A Critique of Lenin’s What is to Done part two

Chapter Three –Trade-unionist Politics and Social Democratic Politics

Lenin argues that the attempt to insist that the economic struggle itself has a political character is not a principled approach that is compatible with a Social Democratic approach. Instead the equation of economics with politics becomes the justification for a trade union type of politics that gives primacy to economic reforms rather than the struggle for revolution: “Thus behind the eloquent phase ‘imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself’, which sounds so profound and revolutionary, is hidden in essence the traditional striving to lower Social Democratic politics to trade-unionist politics! Under the guise of correcting the one-sidedness of Iskra – which don’t you know places ‘revolutionising of dogma higher than the revolutionising of life’ we are given something new the struggle for economic reforms.”(p730). This perspective of the Economists is based on the rigid conception of stages which maintains that the economic struggle is a stage prior to the political struggle. But this standpoint does not allow for the fact that the very economic struggle of the working class is restricted by the state repression of the autocracy. If the working class is to be able to develop its economic power and ability to oppose the employers it must advance the struggle against the state. This is why political tasks are actually primary because they establish how the working class is able to advance towards a higher level of struggle. This means the political does not follow the economic in a process of rigid stages but rather the political tasks establish what is necessary and indicate that the economic are of secondary priority.

The approach of Lenin may have been appropriate in the situation in which the opposing the state power of the autocracy was crucial if the working class was to develop its class coherence and ability to realise bourgeois democracy. Hence the relation of the economic to the political was defined by the level of historical development of Russian society and the fact that the working class had already engaged the employers in conflict and were becoming ready to develop the prospect of the revolutionary overthrow of the autocracy. In this context to argue that the economic struggle was crucial for the political struggle was a slogan that had become outdated and it represented the crude view that economic struggle was essential for political struggle to be generated. The point was that the economic struggle would have to be replaced by the strategic priority of the political struggle if the intensification of the class struggle was to be realised. This standpoint was connected to the view that the struggle for economic reform was secondary to the aim of the revolutionary overthrow of the autocracy. Consequently there was a tension between reformism and revolutionary politic s and the approach of the Economists was to reject the principled character of Social Democracy and reduce it to the standpoint of the trade unionist politics.

Lenin’s arguments were appropriate for the period when the overthrow of Tsarism was the priority. The working class had carried out economic struggles which indicated a willingness to advance towards the realisation of the overthrow of Tsarism. Hence to argue that economic struggle was the expression of political struggle represented a cautious view that effectively denied the relationship between the working class and revolutionary tasks. It was a standpoint that suggested the working class was naturally inclined towards the struggle for economic reforms and the bourgeois liberals would attempt to overthrow the autocracy. In contrast Lenin argued that the very success of the economic struggle indicated that the working class could act as the hegemonic leadership of the struggle against the autocracy. Economic struggle had to be replaced by political struggle that was capable of becoming a challenge to the power of the repressive state. But the actual development of the 1905 revolution refuted the views of both Lenin and the Economists. On the one hand economic struggle acquired revolutionary dimensions and so did interact with the role of politics. Luxemburg indicated how the mass strikes could become the strategic basis for the overthrow of the Tsarist state. On the other hand the economic struggle was not limited to reformist goals and this meant the working class become the leadership of the attempt to overthrow the autocracy because of the very power represented by the development of strikes. This process culminated in a general strike that had the potential of an insurrection. Lenin continued to argue rigidly in terms of the primacy of political tasks and so he ignored the potential of the role of the economic and so denied the interaction of the economic with the political. Hence he did not recognise that WITBD was itself a product of an earlier stage of the class struggle that had been superseded by events. This rejection of the relation of the economic to the political was overcome in 1917 when Lenin issued the call for All Power to the Soviets.

The relation of the economic to the political was continually expressed throughout the class struggle of the 20th century. For example the attempt of the British state and the mine-owners to reduce the wages of the miners in 1925 led to the General Strike that was a challenge to the supremacy of capital over labour. The trade union leaders retreated because of the very fact that the strike was a political challenge to the domination of capital over labour. This situation was repeated in different circumstances because the importance of the economic has meant that effective strikes have undermined the political power of the bourgeois state. The militancy of the working class has been able to indicate the significance of the interaction of the economic with the political and so to that extent the economic struggle does have political significance as the Economists had claimed. It was Lenin’s view that the economic and political should be differentiated that seemed to have become outmoded in the social conditions of the politicised character of the importance of capital-labour relations. It was the trade union bureaucracy who attempted to deny the relation of the economic with the political in order to try and reduce the role of class conflict and to instead emphasise the importance of negotiations with the employers and the state. Lenin’s standpoint that prioritised the political in relation to the economic seems to be become an anachronistic expression of the situation during the period of the domination of Tsarism. However the character of the struggles against Stalinism and the character of the Arab Spring have also shown the importance of the political and the role of democracy. It was the very fact that working class leadership did not develop during these struggles against state repression that has meant the concept of democracy has been monopolised by other social forces.

The attempt of the ruling class to implement austerity measures during the economic crisis has also indicated the interaction of the economic with the political. The arguments for the austerity measures have not been exclusively economic. Hence the measures have been defended in the ideological terms of the rejection of the role of the state and the economic reasons have been incorporated into this standpoint. If the working class is to be able to defend its social interests in these circumstances it must develop an effective challenge to the power of the state and provide a political alternative that is credible and durable. In contrast the trade union bureaucracy tries to deny the political significance of the events and instead reduce the issues to a collection of economic questions such as the reduction of pensions. They do not recognise that support of the role of the public sector is of political importance and is about upholding an alternative type of social system. At present the mass movement does not recognise that the situation demands a political opposition to the priorities of the state and instead the illusion that the situation can be resolved by militant pressure and negotiation is widespread. Consequently it is the role of Marxism to indicate the relation of the economic and the political and to argue against the illusion that the economic and the political can be differentiated. This means the analysis of the economic crisis developed by Marxism will have political consequences. In other words the suggestion that the crisis can be resolved in a different manner to that advocate by the ruling class is a call for the formation of a state power that will act in the interests of working people rather than the capitalist class. The crisis will continue to be resolved at the expense of working people as long as the existing state is not overthrown and replaced by a new state that represents a revolutionary regime. Hence the economic demands that are an expression of how economically the crisis can be resolved for the benefit of the people are also a political challenge to the domination of the existing state. It is not possible to demarcate the economic and political in the manner demanded by Lenin because we are in a situation based on a different level of social progress and the role of the economic interacts with the political in a more complex and dynamic manner.

However it is important that the recognition of the role of the economic should not become the justification for denial of the significance of the political. The trade union bureaucracy tries to deny the role of the political and instead argue that the issues are reduced to that of the wrong economic policy being implemented by the government. Hence the suggestion is that the situation would be improved by change to a different economic policy such as expansion replacing deflation. This standpoint is an illusion because it does not recognise that in a period of crisis the ruling class considers that only one policy is sufficient: a policy that undermines the material conditions of the working class. Consequently the only principled response is to politically challenge the power of the state that implements this reactionary economic policy. In a paradoxical manner the standpoint of Lenin about the priority of the political acquires renewed relevance. This is not because we can agree with Lenin that the economic does not interact with the political. On the contrary the economic interacts with the political in a dynamic manner and the result is a necessary challenge to the power of the state. But Lenin is effectively arguing that the issue of the advance of the economic struggle requires the input of the role of the political. This point is related to the issue of reform versus revolution. Exclusively on its own the role of the economic struggle is to try and bring about a modification of the actions of the employer and the related attempt to improve social conditions. But this has not become sufficient in order to enhance the social interests of the working class instead the very economic struggle should adopt political demands as their priority and this standpoint will concentrate on the importance of challenging state power. This approach will be revolutionary and be based on the tasks of the overthrow of the dominant political power. Consequently the emphasis on the role of the political will not replace the importance of the economic but instead express the understanding that the capacity to resolve economic issues requires an interaction with the political.

Lenin argues in his polemic opposes the following formulation of Martynov: “’The economic struggle of the workers with the owners and government (‘economic struggle with the government’) besides its immediate revolutionary significance, is also significant because it continually pushes the workers up against the issue of their political rights’……’Economic struggle of the workers with the government’ is precisely trade-unionist politics, and there is a great gulf between it and Social Democratic politics.”(p732-733). This view may have been correct in a period when the tasks could be defined primarily in political terms such as the demand for the overthrow of the autocracy. But Martynov’s standpoint has been proved to be important in relation to the changing tasks of the class struggle in the contemporary era. The attempt to impose austerity measures because of the recent economic crisis has created conditions for economic struggle with the various bourgeois governments. If this economic struggle tries to limit itself to modification of the policy of the governments its results will not be adequate and principled. This is because the attempt to obtain concessions is not likely to succeed and the mass movement will be disorientated and undermined by the suggested pseudo reforms. Instead what is required is an effective challenge by the mass movement against the government and the logic of this challenge will be the overthrow of existing state power. In this context the economic struggle will not be a diversion from the political struggle as Lenin claims and instead the role of the economic will be the basis to try and implement what are political demands. The point is that the government has created a political situation because it is suggesting that the very legitimacy of the political system is dependent upon the implementation of its austerity measures. Hence the only manner in which these austerity measures can be decisively defeated is by the mass movement creating an economic struggle that acquires political dimensions. In this context Lenin is right to argue that without the role of the political principled struggle is not possible. But he is wrong to deny the importance of the economic and the prospect of economic struggle with the government. This is why his prediction that economic struggle with the government can only represent trade union politics is also wrong. On the contrary it is economic struggle with the government that is how the mass movement can become revolutionary. However this struggle would not be sufficient if the economic struggle does not develop political demands In order to articulate its aims and objectives. In this manner we can modify Lenin’s arguments and suggest that economic struggle against the government is important but that without politics it is inadequate and limited. What is required is economic struggle against the government that is political and revolutionary rather than economist and reformist.

Lenin develops an important criticism of the Economists with regards to the relationship between propaganda and agitation. He suggests that to the Economists the issue of what represents the role of agitation concerns what is immediately possible or a guide to action in the present. This means propaganda becomes related to future goals. This standpoint is a distortion of a principled viewpoint that maintains propaganda relates to presenting a complex argument and agitation is the presentation of this complexity in a more accessible manner. In this context the relation between propaganda and agitation is not undermined and differentiated. This argument has immense relevance for the present tasks of struggle against the austerity measures. The trade union leaders contend that what is practical and realistic refers to what they can negotiate from the government in the form of concessions. What is important is compromise and what is irrelevant is the issue of making a challenge to the power of the government. It would seem that all Marxists would reject this approach as being unprincipled. But some Marxists accommodate to the standpoint of the trade union leaders in the sense that they also differentiate between their minimum demands, which they define as what is realisable in the present, from the maximum demand of communism and its prospect of being realised in the distant future. This means there is not a principled demarcation between the trade union leaders and the Marxists who conciliate them in reformist terms. In this context we should reject the role of agitation as a justification for reformism and instead connect it with the role of propaganda and its analysis of capitalism and related revolutionary political conclusions.

The latter point can be elaborated. A principled and detailed analysis of the crisis would be able to indicate that the situation is so serious that reforms are not possible. Consequently the result of propaganda indicates that the only alternative is the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the attempt to construct communism. This means our agitation should present popular demands that express these conclusions and therefore connect immediate aspirations for social improvement with these strategic aims for the future. The point is that if our propaganda had reached different conclusions the content and character of our agitation would also have been different. But the crucial point being made is that the economic crisis is so serious the capitalist system cannot be reformed. This conclusion that has been reached by reflective study is expressed by agitation in terms of readily understandable slogans and therefore the concerns of the present are connected to the aspiration for a different future. In contrast the primary emphasis on the role of agitation has a tendency to undermine revolutionary perspectives and instead present a programme of action in terms of a collection of reforms. This is why a programme cannot be merely a guide to action of an agitational character. Bukharin made this point about the Russian Communist programme of 1919. He argues that the necessity for the adaptation of a new programme was because of the immense social changes between 1902 and 1919. The importance of developing an elaborated conception of capitalism, or refining what was meant by capitalism in propaganda terms, was justification for the adoption of a new programme. It was because the historical development of capitalism had changed in theoretical and propaganda terms the aspect of the programme as a guide to action had also changed. Thus the political priority was no longer the overthrow of the autocracy and instead the priority was world proletarian revolution with the Russian revolution as part of this process. This change of strategy because of new theoretical reflection would mean that the central agitational slogan would change from the overthrow of the autocracy to All Power to the Soviets.

The Economists used their emphasis on the role of agitation in order to gloss over the importance of propaganda and analysis of the capitalist relations of production. This means in a dogmatic manner they would develop reformist conclusions because they were envisaged as being the most realistic. The result was the rejection of the importance of theory and the emphasis on the programme as a guide to action. Using a similar standpoint the reformist Marxists advocate what they conceive as realistic for the class struggle to adopt and therefore underestimate the importance of strategic objectives. Hence their propaganda about the crisis of capitalism has little relation to agitation and instead the emphasis is on a minimum programme of demands. In this opportunist manner they hope to be of relevance for the mass struggle. But the actual result is to provide additional arguments for the role of the trade union bureaucracy and therefore as Lenin argued a crude view of agitation results in providing credibility for reformist politics. Only by recognising the importance of propaganda for political practice can we be successful in developing a principled standpoint. The point is that those who emphasise the role of agitation exclusively have a justification to ignore its relation to propaganda and the result is support for reformism. Hence the principled approach is to connect agitation to the role of propaganda and to therefore recognise that only thoughtful analysis of capitalism can result in revolutionary conclusions. Hence Lenin’s critique of the Economists is still timely in the contemporary era and can facilitate our understanding of the reasons for the opportunist mistakes of some Marxists. The point is not that agitation is not important but rather that sound and principled agitation should have a relation to propaganda. Agitation should be connected to the role of propaganda and in this manner the demands of agitation are constructed not in order to obtain maximum popularity but rather to represent the logical outcome of propaganda.

Lenin contends that the working class has to act as the tribune of the people in the conditions of autocracy and the denial of political rights. Hence it is vital to understand that economic experience does not directly provide this political understanding and consequently it is vital that Social Democracy intervene in order to provide this knowledge of the importance for the working class to be the leadership of the struggle against the autocracy. However the formulations of the Economists do not express this sense of the importance of the role of the political and instead try to suggest that the awareness of the political occurs as the outcome of the role of the economic: “He who focuses the attention, powers of observation and awareness of the worker class exclusively or even primarily on itself is not Social Democrat: the self-knowledge of the worker class is inextricably tied to full clarity in its conceptions of the mutual relations of all classes of present day society – conceptions that are not only theoretical…more precisely, not so much theoretical as they are worked out via experience of political life. That is why preaching of our economists (the economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into the political movement) is so deeply harmful and so deeply reactionary in its practical significance.”(p737)

This approach may have been relevant in the period of the domination of the autocracy. This was because the struggle for political rights was the expression of what was necessary in order to progress to a higher level of development of the class struggle. In contrast the economic struggle in and of itself could not challenge the domination of the autocracy and instead resulted in the realisation of reforms within the autocratic system. Hence the working class had to progress from economic struggle to an understanding of the importance of the political and the intervention of Social Democracy was vital in order to bring about this awareness. The Economists glossed over this recognition of the necessity to make the transformation to the acknowledgement of the importance of the political because they argued that the economic could represent the basis of transition to the role of the political. This meant they conceived that the importance of the economic could define the significance of the political. But an understanding of the importance of the economic does not in and of itself provide the required political knowledge and instead provides an inclination towards supporting reforms and so represents the influence of trade union politics. However the development of the class struggle did express the relation of the economic and political in a manner that overcame Lenin’s rigid differentiation between the economic and the political. The very discontent of the masses with the autocratic system was expressed by the development of mass strikes and the formation of Soviets. Hence the indignation about the lack of political rights was manifested by the development of the economic power of the working class and strikes acquired direct political demands such as for a Constitution, Constituent Assembly and universal voting system. This did not mean that the Economists were right against Lenin because they envisaged economic struggle generating pressure for reforms but the actual development was that the economic struggle represented the striving for the revolutionary overthrow of the autocratic system. This meant Lenin’s conception of the working class as the tribune of the people was not expressed by the exclusive sphere of politics and instead was the outcome of the economic struggle acquiring political characteristics. In this context the Economists were not entirely wrong and could be considered historically vindicated if we define the Economists in mythical revolutionary terms that were not exactly appropriate in relation to their actual political practice.

How can the above apply in the present situation? It could be argued that Lenin’s view that the working class should act as the tribune of the people has almost timeless appeal. If the working class is to become revolutionary it should be able to express the interests of all those that are oppressed by the capitalist system. The ideological domination of capitalism is represented by accommodation to various forms of popular prejudice by working people and the vulgar common sense view of society expresses inconsistencies and contradictions that upholds capitalism and create scepticism about the prospect of an alternative society. Hence the alternative is for the working class to reject attachment to the institutions and influential views prevailing within capitalism and instead manifest the discontent of all sections of society. It could be argued that the failure to realise the revolutionary transformation of society has been because the working class has not been able to articulate the standpoint of other oppressed sections of society and instead has only sustained its own narrow economic standpoint. Consequently an understanding of the economic interests of the working class has not been sufficient to enable this class to act as the tribune of the people and instead it has only been able to act in an isolated manner in an unfavourable balance of the class forces. This means that creating popular alliances for revolution means the working class has to go beyond upholding its own narrow economic interests and becoming instead the class that articulates the universal interests of society. This means the working class has to reject all sense of class egoism and in ideology and practice becoming the universal class that is able to indicate that the capitalist class represents narrow interests. In the past it has been the ability of the ruling class to present the economic actions of the working class as the expression of narrow self interests that has isolated the most militant sections of the working class from the rest of society and the result has been that the ideological domination of capital has been consolidated and perpetuated.

However what does acting as the tribune of the people mean in present circumstances? The attempt of the ruling class to implement austerity measures has affected all sections of the population and therefore the importance of economics has universal significance. In this context the capacity for the working class to act as the tribune of the people is related to whether it can articulate the economic interests of all those people affected by the austerity measures. The role of the political is directly economic and this means it is possible to argue that the interests of say the public sector workers to oppose the cuts in expenditure are also an expression of the interests of all the sectors of society apart from the narrow strata of the capitalist class. The trade union bureaucracy would want to argue for opposition to the austerity measures in rigid sectional terms of how they would directly undermine the interests of the public sector workers but this would represent a self-defeating approach that would not express the potential of a sector of the working class to represent universal interests. Hence it is necessary to oppose the narrow economic stance of the trade union leaders with an approach that argues all sectors of the community are being undermined by the austerity measures and we require a perspective that would unite the various diverse social strata into one mass movement of opposition. The working class can provide leadership by developing a programme that would represent the interests of all the oppressed groups affected by the austerity measures.

However the capacity to act as the tribune of the people does not mean the differentiation of the economic and political. This was an approach that was relevant to the period of the struggle against the autocracy and is outmoded in terms of present circumstances. Instead as the Economists argued the economic does influence the role of the political or the political is the logical outcome of the importance of the economic. The austerity measures represent the economic programme by which the ruling class attempts to defend its political domination of society. In other words the economic platform of the ruling class is the basis by which the ruling class attempts to maintain its political credibility and to argue that only its actions can represent the prospect to overcome the crisis. Any alternative is conceived as being unthinkable and reckless and so this political reasoning justifies the standpoint that the only policy option is one in which the economic interests of the working class are sacrificed in order to uphold the continuation of the capitalist system. Hence rejection of this political logic means rejection of the economic view that only the ruling class has a credible policy with regards to the possibility of resolving the economic crisis and therefore adherence to a different economic approach means the justification of a political challenge to the continued domination of the capitalist system. If the working class argue that the debt crisis should be resolved in a different manner this would seem to be a merely technical economic argument but it is actually a challenge to the continued political domination of the ruling class and the related opposition to the power of the capitalist state. In the present situation of discontent the ideological view that the economic sphere represented an uncontested ideological condition or natural given is no longer credible and the result is that the very political legitimacy of the social system is being called into question. This indicates the complex interaction of the economic and the political and that the role of the political is the outcome of what is inaugurated as economic struggle.

 In the past conditions of boom it was possible to differentiate the economic from the political and economic concessions or reforms could be obtained without the development of a political challenge to the system. It is this period that has come to an end and the result is that every economic struggle has political implications. In this context the character of the intervention of principled Marxism should be to outline the importance of the political aspects of every economic struggle and to argue that the objective material basis of the differentiation of the economic and the political is coming to an end. Consequently in order to raise the profile of the political does not necessarily mean suppressing the significance of the economic. Instead we can indicate that the political character of struggles is expressed by the role of the economic. Effective opposition to the austerity measures will create political tensions and contradictions and pose the ultimate political challenge of the prospect of the overthrow of state power. In this context the attempt of the trade union leadership to deny the importance of the political is an illusion but if people support this illusion the result could be support for a defensive strategy that cannot result in victory. It is not possible to oppose the austerity measures without coming into conflict with the government and so creating a political dispute. The alternative of trying to emphasise the economic is to advocate retreat and the acceptance of the standpoint of the government. The development of an effective mass movement requires an offensive strategy and the acceptance of the prospect of political conflict with the government. This is why an understanding of the importance of the political represents a revolutionary approach and support for a strategy of the overthrow of the government that advocates the austerity measures. The issue of what represents the alternative to the austerity measures can only be realised by the process of transformation of state power and this is why the economic alternative is actually a political alternative that cannot be realised under the existing system. However most people’s ideas are formulated in the past and this is why the prevalent illusion is in the possibility of improvement within the existing system. Hence, as Lenin argued, Marxism has to intervene in the organisations of the mass movement with the political arguments as to why these illusions are no longer credible. But in contrast to Lenin’s effective diminishing of the importance of the role of the economic we would argue that these revolutionary and political arguments have to be supplemented by an economic understanding of how the crisis of capitalism can only be resolved in the interests of working people through the social transformation of capitalism. In other words the intervention of Marxism in order to challenge the spontaneous illusions of the mass movement consists of the importance of both economic and political arguments.

Lenin goes on to develop his argument and insists that the problem with the Economist approach is that they conceive the character of theory in terms of a narrow economic reductionism. This is not sufficient for an awareness of politics: “But this kind of activeness is not enough for us: we are not children whom you can feed with the thin soup of ‘economist’ politics by itself we want to know everything that everyone else knows, we want to become acquainted in detail with all sides of political life and actively participate in each and every political event. For this it is necessary that the intelligentsia spend less time repeating what we already know, and more time giving us what we don’t know, what we ourselves will never be able to learn from our own factory and ‘economic’ experience, namely: political knowledge.”(p740-741). Lenin is suggesting that the issue of what constitutes the tasks of the working class cannot be defined exclusively by an understanding of the role and importance of the economic. Hence the role of the party is important in order to provide what is necessary in political terms. This is why economic experience is not sufficient and instead a broader conception of reality and the role of the political are essential.

Lenin’s argument is of vital importance in the present period. It is the trade union bureaucracy that tries to reduce the issues concerning the austerity measures to the role of the economic and argue that any additional political aspects are irrelevant and potentially undermine the unity of the mass movement. This approach does not actually reject the significance of politics but is instead the basis of the justification for trade union politics. Lenin made this point in WITBD and maintained that the Economist concentration on the role of the economic was a rationalisation for the rejection of the intervention of Social Democracy and support for the existing leadership of the mass movement by opportunist trade union leaders. Hence the explicit articulation of the role of politics was the basis for developing principled leadership of the mass movement. Consequently the proponents of the importance of politics in the present will be the Marxists who are concerned to develop a principled strategy for the mass movement. They will reject the view that the importance of the economic is the rationalisation for the rejection of political tasks and aims. However unlike Lenin the reason for the significance of the political is not based upon a separation from the role of the economic. Instead it is the very interaction of the economic and political that indicates why the political is important. The austerity measures of the ruling class are of an economic character and represent the attempt to resolve the economic crisis at the expense of the working class. This is why the political response of the working class, the advocacy of a different economic policy, will have an economic content. But this response of the mass movement will not be narrowly economic and so try to avoid political issues. Consequently the very justification of a different economic policy will represent an implicit political aspiration for an alternative type of society, and it will be recognised that an economic rejection of the significance of the political represents a defensive approach that will not advance class struggle against the measures of the ruling class.

In other words the significance of the political is not imposed from outside the class struggle and is not an expression of the fact that the character of the struggle is not primarily economic. The character of the situation is defined by the economic problems of the capitalist system and so the role of the political will be related to how this economic situation is perceived and interpreted. The ruling class will develop one particular type of economic response in terms of what they consider to be the requirements of the capitalist system. Consequently the issue of an adequate response of the working class should be not the adaptation to the requirements of capital and instead should develop an economic analysis that is able to justify a political challenge that undermines the domination of capital. If the working class should accept the arguments of the representatives of capital the result will be an acceptance of the burdens of the crisis in the name of the nation and social stability. Hence acceptance of eh validity of the economic argument of the ruling class will undermine the prospect of political opposition to capitalism by the mass movement. This is why the economic is of supreme ideological and political importance and establishes whether the class struggle will intensify or whether the mass movement will accept the situation as outlined by the ruling class. This means that political issues such as the role of the state and attitudes towards policy are an expression of how the economic is perceived by the potentially contending class forces. The ability to dispute the political justification of the ruling class is connected to the capacity to formulate an economic policy that is able to oppose the imperatives of capital. Without the recognition of the importance of the economic the working class lacks political guidance and instead will be susceptible to support to accept the economic version of what is justified in policy terms by the ruling class.

The point is that Lenin may have been able to separate the significance of the economic and political in the time of the autocracy in Russia but this is not possible in the social conditions of developed capitalism. Acceptance of the domination of capital by the working class has been based on agreement with the economic policy of the ruling class. This is why the offensive of capital against the trade unions in the 1980’s was not generally opposed because the perspective of the reconstruction of the efficiency of capital was supported by the general public and trade union militancy was disliked. However the prospect to develop a mass movement against the austerity measures is because many people do not accept the validity of the policy of the coalition government. The do not accept the economic arguments being used to justify the austerity measures. Hence the important problem is the limitations of trade union politics that have created organisational and political problems in relation to creating an effective mass movement of opposition to the austerity measures. In this context Lenin is right we cannot rely on the role of the economic in and of itself for creating a movement of opposition to the ruling class and for socialism. Exclusive reliance on the role of the economic will result in trade union politics that is limited and defensive. Consequently political arguments are crucial in order to create support for a principled political alternative based on the merger of Marxism with the mass movement. The very significance of the economic is actually the reason why we have to argue for the development of the political aspects of an alternative in terms of developing a principled strategy for the mass movement based on the influence of Marxism. Hence the need to develop an alternative economic policy raises important political questions about how to advance this perspective and what type of organisational forms would best address these issues. Thus the importance of the economic does not transcend political issues about the role of policy, strategy and organisation. Primarily the central political issue concerns what ideology will the mass movement be based upon: will it be trade union politics or Marxism?

Lenin contends that the importance of the economic is not sufficient to establish the role of the political. Consequently: “Class political awareness can be brought to the worker only from without, that is to say from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of the relations of workers to owners. The only area from which this knowledge can be taken is the area of relations of all classes and (social) strata to the state and to the government - the area of the interrelations between all classes.”(p745) This approach has been outdated by the historical development of capitalism that has created a situation in which the economic acquires direct political significance. This means that the economic is central to the issues that motivate the class struggle and so the knowledge of the importance of the political does not come from outside the class struggle and its relation to the economic. However this situation does not meant that the working class is able to interpret the relation of the economic to the political in an adequate manner on the basis of the importance of the class struggle. It is entirely possible that the importance of the economic can be interpreted in an uncritical manner and therefore results in a passive acceptance of the domination of capital over labour. Furthermore the alternative of revolutionary politics can be rejected as being a distraction from the tasks posed by economic activity and this means that the dynamic interaction of the economics and politics can be obscured and misunderstood at the level of consciousness. Hence despite economics being an important ontological condition of human activity of contemporary capitalism it can still be misunderstood or perceived in uncritical terms. This is why Marxism still has to develop a political intervention in order to enhance the prospect of people developing an adequate conception of the relation of the economic to the political. But it would be wrong to define this intervention as being outside the economic and therefore belonging to an exclusive political sphere because one of its central tasks is to de-mystify the character of the role of the economic. Marxism should aim to make the economic comprehensible and understandable to the very participants in its processes. This means that the vantage point of Marxism is not from outside the economic and is instead internal to the economic or else it could not recognise what it is trying to describe and explain.

However Lenin’s point seems to be valid that the economic processes cannot spontaneously develop an adequate class consciousness able to understand what is necessary in order to make progress in the class struggle. It is one thing to engage in strikes but it a different thing entirely to develop a strategy for socialism. The prospect of the latter requires the role of a political party that is able to expand the understanding of the relation between the economic and the political. Primarily the Marxist organisation can advocate the validity of the revolutionary struggle for socialism and suggests that concentration on reforms has become an inadequate defence of class interests. The mass movement will not spontaneously support this perspective and Marxism will have to engage in ideological struggle in order to develop support for this standpoint. To this extent the intervention can be said to have originated from outside the role of the economic and the mass movement but this is only true to the extent that the party is originally one of intellectuals and has few working class supporters. The more that a party grows the more internal is its relation to the class struggle, and struggle itself will extend the influence of the party. Furthermore the capacity of Marxist organisation to understand the economic will enhance its capacity to develop because the role of the economic is crucial to the process of political intervention and the prospect of enhancing revolutionary class consciousness.

Lenin himself defines the conception of class consciousness originating from outside the class struggle in terms of recognition of the role of all the different social strata in the struggle against the autocracy. This is true for the historical period he was concerned with. It would be a serious mistake to ignore the importance of the peasantry for the struggle against the autocracy and to instead concentrate on the role of the workers. The same point can be made about the contemporary world in which half of the population still consists of peasants. But these questions for strategy do not mean that Marxism as it is presently constituted originates from outside the role of the economic. The very nature of capital-labour relations means that nobody is outside of this relation but the role of Marxism is to try and challenge the various views spontaneously generated by economic activity such as the standpoint that we cannot overcome dependency on the role of capital. In this crucial context Marxism is making a political intervention and is suggesting that the consciousness immediately generated by participation in economic activity is not sufficient for both understanding of the situation and is not adequate as a guide to action. But in contrast to what Lenin is arguing the economic must also represent the prospect to gain knowledge of what is necessary to advance in the class struggle. This means the role of Marxism should be to challenge the limitations of spontaneous consciousness whilst also making explicit what is progressive and emancipatory in our economic relations. The point is that communism would not be possible if its forms were not emerging within capitalism and so one of political roles of Marxism is to indicate the possibilities for communism within capitalism.

An important strategic issue arises in Lenin’s discussion of the strategic differences between the followers of Iskra and the Economists. He argues that the Economists suggest that success should be realised in the trade union struggle before engaging with the political struggle against the autocracy. Lenin rejects this approach and contends that the situation is maturing for a struggle of all the oppressed people against the autocracy. This struggle can be lead by the working class who have already proved themselves in the economic struggle and are ready to lead the struggle for democracy. This is why Martynov is pessimistic when he argues the following: “But the Martynovs and the other ‘economists’ nevertheless continue to think that the workers must first accumulate forces (for trade-unionist politics) by means of the ‘economic struggle with the owners and the government’, and only then make a ‘transition’ - evidently, from trade-unionist ‘education for activeness’ to Social Democratic activeness.”(p756) The contemporary trade union leaders make outline similar arguments to the Economists, they maintain that it is necessary to first wage struggle to realise the economic demands of their members and then the struggle can be embraced in order to embrace the wider community. This narrow standpoint ignores the fact that the wider community is becoming interested in struggle against the government and is effectively asking the trade unions to become the leadership of this broad and democratic struggle against the government. In contrast the trade union bureaucracy is attempting to narrow the scope of the struggle in order to avoid the prospect of making a challenge to the government. They are attempting to create the conditions for negotiation rather than conflict and the concentration on their own demands is part of this approach. In order to reject this attempt at class conciliation and compromise Marxists should be demanding that the trade unions do become the leadership of a struggle of the general community to oppose the austerity measures and therefore emphasis on the pensions of the trade union members is not an adequate basis for mass struggle. Marxists should point out that community struggles about closures of local facilities has already begun and there is a popular mood in favour of mass struggle. What is required is organisation and strategy in order to coordinate the diverse struggles into one centralised campaign and the present passivity of the trade union leadership is only undermining the realisation of this prospect. The point is that economic struggle will not become the basis of community struggles because the community struggles are actually occurring before the onset of economic struggle. Instead we require a unification of all the various struggles. This was the very potential that Lenin argued was developing in 1902 and yes this potential was underestimated because of the dogmatism of the Economists standpoint. The Economists tailed behind the mass movement and the same situation is developing in the modern context where the trade union leaders are tailing behind the development of community struggles against the government.

Lenin insists that the two major political alternatives are between trade union politics and Social Democracy. The latter argues in favour of democracy on the basis of the standpoint of socialism whilst the former conceives of the importance of democracy in terms of a capitulation to the importance of the liberal middle class. In other words Social Democracy attempts to establish the political independence of the working class from other classes as the basis of inter-class relations and the conception of the working class as the tribune of the people. In contrast the Economists can only conceive of the distinctive role of the working class in terms of the economic struggle and accept that in the realm of politics the working class will be subordinated to the hegemony of liberal democracy. Hence the Economists do not conceive of the possibility that the working class will be the leadership of the democratic revolution and that it will connect all aspects of political repression of all the oppressed social strata of the Russian population to the struggle to overthrow the autocracy. The Economists are indifferent to this political aspect of the oppression within Russian society because of their emphasis on the importance of the economic and the result is that they conceive of the class interests of the working class in very narrow terms. However the result is that they effectively consider politics in the reformist terms of trade unionism and deny the hegemony of the working class in the struggle against the autocracy.

These concerns of Lenin seem to have little relation to the situation today. But the trade union leaders have a similar approach to that of the Economists. They also argue that the working class should be narrowly concerned with economic questions such as the defence of the level of pensions and ignore any wider political questions. The significance of the political should be left to the Labour Party and Parliament and this means that the prospect of the trade unions becoming the tribunes of the people and expressing leadership of a general struggle against the austerity measures is precluded by this approach. Instead the public sector workers should concern themselves exclusively with their own interests and not attempt to become the leadership of all working people and oppressed social strata in opposition to the austerity policy. Hence the trade union leaders do not envisage that the trade unions should express the universal interests of the many different social groups within society. The concern with these aspects should be left to the professional politicians of the Labour party. This standpoint is ludicrous because the many different community organisations consider that the trade unions should provide leadership in the struggle against the austerity measures. Hence the attitude of the trade union leaders contradicts the logic of the popular mood of discontent. However is it opportunist to advocate trade union leadership of the potential mass struggle? Lenin argued that there is a choice between trade union politics and Social Democracy and the former represents reformism and the latter is revolutionary. His standpoint was valid for its time but could not explain all the various different circumstances in the class struggle. At this moment in time the trade unions have been placed in a position in which they can lead an effective mass struggle against the austerity measures of the ruling class. If they are reluctant to develop this struggle because of sectionalism and the legacy of compromise and a defensive approach the result will be serious defeat in the class struggle.

In other words the choice is presently between the politics of cautious trade unionism and the alternative of a more militant trade unionism. This choice does not deny the importance of the intervention of Marxism but rather that this intervention should be in support of militant trade unionism and be opposed to the approach of cautious trade unionism. Hence Marxism should be involved in order to facilitate the political transformation of the unions and to create a condition in which the Unions would be willing to lead a generalised and universal struggle against the austerity measures. This means that the problem with reformist Marxism is that it is not willing to oppose the domination of the existing trade union leadership in the name of unity and the requirements of the mass struggle. What is not understood is that under the existing leadership the necessary mass movement is not likely to be promoted and developed. The trade union leaders are trying to obtain compromise through negotiation and reject the prospect of militant struggle and so limit strike action to one day mobilisations. Consequently Marxism can intervene by promoting a revolutionary leadership that would reject support for the usual trade union politics. This is the basis by which the trade unions would relate to the mass struggle. But it is important to understand that without trade union involvement it will be difficult to develop effective mass struggle. This does not mean that the role of Marxism is being underestimated by this perspective. On the contrary the importance of Marxism and its relation to the mass movement is being advanced in terms of the struggle to transform the unions and develop new leadership. The attempt to renew the unions with a new leadership and programme is the struggle to advance the influence of Marxism, or represents the character of the Marxist intervention in the mass movement.

This approach would only represent an accommodation to the Economists if concessions were being made to the trade union politics of the bureaucracy. But what is being advocated is a very different type of trade union politics that is revolutionary and attempts to establish the role of the Unions as tribunes of the people. The Unions would become the most important expression of the various diverse struggles that are occurring against the austerity measures. Hence the Unions would no longer undermine the mass struggle and instead articulate the aspirations of all the various social strata with a grievance against the austerity measures. This would also mean that Marxism would become the basis of the politics of the Unions and the contrast between the character of the Unions and Marxism would be ended. Consequently Lenin’s differentiation between trade union politics and Marxism would be shown to be outmoded. Lenin poses an either or of the domination of trade union politics or the alternative pole of attraction of Marxism. This implies that Marxism would realise hegemony through the role of the party and so displace the mass influence of the Unions. Hence the more that the role and influence of the party increases the less is the influence of the Unions. Alternatively the party acquires effective political control over the role of the Unions, which was the German Social Democratic model. In actuality the very influence of the Marxist party was utilised in order to allow the trade union leaders to have freedom of action and to practice a reformist approach. This type of division of labour upheld opportunist political practice. This meant it was questionable whether it could be argued that the influence of Marxism had developed within the Unions. But the type of relation of Marxism and the Unions that is envisaged in the present is one in which the ideas and perspectives of Marxism would influence the character and conduct of the Unions. Hence the Unions would become socialist and in this sense organs of militant mass struggle. The very interaction of Marxism with the mass movement would take the form of the transformation of the Unions and their defensive role would be interrelated with the adoption of an offensive strategy of support for the struggle for socialism. If this prospect is to be possible the influence of Marxism within the Unions has to be immensely increased and a struggle for support of Marxism has to be developed in these mass organisations.

What is problematical about Lenin’s approach is not within his description of the importance and influence of the reformist character of trade union politics. The problem is that he seems to suggest that this type of politics is inherent to the role of the Unions and so this situation cannot be altered. This is why the political prospect of revolutionary activity is exclusively with the role of the party. But actual political development indicated that the economic struggle could become revolutionary and that the very actions of the working class would challenge the ideological domination of trade union politics. It is true that trade union politics of the type described by Lenin are generally dominant and undermine the prospects of the class struggle becoming revolutionary but the options are not to absolutely contrast the economic and the political in the manner of Lenin. Hence the trade unions are not inherently reactionary when contrasted with the role of the party. Instead the party should continually try to develop a perspective for the transformation of the trade unions and to create a situation where they interact with the aims of Marxism. This task should be a priority of the present because of the immense importance of the trade unions for the prospect of the development of mass struggle against the austerity measures.

Chapter Four: The Artisanal Limitations of the Economists and the Organization of Revolutionaries

Lenin begins this chapter with a detailed discussion of the history of the development of Russian Marxism. He contends that the beginning of this movement was undermined by an approach that meant the various organisations established were susceptible to police repression. However the success in establishing trade unions had led some to consider that the Unions are more important than the role of the party. This is disputed by Lenin. He argues: “The moral of all this is simple: if we begin by firmly establishing a strong organisation of revolutionaries, then we shall be able to establish the stability of the movement as a whole, to realise Social Democratic aims along with specifically trade-unionist ones.”(p782). The issue of the comparative importance of party and unions has been raised by the present situation. On the one hand the unions seem to be solid and durable organisations of the working class and vitally important to the prospect of developing struggle against the austerity measures. On the other hand the various Marxist parties seem small, insignificant and not very effective. Hence it would appear that the role of parties has become outdated and replaced by the role of other types of organisations. But the problem is as Lenin argued the Marxist party still remains the most effective instrument for the promotion of the influence of Marxism and therefore the central issue is how to establish the connection between the Marxist party and the mass organisations of the working class. This situation is presently complicated by the fact that the various Marxist parties are ineffective and inadequate for the tasks concerning the promotion of their views. But the answer is not located in the effective repudiation of the role of Marxist organisations instead we should try to improve their efficiency and ability to communicate Marxist theory. If there were no Marxist parties in existence there would be the lack of an organised expression for the communication of Marxist ideas and this would mean the influence of trade union politics would be even stronger and more dominant. Marxist organisations may presently be peripheral and isolated but they still represent an alternative, however feeble, to the standpoint of the trade union leaders. Consequently without the role of Marxist organisations the prospect to advocate revolutionary ideas and principles would be inconceivable and this task would be carried out by individuals. Sooner or later these individuals would have to come together in order to form an organisation that could advocate Marxism in a more effective manner.

However the importance of Marxist parties for the propagation of revolutionary principles does not diminish or rival the influence of the trade unions as Lenin seems to suggest. Instead the very necessity of Marxism is in order to influence the trade unions to adopt revolutionary politics. Presently the trade unions are comparatively large organisations and the Marxist groups are very small but this does not mean that the latter are irrelevant. Marxism is still capable of developing the most effective analysis of the economic situation and so is able to outline the most impressive answers to the crisis. These answers favour the interests of working people rather than the ruling class. The very significance of Marxist theory that is expressed in the organised form of parties is able to articulate what should be promoted at the level of practice. In this manner an alternative is developed that contrasts favourably to the narrow pragmatism of the trade union bureaucracy. It is the very capacity of Marxism to represent an alternative to trade union politics that indicates its importance and is why the more the influence of Marxism is developed by the growth of Marxist organisation the greater is the opportunity to challenge the existing domination of trade union politics. In this context the very supremacy of trade union politics is connected to the weakness of Marxist parties. The growth of Marxist parties would provide an alternative pole of attraction that represents the challenge of revolutionary principles to the domination of reformism and suggests that the answer to the crisis requires the transformation of society.

The above is an argument for the political role of Marxist parties. The next question concerns their organisational efficiency. How can we ensure that Marxism can overcome organisational limitations and be equal to the challenges posed by its political tasks? Lenin argues that what has undermined the development of the revolutionary party in Russia has been artisanal limitations or the problem of being an amateur in relation to the carrying out of tasks. These problems can be resolved by developing a professional organisation, or a party of revolutionaries by trade, who are devoted to the task of consolidating an organisation and capable of overcoming the problem of state repression. It is significant that this type of revolutionary is expert in theory and so is able to connect theory to the role of practice: “A person who is flabby and shaky on theoretical issues, who has a narrow horizon, who uses the stikhiinost of the mass in justification of his own sluggishness, who resembles more the secretary of a trade union than a peoples tribune, who is advance a broad and daring plan that would inspire respect even from his opponents, who is clumsy even in the art of his own trade……This person is not a revolutionary but some kind of wretched artisan.”(p788)

It is interesting that one of the traits of being an artisan is the utilisation of the importance of the mass movement as an excuse not to develop the theoretical and organisational tasks of the revolutionary party. This problem has become one of the major traits of various groups claiming to be Marxist parties in the present situation. Hence one of the major features of a revolutionary organisation is its ability to maintain an independent and principled approach towards the mass organisations of the working class. Hence the basis of a professional party is not primarily its organisational capacity to stay in existence but rather how it connects the relation of theory to practice. If a group is able to evaluate developments in a principled manner it is more likely to be professional in its organisational functions. This is because one of the tasks of a revolutionary by trade is to become a theoretical expert. A contradiction in terms is the pride in maintaining an organisation despite having important theoretical limitations. One of the most important manifestations of lack of expertise in theory is the justification of an uncritical attitude towards mass movements or an accommodation to trade union politics. This is why the issue of principles and values is integral as to whether a professional organisation is being built. The conception of a professional organisation that was indifferent about the character of its politics would be an absurdity.

Hence Lenin makes a contrast between a trade union organises and a professional revolutionary. The trade union organiser is indifferent to the role of politics and is instead concerned with results and whether the membership of the union is growing. The concerns of the professional revolutionary are different. She is primarily motivated by the relation of theory to practice and the capacity to apply principles in a complex world. If theory is shown to be inadequate it will be necessary to develop a new analysis and so on. This is why the professional revolutionary is a theoretical expert and the organisational tasks of the party are subordinated to this role. In present circumstances the problem of the isolation of the Marxist groups will create a temptation to reject the importance of principles in order to promote an opportunist schema for mass growth. This will take the form of rejecting the very importance of the role of Marxist organisations and instead advocating the replacement of the party by the role of the trade unions. The result of this type of opportunism will be a rejection of the importance of theory and concentration on the role of practice. What actually develops is an accommodation of the Marxist organisation to trade union politics. In contrast Lenin defines professional party organisation in terms of the ability of the party to demarcate itself from opportunism and to elaborate a principled position that can indicate the importance of revolutionary leadership and principles. Only the constant development of theory will allow this type of professional organisation to thrive and develop.

In relation to these tasks Lenin maintains that the party should concern itself with raising the theoretical level of the workers to that of the intellectuals. This process may involve making the workers full time members of the party apparatus and therefore taking them out of the factory situation. In the present situation of a shortage of finance for many groups the realisation of this aim will depend on the circumstances but the principle of raising the workers to the level of the intellectuals is still important. In organisations that lack principle and have a disregard for theory the perspective of raising the workers to the level of intellectuals is considered to be unimportant. This is because the conception of the relation of theory to practice is not recognised and instead the spontaneous consciousness of the workers is considered sufficient for the development of the party. The result is an accommodation to trade union politics. But the party that is devoted to raising the workers to the level of the intellectuals understands the importance of theory and is more dedicated to revolutionary principles. The result is the development of a party that is able to provide coherent theoretical reasons for its practice and so able to maintain an independent attitude towards the mass organisations of the working class.

Lenin is quite adamant that the centralised party based on restricted democracy is an organisation that operates under conditions of autocracy. The aspect of conspiracy is connected to the problem of trying to oppose the repression of the autocracy. However in a bourgeois democracy it is possible that democracy would be a vital aspect of the organisation of a party and the basis to organisationally define the role of members of the party: “The natural selection provided by full glasnost, elections and universal monitoring guarantees that, in the final analysis, each activist ends up in his proper place, finds the job best suited to his talents and capacities, suffers all the consequences of his mistakes himself and demonstrates before all eyes his capacity to become aware of his mistakes and to avoid them.”(p799). This comment shows that the normal functioning of a party is based on the importance of the role of democracy. It is a misinterpretation of Lenin’s views to suggest that he denies the necessity of democracy within a revolutionary organisation. What is the aberration in terms of party organisation is the limitation of democracy because of the problem of state repression. In these circumstances the importance of conspiracy becomes a priority and democracy is a luxury that has secondary priority in relation to the importance of centralisation. However for historical reasons the emphasis on centralisation has been at the expense of democracy and it is questionable whether many parties have practiced democracy in the manner advocated by Lenin. He argues in WITBD that democracy is the method by which we can establish the relation of the individual to the most suitable function within the organisation. Hence democracy is the content of the organisational norms of the party and it becomes the basis to establish the relation of the individual to the tasks connected to specialisation. If a person is considered to be unsuitable for a post it will be possible to show this criticism by means of democratic election and the leadership will not be able to perform in an incompetent manner because they will also be held accountable by means of voting. Hence democracy will be the means to ensure the efficient realisation of tasks by the various holders of functions within the party, and regular elections will be held in order to ensure that the leadership and the various post holders are subject to accountability and the possibility of recall.

 Historically most parties have not upheld the strict democratic criteria insisted upon by Lenin. Most leadership’s have not been subject to regular recall and instead they have been allowed to remain despite questions about their ability and efficiency. The opportunist degeneration of leadership’s has also not led to their replacement and instead organisations have split, and the process of political renewal has not been decided by the utilisation of democracy. This has meant it has been a complex question in relation to deciding which organisation is principled and which is less principled. Most organisations have not been organisationally superior and therefore it has been issues of policy that usually decide which group is more principled. The test of democracy, which is the ability to hold the leadership to account for policy, is not utilised by most organisations and the result is factional struggle in order to change policy. Hence the lack of organisational democracy has meant the fragmentation of Marxist groups and the result is the formation of many parties that have only minute differences. Often the organisations that are closest to each other have the bitterest differences and it is sometimes differences in the past that are responsible for demarcation in the present. This means that the various groups are not able to act in a united manner to promote the interests of the mass movement and they are more concerned with advantages in their fraught inter-party relations.

It has been argued that Lenin established a precedent for this sectarian process because of his support for the centralised model of party that was defended in WITBD. But the differences that led to the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks concerned the membership of the editorial board of Iskra and were not created by organisational tensions about the character of the party. Later differences were caused by contrasting perspectives about the Russian Revolution and ultimately by the tensions between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1917. Lenin was committed like the other Russian Marxists to support for the German model of Social Democracy and his aim was the formation of a mass and united Marxist party in Russia. It was the actions of Social Democracy in 1914 that created the historic divisions within Marxism and the later splits was primarily because of the role of Stalinism and the internal tensions within Trotskyism. Hence it could be argued that the Leninist organisational model has rarely been realised in practice and the actual practice of the Leninist party was deformed by the demands of state power. Lenin was committed to emulating the democratic model of German Social Democracy but for various political reasons he was not able to develop a party that conformed to that model. This failure has been repeated within the history of Marxism and it could be argued that the majority of the organisations claiming to be Marxist are not consistently defined by adherence to democratic norms. This important failure could undermine the ability of Marxism to relate to the mass movement in the present period because the lack of democracy could undermine the development of the mass appeal of Marxism. However recognition of the importance of internal party democracy could transform this organisational situation and enhance the political attraction of Marxism and result in mass support.

It has also been argued that Lenin’s conception of the division of labour within a party is elitist. It suggests that the workers would do the practical work and the intellectuals would develop theory. However this standpoint is the opposite of what Lenin intended. One of his central organisational aims was to raise the workers to the level of the intellectuals. Hence there is no reason why the workers could not be assigned theoretical tasks that were traditionally carried out by the intellectuals. Consequently his emphasis on specialisation did not imply the justification of elitism instead it only implied that certain people would be good at a particular task and it was entirely possible that people who had the role of distributing the paper could not become important contributors to the paper. However the influence of this interpretation of Lenin’s approach as elitist is possibly because the actual history of Marxist organisation has indicated the resilience of this division between intellectuals and workers. But this is the organisational flaw of parties’ actual practice and is not because they have faithfully followed the advice of WITBD. The development of the elitism of Bolshevism was because of the privileges of state power and not because of adherence to the organisational model of WITBD.

The fifth chapter about the importance of an all Russian newspaper represents important arguments about why a centralised newspaper is superior to the concentration on local agitation based on the role of leaflets. The views expressed in this chapter seemed to have been overwhelmingly accepted and are not subject to general controversy. Lenin was able to show that the Economists supported local propaganda because they adhered to the type of local struggle that was being replaced by a generalised struggle against the autocracy. This generalised struggle required a centralised paper in order to coordinate action and to also publicise the various manifestations of oppression by the Tsarist state. A national newspaper could combine the role of the national and local in one propaganda organ. The alternative of specialist writers on local issues was not practical given limited resources and also the fact that the struggle had gone beyond the role of the local. In relation to the present situation where the mass struggle is just beginning it would be one of the important tasks of a national newspaper to publicise local struggles in order to indicate the potential for national action and to criticise the trade union bureaucracy for not adequately supporting these local struggles. The call would be made to coordinate and centralise the various local struggles into one generalised form of action and to make appropriate related demands. The present fragmented character of the various struggles would be criticised as not being sufficient for success and in order to develop beyond militant localism we would make the demand for centralised action. Hence the development of national action would then become the prelude to European action which has been made possible by the acute crisis of the Euro zone.