism has been redefined so that is made compatible with the domination of the Stalinist party elite over society.

In other words, the character of the Soviet Union under the domination of Stalin still expressed some aspects of what would be considered to be aspects of a genuine socialist society such as the role of the nationalised economy. However, these aspects would also be distorted in terms of the aspect of bureaucratic domination and so the conception that socialism was being created would be connected to the role of the party elite and the connected aspect of the domination of a managerial stratum over the economy. But the point is that the importance of the very process of proletarian revolution would mean that the possibility to establish some form of capitalist economy was not possible. Indeed, this development would have to be connected to the role of a system of private production by companies as opposed to the aspect of the control of the economy by a bureaucratic state. In other words, the party elite could suggest that this bureaucratic socialism was part of the legacy of the process of revolutionary change, and so the very development of the elite rule of the party was considered in these terms to be part of the heritage of the revolutionary aspects of the radical change that had occurred. However, it is problematical to suggest that this development was the result of the legacy of Lenin’s leadership of the government between 1917-24. Instead, he tried to reconcile the role of the supremacy of the party with the attempt to facilitate the development of the realisation of socialist objectives. But Mattick suggests that Leninism is opposed to the genuine expression of the aims of socialism and is instead defined by the attempt to realise state capitalism. In other words, the important role of the leadership of the revolutionary party cannot establish the realisation of the aim of a democratic socialist society. Instead: “By itself, the workers self-initiative and self-organisation offers no guarantee for their emancipation. It has to be realised and maintained through the abolition of the capital-labour relationship in production, through a council system, which destroys the social class divisions and prevents the rise of new ones based on the control of production and distribution by the national state. However difficult this may prove to be, the history of the existing state capitalist systems leaves no doubt that this is the only way to a socialist society.” (pxi) But the Bolsheviks did obtain a majority in the major Soviets and this was the basis to realise the success of the October revolution. There was an initial relationship between the role of the Soviets and the leadership of the Bolsheviks, and so in this manner it could be suggested that a revolutionary democratic regime was established. Hence the initial approach of the Bolsheviks was based on this aim to express and realise the objectives defined by the Soviet to establish a popular revolutionary regime. The government of the Soviets in which the Bolsheviks were dominant had been created by the expression of the aspirations of the workers and peasants to establish a regime based on the principles of radical change. Therefore, it was dogmatic of Korsch to claim that what had occurred was a state capitalist revolution that was based on the objective of the introduction of a state capitalist society. Instead, it has to suggested that the difficult economic and political problems of the post-revolutionary period meant that there seemed to be no alternative to the increasing expression of the policies of the Bolsheviks to act in authoritarian terms. In this pragmatic but unforeseen manner the aspects of the creation of a new type of bureaucratic social formation became generated. This does not mean that the Bolsheviks had a false ideology which was based on the deception of the people concerning their real objectives of establishing a new elite type of society, but rather that the complexity of the situation meant that the development of the aspects of the creation of a new elite social formation became increasingly realised. However, the contradictions of this situation were expressed by the fact that this development was conceived as being an aspect of the process of the creation of genuine socialism. The complication was that under the Lenin regime it could be suggested that the elitist aspects of the government was in an important manner connected to the serious attempt to realise the aspirations of the people. In this context both the policies of war communism and the New Economic Policy were an aspect of trying to realise the interests of the workers and peasants. Indeed, these policies would not make sense if they can be conceived as being nothing more than the expression of the creation of a new state capitalist society. Instead, a bureaucratic workers state was being formed because in an elitist manner the Bolshevik government still attempted to express the interests of the workers and peasants.

However, this situation could not be defined as genuine socialism because there was a lack of the expression of an effective system of economic and political democracy. Instead, the rule of the single dominant party meant the expression of the possibility to establish relations of domination and subordination within the economy, even if the aspects of capitalism had been overcome. Only the establishment of genuine economic and political democracy could change this aspect in terms of the creation of a democratic type of socialism. Mattick defines this development as the expression of state capitalism: “Although designated as socialism, state control of the economy and over social life generally, exercised by a privileged social layer and newly emerging ruling class, has perpetuated for the industrial as well as agricultural labouring classes the conditions of exploitation and oppression which had once been their lot under the semi-feudal social relations of capitalistically underdeveloped nations….socialism became quite generally identified with the prevailing state capitalist systems.” (pxii) But it could be suggested that without the role of private enterprise it is problematical to define this type of society as state capitalist. Instead, the continuation of the aspects of exploitation and the subordination of labour within the relations of production is defined by different economic objectives. But Mattick considers that the development of state capitalism is the expression of the very dynamics of the capitalist system: “This possibility finds its support in the centralising tendencies inherent in capitalism itself. This concentration of capital, its monopolisation, and the rise of co-operations in which ownership is ownership is separated from direct control, and finally, the reluctant integration of state and capital in the mixed economy, with its fiscal and monetary manipulations, seems to spell a tendency in the direction of fully fledged state capitalism.” (pxii) But it could be suggested that this understanding is a dogmatic interpretation of the character of global capitalism and that the emphasis on the importance of the role of the state has been exaggerated. Instead, it can be suggested that capitalism is still defined by the importance of companies that have aspects of ownership and domination by private entrepreneurs. Hence it could be suggested that state capitalism is actually a questionable definition of a possible form of society and that the choice is between the continuation of a private type of capitalism or the alternative of bureaucratic society or the development of a genuine democratic socialism. In other words there are important choices and the issue of what occurs ultimately depends on the level of consciousness and organisation of the workers to try and realise the development of a genuine alternative type of society without the aspect of economic exploitation or political domination.

Mattick concludes that the role of communist parties is to advocate the formation of state capitalist economies and societies: “But should everything fail, and an intensified class struggle pose the question of social revolution, there can be no doubt that these parties will opt for state capitalism, which in their view is the only possible form of socialism. Thus, the revolution would be at once a counterrevolution. The end of capitalism demands therefore, first of all, the end of Bolshevik ideology and the rise of an anti-Bolshevik revolutionary movement, such as has been attempted at the earlier revolutionary situation to which this book tries to draw attention.” (pxii-xiii) But in actuality the communist parties of Western Europe advocated the continuation of capitalism in terms of the realisation of reformist objectives and the end of the domination of the present social system was limited to the role of the occupation of Europe by the armies of the Soviet Union in the post second world war period. Hence ultimately Stalinism was based on an accommodation to an acceptance of the domination of world capitalism and it did not attempt to establish a serious alternative, and instead the formation of bureaucratic regimes was limited to particular countries occupied by the USSR after the second world war. In actuality the Stalinist system was based on an accommodation to the continued domination of global capitalism.

We would suggest that it is not possible to develop a principled revolutionary movement that is anti-Bolshevik. Ultimately the attempt to realise this possibility can only be based on the rejection of the role of the necessity of radical and popular struggle to try and achieve the transformation of capitalism into a different and more emancipatory type of society. Instead, it will become suggested that what is necessary is the advocacy of reforming and gradual type of change instead of radical attempts to transform the character of the system. In other words, the genuine Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky is connected to the role of the Soviets, and so there is no conception of the expression of Soviet democracy which can be expressed in different terms. Hence the standpoint of an anti-Bolshevik revolutionary struggle based on the importance of the popular democracy of the Soviets is effectively an illusory approach. Indeed, this development never occurred in terms of the events of the 1917 revolutionary process. Instead, only when the Bolsheviks became the leadership of the Soviets was it possible to realise the political conditions in which these organisations could become dominant within society. Thus, it is not surprising that Mattick does not outline how Soviet democracy could be realised, instead this objective is only outlined in vague terms. But we would suggest that the October revolution was a genuine expression of the attempt to establish the supremacy of a system of Soviet democracy. In this manner the development of bureaucratic elitism was an undermining of the potential of this radical process of change. But such a situation was the result of the complex and unfavourable conditions in which the revolution occurred and was not the inevitable outcome of the supposed authoritarian elitism of the Bolsheviks. Instead, the situation of the civil war led to the formation of a bureaucratic type of government and this type of administration seemed to become practically necessary in order to attempt to resolve the complex problems of the post-revolutionary situation. But it could be suggested that under Lenin’s leadership this type of administration was genuinely considered to be temporary and a necessary prelude to the redevelopment of the role of Soviet democracy after the end of the civil war. But what was not being established was the relation of this situation of one-party rule with the possibility to develop a democratic socialism that seemed to require the end of this aspect. Hence the bureaucratic elitism of the domination of one party only appeared to be conducive to the creation of a system that was not conducive to the realisation of what would be considered to be democratic socialism. However, this situation of the domination of one revolutionary party seemed to be inevitable given the opportunist and reactionary character of the other political organisations. They seemed to aspire to the restoration of capitalism and were opposed to the aims and role of the revolutionary regime. In this situation the role of the dominant revolutionary party seemed to be an inevitability. Indeed, Mattick does not satisfactorily address how this situation could be changed in terms of the realisation of a credible policy of popular democracy. Instead, there seemed to be no alternative to the supremacy of the Bolsheviks acting on behalf of the interests of the workers and peasants. In this context what could be defined as a bureaucratic workers state was an expression of progress and expressed the possibility for change that would be able to facilitate the realisation of a democratic socialist society. Only the ascendency of Stalinism led to a different situation that ended the possibilities for reform of the system in a progressive manner. Hence it was not Bolshevism that expressed the tendency for the development of authoritarian elitism and instead the very distortion of this approach by the role of Stalinism. The domination of Stalin meant an end to the role of the degenerated workers state and instead the consolidation of a new type of regime. Mattick would contend that these developments are the outcome of the role of the elitism of Bolshevism but the problem was an empirical one that the parties of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries adopted a standpoint based on opposition to the Bolshevik government. Hence it would seem that the domination of the single party became inevitable under those circumstances. But it could also be suggested that the Bolsheviks should have done more to try and establish a credible coalition government of all of the socialist parties. It was not understood that their dogmatic approach in this context could ultimately result in the Stalinist bureaucratic social formation. In other words, mistakes were made that led to the development of an elitist regime. But Mattick considers that this outcome was the logical result of the approach of the Bolsheviks. However, they were not responsible for the antagonism of the other socialist parties towards their administration which made the possibility of a genuine coalition government an impossibility. Instead, there seemed to be no credible alternative to the Bolsheviks forming a single revolutionary administration because this seemed to be the only option in a polarised situation.

In other words, the only possible alternative was the successful realisation of a counterrevolutionary government. Hence the aspect of the political supremacy of the Bolsheviks may not have been the realisation of a genuine democratic socialist regime but it was the most progressive alternative under the given circumstances. The only other credible option was the success of the political supporters of counterrevolution. These choices were not recognised by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries who instead adopted an effective approach of political abstentionism. In this context the only option was for the Bolsheviks to be the major aspect of the Soviet government and in this manner oppose the possible development of the success of the forces of counterrevolution. However, Mattick seems to deny these aspects of the post-revolutionary situation and instead vaguely advocates the realisation of popular democracy? But what did this mean given the opposition of the other radical parties to the role of the Bolsheviks? There was only a choice between a government based on the majority will of the Soviets or else the victory of counterrevolution. It could be suggested that this type of administration could not result in genuine socialism, but there was not an alternative under the difficult political circumstances. The point is that the criticism of Mattick is explicit about making criticism but is vague about what is the progressive alternative under the present circumstances.

For example, he interprets Luxemburg as emphasising the role of the mass strike of the workers in order to realise radical change, but he does not outline what this process would mean in terms of the character of the post-revolutionary society. He comments: “She does not confuse revolutionary consciousness with the intellectual consciousness of the Leninist professional revolutionists, but for her it is the act consciousness of the masses themselves, growing from the constraint of necessity. The masses act revolutionary because they cannot act otherwise, and because they must act. Marxism to her is not only ideology which crystallises in the organisation of the, but the living and struggling proletariat which actualises Marxism not because it wants to, but because it cannot do otherwise. While for Lenin the masses are only material which the conscious revolutionists work….in Rosa Luxemburg’s writings the conscious revolutionists spring not from growing insight but more still from the mass in its actual revolutionary activity.” (p44) In other words only the logical result of dynamic and democratic mass struggle can create a situation that would make the realisation of popular socialism a possibility. This is said to be the standpoint of Luxemburg when contrasted to the apparent inherent elitism of Bolshevism. But how does this analysis explain the emphasis of the Bolsheviks in 1917 on the attempt to establish a democratic majority in the major Soviets? The point is that the Bolsheviks aspired to create a successful and principled revolutionary perspective based on obtaining the support of the workers organised in the Soviets. There is nothing to suggest that the approach of Luxemburg would be opposed to this approach. Indeed, it could be suggested that this perspective was a confirmation of her strategy of change. Both the Bolsheviks and Luxemburg were attempting to connect the mass movements of the workers with the development of increased support for the aims of a revolutionary perspective. Indeed it could be suggested that the Bolsheviks in 1917 had become the convinced supporters of the approach of Luxemburg and so were opposing their previous emphasis on an elitist approach. In other words the perspectives of Luxemburg concerning the radical potential of the mass strike were entirely compatible with the attempt of the Bolsheviks to achieve a situation of the hegemony of the role of Soviet democracy.

This point was established by the fact that Luxemburg considered the Bolshevik regime to be a genuine expression of the process of proletarian revolution. However, she did criticise aspects of the policies of the Bolsheviks such as the decision to dissolve the role of the Constituent Assembly. In other words what she considered to be an expression of a genuine form of proletarian regime could carry out policies that facilitated the aspects of bureaucratic elitism. The approach to these developments was not to reject the validity of the Bolshevik regime but instead to suggest limited measures that would facilitate the possibility to correct the mistakes that had been made. However, she did not seem to have addressed the attitudes of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries but instead emphasised that in overall terms the Bolshevik government was an expression of the role of a genuine form of worker’s state. This standpoint seems to be ignored by Mattick who instead wants to claim that Luxemburg is a critic of the Bolshevik administration. But instead, it would be more accurate to claim that she is a critical supporter and is this manner trying to actually promote policies that would result in the increased support for this government. In other words, she does not consider that the possible tendency towards elitism defines the character of the Bolshevik administration, and it is instead a form of government that depends on the support of the workers. In this manner she is implicitly critical of the opposition of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries because this standpoint can only uphold the interests of counter-revolution. What is primarily required in this situation is the development of a closer relationship between the government and the workers and the promotion of the realisation of the aim of international revolution so that the various limitations of the administration can be overcome by the increasing of the influence of the international working class. Hence there is nothing in this approach that can represent sympathy for the oppositional stance of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Hence Mattick can only contend in vague terms that there is an opposition between the bureaucratic elitism of Lenin when compared to the support of popular democracy of Luxemburg, but it could be suggested that what was actually being manifested was a stance of critical support of the revolutionary regime as a genuine expression of the role of the soviets. In this manner any criticism made by Luxemburg had to be understood in this context. Hence her actual major criticism was made of the Brest Litovsk treaty made by the revolutionary regime with Germany. This was considered by Luxemburg to be the expression of accommodation to the interests of German imperialism. But in actuality it could be suggested that this standpoint represented a dogmatic denial of the importance of an adverse balance of international forces that had to be tackled by the Soviet regime in Russia. Luxemburg’s standpoint represented a moralistic view that was not able to sufficiently appreciate the importance of an adverse balance of class forces which meant that the Soviet government had to make treaties with the major imperialist power that was capable of restarting a war of aggression. However, Luxemburg was being more correct when she made some critical comments about the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly by the Soviet regime. Hence in overall terms she can be considered a critical supporter of the Bolshevik regime and any criticism she made was in terms of support for the new revolutionary administration. Thus, she would not be sympathetic to Mattick’s view that the new regime could only express the development of a state capitalist society. Instead, she welcomed what was considered to be a proletarian revolutionary regime and any criticism that was made was in terms of support for the new government. She was far more critical of the opportunism of the German Social Democrats and emphasised their betrayal of the interests of the international working class. In other words, the approach of Luxemburg was based on the expression of critical support of the Bolshevik regime. She was in solidarity with the new revolutionary regime and the analysis of Mattick cannot obscure this interpretation of her standpoint.

In relation to Lenin Mattick is only able to make a critical analysis of the theory and practice of Lenin as essentially the justification of authoritarian elitism which could not advance the realisation of the principles of socialism. He suggests that the approach of Lenin was only able to result in the development of a society based on authoritarian elitism that ultimately led to a type of state capitalism. The initial popular character of the October revolution was because of the dynamism of the actions of the workers and had nothing to do with the role of the Bolsheviks: “But even in the cities, Lenin was not the decisive factor in the conflicts between capital and labour. On the contrary he was helplessly drawn along in the wake of the workers, who in their demands and actual measures went far beyond the Bolsheviks. It was not Lenin who conducted the revolution, but the revolution who conducted him. Though as late as the October uprising Lenin restricted his earlier and more through-going demands to that of control of production, and to stop short with the socialisation of the banks and transport facilities, without the general abolition of private ownership, workers paid no further attention to his views and expropriated enterprises. It is interesting to recall that the first decree of the Bolshevik government was directed against the wild, unauthorised expropriations of factories through workers councils. But these soviets were stronger than the party apparatus, and they compelled Lenin to issue the decree for the nationalisation of all industrial enterprises. It was only under the pressure brought to bear by the workers that the Bolsheviks consented to this change in their own plans. Gradually, through the extension of state power the influence of the soviets became weakened, until today they serve no more than decorative purposes.” (p53) But if this is an accurate description of what happened, which we very much doubt, it only shows the importance of the political relationship between the workers and the Bolsheviks. The point is that the role of the soviets became primary after the revolution of October 1917 and so this meant the Bolshevik government had to respond to the aspirations of these institutions. Only the problems created by the civil war meant that a party dominated government became expressed and so an aspect of the political degeneration of the regime occurred. But the initial character of the leadership of Lenin was expressed in his ability to understand the aspirations of the workers to create a society based on the expression of economic and political democracy, and so the new regime attempted to represent these aspirations. Hence what occurred could not be defined as state capitalism, contrary to the view of Mattick, but was instead the realisation of a worker’s government which expressed the aspirations of the workers and peasants via the role of the soviets. Only the situation of civil war led to the bureaucratisation of the regime, but it still in a limited manner represented the aspirations of the workers. Hence what had occurred was not the expression of state capitalism but instead the role of a degenerated workers state which still in a limited manner was able to realise the aims and interests of the workers.

Mattick outlines a dogmatic view that the workers and peasants carried out a revolution in 1917 which was then betrayed by the bureaucratic elitism of the Bolshevik government. But why did the apparently elitist Bolshevik’s act in terms of the perspective of realising the aspirations of the workers and peasants. This point is not addressed by Mattick. The point is that the Bolsheviks were able to respond to the aspirations of the workers because under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky they had a principled perspective of the aim of the realisation of a genuine proletarian revolution. There was a situation of the interaction of party and class which was expressed by the aim of ‘All power to the Soviets’. The party was able to promote this principled perspective of revolutionary change, and on that basis, it was possible to create an alliance of workers and the party. The party acted to organise the workers in terms of the aim of ‘All power to the Soviets’. The workers responded to this perspective and in these terms a process of revolutionary change was achieved. In other words, the leadership of Lenin was shown to be both perceptive and principled and a genuine development of the overthrow of the bourgeois government was achieved and so in this manner the role of the Soviets became of primary importance. Mattick can formerly acknowledge the political role of Lenin but only in order to belittle it and to portray it as unprincipled and an expression of elitism. We would suggest that this is a caricature and that instead Lenin was the genuine leader of a process of proletarian revolution. However, the problems of the civil war and the economic situation were to result in the development of tendencies that facilitated the development of a bureaucratic elitist regime. But this outcome does not undermine the importance of Lenin’s revolutionary role despite the dogmatic criticisms of Mattick.

In other words, Mattick contends that the Bolsheviks were never really concerned with anything other than the establishment of their supreme political power. In this manner it was possible to develop a state capitalist economy: “Like all governments, the Bolshevik regime involves submission of all social layers to its authority. Slowly centralising all power and control into their hands, the Bolsheviks were soon able to dictate policy. Once more Russia became thoroughly organised in the interests of a special class – the class of privilege in the emerging system of state capitalism.” (p66) This understanding is based on the problematical claim that the Bolsheviks merely wanted to realise their own political power in order to establish a system of state capitalism. But why was their doctrine about the expression of the intention to realise socialism and communism? It could be suggested that their policies could not result in the success of these objectives, but this would be an unintended result of the role of the Bolshevik regime. Instead, it is implied by Mattick that the actual intention of the Bolsheviks is to realise a system of state capitalism. But why did they outline their objectives in terms of the aim to achieve socialism and communism? It could be suggested that their approach could not realise this standpoint, but this would be an unintended result of the limitations of their policies and the problems posed by the unfavourable economic and political situation. The point was that the development of civil war meant the necessity to create the role of an authoritarian type of government which meant that it become problematical to realise a democratic type of socialism. However, the aims of the Bolsheviks were defined in terms of the aims of socialism, and so in this manner the outcome of state capitalism would actually be the unintended result of the expression of their ascendency over society. Instead, it has to be suggested that the Bolsheviks attempted to realise socialist aims in an elitist manner and so the character of society could be defined in these terms as an expression of a form of bureaucratic socialism. This was still unsatisfactory because a democratic type of socialism would be the most progressive outcome, but the difficulties of the situation meant that the only possibility to express the role of Bolshevik government was in terms of the practices of an authoritarian and elitist character. But the aspects of what could be considered to be state capitalism were an expression of the attempt to create the conditions for socialism. It could be suggested that the Bolsheviks did not have success in the realisation of this perspective, but this was the unintended result of what became a failed policy. Therefore, the result of this problematical approach was the justification of the rule of the party elite in order to attempt to develop the process of the realisation of socialism. Hence the aim of socialism was outlined in terms that no longer had any important democratic aspects and instead was identified with the role of the Bolshevik party. It was the activity and ideology of this organisation which would define the validity of the perspective that socialism was being created. But without the genuine participation of the workers in the process of trying to realise economic and social aims this approach was problematical. However, this society could not be said to be classically capitalist because it was based on the domination of a party that had socialist objectives. The result of this ideology was a bureaucratic socialist economy in which the aims of the party to overcome the domination of capitalism and replace it with a new type of economic system were important. But such a system could not be democratic socialist because of the lack of the influence of the workers in the organisation of the economy and the related inability to establish a genuine political system that would enable the party to be made accountable to the people.

But Mattick contends that the only alternative to a democratic socialist economy and political system could be state capitalism: “The Bolsheviks of course were convinced that what they were building in Russia was if not socialism, at least the next best thing to socialism because they were completing the process which in the Western nations was the still only the main trend of development. They had abolished the market economy and had expropriated the bourgeoisie; they had also gained complete control over the government. For the Russian workers nothing had changed; they were merely faced by another set of bosses, politicians and indoctrinators. Their position equalled the workers position in all capitalist countries during times of war.” (p71) This seems to be a dogmatic view that denies the importance of the political changes of 1917 and the realisation of a government that was committed to be an expression of the role of the Soviets and its relationship to the principles of popular democracy. Furthermore, the ideology of the revolutionary government was based on the aim of the achievement of socialism and the development of the progress of international proletarian revolution. It could be suggested that the practice of the Bolshevik administration did not correspond to the theoretical perspective, but this could be because of the difficulties of the economic and political situation rather than the supposed aspect that the government was committed to state capitalist objectives. Obviously in a pragmatic manner the Bolsheviks did not reject the role of state capitalism, but this was because it considered that this aspect was a necessary expression of developing the material conditions for the realisation of socialism and communism. Instead Mattick suggests that the aim of state capitalism defined the primary character of the Bolshevik administration. But if this view was valid, it would only imply that there was a contradiction between the theory and practice of the Bolsheviks. Their intention was to realise socialism, but the actual outcome of their policies was to consolidate a system of state capitalism. The point is that in actuality the theory of the Bolsheviks was connected to the approach of Lenin’s ‘State and revolution’, which outlined the principles and aspects of a system of popular and participatory democracy for organising the economy and political system. It can be suggested that the actual outcome was different to this standpoint, but this development indicated a difference between theory and practice. In contrast, Mattick implies that Lenin intended to create a system of state capitalism and so the result was in correspondence to this viewpoint. But the conception of state capitalism was actually considered to be an expression of a practical policy that would promote the possibility to realise socialism and communism. None of Lenin’s articles suggested that state capitalism was an end in itself. Therefore Mattick has to effectively ignore the aspects of Lenin’s perspectives and instead maintain that he became an adherent to the aim of the realisation of state capitalism. But the point is that Lenin considered that state capitalism was a pragmatic policy that would contribute to the development of the basis to establish socialism. The role of the state in the promotion of the private production of the peasants was connected to the realisation of a relationship to the industrial economy that was organised in terms of the principles of socialism. In this pragmatic manner the objective basis of the generation of socialism was possible. But Mattick rejects the importance of these pragmatic aspects of considering the development of a socialist economy and instead can only conceive of the two possible alternatives of a form of capitalism or the development of the democratic socialism of the producers. He cannot conceive that under unfavourable economic conditions it may be necessary to adopt transitional measures that enable the development of the possibility for socialism to be created. Instead, he can only envisage the alternatives of the justification of state capitalism or the realisation of democratic socialism. But in actuality there were also other complex and practical possibilities such as the introduction of measures which ultimately unintentionally resulted in the development of what could be considered to be bureaucratic socialism. But the point is that the Bolsheviks attempted to introduce economic measures that resulted in the development of an elitist bureaucratic economic system, but this was the unexpected outcome of the problems of a complex situation which could not express the aspect of a democratic socialist economic system. In this manner there was a contradiction between theory and practice. But this complexity is not recognised by Mattick who can only conceive of the role of the actual intention of the Bolsheviks to introduce what he defines as a state capitalist type of economy.

This conclusion is connected to the view that only the activity of the workers in struggle can create the conditions for a democratic socialist economy. This is the approach of what he defines as council communism: “The groups of Council Communists recognise also that no real change is possible under present conditions unless the anti-capitalistic forces grow stronger than the pro-capitalist forces, and that it is impossible to organise anti-capitalistic forces of such a strength within capitalistic relations. From the analysis of present day society and from a study of previous class struggles it concludes that the spontaneous actions of dissatisfied masses will, in the process of their rebellion, create their own organisations, and that these organisations, arising out of the social conditions, alone can end the present social arrangement.”(p84) But the issue is not tackled is how the development of popular organisations of mass struggle will be able to create a different and democratic socialist society because of the presumed possibilities of their forms of struggle. Instead, it could be suggested that the most that can be achieved is forms of defensive organisation and so the issue of the development of socialism is still something that requires the role and influence of a revolutionary party and its ideology. The point is that the development of the possibility of socialism has not been the result of any mass struggles and instead it has only been the relationship of a socialist party to the role of the workers which has created the prospect for the realisation of this objective of a new type of society. Hence it is important that the Marxist party is able to advocate a programme of change that will enable the workers to become convinced of the necessity to support the realisation of this objective and so in this manner attempt to create a new type of socialist society. But Mattick seems to gloss over the importance of this perspective and instead in a vague manner contends that the dynamism of the role of the mass movement will somehow generate the possibility to realise this type of emancipatory change. In other words, he is actually justifying an unrealistic perspective as the only basis for the expression of the possibility of socialism and so criticising the Bolsheviks for not supporting this type of approach in a principled manner. Indeed, it can be suggested that the October revolution was able to occur because of the development of a dynamic relationship between the role of the party and the working class organised in the Soviets, and this process of interaction generated the possibility of change. Indeed, this development would seem to actually correspond to the essentials of the very perspective being outlined by Mattick but he interprets the October revolution of 1917 as essentially merely the expression of the supremacy of the party elite. But in actuality this process of change could only occur in terms of the interaction of party and class that is being advocated by Mattick. However, he proposes to interpret the actions of the Bolsheviks as being merely the result of the attempt to create a state capitalist type of society.

In other words he contends that the Bolsheviks rejected the only expression of the aims of democratic socialism which he defines in the following terms: “The groups further realise….. that such a society can function only with the direct participation of the workers in all decisions necessary; its concept of socialism is unrealisable on the basis of a separation between workers and organisers. The groups do not claim to be acting for the workers, but consider themselves as those members of the working class who have, for one reason or another, recognised evolutionary trends towards capitalism’s downfall, and who attempt to coordinate the present activities of the workers to that end. They know that they are no more than propaganda groups, able only to suggest necessary courses of action, but unable to preform them in the interests of the class. This the class has to do for itself. The present functions of the groups, though related to the perspectives of the future, attempt to base themselves entirely on the present needs of the workers. On all occasions, they try to foster self-initiative and self-action of the workers…. They demonstrate in word and deed that the labour movement must foster its own interests exclusively; that society as a whole cannot truly exist until classes are abolished; that the workers, considering nothing but there specific, must immediately interests, must and do attack all the other classes and interests of the exploitative society .. and so prepare themselves to solve the even more urgent problems of the morrow.”(p85) But what this vague perspective does not establish is how the workers will be able to establish a democratic socialist society based on the expression of a vague conception of democratic socialism. For example, how will the organisation of a process of what seems to be spontaneous forms of mass struggle be able to achieve the clarity of definite perspectives based on the expression of the aim of an emancipatory form of socialism that is able to reject the importance of the role of definite political leadership of a revolutionary party? This ambiguous strategy may be able to express the view that the spontaneous struggles of the workers will be able to achieve the formation of a democratic socialist society, but it is not explained how this lack of definite organisation within the process of mass struggle will be able to realise this objective. The point is that there does not seem to be any credible alternative to the important role of a hegemonic and influential revolutionary party if the struggles of the workers are to assume a revolutionary character. Instead in vague terms it is being suggested that the dynamics of spontaneous struggle can achieve both the overcoming of the supremacy of capitalism and so realise a democratic type of socialism, but this vague hope is not outlined in terms of a definite strategy of change and the lack of the importance of the revolutionary party is not justified in relation to the justification of this vague perspective of social transformation. Instead, we would suggest that the development of a relationship between party and class is vital if the process of revolutionary change is to be realised and the possibility to begin constructing socialism is to be established. In other words, the view that the spontaneous struggle of the workers can realise these radical objectives is an optimistic view that has never been historically realised. It is correct for Mattick to suggest that the role of the Marxist party is to encourage the development of the dynamic struggles of the workers and to encourage the expression of the potential to create a socialist society, but this acceptance of the importance of revolutionary leadership only indicates that the logical result of this development would be the formation of a government in which the role of the Marxist party would be important. Instead of the attempt to justify the view that the importance of the party can be superseded by the dynamics of the class struggle it would be more relevant and realistic to suggest how this aspect of the leadership of the Marxist organisation can be reconciled with the aspirations of the workers in a principled manner. In this context instead of the unrealistic claim that the importance of the Marxist party should be superseded it should instead be outlined how the role of the socialist organisation can become the basis to promote the creation of a democratic socialist society. Hence the party need not be elitist and aiming to establish its own domination of society and instead can be the expression of the possibility to facilitate the capacity of the workers to establish a democratic economic and political system. In other words, this prospect cannot be realised without the role of party-political organisation. The workers cannot spontaneously establish and consolidate a socialist society. Instead, they need the guidance of the Marxist party, but this aspect need not result in elitism because the very importance of the party is to provide leadership in order to generate the development of the capacity of the workers to create an economic and social system based on the principles of popular democracy. Hence the role of the party is not elitist and is instead defined by the attempt to make progress in the realisation of a democratic socialist society. But it is unrealistic for Mattick to suggest that this process of change can be achieved spontaneously without the aspect of political leadership. If this aspect of leadership is principled then this means that the party will be facilitating the development of the realisation of the capacity of the workers to create socialism. But instead of this credible approach Mattick is implying that this process of change can be spontaneously realised by the workers without the importance of political organisation. However, the problem is that his perspective has never been successfully realised. Instead, the defeats in the class struggle have continued to indicate the necessity to develop a process of interaction between a revolutionary party and the working class. Hence the lack of progress in the class struggle is because of the increasing failure to create a Marxist party that is able to relate to the workers in a principled manner and as a result advocate a principled programme of revolutionary change.

This criticism of the apparent problems of the approach of Mattick is not meant to suggest that what is justified is an elitist understanding of the relationship of party and class. Instead, the point being made is that the spontaneous actions of the workers are not in and of themselves sufficient in order to realise socialism. In other words, there has to be a necessary and principled relationship between party and class. But the very major objective of the strategy of the party should be to facilitate the development of the potential of the workers to both engage in militant struggle and in that manner to become increasingly supportive of the aim of revolutionary change. This very development of a relationship between party and class would then become crucial both in relation to the task of ending the domination of capitalism and in terms of establishing a revolutionary type of society. It could be suggested that this was the very approach adopted by the Bolsheviks and was expressed in their objective of trying to facilitate the realisation of a society based on the role of the democracy of the Soviets. Contrary to the view of Mattick the Bolsheviks were not elitist and instead promoted the attempt to develop the capacity of the workers who were increasingly organised in the Soviets to attempt to achieve the revolutionary transformation of society. Indeed, Mattick ambiguously suggests that Karl Korsch was right to critically support the Bolsheviks until they accommodated to the domination of global capitalism in the mid 1920’s. But this dogmatic view does not explain that the most important ideological aspect of regression of the Bolshevik regime was the adoption of the approach of socialism in one country and the effective repudiation of the importance of international proletarian revolution. But the point is that sections of the Bolsheviks opposed this opportunist approach in terms of the support of the aim of international proletarian revolution in terms of the development of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky. Only from within the ranks of the party would it be possible to establish a principled expression of international socialism. In other words, the Bolshevik leadership had rejected the aims of the Lenin-Trotsky leadership of the initial revolutionary regime. Thus, the struggle for principled socialism could only be successful if the party was reformed and a more principled leadership that was committed to the success of the international class struggle. But Mattick considers this issue an irrelevancy because he implies that the Bolsheviks were elitist and so logically the development of Stalinism was the logical outcome of their authoritarian character. Thus, he can only imply that the Left opposition could never be successful and so achieve the defeat of Stalinism. Instead, Stalinism is considered to be the logical outcome of the elitist character of Bolshevism. But the very development of the Left opposition indicated that there was an alternative in terms of the attempt to realise a policy of international socialism. Stalin could only be victorious by ending all aspects of inner party democracy and even by ultimately undermining the importance of his Bukharinist allies. The development of this authoritarian regime was an indication that this situation was not the logical result of the character of Bolshevism and instead represented the end of the importance of the role of the Communist party which was replaced by the domination of the Stalinist elite. The ideology of socialism in one country was the justification of this development and the aim of international proletarian revolution was effectively rejected. In this manner the bureaucratic socialism of Lenin was replaced by the ascendency of a new system of authoritarianism. But Mattick cannot credibly explain these developments because in a rigid manner he can only suggest that an elitist regime was established by the October revolution. Thus, Stalinism is considered to be the logical outcome of what is understood to be an elitist revolution. But this approach denies the importance of the radical differences between Leninism and Stalinism. We would suggest that the outcome of Stalinism was a rejection of the aims and principles of the October revolution, and this was expressed by the ending of all aspects of genuine Soviet democracy. Instead, the domination of the communist party became the defining feature of a process of the political degeneration of what had been originally a revolutionary regime. In contrast Mattick suggests that Stalinism was essentially the continuation of Leninism. The differences between Lenin and Stalin are denied in these terms.

Thus, the approach of Mattick contends that Lenin effectively advocated the importance of an elitism that could not overcome the aspect of the continuation of the role of capitalism in a new form. But this interpretation of Leninism would imply that Lenin’s ideology was essentially false and was based on an illusory conception of socialism which could not be realised because of its authoritarian and elitist character. In this manner all that was possible was the realisation of a form of state capitalism. But if this was the actual development why did the Bolsheviks emphasise the view that the aim was to achieve the development of socialism in Russia and to try and promote the success of international proletarian revolution? Surely the situation of the development of state capitalism would be reflected in the ideology of the Bolshevik’s? Mattick resolves this issue by the justification of the identity of the role of the Soviets with the monopoly of power of the Bolsheviks: “However, just as Lenin equated soviet power with the power of the Bolshevik Party, so he saw in the latter’s government monopoly only the realisation of the rule of the Soviets. After all, there was only the choice between a parliamentary bourgeois state and capitalism and a worker’s and peasant’s government which would prevent the return of bourgeois rule. Considering themselves the vanguard of the proletariat and the latter the vanguard of the people’s revolution, the Bolsheviks wished to do for the workers and peasants what they might fail to do for themselves. Unguarded, the soviets were quite capable of abdicating their power positions for the promises of the liberal bourgeoisie and their social-reformist allies. To secure the ‘socialist’ character of revolution demanded that the soviets remain Bolshevik soviets, even if this should require the suppression of all anti-Bolshevik forces within and outside the soviet system. In a short time, the soviet regime became the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. The emasculated soviets were only formally retained to hide this fact.” (p221) In this manner it is suggested by Mattick that a system of state capitalism with a new Bolshevik ruling class was created. But this understanding denies the popular character of the revolutionary process that led the workers to act in order to establish workers control of the economy. They also expected that the aspect of soviet democracy would ensure the development of a system of participatory economic and political democracy. But it could be suggested that it was the adverse circumstances of the civil war rather than the intentions of the Bolsheviks which led to the development of a system of authoritarian rule of the communist party. In this context what could be considered to be the policy of state capitalism was the result of unfavourable circumstances rather than being the expression of the deliberate intentions of the Bolsheviks. The aim was to establish workers control of the economy, but the serious economic problems meant that this objective could not be realised.

But regardless of the apparent problems with Mattick’s analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution he is correct to suggest that genuine socialism can only be realised with the development of the importance of workers control of the economy. But he seems to be pessimistic about the credibility of a perspective of radical change because of the apparent ability of the defenders of capitalism to obtain the support of the workers for the continuation of the present system: “Reforms presuppose a reformable capitalism. So long as it has this character, the revolutionary nature of the working class exists only in latent form. It will even cease being conscious of its class position and identify its aspirations with those of the ruling classes. But when capitalism is forced by its own development to recreate the conditions which lead to the formation of class consciousness, it will also bring back the demand for workers control as a demand for socialism. It is true that all previous attempts in this direction have failed, and that new ones may fail again. Still it is only through the experiences of self-determination, in whatever limited ways at first, that the working class will be enabled to develop towards its own determination.” (p230) This conclusion written in 1967 could not anticipate the problems involved in the development of the class struggle and the attempts to realise socialism. Primarily what has not been anticipated is the issues posed by the offensive of capital against labour in the era of austerity. In other words, the aspect of the complexity of the class struggle and the problems it creates in the establishment of workers control is not being evaluated in terms of this dogmatic approach. Instead, it is being implied that the development of the aim of workers control will be the logical result of the dynamism of the role of the class struggle. But this development has not occurred because of the very ideological influence of the standpoint of the superiority of capitalism and the connected difficulties of trying to convince workers of the possibilities to realise a more radical alternative of the aim of worker’s control.

But primarily the approach of Mattick underestimates the importance of the necessity to develop the role of a revolutionary party which could then become the expression of a principled relationship of party and class in terms of the promotion of the aim of workers control of the economy and of society. It has been the failure to develop this type of connection which has enabled the capitalist system to remain dominant. However, instead of establishing the importance of this type of perspective Mattick suggests that the spontaneous struggle of the workers can establish a situation in which workers control of the economy becomes a feasible possibility. However, he fails to outline why this perspective can become credible and instead only asserts the necessity of this approach. However, he has outlined the importance of the aim of workers control of the economy if genuine and principled change is to be realised. But we would suggest that the possibility to establish the successful achievement of this aim requires the development of a relationship between Marxist party and class. In this manner the revolutionary organisation will be able to utilise its influence in order to promote the importance of a programme of radical change that should be able to facilitate the development of the economic and political conditions that would make workers management of the economy a possibility. However, it will be suggested that this approach is optimistic and does not explain the present marginalisation of the Marxist party and the connected domination of bourgeois ideology. In this context the spontaneous struggles of the workers seem to have limited economic objectives and so do not become related to a more radical attempt to try and change the character of society. Instead, it could be suggested that the features of the political system are defined by the domination of bourgeois ideology and the supremacy of the parties that support the continuation of the capitalist system. In this context the role of the Marxist organisations seems to be marginal and insignificant. We would suggest that this situation cannot be transformed in the short-term. Instead, what is required is a protracted process of tying to develop the influence of a Marxist party. But this possibility is undermined by the various splits between the rival Marxist groups which means that the emergence of a popular and important socialist party becomes undermined by this unfavourable situation. Hence the initial task is to try and create the political conditions that will enable the formation of a universally accepted Marxist party. This development would mean that it would become possible to establish the importance of an agreed perspective for the transformation of the character of society. Obviously, this development would not mean that change had become inevitable, but it would mean that the possibility to improve the prospect of the radical transformation of society would have been advanced. In this context it would be possible for the Marxist party to advocate a universally accepted programme for the change of society. The increased credibility represented by this development would mean that the policy for the transformation of society would be more likely to realise mass support. In this manner it would be increasingly possible to create a relationship between party and the working class that would enable the development of a struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society to become a possibility.

However, even with this development of the role and importance of an accepted Marxist party the possibility for the transformation of society would not become an inevitability. Primarily in ideological terms the parties that supported the capitalist system would be able to claim that Marxism had not acquired a genuine credibility that was expressed by the role of the electoral system. The continual domination of politics by the elections of parties that supported capitalism would seem to undermine the claims of the Marxist party to represent the aspirations of the people. In other words, the apparent marginalisation of the Marxist organisation in terms of the electoral system would seem to undermine its claim to represent the interests of the people in a manner that was superior to that of the parties that defended capitalism. In this context there seemed to be a contradiction between the economic and political aspects of society. In economic terms it was possible for the workers to organise in collective manner and to possibly achieve some of their demands. But politically the workers seemed to be marginalised by the continued domination of the parties that supported capitalism. The overall result of this situation was that the defenders of capitalism remained dominant because of a political superiority which could be expressed by the results of elections. This marginalisation of the forces of Marxism could only undermine the attempt to achieve revolutionary change as a result of mass struggle which was generally connected to the economic role of the workers. Therefore, despite any possible progress that could be made in political terms it would seem that the capitalist system remained dominant because of the political supremacy of parties that supported the present social formation. In this context there does not seem to be any effective approach that would change this situation in terms of the interests of the Marxist party and the role of the workers. Ultimately the capitalist system would remain dominant because of the importance of an unfavourable balance of class forces which meant that the workers would be unable to transform the political situation connected to the supremacy of the parties that supported capitalism. However, Mattick fails to connect his strategy for workers control of the economy to the important issue of tackling these complex political issues. Instead, he outlines his perspective in abstract terms and so effectively evades the issue of trying to provide a policy to resolve the issue of the marginalisation of the Marxist parties when contrasted to the political domination of the parties that support capitalism.

Indeed, he does not tackle the complicated problem of how to unite the various and competing Marxist groups into one effective and principled socialist organisation. The point is that the various Marxist organisations because of a complicated political history are often divided into opposing parties and so the possibility to establish one united group that is able to advocate a credible programme of change is undermined because of this development. This aspect can only contribute to the marginalisation of the Marxist parties and the resulting failure to provide a single organisation that can promote a credible programme of change. Instead, this aspect of disunity would seem to suggest that there is no alternative to the continuation of capitalism and the most credible prospect that the domination of the present system cannot be effectively challenged. In this context it would seem that the major issue is to try and advocate a policy that would facilitate the possibility for the unity of what are rival Marxist groups. But this is not suggested by Mattick because he seems to imply that the dynamics of the spontaneous struggles of the workers will somehow resolve these issues in a constructive and principled manner. However, the problem for the credibility of this perspective is that the aspect of mass struggles has not led to the development of this type of change. Instead, various militant movements of the workers have created problems for the supporters of capitalism, but this aspect has not been sufficient in order to facilitate the development of the potential to achieve radical change. Instead, there would still seem to be no alternative to the importance of the role of a credible Marxist party that would be able to promote the aspect of a perspective of change that would be able to acquire popular support. However, Mattick seems to ignore these issues and instead in a dogmatic manner implies that the development of mass struggles will somehow resolve these outstanding political questions. But the fact that this possibility has never been realised does not seem to him to be an issue to try and tackle in more effective terms. In other words, the issue of the continual ideological hegemony of the present capitalist system is not being addressed. Instead in vague terms he implies that the aspects of the economic and political domination of capitalism will be overcome by the development of mass struggle. The fact that this development has not occurred does not seem to him to be an issue to address.

But if the perspective of Mattick is problematical what is the alternative. We would suggest that there is no alternative to the development of the influence of a credible Marxist party that would facilitate the realisation of a situation in which it would become possible to achieve popular support for its programme of social change. The problem is that this development seems to have failed over the past one hundred and fifty years. Marxist parties have become reformist or Stalinist, or alternatively they have remained marginalised and unpopular. Apart from the role of the Bolsheviks between 1917-23 it could be suggested that there has been a lack of success in the attempt to create a credible and principled revolutionary party that is able to lead a genuine struggle for the attainment of socialism. Instead, it would seem that capitalism has remained dominant, and it has only been challenged by what can be defined as an authoritarian type of Stalinist bureaucratic socialism. However, these problems do not seem to be of major concern to Mattick and in the abstract he implies that the alternative of popular and militant socialism can become the aspiration of workers in struggle. This dogmatic view means that he does not seem to address the problems that have undermined the development of this possibility. However, we would suggest that it is the marginalisation of genuine Marxist parties which has meant that it has been extremely difficult to develop the influence of a principled type of revolutionary socialism. But this situation can only be favourable to the interests of the defenders of capitalism or authoritarian Stalinism. It has been the marginalisation of revolutionary Marxism which has meant that any militant struggles of the workers do not acquire a possible conscious expression of the aim of democratic socialism. In this situation it has been possible to maintain the domination of capitalism. However, instead of tackling these issues Mattick implies in a dogmatic manner that the adoption of the perspective of the aim of democratic socialism by workers in struggle will somehow resolve these problems concerning the elaboration of a strategy of radical change. This view is a dogmatic approach that seems to underestimate the complexity of the problems involved in trying to realise the success of the possibility to achieve socialist change. In other words, he does not seem to recognise that the very marginalisation and insignificance of the Marxist parties is connected to the aspect of the economic and ideological domination of the capitalist system. Instead in abstract terms he advocates a programme of mass struggle as the basis of revolutionary change and does not seem to address the reasons for the difficulties in terms of trying to establish the successful development of this approach. Indeed, he does not address the reasons why reformism has become dominant within the working class and why this approach has undermined the attempt to develop the credibility of a Marxist alternative. Instead in dogmatic terms he vaguely outlines a revolutionary perspective based on the struggle to achieve workers control and does not connect this approach to the issue of the present marginalisation of the Marxist parties. But the result of the important omissions in his perspective is the justification of a dogmatic perspective that is unable to tackle the challenges connected to the importance of the present marginalisation of revolutionary Marxism. However, this dogmatism would seem to be an aspect of a strand of radical socialist thought that because of its emphasis on popular radical change is unable to address the problems involved in trying to successfully realise this approach. But we would suggest that the only credible manner in which a revolutionary perspective can be justified is to try and tackle the problems that could undermine its realisation. Primarily this would mean tackling the issue of the present marginalisation of revolutionary Marxism. But instead of this type of analysis, Mattick can only contend that in some vague manner it will become possible for the development of an alliance between the workers and a principled Marxist party that will result in the potentiality of radical change.

However, the issue of the problems of the approach of Mattick does not establish the credibility of an alternative approach. Instead, it is still necessary to try and establish the possibility to achieve the aims of a revolutionary socialism. The ultimate challenge for revolutionary Marxism is the failure to establish the important influence of a genuine socialist party. Instead, the various parties that uphold a reformist type of approach seem to be dominant within the working class. This is the very issue not addressed by Mattick who instead assumes that the situation will develop that enables the workers to spontaneously struggle to achieve revolutionary objectives and the realisation of a democratic socialist society. But the problem with this view is that it seems to lack credibility and the aspect of making progress towards the achievement of socialism would seem to be dependent on the necessity to achieve a process of dynamic interaction between the role of party and class. In other words, the workers will not spontaneously strive to realise socialism, and so the approach of Mattick seems to be unrealistic. But it also seems to be problematical concerning whether it is possible to create a successful and popular Marxist party. Indeed, it could be suggested that this prospect has not been realised for at least fifty years and instead there has been the success of the forces of capital in its apparent offensive against labour and so enabled the introduction of a situation of austerity. It would seem that capital is powerful whilst the forces of labour seem to be reduced to being in a situation of subordination and are not able to end this situation in terms of the role of effective mass struggle. This situation seems to have become increasingly apparent since the 1980’s and the period of the influence of labour in the post war period has been ended. The analysis of Mattick has nothing to say about this challenge and so it would seem that his approach is old fashioned and not able to relate to the issues of the present situation. Instead, we have the success of the forces of capital in being able to impose austerity on the working class and the result is a situation of demoralisation and a generalised scepticism about the credibility of any progressive alternative. In these circumstances the forces of Marxism seem to be unable to promote the role of a perspective that would suggest the possibility to revive mass struggle against the ascendency of capital. Furthermore, the Marxist parties are ineffective and marginalised and unable to establish their relevance in these adverse circumstances. It would seem that the forces of capital have become omnipotent and so Mattick’s confidence about the possibility of progressive change seems to be an antiquated approach that has little relation to reality.

However, the very success of capital is an indication that there is no alternative than to try and develop the role of a Marxist party that can be effective and popular. But for this possibility to occur means that it is necessary for a socialist organisation to emerge that is able to promote a credible perspective of change. But for this prospect to be realised this would mean that a programme of change has to be based on an understanding of the importance of the present balance of class forces and the success of the forces of capital in the undermining of the influence of the workers within society. The point is the very importance of establishing a relationship between a credible Marxist party and the working class has to be based on the promotion of a programme of radical change that is connected to an accurate understanding of the present adverse balance of class forces. We have to understand that there has been a prolonged period of the success of the offensive of capital against the expression of the interests of labour. Therefore, the very task of developing a political relationship between a Marxist party and the workers has to begin with a recognition of the importance of defensive tasks. It is necessary to establish the economic and political conditions that would enable the workers to begin the process of being able to oppose the offensive of the defenders of capital. This approach would be connected to the attempt to create a Marxist party that would be able to establish a relationship to the workers because it was seriously concerned to promote the credibility of a defensive programme of struggle. Only success in this context would enable the issue of socialism to become a genuinely credible possibility. Hence the problem with Mattick’s approach is that it is not connected to an understanding of the importance of these challenges. Instead, he seems to justify the vague expectation that socialism can be a short-term possibility. But this claim is tenuous and is not related to developments within the class struggle over the last fifty years.

In other words, Mattick does not address the issues created by the marginalisation of Marxism and the success of the offensive of capital against labour. The point is not that these developments make the domination of capitalism a certainty, but this situation does indicate the complex problems involved in trying to develop the arguments in favour of the socialist alternative. In other words, it is not satisfactory to express the vague hope that at some point in time the spontaneous dynamism of the workers will realise revolutionary change. This type of assumption has proved to be problematical and unable to explain the complex challenges posed by the international class struggle. There would seem to be no alternative than to attempt to develop the importance of a Marxist party that would attempt to obtain popular support for the realisation of a programme of revolutionary change. But the failure in this regard means that the capitalist system continues to be dominant and is not undermined by forms of popular opposition. The problems involved in the realisation of this approach does not mean that Mattick’s reliance on the potential spontaneous dynamism of the people represents a superior approach. This is because his perspective has never been realised even in limited terms. Instead, it is the problems involved in trying to create a Marxist party which means the domination of capitalism is not challenged in an effective manner. Therefore, the approach of Mattick represents the justification of vague hopes that are not connected to the elaboration of a credible programme of change. However, this criticism is not meant to suggest that the alternative approach based on the importance of the role of a revolutionary party can result in inevitable success. On the contrary the failure to create credible revolutionary organisations would seem to indicate important problems with this approach. The result of these failures is that the capitalist system is able to continue to be dominant and is not challenged in a serious manner. Nevertheless, despite these limitations there does not seem to be an alternative to the necessity to create a popular Marxist party. If this task was successfully realised this development would result in the generation of class consciousness and the increasing influence of the view that progressive change could be possible. In other words, despite the problems involved in relation to achieving the creation of a revolutionary organisation there would seem to be no alternative to the attempt to successfully realise this task. The role of a credible Marxist party would mean that the issue of the possibility of progressive change would seem to be increasingly possible. In this context the consciousness of the workers would undergo progressive development and it would become feasible to advocate the prospect of revolutionary transformation in a manner that no longer seemed to be incredible.

The development of a popular Marxist party would mean that it would become possible to develop a relationship between the workers and this organisation. In this manner the defensive struggles of the workers would begin to acquire more ambitious aims that could represent the attempt to genuinely increase the influence of the trade unions within society. In other words what had been the defensive character of the class struggle would start to acquire a more ambitious purpose. It would become feasible to advance the importance of the perspective that it was possible to achieve the transformation of society as a result of the development of the role of a mass movement against the domination of capital. However, if a Marxist party does not become popular and is unable to influence the development of a defensive mass movement then this process of radicalisation is not likely to occur. Instead, the continued domination of bourgeois ideology will undermine the realisation of the influence of the view that defensive mass actions can become more offensive and ambitious. In other words, the very prospects of the class struggle are connected to whether it does become possible to establish a credible Marxist party that is able to influence the actions of the workers in radical terms. The failure to achieve this development since the onset of the era of austerity has meant that the situation of the workers has often been that of disorganisation and a defensive condition that is not conducive to the development of more ambitious forms of mass struggle. It is still necessary to create a credible Marxist party that is able to influence the class struggle in radical terms.

In other words the problem with the approach of Mattick is that he assumes that the workers can spontaneously develop a level of organisation and activity that will be able to create the possibility for revolutionary transformation. This understanding seems to ignore the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology which undermines the expression of this possibility. Also, the effective offensive of the role of capital in the era of austerity seems to undermine the development of the role of popular struggle in order to express the interests of the workers and so in this manner create the conditions for a process of the revolutionary transformation of society. In other without the important influence of the role of a Marxist party the result is that the actions of the workers remain defensive and of a limited character. There is no expression of a spontaneous dynamic that would result in the generation of struggle against the capitalist system. But if the approach of Mattick is problematical for these reasons this does not mean that the approach of a revolutionary form of Marxism is credible. Instead, there has been a prolonged period of the inability to create the role of a popular Marxist party that would be able to influence the workers to engage in the development of opposition to the capitalist system. Hence It would seem to be impossible to be able to challenge the domination of the present social formation. Therefore, the approach of traditional Marxism seems to be no more credible than the syndicalist approach of Mattick. But if these strategic issues are not resolved in a principled manner than it can be suggested that the domination of capitalism will continue. It is necessary to attempt to create a credible revolutionary party which is able to outline the reasons to the workers why it is necessary to transform society in radical terms. Without this development it can be suggested that the present domination of capitalism will continue. However, Mattick has outlined important reasons why the authoritarian elitism of a Bolshevik approach will not be able to realise the role of a principled revolutionary party. But this problem does not seem to be resolved and instead there is a situation of political competition between rival elitist parties. In this situation none of these organisations are able to make a credible claim for the support of the workers and so the result is that they continue to be marginalised and instead people tend to accept the domination of various bourgeois parties within society. However, it does not seem to be obvious how these problems can be resolved.

There would seem to be no alternative than the attempt to achieve the unity of the various competing Marxist groups. This could be achieved in terms of support for an agreed programme for the revolutionary transformation of society. Such a possibility could be realised if it was not for the influence of the sectarian ideology of the rival organisations. Hence this issue has to be tackled and the members of the rival groups have to accept that the objective of socialism means that they should agree to establish a situation of political unity. In other words, the sectarian approach of the various competing groups means that they are not able to a common programme for the struggle for socialism. However, we would suggest that this programme is a credible possibility. We would suggest that in elections the groups unite around a perspective for achieving socialism. This would be based on the aim of achieving workers management of the economy and the promotion of mass struggle in order to realise this objective. However, it will be suggested that the continual election of the various parties into government that defend the capitalist system is an aspect that undermines the credibility of a revolutionary programme for mass struggle. We would suggest that there is no simple resolution of this problem. Instead, the development of the actions of the workers against capitalism can only initially occur in the context of a contradictory situation in which people generally vote in support of parties that defend the present social system. Hence there will be a situation of tension between the expression of the popular democracy of the workers and the expression of the system of formal democracy that results in the ascendency of bourgeois parties. In other words, there will be a conflict between the popular democracy of the workers with the system of established political democracy. There is no credible alternative to this situation. Instead, all that is possible is that the workers develop forms of mass struggle that can create the conditions for the realisation of the role of a revolutionary government. If this aim is successful, then elections may result in the conformation of the workers government. But if elections result in a majority support for a bourgeois administration, then the workers organisations would have to seriously consider the possibility of defying this decision. However, there is no dogmatic resolution of this problem. Instead, the approach adopted would have to represent an understanding of the complexities of the situation. What has to be considered is whether the level of popular support for the workers government is able to defy the decision made by elections. There is no dogmatic approach that can resolve the challenges of this situation and instead the organisations of the workers will have to try and reconcile their adherence to progressive principles with an understanding of the complexity of the situation.

However, it could be suggested that the present marginalisation of the organisations of the workers means that these issues are not yet of a practical importance. The present problem is how to develop the support for the trade unions and parties of the workers so that they are able to develop an effective challenge to the domination of the system. Mattick does not seem to analyse this issue and instead in a vague manner implies that inevitably the workers will be able to oppose the continuation of the domination of the system. But this is an issue that has seemed in the last fifty years to have become increasingly problematical because the parties that have supported capitalism have remained politically in the ascendency. Hence, we have to address the issue of how to overcome the present marginalisation of revolutionary Marxism and in this manner advocate a programme that can realise popular support. But this seems to be the very question that is ignored by Mattick because he considers that the spontaneous dynamism of the struggle of the workers will frequently raise the issue concerning which class should be dominant within society. However, this seems to be a dogmatic issue that underestimates the complexity of the problems involved in trying to achieve socialism. Primarily it is necessary to elaborate a strategy that will create the possibility for radical change. (We analyse this issue in another recent article) In other words we cannot suggest in a vague and dogmatic manner that the spontaneous struggles of the workers will somehow generate the basis for effective radical change within society. Such a development has never been realised, and various general strikes have not created the conditions for transition to socialism. Instead, there would seem to be no substitute to the necessity to develop a credible Marxist party that is able to advocate a programme for revolutionary change in a convincing manner. But these types of issues are apparently ignored by Mattick which means his approach is dogmatic.

In other words, we would suggest that the anti-Bolshevik communism being advocated by Mattick is not convincing. This does not mean that criticisms cannot be made of the theory and practice of Bolshevism, but we would suggest that the present task is to develop a form of contemporary Bolshevism that is able to respond to the complex challenges posed by the character of the present system of global capitalism. This does not mean that we disagree with all of the views of Mattick but we would suggest that the major conception that the spontaneous struggles of the workers can result in revolutionary change is a flawed and dogmatic view that has to be modified and essentially replaced by a perspective that would express the necessity to develop a relationship between a Marxist party and the working class if the possibility to achieve socialism is to be realised.