**What is the Contemporary Significance of Lukacs’s Views about Class Consciousness?**

This article is not meant to be an evaluation of the philosophical and political importance of Lukacs’s views on class consciousness as outlined in *History and Class Consciousness* (Merlin Press, London: 1971). Instead, it is meant to show either the relevance or the lack of this aspect in relation to understanding the tasks of the class struggle in the present period. Obviously, we cannot expect that Lukacs would be familiar with the contemporary political situation, but that is not the issue which we will be considering. Instead, what is of interest is the question as to whether the understanding of proletarian class consciousness provided by Lukacs has any relevance for the present tasks of the class struggle. Obviously, we have to establish the differences. Unlike in the work of Lukacs, we are not able to understand the present situation in terms of the success of a recent proletarian revolution. Furthermore, there is not the emergence of mass revolutionary communist parties. Instead, it seems that the era of Marxism and the objective of proletarian revolution is over because of the failures of Stalinism and the apparent domination of the capitalist system. The influence of Marxism has been replaced by the hegemonic importance of the approach of bourgeois democracy, and the role of various Social Democratic parties seems to be on the decline. This has meant that Marxist organisations have been reduced to a collection of competing small groups and the workers are unable to conceive of any alternative to the domination of the present capitalist system. In this context the ideology of liberal democracy is still hegemonic, and the only issue is whether the present social formation can overcome the tendency for economic crisis. Hence it would seem that class struggle is over and has been replaced by the influence of moderate attempts to improve the present capitalist system. The various single-issue campaigns have objectives about improving the present system and are not concerned with revolutionary change. Some commentators have referred to the importance of the activist, but they cannot outline how this aspect would realise the process of social transformation. In other words, the praxis of the activist is not about the successful achievement of revolutionary change, and indeed the ideology of socialism and communism is not advocated by these participants of the various campaigns for the improvement of society. This situation is not conducive to the successful development of revolutionary Marxism and instead, in a vague manner, various commentators such as Meszaros outline how the dynamics of class struggle will somehow realise change. But they cannot argue this point in a convincing manner given the continued decline of the influence of Marxism. Hence it would seem that it is necessary to provide new and convincing reasons why, as Lukacs suggests, Marxism can become a perspective that is able by ‘gripping the masses which convert the theory, the dialectical method, into a vehicle of revolution’. (Lukacs, p2). It could be argued that the views of Gramsci are more relevant. This point is essentially correct because Gramsci was aware of the complex problems which undermined the possibility of establishing the success of proletarian revolution. But this is the reason why we do not have to discuss Gramsci because he has outlined possibly better than any other theorist the difficulties involved in achieving proletarian revolution. This means it will be necessary to relate the ideas of Gramsci to our discussion of Lukacs.

However, before we begin our study it is necessary to outline some of the complex issues in relation to the character of the class struggle. The history of the international working-class movement has been dominated by the role of Social Democracy and Stalinism. For various reasons these movements essentially rejected the primary importance of proletarian revolution and instead adopted reformist or bureaucratic perspectives that rejected social change based on the dynamics of genuine mass struggle. The attempt to develop revolutionary Marxist alternatives to the influence of these opportunist forces has proved to be a failure. Instead, the capitalist system has proved to be durable and various bourgeois parties have been successful in elections. This situation has meant that there is frequent questioning of the validity of Marxism. The various revolutionary groups seem reluctant to address these important issues and instead seem content to provide illusory perspectives about the possibility of revolutionary change. Furthermore, none of the organisations seem to be receptive to the objective of achieving unity in order to create a single and serious Marxist group in each country. Instead, the groups are disunited and yet make claims to be the authentic expression of the interests of the working class. It would seem in this situation that the domination of capitalism is essentially not likely to be overcome by revolutionary change.

So why given this political situation should we consider that Lukacs’s work is relevant? It is because Lukacs still provides one of the most important works concerning the development of class consciousness. He indicates a necessary starting point when he maintains: “Even more to the point is the need to discover those features and definitions both of the theory and the ways of gripping the masses which convert the theory, the dialectical method, into a vehicle of revolution. We must extract the practical essence of the theory from the method and its relation to the object.” (Lukacs, p2). This formulation is of primary importance. How can Marxism as a theory become the expression of the consciousness of the workers and so create mass support for the aim of revolutionary change? Such a question is the very important aspect that is ignored by most revolutionary Marxist groups. Instead, they deny their own marginality and insist that at some vague moment they will become relevant to the class struggle. The result is that various programmes are advocated as being necessary for the struggle for socialism but the issue as to how they will become popular with people is ignored. In other words, the question of how and under what circumstances the relation of theory and practice is realised is ignored because of this dogmatism. Lukacs maintains that only with the development of consciousness which enables the relation of theory and practice to be established will revolutionary change become possible: “Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understand society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and object of knowledge; in short only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of theory become possible.” (Lukacs, pp2-3). The problem has become complicated by the fact that the workers require the party in order to achieve this level of consciousness but all their organisations seemed to become opportunist and so have rejected the aim of genuine revolutionary change. In these adverse circumstances how can the workers achieve the level of consciousness being suggested as necessary by Lukacs if the transformation of society is to be realised? Indeed, this point is emphasised by the insistence of Lukacs on the importance of Marxist theory for revolutionary change. He comments: “The links between the theory….. and the revolution are not just arbitrary …. On the contrary, the theory is essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself.” (Lukacs, p3). But the problem is that this connection has become essentially defunct in the period of the failure of Marxist organisations to acquire popular support - the contemporary period. Instead, Marxism seems to be an antiquated and irrelevant approach, and indeed this is reflected in the apparent demise of genuine revolutionary situations reflecting the aspiration for popular change. The various Marxist groups are small and irrelevant, and the ideology of the capitalist system seems to be omnipotent and not subject to critical questioning. There is a decline in the importance of the Marxist parties and intellectuals with the result that is quite credible to outline theories about the omnipotence of capitalism. In other words, it is Marxism itself, that seem so have become an expression of a type of thought in which as Lukacs outlines: ‘thought becomes contemplative and fails to become practical; while for the dialectical method the central problem is to change reality’ (Lukacs, p3). However, this development is not because of any inherent tendency for Marxism to become a contemplative type of theory but is instead because of the apparent inability of the workers to become a genuine revolutionary class. However, this aspect has been reinforced by the related opportunist degeneration of the various Marxist groups, which have expressed these very developments in terms of increasingly reformist politics. Therefore, there is a problem at the level of the role of both party and class. In the case of social practice, the objectives of Marxism seem to have been rejected in popular terms. The result is the apparent irrelevance of the groups that have remained supportive of the revolutionary aims of traditional Marxism.

Lukacs essentially summarises his standpoint in the following terms: “It was necessary for the proletariat to be born for social reality to become fully conscious. The reason for this is that the discovery of the class-outlook of the proletariat provided a vantage point from which to survey the whole of society. With the emergence of historical materialism there arose the theory of the “conditions for the liberation of the proletariat” and the doctrine of reality understood as the total process of social evolution. This was only possible because for the proletariat the total knowledge of its class situation was a vital necessity…… only if the whole of society could be understood; and because this understanding is the inescapable precondition for its actions. Thus, the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat. From its own point of view self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge.” (Lukacs, pp19-20). However, what is implicit in this understanding is the recognition that the very possibility for the proletariat to achieve self-awareness itself requires the influence of the role of the revolutionary party. Without this aspect the possibility to realise the type of class consciousness required to transform society becomes more difficult. But the problem is that generally the type of party that has been influential within capitalist society has been of a reformist character which has rejected the necessity for the realisation of the revolutionary objective of the transformation of the economic and political conditions in order to achieve socialism. The result of this development is that it becomes difficult to achieve the development of a popular form of revolutionary class consciousness within the workers. However, we also have to suggest that there have been aspects of the development of capitalism which have undermined the creation of the popular influence of revolutionary aspirations within the proletariat, such as affluence and the creation of a white collar section of the workers. But ultimately the influence of genuine revolutionary Marxism has declined within the working class and the various Communist Parties became reformist and ultimately without political significance. Hence the assumption of Lukacs that the very class character of the workers implies that it has a revolutionary potential has been complicated in terms of the very economic and political developments within capitalist society. It seems that the capitalist class is able to oppose the possibility of revolutionary change, whilst the workers do not seem able to acquire a sense of the importance of the objective of the transformation of society. Lukacs quotes Marx to the effect that the workers become revolutionary because of the limitations of capitalism, but this view that the working class can only liberate itself by overcoming the domination of capitalism has to be qualified by the apparent fact that the workers seem prepared to accommodate themselves to the present situation because they can obtain various benefits from their very subordination to capital. In other words, as a result of this complicated situation the workers are prepared to accept capitalism because they can realise some level of improvement in their economic and political situation. However, we also have to suggest that the workers can be prepared to accept the continuation of capitalism even when social gains are not possible because they cannot envisage the feasibility of an alternative. This situation is reinforced by the usual marginal role of the revolutionary party.

Lukacs assumes a relationship between the increased influence of Marxism and the aspect of the development of the class struggle: “For the Marxist method, the dialectical materialist knowledge of reality, can arise only from the point of view of a class, from the struggle of the proletariat.” (Lukacs, p21). But the problem with this view is that it has seemingly been discredited by historical events. The importance of the problems of the presumed revolutionary parties has meant increasing difficulties in establishing a connection between Marxism and the aspect of the class struggle of the workers. Furthermore, the very development of class struggle has been complicated by important economic and political aspects that has meant the very validity of this aspect has become questioned by the seeming lack of success of militant actions of the workers. Or, to put it in a different manner the period of advance related to the role of collective struggle seems to be over. Lukacs seems to consider that the inherent character of the proletariat means that it becomes the ‘conscious subject of total social reality’. (p21). But we suggest that the problem with this view is that it seems that the workers are generally characterised by the influence of an alienated consciousness that undermines the possibility of realising this development. Thus, the formulations of Lukacs seem to underestimate the importance of the problems involved in trying to generate an authentic revolutionary consciousness. But Lukacs seems to address these criticisms with the understanding of the relation of theory and revolutionary practice: “First, historical materialism became a formal, objective possibility only because economic factors created the proletariat, because the proletariat did emerge (i.e., at a particular stage of historical development), and because the subject and object of the knowledge of social reality were transformed. Second, this formal possibility became a real one in the course of the evolution of the proletariat. If the meaning of history is to be found in the process of history itself…. this presupposes a proletariat with a relatively advanced awareness of its own position, i.e., a relatively advanced proletariat and therefore a long proceeding period of evolution.” (Lukacs, p22). However, the major problem with this view is that it is assumed that the very character of historical development will ultimately result in the generation of forms of revolutionary class consciousness, but this approach has apparently been discredited by the character of actual social developments. Indeed, such a possibility has been complicated by the apparent opportunist degeneration of most of the various types of socialist party. Hence there seems a problem because on the one hand the spontaneous dynamics of the role of the workers and the aspect of class struggle does not seem to generate the development of revolutionary consciousness and the various socialist-type parties also have apparently undergone a process of opportunist regression and so have accommodated themselves to the continuation of capitalism. However, the views of Lukacs seem to maintain their relevance when he outlines that the possibility of success in the class struggle is connected to opposing the influence of reformist and bourgeois ideology and on the other hand promoting the revolutionary approach: “The path to consciousness throughout the course of history does not become smoother but on the contrary ever more arduous and exacting. For this reason, the task of orthodox Marxism, its victory over Revisionism and utopianism can never mean the defeat, once and for all, of false tendencies. It is an ever renewed struggle against the insidious effects of bourgeois ideology on the thought of the proletariat. Marxist orthodoxy is no guardian of traditions, it is the vigilant prophet proclaiming the relation between the tasks of the immediate present and the totality of the historical process.” (Lukacs, p24). But the problem has been more complicated because of the political degeneration of the forces of revolutionary Marxism which means that it is unable to establish this principled relation to the workers. There is no effective organisation that can facilitate the development of a revolutionary consciousness of the workers. In this context how is it possible to realise the influence of Marxism with the lack of the role and influence of a genuine revolutionary party? It seems that the only outcome in this situation is the tendency of the workers to accommodate to the capitalist system. This problem has only intensified given the general failure of the various Trotskyist organisations to become effective revolutionary parties. Therefore, it would seem that the only credible approach is to emphasise the transforming potential of the various inevitable struggles of the workers within capitalism. However, the issue that arises in relation to this perspective is how can the dynamics of spontaneity acquire conscious revolutionary possibilities? Is there no alternative to the role of the revolutionary party despite the apparent important problems in developing this possibility? In his discussion of the views of Rosa Luxemburg, Lukacs outlines the importance of the party to the spontaneous aspects of the class struggle. The interaction of the party and class in the process of struggle is essential to the possibility of victory: “The true strength of the party is moral: it is fed by the trust of spontaneously revolutionary masses whom economic conditions have forced into revolt. It is nourished by the feeling that the party is the objectification of their own will…. that it is the visible and organised incarnation of their class consciousness. Only when the party has fought for this trust and earned it can it become the leader of the revolution. For only then will the masses spontaneously and instinctively press forward with all their energies towards the party and towards their own class consciousness.” (Lukacs, p42). However, the problem with this perspective is that it primarily does not seem to be a feasible approach because of the limits of the possibility to develop class consciousness and the various opportunism of the various so-called socialist parties. In general terms Lukacs seems to be describing an idealised relationship of party and class that has not been established in terms of actual empirical developments. Hence he seems to be assuming that this connection of party and class will be an inevitable aspect of the vey character of the exploitative role of capitalism, but in actuality this stance seems to be denying the importance of ideology and politics which tend to ensure the undermining of the development of class consciousness. But Lukacs would seem to be addressing this criticism with the view that the very practice of the class struggle is the basis to resolve the problem of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist system. He comments: “The unity of theory and practice exists not only in theory but also for practice……the proletariat as a class can only conquer and retain a hold on class consciousness and raise itself to the level of its – objectively -given – historic task through conflict and action. It is likewise true that the party and the individual fighter can only take possession of their theory if they are able to bring this unity into their praxis.” (Lukacs p43). But this approach is only essentially an expression of principles and does not establish a strategy that can tackle the difficulties involved in the class struggle and in relation to the tasks that are indicated by the complexity of this situation. In a sense all that has been established are the principles of the relationship of theory and practice. Therefore, the optimistic view that the imperatives of practice will generate the aspect of the role of theory is a dogmatic assumption unless it is indicated in more convincing terms. Indeed, it could be argued that the apparent immediate importance of practice actually indicates that the role of theory is not significant. Hence it is vital that a credible Marxist party emerges that is able to outline in convincing terms the importance of the role of strategy in order to facilitate the possibility of success in the class struggle. The point being made is that the importance of practice is merely an expression of immediate aims unless it is connected to the influence of Marxist theory which can show the significance of revolutionary objectives. In other words, without the importance of a credible strategy for the class struggle, as outlined by the role of the Marxist party, the possibilities of success by the mass activity of the workers will be undermined. But in an important manner Lukacs does not make this point in convincing terms. Instead, the relation of party and class is outlined in the vague terms of what is defined as a practical imperative, but it is not established how this relationship can result in the revolutionary transformation of society. In this context it is interesting that in his discussion of the views of Rosa Luxemburg he does not evaluate her strategic perspective of the mass strike. Instead, Luxemburg is discussed in a rigid manner in order to justify the views of Lukacs. The result of this approach is that the actual strategic importance of the views of Luxemburg are not discussed in a more detailed manner. This is a problem because Luxemburg has outlined in systematic terms the role of the promotion of the mass strike as the basis of the development of the class struggle and the expression of the potential for revolutionary change. Instead of this evaluation of the possible advantages or limitations of the approach of Luxemburg her views are only discussed by Lukacs in vague terms. The result of this apparent dogmatic approach is that her elaboration of an important strategy for the transformation of the class struggle into a revolutionary opposition to capitalism is not discussed in any meaningful terms. Instead, Luxemburg is merely understood as an economist who is able to outline a theoretical standpoint which seems to have little relation to the class struggle. This one-sided approach does not tackle the importance of the views of Luxemburg in a satisfactory manner.

In other words, the problem with the approach of Lukacs is that he does not seem to recognise the importance of the approach of Luxemburg who has outlined a credible strategy in order to facilitate the possibility of transformation of the present situation of the domination of the workers to the imperatives of capital into a situation in which they become an expression of opposition that is able to represent the possibility of transformation of capitalism into socialism. Instead of this type of analysis of the strategic contribution of Luxemburg, Lukacs seems to prefer to make obscure points about the apparent limitations of her economic and philosophical standpoint. But in a sense the ultimate expression of the criticism of Luxemburg is the apparent underestimation of the following understanding of the role of the party in the promotion of success in the class struggle: “Class consciousness is the ‘ethics’ of the proletariat, the unity of its theory and practice, the point at which the economic necessity of its struggle for liberation changes dialectically into freedom. By realising that the party is the historical embodiment and the active incarnation of class consciousness, we see that it is also the incarnation of the ethics of the fighting proletariat. This must determine its politics.” (Lukacs, p42). Therefore: “The true strength of the party is moral. It is fed by the trust of the spontaneously revolutionary masses whose economic conditions have forced it into revolt. It is nourished by the feeling that the party is the objectification of their own will…..that it is the visible and organised incarnation of their class consciousness. Only when the party has fought for this trust and earned it can it become the leader of the revolution. For only then will the masses spontaneously and instinctively press forward with all their energies towards the party and towards their own class consciousness.” (Lukacs, p42). Lukacs indicates the important role of Luxemburg in the struggle for the possibility of proletarian revolution but he does not precisely establish that she was one of the major formulators of the approach that he is indicating in connection to the relation of the party and class in the development of revolutionary consciousness. But the central point that he does not indicate with his various formulations about the character of the relation of party and class is that Luxemburg has elaborated the strategy that can feasibly realise this interconnection of party and class in a principled manner of adherence to revolutionary objectives. This is the approach that the strikes of the workers should become the basis of generalised opposition to capitalism and the very dynamism of this mass movement has the potential to become a conscious rejection of the domination of the present system and instead express the possibility of revolt. Lukacs contends that “the unity of theory and practice was preserved in her actions”. (Lukacs, p44). But this recognition of the principled character of the role of Luxemburg is not connected to her elaboration of a credible and genuine strategy for the liberation of the working class, which was expressed in the approach of the mass strike. Instead, his praise for the principled character of the role of Luxemburg actually lacks any genuine political content. This means that Luxemburg is being interpreted as a moral example for the struggle of socialism to gain inspiration, but the actual theoretical and political role of her activity remains obscure. The point is that her most important contribution was to develop a credible conception of the revolutionary transformation of society. Indeed, it can be argued that one of the most important tasks of the present is to try to develop support for the approach of the mass strike. Failure in this task can only be to the detriment of the possibility of success in the contemporary class struggle.

In other words, one of the most important aspects of the possibility to develop revolutionary class consciousness is the development of a strategy that can facilitate the prospect of the realisation of social transformation. It could be argued that it is the apparent failure to develop this perspective in the present period which is an important aspect of the crisis of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. In other words the practical problems of the influence of a false consciousness is an adaption to the interests of the bourgeoisie which means that the possibility to develop effective and principled forms of class struggle are being undermined: “But in the case of the proletariat such a consciousness not only has to overcome these internal bourgeois contradictions, but it also conflicts with the course of action to which the economic situation necessarily commits the proletariat (regardless of its own thoughts on the subject). The proletariat must act in a proletarian manner, but its own vulgar Marxist theory blocks the vision of the right course to adopt. The dialectical contradiction between necessary proletarian action and vulgar Marxist (bourgeois) theory becomes more and more acute. As the decisive battle in the class struggle approaches, the power of a true or false theory to accelerate or retard progress grows in proportion.” (Lukacs, p69). Thus: “In other words, when the final economic crisis of mankind develops, the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the, i.e., on its class consciousness.” (Lukacs, p70). But what is the strategy that will transform the workers from a subordinated class within capitalism to becoming a social force capable of challenging the domination of capitalism and so facilitating the possibility of the transformation of society? It could be argued that Lukacs has not yet established the importance of a strategy of change and instead has only outlined reasons for the development of class struggle. In other words, the opposition of the workers to the aims of capital accumulation is not sufficient to establish a revolutionary consciousness that is based on the objective of the transcendence of the present economic system. But Lukacs asserts that limitations of the accommodation of the workers to capitalism does establish a dynamic of revolutionary change: “But as the proletariat has been entrusted by history with the task of transforming society consciously, its class consciousness must develop a dialectical contradiction between its immediate interests and long-term objectives, and between the discrete factors and the whole. For the discrete factor, the concrete situation with its concrete demands is by its very nature an integral part of the existing capitalist society; it is governed by the laws of that society and is subject to its economic structure. Only when the immediate interests are integrated into a total view and related to the final goal of the process do they become revolutionary, pointing concretely and consciously beyond the confines of capitalist society.” (Lukacs, p71). But how do immediate interests of the workers become transformed into the long-term objective of the overcoming of the domination of the capitalist system? Would it not be more logical and feasible for the workers to aim to improve the present society through the realisation of reforms and improvements? Lukacs does not seem to have a satisfactory answer to this question apart from vaguely suggesting that the workers attempt to overcome the limitations of a false consciousness and related adaptation to the capitalist system in terms of the impetus to continually attempt to overcome the problems of the immediate situation. But this reason for the development of class struggle is not sufficient to establish the possibilities of the revolutionary demise of capitalism. Instead Lukacs has outlined the premises of discontent with capitalism but has not established how the domination of this economic system can be overcome. In this context the major issue that has not been resolved is the issue of the development of a strategy of change. Lukacs has outlined how the subordination of the working class within capitalism may result in the discontent of the workers, but this aspect does not indicate the feasibility or possibility of the revolutionary transformation of society. Ultimately only the elaboration of a strategy of class struggle can provide important answers to these types of questions.

However, these limitations do not mean that Lukacs is unaware of the various problems and challenges related to the realisation of successful class struggle. He comments that: “Here in the centre of proletarian class consciousness we discover an antagonism between momentary interest and ultimate goal. The outward victory of the proletariat can only be achieved if this antagonism is inwardly overcome.” (Lukacs p73). But it could be argued that this difference is not necessarily of a polarised character. Instead, the very advances in terms of the achievement of reforms could become the basis to develop an impetus to strive to transform these reforms into a definitive expression of revolutionary change. Importantly the issue involved is that of perspectives. An understanding of reforms as being all that is necessary, and radical change is not required, will result in a situation of the ideological accommodation of the working class to the capitalist system. But a contrasting view that connects reforms to the possibility of revolutionary change will mean that the aim becomes to consider reforms as part of an integral process of the genuine transformation of society. Therefore, the primary issue is the type of strategy that is being advocated by the socialist party. This approach will influence the views of the workers and as a result provide the basis for the character of the political actions of the people. The choice is not between reforms or revolution but instead whether reforms become to be considered as part of a process of genuine revolutionary change.

In other words, the problem of the intransigent approach of Lukacs is that he seems to reject the role of reforms because of an emphasis on the monetary interests of the working class at the expense of the long term aim of revolutionary change and the realisation of socialism. This is definitely the standpoint of a reformist approach, but the principled alternative is not to reject the role of reforms but instead to try and connect them to the ultimate objective of the transformation of capitalism and the achievement of a genuine socialist society. The approach of Lukacs seems to express the ultra-leftism of the period of the early 1920s, which is a reaction to the opportunist role of the parties of social democracy. In relation to the present period, even the approach of reforming capitalism has become discredited because of the apparent domination of the various bourgeois parties that support the present system. Hence the political aim is to re-establish the importance of reforms, but also to outline how they are connected to the possibility to advance socialism. But these reforms will be based on the activity of the workers, such as the attainment of a 30-hour week and the advance of workers’ management of production. What is necessary is that the various socialist parties try to promote a programme that connects immediate demands to the ultimate objective of the socialist transformation of society. It will be argued by some that this approach has become impractical because of the domination of bourgeois ideology, which means that most people support the system. This is a valid point, but the ability of the conservative parties to seem credible is the result of left-wing parties being divided, and being confused about the type of programme they want to promote. Instead of this unsatisfactory situation we need to develop the credibility of a programme that connects reforms to the process of changing society in a socialist manner. It could be argued that this possibility is no longer feasible because the various social democratic parties have become uncritical defenders of capitalism whilst the revolutionary alternative is small and ineffective. This point is correct, but there is no alternative other than to try and promote a credible programme that is able to relate to the aspirations of the people, and to show that the realisation of the aims of the workers requires the demise of capitalism. However, it could be suggested that the situation is more unfavourable to this possibility than in the era of Lukacs in the 1920s when strong communist parties emerged in order to express a credible revolutionary alternative. This is a valid point, but it should not be used as a justification for not advocating a programme of radical reforms. It can be possible to develop support for this approach, but this also means that the various rival Marxist organisations need to unite in favour of the aims of what is a minimum programme. In this manner they can attempt to influence the forces of mass social democracy to adopt this radical approach. Obviously even this constructive development will not necessarily result in success, but the objectives of social change will have been advanced for increasing popular support for the transformation of capitalist society. Indeed, it could be argued that in one respect the situation is more favourable than in the era of Lukacs when the social democratic parties were essentially motivated to defend the capitalist system. In contrast, in the present the various social democratic organisations are often inclined to support radical alternatives given the failure of their attempt to stabilise capitalism. But the problem is the weakness of the forces of Marxism when compared to the development of the mass communist parties of the 1920s.

Lukacs considers the contradictions of proletarian class consciousness as follows: “Here, in the centre of proletarian class consciousness we discover an antagonism between momentary interest and ultimate goal. The outward victory of the proletariat can only be achieved if this antagonism is inwardly overcome.” (Lukacs, p73). This understanding is an important point, but it can be argued that the situation is even more complicated in the present than this formulation implies for the period with which Lukacs is concerned. This is because the role of bourgeois ideology is to suggest that it has become increasingly impractical for workers to try to realise their immediate interests through the trade unions. Instead, it has become the ideology of the present situation that only the actions of bourgeois governments can ensure that the workers are able to achieve their material interests. In this context, it is being suggested that the utilisation of militant action by the workers to try and realise their aspirations is futile. The influence of this ideological view has been very important in the undermining of militant activity, and so the present situation seems to express the lack of confidence of the workers that they can even act to realise momentary interests. It is necessary for socialists to try to challenge the influence of this pessimistic ideology, and to instead attempt to increase the influence of the view that the workers can act in an effective manner to uphold their immediate interests, and in that manner promote the possibility that they will be able to realise a more progressive type of society. Hence there is a connection between the effective defence of minimum interests and the generation of the transformation of society. But the major problem is that the trade unions have increasingly become ineffective even in relation to the defence of the immediate interests of the workers. This problem has to be tackled with the regeneration of the trade unions into effective defence organisations of the workers. Only thus will it become possible to develop the conditions for a more radical transformation of society.

However, Lukacs is ambivalent about this type of perspective and comments: “Every momentary interest may have either of two functions: either it will be a step towards the ultimate goal or it will conceal it. Which of the two it will be depends entirely on the class consciousness of the proletariat and not on the victory or defeat in isolated skirmishes.” (Lukacs, p73). But this apparent limitation of trade union activity is increasingly irrelevant in the recent period when it has become very difficult to develop effective militant action. The point is that essentially any trade union action, if effective, can be of importance in raising the confidence of the workers and so facilitating the general development of class consciousness. Lukacs considers that the problem of trade union activity is that the members of these organisations sometimes consider immediate aims more important than the ultimate objective of socialism. This is obviously an aspect of the character of trade unions, but in the present situation of the general decline of the role of these organisations any success in the realm of industrial actions can only contribute to the development of class consciousness. The victory of the trade unions in the present difficult circumstances can only contribute to the progress of the confidence of the workers concerning their ability to change society. Hence the view that the defence of immediate interests is somehow problematical, because it is not inherently connected to more radical views, seems to have become an antiquated perspective. Instead, any success of immediate struggles of the trade unions can only have a progressive aspect because they result in the increased confidence of the workers that they can uphold their interests in a militant manner. But in ambiguous terms Lukacs seems to deny the progressive possibilities of limited struggles. Instead, he outlines the possibility for the reformists to undermine the development of the actions of the workers because of the limitations of the role of their opportunist ideology. But he contends in a dogmatic manner that this aspect will be overcome: “But the proletariat cannot abdicate its mission. The only question at issue is how much it has to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true understanding of its class situation and a true class consciousness.” (Lukacs, p76). However, this comment is a dogmatic assertion which does not explain the problems involved in the development of a genuine class consciousness of the workers. Instead, it is assumed that the workers will somehow acquire class consciousness because of the character of their situation within capitalism, which makes them inherently receptive to this possibility. But we know that this assumption has proved to be questionable for a variety of reasons, such as the failure to create viable and principled revolutionary organisations and the complex problems involved in the development of a consciousness that supports the aims of socialism. This is not to suggest that socialism is not feasible, but it does mean that the issue is more complex than the assumption being made by Lukacs about the inevitable development of a revolutionary class consciousness of the workers. The major aspect was the point made by Gramsci about the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie which has undermined the possibility to develop effective support for a revolutionary alternative. Instead, Lukacs assumes in a dogmatic manner that at some inevitable moment the logic of the class position of the workers will result in them becoming a conscious opposition to capitalism. But the complexity of the development of class consciousness has indicated the problems with the optimistic aspects of Lukacs’ perspective.

Indeed, he seems to contradict the apparent optimism of his initial perspective of revolutionary change when he also comments that: “As the product of capitalism the proletariat must necessarily be subject to the modes of existence of its creator. This mode of existence is inhumanity and reification. No doubt the very existence of the proletariat implies criticism and the negation of this form of life. But until the objective crisis of capitalism has matured and until the proletariat has achieved true class consciousness and the ability to understand the crisis fully, it cannot go beyond the criticism of reification and so it is only negatively superior to its antagonist. Indeed, if it can do no more than negate some aspects of capitalism, it cannot at least aspire to a critique of the whole, then it will not even achieve a negative superiority. This applies to the petty-bourgeois attitudes of most trade unionists…..And if the proletariat finds the economic inhumanity to which it is subjected easier to understand than the political, and the political easier than the cultural, then all these separations point to the extent of the still unconquered power of capitalist forms of life in the proletariat itself.” (Lukacs, pp76-77). This comment would seem to suggest important and incontrovertible reasons why it is difficult for the workers to challenge and then realise the demise of capitalism. The subordination of capital to labour results in the influence of a form of reified consciousness which results in the acceptance of the supremacy of capitalism, and so undermines the possibility to develop popular support for a revolutionary alternative. In other words, the exploitative character of capitalism facilitates the influence of a reactionary type of consciousness within the workers which is connected to an acceptance of a subordinated position within the relations of production. Thus, the only apparent alternative to a consciousness of a ‘passive observer moving in obedience to laws which it cannot control’ is a subjective illusion of the ability to establish control of objects in a meaningless manner. (p77). In other words, it would seem that the workers can only arrive at a form of alienation in response to their situation of exploitation. They are not able to facilitate the realisation of a genuine expression of being able to define the character of the relations of production in accordance with their class objectives. Instead, it would seem that the domination of capital over labour is an inevitability that is difficult to transcend. In an important sense Lukacs has outlined the problems involved with realising the task of the transcendence of the domination of capital over labour. But it could be argued his description of the invincible character of the supremacy of capitalism results from him not outlining the aspects of an alternative in an explicit manner. However, he does suggest that what is necessary is the ‘successful conclusion of the class struggle’. (Lukacs, p80). But it has not been explained how this possibility can be realised in strategic terms. Instead, the apparent difficulties of the class struggle, such as the role of the ideological and economic domination of the capitalist class has been indicated, but the alternative of a principled strategy for the transformation of society has not been elaborated, except in terms of the justification of some vague principles of the importance of the overcoming of the domination of capital. But it would be unfair just to criticise Lukacs for these limitations. It could be argued that this problem is a general aspect of the approach of many Marxists and socialists. Possibly Gramsci has attempted to tackle it most effectively with his counter-hegemonic perspective of the necessity to establish the credibility of the ideological alternative of socialism. But it could be argued that in general terms there has been a political crisis because of the increasing failure of contemporary revolutionary Marxists to construct a convincing strategy of change. Instead, in a dogmatic manner, the approach of Lukacs is often supported despite the situation of the present being different.

In other words, there would seem to be a credible reason for the political optimism of Lukacs, which was the empirical fact of the recent Russian Revolution and the general development of political unrest in Europe. But this perspective would seem to have been discredited by the capacity of the capitalist system to continue and ensure a situation of apparent domination. Thus, it would seem that the issue of the perspective of change has become more complex than trying to outline to the workers the necessity to overcome their exploited situation, which had been the general perspective of Lukacs. Indeed, it has been the very failure of so-called Marxist parties that has led to increasing questions being raised about the revolutionary perspective. Therefore, the issue has become more complicated than the approach of Lukacs, which was about convincing workers to overcome their exploited situation. Instead, the domination of bourgeois ideology means that the very importance of a socialist alternative has been called into question and the various organisations of the working class have been put onto the defensive. The result of these developments is a crisis of perspectives and the increasing questioning of the validity of the socialist alternative. In contrast the early era of Lukacs seemed to be an expression of the increasing development of possibilities for the success of international proletarian revolution. This meant he could write with a sense of confidence about the possibility of the victory of the workers and of the credibility of revolutionary change. Therefore, he could effectively deny the importance of the difficulties that have become increasingly apparent for revolutionary change. But in a sense what could be considered to be over-optimistic in his approach was the expression of the situation that was apparent in the early 1920s. But it could also be argued that this perspective actually under-estimated the difficulties of revolutionary change in terms of the situation in Europe in this period. However, in philosophical and economic terms, Lukacs did recognise the complexities of revolutionary change. But in an important sense there was a contradiction between these different aspects of his approach. In political terms he was upholding the standpoint of growing popular opposition to the domination of capitalism, but this approach proved to be increasingly discredited by events. But if we consider that the political aspects of his standpoint were not the most important aspect of his theory, then it could not be suggested that his approach was being undermined by a sense of over-optimism. Instead, he outlined a conception of social reality that made an effort to understand its complexity in socialist terms.

Lukacs outlines a summary of his understanding of the revolutionary potential of the working class: “In his early critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, Marx gave a….account of the special position of the proletariat in society and in history, and the standpoint from which it can function as the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution: “When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the previous world order it does no more than reveal the secret of its own existence, for it represents the effective dissolution of that world order.” The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realisation of the – objective – aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention.” (Lukacs, p149). But this view is the major illusion of Marxism. There is no inherent revolutionary role for the workers within capitalism because of their social location within the relations of production. Instead, this perspective is based on the interpretation provided by socialist and Marxist theory. It is this standpoint which has indicated that the workers are exploited by capitalism, and that this is unsatisfactory, and so the situation demands the necessity for the liberation of the proletariat and the achievement of an alternative socialist system. Certainly, it can be shown in convincing terms that the workers are exploited by capitalism, but this understanding requires the development of a socialist critique of capitalism. This view does not deny the possibility that workers may come to an understanding that they are exploited by the capitalists, but it still requires the elaboration of a critique of capitalism in theoretical terms for this exploitative character of the economic system to be understood in a systematic manner. Hence, the doctrine of socialism as an alternative to capitalism is bound to be developed by intellectuals. Therefore, the crucial issue is: Does this elitist intellectual role actually undermine or enhance the possibility to realise the liberation of the working class? In other words, is socialism actually an elitist doctrine in the interests of the intellectuals who formulate it, or does it genuinely express the aim of the emancipation of the working class? Marx seems to indicate that his political economy of the exploitative character of capitalism is an indication that his objective was to genuinely achieve the liberation of the workers as an alternative to this situation of the domination of labour by capital. However, the role of the socialist party was a complicating factor because this development could imply that this party could acquire interests that express an increasing elitist ambition to dominate society after the overthrow of capitalism. This issue became important after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. But this issue was bound to be a necessary dilemma of the process of revolutionary change because the development of history has proved that the workers are not able to spontaneously overcome the domination of capitalism without the role of a socialist party. This means the actual issue becomes how to establish the genuine accountability of the revolutionary party to the working class and so, as a result, create a truly participatory form of a post-capitalist society. But, unfortunately, the examples are not inspiring in this context because the various attempts to replace capitalism with a new type of society have led to the domination of an elite party.

However, it could be unfair to criticise Lukacs in this manner, because his book is essentially written before the emergence of Stalinism. But what was of immediate relevance is the issue of his perspective of revolutionary change. He considered that the reification or alienation and exploitation expressed by the character of the capital-labour relation would create a dynamic of opposition to the system that would facilitate the process of change: “By becoming aware of the commodity relationship the proletariat can only become conscious of itself as the object of the economic process. For the commodity is produced and even the worker in his quality as commodity, as an immediate producer, is at best a mechanical driving wheel in the machine. But if the reification of capital is dissolved into an unbroken process of its production and reproduction it is possible for the proletariat to discover that it is itself the subject of this process, even though it is in chains and is for the time being unconscious of the fact.” (Lukacs, pp180-181). In other words, the very character of capitalism as an exploitative system creates the possibility for labour to come to an understanding of this situation. However what Lukacs has not yet established is whether this possibility of knowledge of the economic system by labour can facilitate its capacity to transform this situation in a genuinely revolutionary and progressive manner. Instead, it could be suggested that all that has resulted is that labour is aware that it is exploited by capital, and yet has not been able to establish how to transform this situation in a genuinely progressive manner by the actual transcendence of this economic relationship. Lukacs does suggest that the worker can understand the alienating limitations of the capital-labour relation, but this situation could merely result in discontent unless this aspect is connected to developing the popular influence of a coherent and valid strategy of change. But instead of addressing this issue in a convincing manner Lukacs seems to be content to suggest that history has a dynamic of inherent change: “History is no longer an enigmatic flux to which men and things are subjected…..History is, on the one hand, the product (albeit the unconscious one) of man’s own activity, on the other hand it is the succession of those processes in which the forms taken by this activity and the relations of man to himself (to nature, to other men) are overthrown.” (Lukacs, pp185-186). But this description of the character of history does not establish the problems created by the role of the capital-labour relation and the issues that are indicated in relation to the tasks of the transformation of this system into its emancipatory opposite. The point is that the character of people’s productive activity can be an expression of the domination of the forces of dominating relations that ensure that the creative and dynamic aspects of the process of production are undermined, and instead the superiority of capital seems to be an expression of the durability of an economic system based on the exploitation of labour. In this context the task, as Lukacs is aware, is to facilitate establishing the effectiveness of an alternative to this situation but the problem is complicated by the transformation of the various Marxist parties into reformist organisations that adapt to the interests of capital. Hence it is necessary to establish credible alternative types of revolutionary parties which can promote revolutionary strategy within the working class. Hence, there is no inherent dynamic that indicates that the exploitative character of the relations of production of the various types of society is an indication that progressive change is inevitable. Therefore, the seeming perspective of Lukacs that there is an inherent tendency for the development of social transformation, because of the exploitative character of the major forms of social relations, is a questionable perspective because of the complex aspects involved in the possibility to realise revolutionary change that will establish new relations of production. This issue has become more complicated in recent history because of the conscious awareness of the capitalist class to try and undermine the promotion of change as a result of the struggles of the working class. Indeed, it is necessary for the bourgeoisie to uphold its economic and political domination by the consolidation of its ideological hegemony over society. Only if the workers are able to effectively reject this type of domination will it become possible and feasible that genuine revolutionary change is credible. However, the conception of historical materialism being promoted by Lukacs seems to suggest that as a result of the dynamic character of the various forms of the social and economic character of society there is an inherent tendency for people to reject the domination of a ruling class within the prevailing relations of production. But the problem with this approach is that the result of the discontent of the producers has not been to establish an emancipatory type of society. Hence Lukacs would have to address the problems in his approach and provide reasons why the discontent and activity of the producers does not result in the formation of an emancipatory society. Thus, he has to tackle the very problematical aspects of his own attempt to justify a revolutionary perspective.

The ultimate answer to these apparent dilemmas is to suggest that the alienated character of the workers does not necessarily result in the development of the popularity of a revolutionary approach because of the influence of the ideology of the capitalist system, which includes the conservative role of the various Social Democratic organisations: “The danger to which the proletariat has been exposed since its appearance on the historical stage was that it might remain imprisoned in its immediacy together with the bourgeoisie. With the growth of social democracy this threat acquired a real political organisation which artificially cancels out the mediations so laboriously won and forces the proletariat back into its immediate existence where it is merely a component of capitalist society and not at the same time the motor that drives to its doom and destruction. Thus, the proletariat submits to the ‘laws’ of bourgeois society either in a spirit of supine fatalism (the state as an ideal or cultural positive) …. or else in a spirit of moral affirmation….. It is doubtless true that these ‘laws’ are part of an objective dialectic inaccessible to the reified consciousness and as such lead to the downfall of capitalism. But as long as capitalism survives, such a view of society corresponds to the elementary class interests of the bourgeoisie.” (Lukacs, p196). In other words, the very actuality of capitalism facilitates the development of an alienated consciousness within the working class that seems to suggest that it has not the economic and political power to change society and instead has to adapt to the domination of the present system. This development is connected to the increasingly reformist character of Social Democracy which suggests to the workers that their class interests are most effectively promoted by a perspective of trying to change the prevailing system in a moderate manner rather than supporting the alternative of a revolutionary approach which is considered to be impractical and not connected to what is possible within the limits of capitalism.

Lukacs is suggesting that social democracy is based on an acceptance of the situation of reification which means that it facilitates the domination of capital over labour in terms of the justification of an alienated consciousness within the working class that is based on the acceptance of the exploitative limitations of the capitalist system: “On this territory, social democracy must inevitably remain in the weaker position. This is not just because it renounces of its own free will the historical mission of the proletariat to point to the way out of the problems of capitalism that the bourgeoisie cannot solve; nor is it because it looks on fatalistically as the ‘laws’ of capitalism drift towards the abyss. But social democracy must concede defeat on every particular issue also. For when confronted by the overwhelming resources of knowledge, culture and routine which the bourgeoisie undoubtedly possesses and will continue to possess, as long as it remains the ruling class, the only effective superiority of the proletariat is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality - to see the reified forms as processes between men; to see the immanent meaning of history that only appears negatively in the contradictions of the abstract forms, to raise its positive side and put it into practice.” (Lukacs, p197). Thus, the very problem with social democracy is that it can only promote an understanding of society which essentially justifies the very alienated conditions of capitalism and so implies that social transformation is not feasible and instead that it is necessary for the worker to adapt to this situation and to try and achieve only modest change within the limitations of capitalism. Hence the issue becomes whether the revolutionary party can promote popular support for this justification of adaptation to the capitalist system by social democracy. But there is an important problem in relation to the feasibility of this perspective. How can the very supremacy of Social Democracy because of the significance of alienated consciousness, in a situation that is conducive to this development, be overcome by a revolutionary alternative? Hence how can it be feasible to establish the influence of a non-alienated consciousness given that the very situation of the character of capitalism is conducive to the influence of reification?

On this issue the perspective of Lukacs seems to be vague: “Reification is, then, the necessary immediate reality of every person living in a capitalist society. It can be overcome only by constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development…. But it must be emphasised that (1) the structure can be disrupted only if the immanent contradictions of the process are made conscious. Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality. If the proletariat fails to take this step the contradiction will remain unresolved and will be reproduced by the dialectical mechanics of history at a higher level, in an altered form and with increased intensity. It is in this that the objective necessity of history consists.” (Lukacs, pp197-198). In other words, the issue of challenging the importance of the aspects of alienation and reification within the process of production requires the workers become a conscious opposition to this process of subordination within the capitalist system. But how is this to be possible given that these aspects of the expression of the domination of the system seem not to be receptive to challenge by a working class that is currently unable to oppose the expression of opposition to its very alienated condition? In other words, how can the workers develop a praxis of the transformation of society given that its situation seems to be an expression of the capacity of the capitalist system to facilitate domination over labour? Lukacs’s answer is that the workers have the ability to become a subject-object of history that is able to establish a praxis of emancipation. But this perspective does not seem to address the difficulties he has already established in terms of the situation of the subordination of labour to the interests of capital. How is this domination of capital to be overcome by a working class that is subject to the reactionary influences of a condition of reification and alienation that results in its subordination within the relations of production? Lukacs’ perspective that the workers can become a subject-object of history based on an emancipatory praxis seems to be a dogmatic perspective that tries to deny the very importance of the contrasting aspect of the capacity of capitalism to ensure the continued subordination of labour within the relations of production. In other words, how can an alienated class become a revolutionary agency of change? This problem would seem to have been confirmed by the very character of events within history which have apparently indicated the ability of the capitalist class to maintain its domination over labour. In this context the very approach of revolutionary Marxism seems to have become discredited because of the failure to promote the possibility of change by the workers. Instead, the capitalist system, despite serious periods of economic crisis, has been able to undermine successful realisation of revolutionary change by the workers. It is the very conception of the workers as the subject-object of history which seems to have become a problematical perspective, because of the apparent discrediting of this approach by the role of empirical events. The question arises: Can this perspective in some manner be re-developed so that it becomes credible in providing a perspective of social change?

In answering this question, it may be necessary to reject the view that history has some purpose in terms of the imperative of the proletariat to act as a subject-object of revolutionary change. This point is not meant to deny the possibility of revolutionary class struggle, but this will not occur because of some teleological dynamics to history which makes change a pre-determined necessity and possibility. Instead, the complexity of history has indicated that revolutionary transformation is not a possibility based on some inexorable dynamic of change or inherent expression of the revolutionary character of the workers as the subject-object of history. This means that change is a contingency that can only be realised if the forces of revolutionary Marxism become able to establish a genuine process of inter-relationship with the workers. Only in this manner will the political and ideological conditions be created for the development of principled class consciousness and so creating the genuine possibility for social change and the attainment of socialism. But the present problems involved with the development of the revolutionary party means that this task is very difficult, and is not based on the perspective of the inevitable success of socialism. Instead, the very character of history has inherently contingent aspects which mean that the issue of revolutionary change is very complex. Indeed, the complex character of social reality means that a dogmatic conception of the inevitability of socialism has proved to be discredited by actual events. Instead, history has an aspect of contingency which means that neither the domination of capitalism, nor the success of proletarian revolution, are inherent aspects of social reality. On this logic it has to be accepted that the victory of the workers in the class struggle is an inherent dynamic of the supposed role of the proletariat as a subject-object of history. Instead, the situation seems to favour the continued domination of capital because the character of reality is not receptive to the possibility of revolutionary change owing to the weight of the institutional supremacy of the present system. Furthermore, there may be reasons why the workers are not receptive to the perspective of revolutionary change. These include the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology and the frequent lack of credibility of revolutionary parties which often tend to be small and unpopular. Thus, the complexity of the political situation is not receptive to the realisation of the vague and hopeful notion that the workers can act as a subject-object of history. There is actually no inherent reason for this development because the exploitation of the workers may be accepted by them as a logical aspect of social reality and so this situation does not promote the dynamics for them to act as a transforming subject-object of history. Instead, it could be suggested that this perspective of the role of the proletariat as the subject-object of history is only possible under specific conditions when the workers become discontented with the continuation of capitalism and so aspire to realise a progressive alternative. But such a development is not an inherent aspect of the character of the working class and instead requires the creation of specific circumstances, such as the crisis of capitalism that indicates the limitations of the present system. However, even under these circumstances, the workers have to be able to act to enhance their social power, and the possibility of defeats in the class struggle could mean that they do not become receptive to the objective of revolutionary change. Instead, only victories in the class struggle in terms of the importance of militant action will generate the possibility of political conditions favourable to revolutionary change. However, increasingly the seeming ability of the forces of capital to ensure the continuation of its domination over labour means that the workers often become demoralised and so not receptive to the objectives of revolutionary change. Rather, it seems under these circumstances that the only possible course of action is to accept the continuation of capitalism and to try to obtain modest gains in this context. This has been the apparent lesson of the last fifty years because of the effectiveness of the offensive of capital against labour. It seems that the very conception of the proletariat as the subject-object of history has been discredited by the empirical importance of actual developments in political terms. It is also necessary to suggest that the various Marxist parties have become discredited and marginalised by this situation and so their capacity to promote a perspective of the workers as the subject-object of history has been discredited by the importance of actual developments in the class struggle. But does this criticism mean that only pessimistic conclusions can be made? This would be a one-sided approach because the exploitative character of capitalism results in the working class being unable to accept its subordination within the relations of production in an enthusiastic manner. Instead, there is only the reluctant acceptance of capitalism even if people cannot envisage the credibility of an emancipatory alternative. Therefore, it is not impossible to develop a credible revolutionary party that is able to promote the aims of socialism. However, the crisis of the various Marxist organisations has to be overcome through the generation of a situation of unity and the related increased potential to promote the objectives of socialism in a more effective and popular manner. But such a development will not automatically resolve the crisis of the Marxist party, and nor will a relationship with the workers be established inevitably as a result of these developments. But the point is that without this type of progress it will be immensely difficult to establish an effective revolutionary party which could generate the development of the potential for the workers to act as the subject-object of history. This perspective is not inherently unrealistic because workers only accept the domination of capitalism, since they cannot envisage the feasibility of an alternative. In other words, they are not enthusiastic supporters of the present system. Thus, if effective progress is made in the development of a credible revolutionary party this situation could be transformed. In this context, the pre-conditions could be created for the workers to act as a genuine subject-object of history.

Therefore, what is being suggested is that the role of the workers as the subject-object of history is not inherently unfeasible. Instead, there are important reasons why this development does not occur. This situation indicates that the workers cannot conceive of an alternative to capitalism and do not envisage that they could act as the agency of the progressive transformation of reality. Furthermore, there is not the development of an effective revolutionary party which could act as the political basis to challenge this domination of bourgeois ideology within the working class. In other words, the weight of the apparent inability of the workers to be able to change society means that the perspective that it can act as the subject-object of history seems to have been discredited by actual political developments. Instead, it seems that the inherent situation of the workers is to be dominated by capital. Indeed, it appears that the problems involved in overcoming the supremacy of the capitalist system have resulted in the conception of the proletariat as the subject-object of history being definitely discredited. However, this would be a premature conclusion because the exploitative character of capitalism means that labour cannot genuinely support the continuation of the present system. This aspect of the subordination of the workers within capitalism results in it being unable to reconcile its interests with the aims and objectives of the present economic system. The subordination of labour within the relations of production means that the workers will never entirely reject the aspiration of revolutionary economic and political change. However, there is presently not a revolutionary party which can relate to this discontent effectively. Instead, the domination of capitalism continues because of the lack of credibility of a socialist alternative. But this situation does not mean that the workers are genuinely reconciled to the present domination of capitalism. The development of an effective revolutionary party could mean that the workers recognise that they are a subject-object of history. This means that the central task is to develop the political conditions which would enable a revolutionary party to become an expression of the aspirations of the workers. Therefore, it could be argued that only success or failure, in regard to this task, will definitively establish whether the workers are a subject-object of history. In other words, the failure to realise this perspective is not primarily because this conception is flawed, or has been definitely discredited by historical developments, but is instead the result of important political problems such as the failure to create credible revolutionary parties as an alternative to the organisations of Social Democracy and Stalinism. Therefore, we cannot suggest that the approach of the workers as a subject-object of history has been definitely discredited by actual developments, but instead the situation has been complicated by the political limitations of the various organisations of the workers. However, if it can be definitively shown that the workers are not a subject-object of history this would indicate that the revolutionary transformation of society was inherently problematical. In this manner the very objectives of Marxism would be shown to be an illusion. But we can suggest that despite all the complications involved in the successful realisation of the role of the workers as the subject-object of history, this understanding has not been discredited. This is because the weight of the workers as producers within the relations of production of capitalism is an indication that they represent a possible basis for the realisation of an alternative economic and political system. But this aspect does not mean that progressive change is inevitable and instead it is quite possible that the domination of capitalism will continue and so the possibility to realise the role of the workers as a subject-object of history will be definitely undermined. Hence what is actually discredited by events is the perspective of the inevitability of revolutionary change as an expression of a supposed teleological character to history.

But does this point mean that the various contradictions and limitations of the capitalist system are overcome and resolved because of the problems involved in developing the realisation of an alternative? The answer to this is provided by the formulation of Lukacs: “It turns out that the contradictions in which the antagonisms of the mechanics of history are expressed are only capable of an objective social solution in practice if the solution is at the same time a new, practically-won consciousness on the part of the proletariat.” (Lukacs, p199). This formulation indicates the ultimate revolutionary potential of the working class because its consciousness is able to understand the character of history and so is able to express the possibilities of resolving the limitations of the social reality of capitalism at the level of practice. It could be argued that this approach has been discredited by the actual empirical character of capitalism which seems to indicate that this perspective has proved to be illusory. There is no inherent attempt by the worker to in some manner express the logic of history and its potential for the realisation of a different and emancipatory society. Instead, this perspective could be considered to be an illusion of Marxism. However, it also can be argued that the discontent of the workers has expressed this potential historical dynamic even if the possibility to realise this aspiration has not been successful. Indeed, it could be argued that the importance of bourgeois ideology is in order to continually undermine the possibility to connect the class character of the workers to the role of historical development and the potential for an alternative to capitalism. The emphasis of bourgeois ideology is on discrediting the prospect of the realisation of the connection of the working class to the possible emancipatory objectives of its actions and expression of discontent with the domination of capital. However, it would seem that the bourgeoisie has been successful in this objective and has continually undermined any aspirations that workers may have had about the possibility of an alternative to capitalism.

Therefore, the following perspective of Lukacs seems to have been discredited by the actual development of empirical events: “What is ‘reflected’ in the consciousness of the proletariat is the new positive reality arising out of the dialectical contradictions of capitalism. And this is by no means the invention of the proletariat, nor was it ‘created’ out of the void. It is rather the inevitable consequence of the process in its totality; one which changed from being an abstract possibility to a concrete reality only after it had become part of the consciousness of the proletariat and had been made practical by it. And this is no formal transformation. For a possibility to be realised, for a tendency to become actual, what is required is that the objective components of society should be transformed; their functions must be changed and with them the structure and content of every individual object.” (Lukacs, pp204-205). But this is not what has occurred or seems likely to occur. Instead, the consciousness of the workers appears to be limited by an acceptance of the continued domination of capitalism and so the most that can be obtained is the realisation of reforms and partial gains. Furthermore, this aspect seems to be upheld by the general reformist character of the parties representing the workers, and the fact that the political system is based on the possibility of limited changes rather than radical transformation. It could be argued that a revolutionary party would challenge this ideological domination of the capitalist system, but the problem has been that it has become increasingly difficult to develop these types of organisation. In other words, the result is that it seems not possible to challenge the domination of capitalism. In this context it would seem logical that the workers would accept the continuation of capitalism as an aspect of social reality that could not be changed. Thus, the optimism of Lukacs about the transforming potential of the consciousness of the workers does not seem to have been realised. Indeed, it could be argued that his approach was actually a dogmatic perspective even in relation to the more radical situation of the 1920s. Primarily he seems to have underestimated the influence of Social Democracy and its ability to express the interests of the workers in a reformist manner. In other words, the problematical aspect is that Lukacs considers the very character of the working class has some inherent revolutionary possibilities and so the importance of the aspects that undermine this possibility are effectively ignored. However, it also has to be suggested that over a period of time the character of capitalist society has become more complex so that the basic divisions are not necessarily between labour and capital. Instead, there has developed an important white collar stratum with complex interests and which is able to express them within capitalism, and the overall result of important social changes is that the aspect of polarisation of the classes that was apparent in the era of Lukacs has become more complex through the increasingly important role of the white collar strata. Hence the understanding of a monolithic opposition between capital and labour has to be modified by recognition of the importance of these developments and the related increasing complexity of the class structure. So, it could be argued that the basis of the popular support for capitalism has been generated by these sociological developments. Thus, even if we can still suggest that the polarisation of alienated labour and capital is present, this has become complicated by these changes to the social structure. The result of these contemporary aspects of capitalism is that any assumptions about the possibilities of proletarian revolution have to take into account the new sociological developments. This observation does not mean that the capital-labour relation is no longer important, but that it has been modified by the increasing complexity of the social structure. So, the issue that is crucial to the question as to whether revolutionary change is still feasible concerns whether the industrial proletariat can establish the support of the white-collar strata for the objective of radical change. Ironically, in some instances the white-collar section of the population has sometimes been more progressive than the manual workers, as shown by the attitudes concerning the membership of the European Union by the United Kingdom. But these reactionary developments are connected to the development of demoralisation within manual workers caused by their apparent inability to influence the policies of national governments. So, the workers create their own sense of having a lack of social power which creates serious questions about the capacity of this group to be able to change society. The seemingly very serious aspect of this development represents something that Lukacs could not have anticipated. Instead to him the only major issue was whether the workers would realise the logic of their class situation as the subject-object of history. But we know that this level of confidence has been seriously questioned by the increased ability of capital to maintain its domination over labour. Thus, it would seem that the approach of Lukacs seems to be an expression of wishful thinking. Or at the very least his confidence about the possibilities of revolutionary change seems to have become questionable given the problems associated in relation to the achievement of this possibility because of the ability of the capitalist class to oppose any attempt at revolutionary change. Indeed, it would seem that the ultimate problem becomes that the party acts on behalf of the working class in order to achieve the success of revolutionary change. This development suggests that the revolutionary perspective is essentially supported by Marxist intellectuals rather than being a genuine aspiration of the workers. However, this problem did not seem to be an issue in the era of Lukacs because in this period it would seem that increasing sections of the working class became supporters of the objectives of the Communist Party. Thus, it was quite logical and persuasive for Lukacs to define the workers as the subject-object of history. But the increased complexity of social reality means that this perspective has become questioned as being no longer important in the character of the contemporary situation. Instead, the workers no longer seem to have an affinity with the objectives of Marxism and the role of revolutionary parties has become increasingly marginal if not entirely irrelevant. Indeed, this development has led numerous commentators to suggest that capitalism is a system that has become dominant and that this situation is not likely to be effectively challenged.

The point being made is that the character of the complexity of social reality seems to suggest that the workers are not an inherent aspect of social transformation through being a subject-object which implies that history will be transformed in accordance with the dynamics of this apparently revolutionary character of the proletariat. Instead, the capacity of the defenders of capitalism to be able to maintain their system in effective terms would seem to suggest that this perspective is not essentially credible. Instead, there have been many problems in relation to the possibility for revolutionary change which seems to suggest that the supporters of capitalism are able to oppose any prospects for challenging the system. This means that the concept of the workers as the subject-object of history is not upheld in terms of the importance of empirical developments which indicate the capacity of the capitalist class to be able to ensure the continued domination of their system. The problem is that a revolutionary party would seem to be crucial if revolutionary change is to occur, but this very aspect has been called into question by the increasing insignificance of the various Marxist organisations. They do not seem to be able to create support within the workers for socialist objectives and instead they are without any political importance. So, the proletariat seems to have consciously rejected the view that it is a subject-object of history and therefore is opposed to capitalism. Rather, the working class seems to have preferred to attempt to realise improvements within the limitations of the system. This aspect has meant popular support for reformist parties and the increasingly lack of importance of revolutionary organisations. In other words, it would seem that the workers prefer to try and improve their situation within capitalism and so periods of mass support for revolutionary-type organisations has become increasingly rare. But it also has to be suggested that the various Marxist-type parties have increasingly adapted to the domination of capitalism and so have tended to adopt a reformist type of political approach. Thus, the influence of genuine revolutionary Marxism has become increasingly ineffective and limited to the role of various small political organisations. In this situation how are the workers able to express revolutionary-type aspirations? Instead, it would seem that the character of the capitalist system indicates the difficulties involved in developing a genuine possibility of change by the workers. The weight of the domination of capital over labour seems to generate problems in relation to the task of establishing the conditions for revolutionary change.

Lukacs tries to reject this conclusion by suggesting that the workers have an inherent praxis of activity that facilitates the possibility of social change. He comments: “But it must never be forgotten: only the practical consciousness of the proletariat possesses this ability to transform things.” (Lukacs, p205). “Thus, proletarian thought is in the first place merely a theory of praxis which only gradually…. transforms itself into a practical theory that overturns the real world…..Only then would the statement that the proletariat is the identical subject-object of the history of society become truly concrete.” (Lukacs, pp205-206). But this perspective is not actually realised in progressive terms. The views of the workers are, under most circumstances, influenced by bourgeois ideology and only under exceptional situations is this aspect challenged by the transformation of class struggle into a dynamic of the aspiration for revolutionary change. Thus, the workers can be discontented and yet still accept the supremacy of capital because of the influence of bourgeois ideology and the related development of scepticism about the possibility of revolutionary change.

Indeed, Lukacs seems to be ambiguous about the revolutionary character of the workers when he comments that: “Even the proletariat can only overcome reification as long as it is orientated towards practice. And this means that there can be no single act that will eliminate reification all in one blow; it means that there will be a whole host of objects that at least in appearance remain more or less unaffected by the process.” (Lukacs, p206). In other words, only the consistent and prolonged development of the class consciousness and practice of the workers will ensure the generation of a consistent revolutionary perspective. Thus, it is implied that the realisation of this development could be undermined by the influence of bourgeois ideology and by defeats in the class struggle. Hence the complexity of the class struggle could create problems in relation to this attempt to develop a consistent expression of a revolutionary approach by the workers. Lukacs concludes that the workers need to develop a consciousness of the necessity of change if this possibility is to be realised: “The objective economic evolution could do no more than create the position of the proletariat in the production process. It was this position that determined its point of view. But the objective evolution could only give the proletariat the opportunity and necessity to change society. Any transformation can only come about as the product of the – free - action of the proletariat.” (Lukacs, pp208-209). This approach seems to be contradictory - on the one hand the emphasis is on the objective dynamics of the capitalist system that can only result in the possibility of the development of revolutionary change, and on the other hand there is the importance that is given to the subjective aspect of the creation of a consciousness of the workers that is receptive to the objective of social transformation. So, there is a tension between an emphasis on determinism and, on the other hand, the voluntary aspect of the conscious expression of a revolutionary consciousness within the workers. But in general, the overall approach is on the importance of the aspects of the alienation and exploitation of capitalism generating the development of a revolutionary consciousness. Hence the importance of free will and conscious activity becomes subordinated to the weight of the determined dynamics of the capitalist mode of production in facilitating the possibility of a revolutionary consciousness. This means that the ultimate emphasis is on historical necessity and the apparent under-estimation of conscious activity, or it could be suggested that the aspect of consciousness is defined by the apparent imperatives of the capitalist social formation, which facilitate the development of a revolutionary approach within the workers. Thus, it is being suggested that the very dynamics of the capitalist system can only ultimately result in the creation of a revolutionary consciousness within the workers. This perspective would actually seem to underestimate the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology and the fact that the subordination of the workers within the relations of production results in the generation of an acceptance of this situation. Instead, dogmatically, Lukacs emphasises the connection between the subordination of labour to capital within the relations of production for creating a potentiality for the development of a revolutionary consciousness. But we know from the very empirical aspects of the class struggle that economic and political developments are more complicated than the views of Lukacs. Instead, the ability of the capitalist class to facilitate its continued domination over society has led to an increasing acceptance of the system by the workers and this aspect has led to the marginalisation of the various Marxist parties. Hence the approach of Lukacs would seem to have become falsified by the actual character of economic and political events and the related apparent ability of the capitalist class to maintain its domination over society. Thus, the understanding of Lukacs concerning the inherent revolutionary character of the workers would have to be seriously modified in relation to the character of events since his period. Instead, it would be necessary to establish a different conception of history in which the role of the working class was related to the complexity of events and instead a more flexible approach adopted that was able to establish a less rigid approach concerning the possible revolutionary potential of the workers. This criticism does not necessarily mean rejecting the approach of Lukacs, but instead that it should be modified in order to allow for the importance of the complexity of the various empirical events that have occurred since his era. In other words, to elaborate a more open-ended conception of history with regards to the possible revolutionary role of the workers.

The most important issue that needs to be elaborated on in order to conclude this study is to discuss whether the conception of the character of the workers as the subject-object of history has been confirmed or repudiated by the complex character of social reality since the period of Lukacs. It would seem that the approach of Lukacs has been repudiated by the apparent success of the supporters of capitalism in maintaining this system and that the workers have apparently been increasingly reluctant to carry out a revolutionary role. Indeed, social and economic changes would seem to suggest that the approach of Lukacs has become antiquated because of the importance of these developments. The working class has become more socially diverse and has led to the development of a white-collar strata that can often obtain improvements within the capitalist system. Furthermore, the workers have often been influenced by nationalism and populism which has led them seemingly to reject their adherence to the objectives of class struggle. In this complex situation the perspective of the workers as the subject-object of history would seem to have become antiquated because of the weight of social and political developments. However, it could also be argued that the perspective of the subject-object is not necessarily undermined by the weight of contemporary political developments. The point is that capitalism is still subject to situations of economic crisis which imply the necessity to realise an alternative. Hence the issue of how capitalism is to be improved is still relevant. This aspect continues to raise the importance of the role of the workers, will they act in order to change the system, or instead will they accept the domination of capital despite the limitations of this system? In other words, if the workers do not act in a manner that expresses the character of being a subject-object of history, capitalism will continue to be subject to economic problems and it will still uphold the situation of the domination and exploitation of labour within the process of production. So, the workers in terms of the importance of their class interests would seem to have reasons why they should act against the continued domination of capital. If such actions occur it will not be because they have consciousness of themselves as a subject-object of history, but instead this development represents their assertion of class interests against the situation of domination by capital. Such a possibility will also be motivated by the continual weight of the economic problems of the present system. However, despite this lack of consciousness of being a subject-object of history it could be argued that this is an aspect of such defensive class actions because the ultimate result of this development could be the formation of an alternative socialist society. In this manner the role of the class struggle would have resulted in the development of a higher social formation that would indicate the ability of the workers to create social progress. Hence even without the actual conscious understanding of the conception of being a subject-object of history this would have been the expression of the creation of a socialist society by the workers. In other words, a higher development of society would have been the result of the role of class struggle and so indicated the outcome of the dynamics of a class acting as a subject-object of history. However, it is necessary to emphasise that there is no inevitable dynamic that would result in the realisation of a teleological logic of history in terms of the workers expressing the character of being a subject-object of history. Instead, only the development of class struggle and the possible aspect of the successful overcoming of the domination of capital will decide this issue in empirical terms. But, without this possibility, it can also be suggested that the workers in general terms, apart from the brief success of the Russian Revolution, have not been able to effectively act as a subject-object of history. Instead, the continued domination of capital would seem to suggest that this possible character of the workers is still only a potentiality that has not yet been realised. So, the situation of the workers is that of a class that is subject to the domination of capital. The continuation of this aspect would seem to confirm that Lukacs’ approach is not confirmed in actual events and developments. However, in a sense the workers despite this apparent unfavourable result of the class struggle are in some sense still a subject-object of history. This is because the workers can never be content with the continued domination of capital, and so they will still strive to transform this situation, even if the methods chosen are often inadequate in relation to this objective. Therefore, the domination of capital is an indication that the present situation is unacceptable and that this means that, in however an inadequate manner, the workers will strive to become a revolutionary class capable of overcoming the domination of capital. In this context they still express the dynamics of being a subject-object of history, despite their limitations at the level of consciousness and practice. The point is that capitalism is still a system of domination and exploitation, if the workers do not act to transform it. Only when they act in a revolutionary manner to transform this situation, or to achieve social progress, which means acting as a subject-object of history, can genuine historical advances be realised. Thus, it could be argued that the workers are a potential subject-object of history, but for various economic and political reasons, this potential has never been realised. Therefore, it would be more precise to suggest that the workers are a possible subject-object of history and the potential for historical development, but for a complex of reasons this potential has not been realised. This does not mean that the workers are content with their situation under capitalism, but they presently cannot envisage the possibility of an alternative. If this situation continues in the long-term then it could be argued that the role of the workers as a subject-object of history has become an illusion. But it is the role of a revolutionary party to provide the reasons why workers should oppose the domination of capital. Success in this context could transform the situation and so facilitate the possibility of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. So, the interaction of party and class indicates that the workers can possibly act as the subject-object of history.

In other words, the tendencies of capitalism, such as the possible role of the workers as the subject-object of history depend on the aspect of developments in the class struggle. Therefore, a potentiality depends on the balance of class forces. In immediate terms it would seem that the domination of capitalism is invincible and that the possibility of revolutionary change is not feasible. However, the continuation of capitalism continues to create discontent which could generate support for the role of an effective Marxist party. In these circumstances, which are not inevitable, it could become possible that the workers act as a subject-object of history. But only the international success of the workers in the class struggle will ultimately and genuinely indicate that the connection of the proletariat to the aspect of being a subject-object of history has been confirmed in practice.