MARXISM AND FREEDOM

It has often been suggested that Marxism is an authoritarian doctrine that is opposed to the genuine attempt to realise human freedom. This issue will be analysed in terms of a study of the book by Raya Dunayevskaya: ‘Marxism and Freedom’. (Aaaker books, Delhi 2013) Her standpoint is based on an elaboration of the approach of a form of revolutionary Marxism that is based on the understanding that the character of the Bolshevik revolution was essentially democratic but that its emancipatory possibilities was undermined by the development of Stalinism which led to the creation of a state capitalist regime. In order to analyse this study in an effective manner it will be necessary to establish that the understanding of the conception outlined in the book concerning the relation of party and class in the revolutionary process and the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat is credible and principled. This type of analysis will enable us to determine whether the Bolsheviks did act in accordance with Marx’s objective of the establishment of an emancipatory type of society that would initially have the form of what was defined as the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words, in this analysis of Dunayevskaya’s book we take nothing for granted and instead attempt to adopt a critical approach that is able to establish a coherent perspective concerning the issue of the character of a proletarian revolutionary regime and the process of transition to communism. This means that in an important manner this article will be a supplement to a previous article about the issue of the relation of authoritarianism and Marxism. We would suggest that Marx never outlined the political aspects of the revolutionary regime after the overthrow of capitalism, and so in an important sense the views of the Bolsheviks cannot be considered to be an un-problematical continuity of previously established views. This does not mean that their policies were inherently unprincipled but instead were an expression of an improvised reaction to the challenges and difficulties of the empirical situation. We have to evaluate whether the approach of Dunayevskaya adequately recognises these practical difficulties of the circumstances of the October revolution that meant that it was difficult to promote the development of a revolutionary regime that would correspond to Marx’s primary aim of the expression of a process of self-emancipation of the working class. The point being made is that there is a tendency for revolutionary Marxists to emphasise the differences between the regimes of Lenin and Stalin and so not recognise the aspects of continuity in terms of the role of the party acting on behalf of society. In other words, people tend to support Trotsky’s view that the Bolshevik government under Lenin’s leadership was essentially principled when compared to the authoritarian and elitist character of Stalinism. This point is not lacking in credibility, but it is also necessary to understand that the effective supremacy of a single party had already been established under the regime of Lenin. This situation would have to be changed in terms of the re-development of genuine democracy of the Soviets if the possibility to establish a more effective type of revolutionary government was to be developed. In other words, the regime of Lenin could only be transitional in relation to the development of a more democratic and principled type of administration, or else the essentially temporary type of government would become the basis for the consolidation of a bureaucratic elite. In other words, it could be suggested that Lenin’s regime was a form of bureaucratic administration that still ruled inconsistently on behalf of the interests of the workers and peasants. For example, the New Economic Policy expressed the influence of the workers and peasants to establish a more stable economic situation that would create the possibility for the development of a higher level of prosperity. However, the ending of the NEP by the government of Stalin indicated that the objective of increased accumulation had become the most important aspect of economic activity in the context of the emergence of a bureaucratic class that benefitted from the development of the increased profitability of the economy. Why had someone like Stalin emerged who seemed to be intent on rejecting the approach of the Bolsheviks that had been established between 1918-28? The answer to this question seems to be that the approach of a Bolshevik government acting on behalf of the workers could only be a temporary prelude to either the development of a more democratic type of economy based on the principles of participatory democracy or else the consolidation of an increasingly bureaucratic system. This latter prospect meant the development of a new system of the exploitation of the producers. We will have to establish how successfully Dunayevskaya analyses these developments in terms of her elaboration of the aims and principles of Marx in order to evaluate the policies of the Bolsheviks between 1918-30. The problem for any attempt to connect the views of Marx with later revolutionary developments is that his standpoint is brief and lacking in empirical detail. This means that it is unavoidable that the result of this problem is that to some extent the relation of Marx to later events in the class struggle must be hypothetical and based on interpretation rather than empirical fact. We can only assume that his revolutionary perspective was based on the principle of the role of the self-emancipation of the workers. But what did this approach mean in relation to the influence of a revolutionary party? Marx does not seem to address this issue in any convincing detail. Instead, we can only make conclusions based on a conception of how we consider that the principle of proletarian revolutionary change would be realised in the most principled and democratic terms. The very problems of this lack of a strategy for the overthrow of the domination of capital meant that the issue of revolutionary change was bound to become subject to controversy. Indeed, it could be suggested that Lenin’s apparent innovations concerning the relation of party and class could not be considered to be anti-Marxist because Marx had not elaborated his views on this issue in convincing detail. In other words, it was possible to interpret Marx’s strategy in imaginative terms because he did not seem to have addressed this type of question in a systematic manner. Thus, what did Marx’s apparently vague reference to the approach of self-emancipation of the proletariat mean in terms of actual practice? Also, what would be the relation of party and class under the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism? Dunayevskaya attempts to address these types of issues and provides an explanation of what would be Marx’s approach in relation to these important aspects of the class struggle. But we have to suggest that however convincing may be her interpretation it cannot be anything other than a collection of conclusions that cannot be considered to be a definitive interpretation of the approach of Marx. But this aspect is not necessarily problematical because it is our own task to elaborate what we consider to be a Marxist approach concerning issues of the class struggle and the character of the revolutionary proletarian regime. However, this means that it would be more credible to claim that we are outlining an interpretation of the views of Marx rather than expressing a definitive understanding of an elaborated textual approach. In this context we have to consider whether Dunayevskaya is content to merely try and develop this limited interpretation of Marx or is instead attempting to justify a definitive understanding of his views on a particular question. Ultimately, we have to be confident that our own views represent the most credible understanding of aspects of class struggle. This approach would obviously be influenced by Marx, but such an evaluation would not be based on an uncritical acceptance of the views of Marx as being inherently credible and correct. In this context the problem is possibly that Dunayevskaya attempts to portray her interpretation of Marx as being the ultimate expression of his approach and so it becomes difficult to understand the various aspects of the class struggle in an independent manner. Thus, what we have to try and achieve is an independent approach that does not rely on Marx in dogmatic terms when evaluating the aspects of history and the relation of theory to these developments.

The introduction to the book of Dunayevskaya outlines the importance of Hegel’s understanding of the role of consciousness for the transformation of reality, and so Marx connects this aspect to the importance of the development of human practice. But Marx was also to indicate the role of alienation which undermines the possibility to creative collective struggle in opposition to the capitalist system. Hence the following conclusion is important: “What is crucial to both Hegel and Marx is that there are barriers in contemporary society which prevent the full development of man’s potentialities, of man’s universality.”(p35) However, this aspect was to be neglected in Marxist theory until Gramsci’s elaboration of the importance of the ideological hegemony of the ruling class as an explanation for the possibility to undermine the development of revolutionary consciousness within the working class. Marx indicated in his classic work ‘Capital’ that the workers tended to accept the role of capitalism because of their subordination to the imperatives of the process of economic accumulation, and so the revolutionary forces were attempting to transform this situation by developing the influence of a perspective that facilitated the cooperative activity of the workers to oppose the system. But the problem with this perspective is that it could be suggested that Marx underestimated the necessity to develop a type of revolutionary consciousness if the possibility of mass action against capitalism is to occur. This is because of the equation of the importance of consciousness with an idealist approach that considers the aspect of the role of the material world and the activity of labour to be of secondary significance. Therefore, it is suggested that: “Hegel, said Marx, could not carry out his dialectical logic consistently because he remained from first to last a philosopher seeking to trace the logical movement, not of the worker, but of the intellectual. Hegel had established the principles. He had discovered them out of the devastating critique which the French revolution made of all previous philosophy. But the philosopher working only with ideas in his head and in the heads of others, cannot solve the problems of society. He cannot create new unities. He can only summarise those already reached. He is always standing apart from the real process of nature – which is nature working on nature – and constantly transforming it into a new unity with himself.” (p42) But this standpoint would seem to suggest that the very role of philosophy is problematical because it is inherently idealist and tends to emphasise the aspect of consciousness instead of the importance of material reality. However, would it not be a less dogmatic conclusion to suggest that what is required is a type of philosophy that is materialist and yet is able to recognise the importance of the role of ideas and the aspect of consciousness? Could it not be suggested that this is the philosophical standpoint being elaborated by Marx? In other words, it is necessary to reject the traditional demarcation between materialism and idealism and instead develop an approach based on the combination of these aspects in the understanding of social reality and its relationship to consciousness. This development could be said to be expressed in Marx’s conception of praxis, or the combination of the role of material practice with conscious aims established by the process of labour. Hence the very issue of revolutionary change by the role of labour would be connected to the workers challenging the justification of the domination of the relations of production by capital as a result of their development of a conscious cooperative character in terms of increasing their influence within the process of economic activity. In this manner the possibility of changing the character of the capitalist mode of production was connected to the interaction of the development of an oppositional form of economic and political practice by the workers as an outcome of this collective aspect of the role of labour. However, what Gramsci understood better than most other Marxists, was that if the capitalist class retained ideological hegemony within the system then this development could be undermined, and the possibility of collective class action connected to the expression of the role of the workers would be replaced by the aspect of ideological acceptance of the system. Thus, Marx’s analysis of capitalism was unsatisfactory until the innovations of Gramsci because of this lack of an ideological explanation of the reasons why the workers would tend to accept the continued domination of the system despite the aspect of their economic exploitation. Marx’s approach tends to be one-sided because of this apparent lack of an analysis of the reasons for the continuation of capitalism, except in terms of the economic capacity of capital to ensure the reproduction of the domination of labour by capital. However, despite the importance of Gramsci’s ideas it is questionable whether the significance of his ideas has been accepted by contemporary Marxists. Instead, the issue of the continuation of capitalism seems to be ignored and this means the advocacy of a perpetual conception of the possibility of revolutionary change. We will have to examine whether Dunayevskaya justifies this type of dogmatism in terms of her study of the political situation of capitalism in the post-war period.

In other words, the major point being made is that the emphasis of Marx on the importance of the process of the exploitation of labour by capital seems to suggest that the workers will inherently reject this situation and instead develop opposition to the continuation of the prevailing economic system. Hence it does not seem to be of importance that the ideology of the ascendency of capital is dominant because this aspect will become challenged by the increasing development of the struggles of the workers to oppose the present economic system. Dunayevskaya outlines how Marx develops an understanding of the alienated character of labour and that the workers will increasingly oppose this development in order to realise the alternative of communism. But we have to accept that this possibility has become complicated because of the development of difficulties concerning the issue of trying to transform capitalism into socialism. The prevailing influence of bourgeois ideology has meant that support for the aim of overcoming the domination of capitalism has often been undermined and reduced to an insignificant aspect of social reality. In other words, there is no automatic relationship between the aspect of the role of exploitation and the development of opposition to capitalism. Instead, the very apparent durability of the present economic system means that people tend to accept its domination. It could be argued that this issue was not apparent to Marx because the character of capitalism could still be understood as an emerging system that was developing in contradictory terms in relation to the role of class struggle. However, as Dunayevskaya outlined what Marx indicated in his works of the 1840’s the connection of class struggle to the possibility to realise an alternative emancipatory society: “It was no accident that his Communist Manifesto was published on the eve of the 1848 revolutions. He could do this because of his idea of theory as the generalization of the instinctive striving of the proletariat for a new social order, a truly human society – a striving that arises out of the dialectic of the economic process which at each stage, produces what Marx called the “new passions and forces” for the new social order. Although no one can see the concrete form of the new society until it actually appears, Marx’s vision did anticipate the future society. He was not “left behind”, not because of his individual genius, but because of his dialectical method of uniting theory and practice.” (p65) However it could be suggested that the actual problem was that Marx underestimated the importance of the difficulties that could undermine the possibility to realise revolutionary conclusions to the development of class struggle. In this context he seems to have consistently underestimated the importance of the role of a revolutionary party if the possibility to relate the struggles of the workers with the aim of communism was to be realised. However, the problems involved in trying to develop an effective role of a revolutionary party has actually become the major issue over the last hundred years for explaining the continuity of the capitalist system. In other words, there has been a spontaneous development of the class struggle, but this has frequently not led to the increased influence of a revolutionary approach because of the failure to develop the importance of the role of a Marxist party. Increasingly the influence of the view that capitalism is the only possible system has become increasingly important. Hence Dunayevskaya’s claim that Marx anticipated the realisation of the future society is a view that seems to deny the importance of the difficulties involved in trying to achieve this objective. Obviously, this issue could not be understood by Marx because he still outlined his predictions concerning future developments at the very beginning of the creation of capitalism, but it could be argued that Dunayevskaya’s emphatic claim about the imminent prospect of proletarian revolution is a dogmatic view that seems to ignore the importance of the difficulties involved in trying to realise this perspective. Instead, she seems to consider Marx’s confident predictions about the possibility of proletarian revolution as an expression of an absolute truth that is bound to be realised. However, the very development of the importance of Social Democracy and Stalinism, and the marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism, seems to have complicated the realisation of the possibility of the development of radical change by the workers.

Marx could not have anticipated these developments, but instead Dunayevskaya still seems to assume that his predictions of imminent proletarian revolution remain valid. She comments: “The discovery of irreconcilable class antagonisms made 1848 a turning point in modern history. Today, even bourgeois writers can see that 1848 opened the era of mass proletarian revolutions. But in 1848 only Marx saw.” (p70) Thus it is suggested that the workers acted in a spontaneous revolutionary manner: “Had the workers listened to their leaders there would have been no revolutions in 1848. But with no parties, in the modern sense of the word to lead or mislead, the revolutions made themselves. Thousands of workers and students appeared on the street of Paris demanding universal suffrage and “organisation of labour”. (p70-71) However there was an important difference between mass demonstrations and the realisation of a successful uprising against the emerging capitalist system. The point is that the very failures of the mass unrest of 1848 was an indication of the important necessity to develop the leadership of a revolutionary party that would also be advocating the role of a strategy of political change. Indeed, this aspect was recognised by Marx with his objective of the realisation of a democratic republic as a prelude to the development of the possibilities to establish an egalitarian type of society. But Dunayevskaya underestimates the importance of the necessity to establish a political relationship between a revolutionary party and the role of the workers when she implies that the workers had in spontaneous terms been able to realise a revolutionary perspective of social change: “Marx caught the essence and spirit of the creative energies of the masses when he recognized that the workers had declared the revolution permanent, that is to say, not to stop at the bourgeois democratic phase but to continue to full proletarian democracy.”(p73) This is a questionable interpretation of the perspective of Marx who it could be argued continued to uphold the necessity for the workers to become conscious supporters of the creation of a democratic republic in terms of adhering to the perspective of the emerging communist party. But instead of this approach concerning the development of a political relationship between party and class, Dunayevskaya interprets Marx’s perspective as expressing the view that the dynamics of the spontaneous struggle of the workers could realise successful revolutionary change: “Marx’s discovery - that the objective movement itself produces the subjective force for its overthrow – transformed utopian socialism into scientific socialism. It drew a sharp class line between the intellectuals (utopians) who would continue with their schemes and the proletariat which had now separated itself from these sects and was creating a movement of its own.”(p73) Thus it is claimed that Marx connected the creative activity of the workers into a theory of liberation, which seems correct but this was not in terms of denying the importance of revolutionary leadership of a communist party and the connected aspect of the promotion of a strategy of change. The point is that it was not the workers who spontaneously advanced the aim of the democratic republic in order to facilitate progress towards the realisation of communism. Instead, this was the perspective of the party associated with Marx. In other words, the objective was to connect the discontent and spontaneous struggles of the workers with the aim of the democratic republic being advocated by the communist party. It was necessary to combine the aspect of the unrest of the workers with the programme of the communists and so in that manner connect mass discontent with the attempt to realise the most effective progress of mass activity. The point is that without this connection the very potential of spontaneous struggle could not be realised because of the failure for this aspect to become genuinely conscious in terms of support for definite political objectives. But these issues are not apparently considered to be an important challenge by Dunayevskaya because it is vaguely implied that the spontaneous dynamism of the mass struggles has led to success. However, it is also accepted that in empirical terms there was a ‘defeat of the 1848 revolutions’(p74) But the point is that an important reason for this defeat was the failure to connect the spontaneous dynamism of the mass struggles with the role of a communist party that would be able to develop the influence of a perspective of the creation of a democratic republic. An important reason why the mass struggles of the 1848 revolutions was defeated was because of the failure to connect this aspect to support for the perspective of a genuine communist party. The spontaneous activity of the workers was not sufficient in order to facilitate the successful realisation of a democratic republic and instead authoritarianism was generally consolidated in Europe.

Dunayevskaya outlines the elitist limitations of Lassalle who accommodated to the interests of the authoritarian state dominated by Bismarck. But it is not indicated that Lassalle also had an important role in the creation of a credible socialist party. The point is that the political limitations of Lassalle were only genuinely overcome when the Social Democrats adopted the programme of support for the creation of a democratic republic. Marx and Engels assisted this development with their ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’. However, there was a problematical aspect to this process of political clarification because it was not sufficiently established how the emerging Social Democrat party should respond to the authoritarian state of Prussia. The result was a gradual development of acceptance of this type of state in terms of the advocacy of a programme of reforms. This situation ultimately led to the support of the Social Democrats for the imperialist policies of the German state with the outbreak of the first world war. In other words, it could be suggested that the approach of Lassalle of adaptation to the role of the Prussian state became effectively supported by the Social Democrats. An important problem was that Marx had not outlined a perspective that would effectively oppose the elitist conception of politics outlined by Lassalle. Instead, he accommodated himself to the leadership of the German socialists by Lassalle. In this context his various criticisms of the leadership of Lassalle were not made public. But the differences were actually very important because what was the basis of the division between Marx and Lassalle was that the former upheld the conception of the necessity of the self-emancipation of the proletariat whilst the latter effectively advocated change in terms of the primary role of a political elite. The Social Democrats inherited the approach of Lassalle and this became defined in terms of the active role of the party in creating a democratic republic. Only Rosa Luxemburg ultimately challenged this elitism with a genuine perspective of change as a result of mass struggle. In other words, it could be argued that Marx’s criticism of Lassalle does not establish the importance of a different perspective of the struggle for socialism by the activity of the workers. Instead, the indication of the limitations of the approach of Lassalle and his later followers within the German socialist movement was connected to aspects of the theory of the aims of socialism. Marx did not sufficiently establish the importance of the political role of the working class in establishing change.

However, Dunayevskaya would reject this conclusion and instead consider that Marx’s work ‘Capital’ indicated the potential of the co-operative character of the workers to change the character of capitalism in progressive terms: “Marx’s shift from the history of theory to the history of production relations gives flesh and blood to the theoretical expression of the instinctive strivings of the proletariat for liberation. More than that. He says that ultimately the fundamental abolition of inequality lies in the shortening of the working day. In 1866, he made this the historical framework of capitalism itself. The struggles of the workers over the working day develop capitalist production. The ultimate creation of freedom rests upon the shortening of the working day. The philosophy of the shortening of the working day, which arose out of the actual struggle, embraces all concepts inside and outside of it. Thus, the thinking of the theoretician is constantly filled with more and more content, filled by workers struggles and workers thoughts.”(p89) This means: “The real movement of the proletariat, at this specific stage of capitalist development, revealed not only the negative aspects in the fight for the working day – the struggle against unlimited capitalist exploitation – but the positive aspects – a road to freedom.”(p90) But the problematical aspect that is not addressed by this interpretation of the perspective of Marx concerns how can a defensive type of class struggle become the expression of an offensive attempt to achieve the revolutionary transformation of society and so achieve the development of new forms of the relations of production? Instead of addressing the complex aspects of the domination of the capitalist system which undermines the possibility to develop the collective opposition of the workers it is instead concluded that the very character of the capitalist economy which results in the development of collective action against the continued ascendency of capitalism: “Due to the cooperative form of the labour process the resistance of the workers is also a mass power. The workers revolt develops from their fight against the instruments of labour into their struggle against the capitalistic conditions of labour. The workers thus at one and the same time fight for their emancipation and against the capitalistic limitations of science and technology. The depth and breadth of the class struggles are a sign that the contradictions of capitalistic production are driving towards a new resolution.” (p94) In other words an assumption is being made that the cooperative character of the role of the workers will generate the development of increasingly radical forms of class struggle that will result in the possibility of emancipatory change. But we know that this perspective has apparently been increasingly shown to be false by events. Thus, it could be suggested that the aspect of the possible progressive role of the collective character of the role of the workers has been undermined by the influence of bourgeois ideology. Furthermore, the very expression of the militant role of the workers because of its collective and cooperative character has not resulted in revolutionary developments. Instead, what has occurred is an attempt to improve the material situation of the workers within capitalism. It could also be suggested that Marx’s conception of the importance of the cooperative character of the workers was not elaborated into the development of a precise strategy of change. Instead, he could only suggest in vague terms that this aspect could become connected to the generation of mass struggle against the domination of capital within the relations of production.

In other words, Marx’s understanding of the capital-labour relation did not generate the development of a feasible perspective of the possibility for the transformation of this situation. Instead in ad hoc terms he could indicate that the experience of the Paris Commune could express important aspects of economic and political change that would transform the relations of production of capitalism into a new emancipatory situation. Hence the following conclusion of Dunayevskaya concerning the possibility for the cooperative character of the workers to achieve revolutionary change is questionable: “Due to the cooperative form of the labour process the resistance of the workers is also a mass power. The workers revolt develops from their fight against the instruments of labour into their struggle against the capitalistic conditions of labour. The workers thus fight for their emancipation and against capitalistic limitations of science and technology. The depth and breadth of the class struggle are a sign that the contradictions of capitalistic production are driving towards a new resolution.” (p94) It could be suggested that this aspect of the cooperative character of labour does indicate this possibility of revolutionary change that would generate the development of a new type of emancipatory society. But there are also important contrasting reasons why this possibility has not been realised. In particular the role of ideology has continually undermined the development of the influence of an alternative revolutionary approach that attempts to promote the aim of the liberation of labour from the exploitative and alienating role of the domination of capital. Increasingly the influence of revolutionary Marxism has become marginalised and the importance of the view that there is no effective alternative to capitalism is not challenged. However what is being suggested is that the Paris Commune established a new situation because it expressed the possibility for overcoming the end of the domination of capital: “What was new was that the Commune, by releasing labour from the confines of value production, showed how people associated freely without the despotism of capital or the mediation of things.”(p101) But the point was that the progressive possibilities of the Paris Commune were ended by the success of the process of counterrevolution. Hence the emancipatory possibilities of the Commune have proved to be an exceptional aspect in history. This development has not become the precedent for the development of genuine proletarian revolution in the twentieth century. Thus, the assumption being made that the Paris Commune was an even that influenced the character of historical events in the twentieth century was shown to be falsified by actual developments. But this does not mean that the role of the Commune was ultimately futile because it is still an indication of what has to be realised in economic and political terms if the emancipation of humanity is to be realised. In this manner it could be argue that the experience of the Commune is more relevant for contemporary socialism than the problematical experience of the Bolshevik October revolution of 1917. The mass actions that led to the formation of the Commune led to the development of a democratic institution in which the various parties in the assembly were genuinely accountable to the electors and various organisations expressing participatory economic democracy were established. In other words, the experience of the Commune is still a development which represents a classic understanding of what is meant by a revolutionary society aiming to create socialism and communism. In contrast the experience of the October revolution led to a tension between the increasingly dominant role of the revolutionary party and the aspirations of the workers who considered that their class interests could be realised by the Soviets. It is questionable whether this issue was ever resolved in a genuinely progressive manner, although the unfavourable economic situation meant that the aspect of the domination of the revolutionary party became unavoidable.

However, it would also be questionable to exaggerate the merits of the experience of the Commune, which Dunayevskaya seems to be doing when she comments: “What was new was that the Commune, by releasing labour from the confines of value production, showed how people associated freely without the despotism of capital or the mediation of things.”(p101) The brief period of the Commune could not have meant the development of an alternative type of relations of production based on the expression of new economic principles which meant a rejection of the role of the domination of capital over labour. Instead, only aspects of the possibility of an economic democracy of the producers could have occurred in the brief period of the Commune. This meant that the role of the Commune co-existed with the continuation of the capital-labour relation. But the point is that the historic importance of the Commune was that it expressed the possibility for the empirical realisation of an alternative type of society. Primarily the formation of the Commune was an expression of the role of the popular revolutionary struggle of the people to end various forms of elitist and authoritarian dictatorships in France. In this manner genuine forms of democracy were an expression of how it could be possible to create a different and emancipatory type of society. This meant that the historic importance of the Commune was that it expressed the ability of the people to develop popular views about the necessity for a democratic organisation of society in economic and political terms. Hence the revolutionary process was an aspiration of the people to try and create a type of society that was a genuine alternative to the domination of authoritarian elitism. In this manner it still remains an example of historical importance because the aims of the Commune have never been realised in terms of actual experience since its demise. But obviously any attempt to emulate the Commune in the present period would have to uphold a more effective programme for the realisation of economic and political democracy. In this manner the issue of the role of political parties would have to be addressed so that the possibility of the domination of the single and exclusive revolutionary party is challenged by the development of a genuine system of democracy. In this context the Commune is actually a model because its government was based on the development of cooperative unity between different socialist organisations. Hence it was the experience of the Russian October revolution which rejected this lesson of the Commune and instead promoted the effective supremacy of the exclusive revolutionary party. Therefore, we can probably learn more from the Commune in constructive terms if we compare its merits with the possibly more problematical experience of the October revolution in Russia. This does not mean rejecting the importance of the October revolution, but rather understanding that it is not a model to be copied. In other words, there is a problem with the very role of the omnipotent domination of one revolutionary party within society. This development cannot establish the possibility to establish genuine democracy which requires the importance of the aspect of competition between different parties. Only when the people are able to freely vote for the particular party which they support can we suggest that democracy is being genuinely expressed in a possible post-revolutionary society. This view does not mean that one form of revolutionary party is not the most genuine expression of the interests of the working class, but the point is that it is necessary that the political system enables the possibility for people to choose between different political alternatives in a genuine manner. In this context it could be quite possible that people could vote to reintroduce capitalism, but this prospect does not mean that we should deny the role of a genuine system of multi-party elections. Instead, the major revolutionary party should act in a manner that indicates that it is a genuine and deserved expression of the interests of the workers. This aspect should ensure that this organisation would continue to have the confidence of the people. It has been the lack of democracy of so-called socialist societies which has provided the major argument in favour of capitalism. The limited character of democracy within capitalist society has still been considered to be superior to a situation of the apparent lack of any type of democracy within so-called socialist societies. Indeed, this issue has proved to be very important for the advocates of bourgeois ideology to provide apparently effective reasons why the alternative of socialism is problematical.

However, Dunayevskaya seems to be unaware of this political problem caused by the Stalinist justification of socialism in terms of the necessary domination of the single revolutionary party. Instead she can only conceive of capitalism as being in a situation of imminent transition to socialism because of the dynamics of the cooperative role of the workers creating the possibilities for revolutionary change: “As far back as the Communist manifesto, Marx showed that the capitalists are unable to grasp that the truth that capitalism is a transitional social order because they and their ideologists transform “into eternal laws of nature and reason the social forms springing from the present mode of production”. Because they do not see the future, the next social order, they cannot understand the present. Proletarian knowledge, on the other hand, grasps the truth of the present. Because it is not a passive, but an active force, it at the same time restores the unity of theory and practice.” (p111) But this perspective would seem to be a justification of a very dogmatic view that seems to have little relationship to the actual problems involved concerning the development of a revolutionary consciousness of the working class. The capitalist class is able to have confidence that the economic system they support is durable precisely because of the problems involved in trying to develop a revolutionary consciousness within the working class. This aspect is connected to the increasingly difficult character of the tasks involved in trying to create an effective and successful revolutionary party. In general terms the forces of revolutionary Marxism are insignificant and marginalised. But the parties supporting the present system are in an ascendency and their domination of the political system is generally not questioned. This point could be made both when Dunayevskaya wrote her book and in relation to understanding the present situation. The general domination of bourgeois ideology within the working class is an indication that the cooperative character of the role of labour does not result in an uncomplicated process of development of a revolutionary consciousness within the working class. Instead, bourgeois ideology is generally dominant, and the forces of revolutionary Marxism are marginalised and insignificant. This does not mean that the development of a radical consciousness of the working class is not possible, but what is obvious is that a sustained influence of what Gramsci defined as a counter-hegemonic ideology is necessary if a revolutionary approach is to become both popular and credible. But these issues seem to be ignored by Dunayevskaya because she utilises the approach of Marxist political economy in order to justify the view that the exploitation of the cooperative character of labour will almost inevitably result in the development of a revolutionary form of class consciousness. Actual historical development has shown that this approach is both dogmatic and generally not based on a convincing understanding of the role of the working class.

In other words, it is being assumed that the aspect of the cooperative character of labour will inherently generate the development of a consciousness of the necessity for the workers to strive to realise an alternative type of society. But this aspect is not realised for may complex reasons, but it could be argued that the very importance of the domination of capital means that labour tends to accept this situation and limits its interests to what economic progress can be made within the limits of the present economic system. However, this understanding is being rejected in terms of the understanding that the very cooperative character of labour means that the only possible development is an intensification of the role of class struggle: “It was the cooperative form of the labour process which grew continually. The more the workers were knit into huge cooperative units, the more capital had to attack and suppress them. Instead of a continuous growth of equality and democracy, you would see such class struggles as the world had never seen before, and a growing and increasing revolt of the workers.”(p122) But this perspective could be said to be a simplified understanding of the economic and political situation of capitalism and this view could be said to underestimate the importance of the aspects that result in the development of forms of discontent with capitalism which do not result in an effective challenge to the system. Indeed, the very development of the role of trade unions could be said to express the understanding that it is possible to achieve improvements within the present economic system in terms of the role of mass collective struggle. This means that the aim of revolutionary change becomes considered to be unimportant and the objective of a few Marxist parties and is an objective that is not supported by the workers in consistent terms. Indeed, it could be suggested that the very aspect of the cooperative character of the workers means that they have the ability to be able to act in a collective manner in order to achieve economic gains within the context of the role of the present capitalist economic system. In this context the aim of revolutionary transformation would seem to be an objective of Marxists which is often not supported by the workers. Instead of the uncertain progress expressed by socialism it would seem to be more credible and effective to attempt to achieve increasing prosperity within the context of the continuation of the capitalist system. However, the increasing austerity of the last forty years would seem to undermine the credibility of this perspective, but it could also be suggested that the working class has become less economically important to the development of the economic system and so lacks the collective capacity to be able to transform the character of the economy.

But these complicating aspects seem to be denied by Dunayevskaya who can only conceive of the growing ability of an increasingly powerful working class to be able to transform society. She quotes Marx who suggests: “Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital who usurp and monopolize all advantages of the process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, degradation, exploitation, but with this top grows the revolt of the working class, a class increasingly in numbers and disciplined, united, organised by the vey mechanism of the process of production itself.”(p122) This perspective is utilised to justify the following conclusion: “Marx wrote this in 1867, ninety years ago. Since that time, the unity, discipline and organization of the working class has grown until today it is the most powerful social class the world has ever seen. As centralisation has increased, and the number of capitalist magnates diminished, so of necessity has the labour bureaucracy grown. For the magnates by themselves are too few to discipline tens of millions of workers. This bureaucracy is their weapon against the cooperative society.” (p122) Such a conclusion is too simplistic to provide a feasible explanation of the failure to change capitalism into an alternative socialist society. Instead, it has to be suggested that the very aspect of the domination of capital over labour continually creates the development of a situation which seems to be omnipotent and so cannot be challenged and transformed. In this context the important issue for Marxism is whether it is able to promote a perspective that is able to express the possibility of genuine revolutionary change given these aspects which seem to reinforce the continual domination of the economic system. Hence the complexity of these issues means that it would seem to be a dogmatic conclusion to mainly blame the role of the trade union bureaucracy for this apparent durability of capitalism. The point is that the trade union leaders tend to accept the continuation of capitalism because they consider that an alternative is not realistic and so what is necessary is to try and realise gains for the workers within the present system. Furthermore, the influence of revolutionary parties has become increasingly marginal and less important. Instead, the very importance of a reformist approach is an indication that the objective of making modest gains within the present system seems to be more realistic than the attempt to realise a revolutionary alternative. Thus, the very aspect of the cooperative character of the workers is to promote the development of collective action in order to make social gains within the limitations of the present system. Indeed, the apparent importance of this reformist approach would seem to have definitively discredited the relevance of a revolutionary standpoint. But this development of the influence of reformism is apparently glossed over by Dunayevskaya who only seems to consider the radical possibilities of the collective and cooperative character of labour.

However, this understanding also seems to be contradicted by the importance of the empirical study of the political role of the various socialist parties that developed after the era of Marx and Engels. Their approach was based on an emphasis on reforming capitalism in the interests of the workers rather than expressing the importance of revolutionary change in order to create socialism. The political character of the Social Democratic party influenced by Kautsky was that: “It lived entirely in the realm of the difference between immediate demands and the ultimate goals of socialism. The ultimate goals of socialism could wait. Meanwhile, there was the “practical” struggle and in that they could show phenomenal gains.” (p153) But this understanding could be said to be a dogmatic interpretation of the perspective of Kautsky. Instead, it could be suggested that he considered that the realisation of reforms would be the most effective manner in which the possibility to make advances towards the achievement of socialism would occur. However, what became increasingly apparent was that it was the very attempt to realise reforms which would increasingly undermine the willingness of the Marxist party to strive to achieve revolutionary change and so in that manner achieve the success of the most convincing strategy of transformation to socialism. Increasingly Kautsky became marginalised because he attempted to uphold the connection of the role of reforms to a process of development of the possibility for socialism, whilst the pragmatism of the majority of the leaders of the Second International became concerned with the importance of reform of capitalism rather than the apparent problematical objective of socialism.

But it is convincingly suggested by Dunayevskaya that it was the creation of Soviets in the 1905 Russian revolution which indicated the development of both a perspective of change and an expression of how an alternative type of society could be created. But the dismissal of the credibility of the perspective of Rosa Luxemburg’s conception of the mass strike means that it seems that this approach is not considered to be the most important interpretation of the events of the 1905 Russian revolution. Instead in dogmatic terms it is claimed that: “No one gave any serious consideration to the phenomenon of the soviet.” (p160) But it could be suggested that in different terms both Trotsky and Luxemburg had developed a perspective that attempted to connect the empirical events of the 1905 revolution to a strategy of revolutionary change. In this manner they understood the role of the Soviet as practical confirmation of their strategic approach. Trotsky had outlined the perspective of permanent revolution and how this indicated the necessity to establish a worker’s government if genuine economic and political change was to be realised, and Luxemburg outlined how the dynamism of the workers could aspire to realise this process of revolutionary change. But the strategic importance of the approach of Luxemburg is not acknowledged by Dunayevskaya. The point is that it was Luxemburg who outlined convincingly the importance of a strategy by which the workers could collectively act in order to realise an alternative type of society. This was the alternative to the general approach of the leaders of Social Democracy, who considered change in the limited terms of the introduction of reform measures in parliamentary type institutions. What Luxemburg attempted to establish was that this process of elitist type change could not result in advances towards the realisation of socialism, and instead only the collective action of the workers could generate the most effective conditions for the establishment of a process of overcoming the domination of capitalism. This is because only the activity of the workers could end the domination of capital over labour, an issue that seemed to be ignored by the increasingly elitist approach of the leaders of German Social Democracy.

In other words, it was the approach of Luxemburg who established in the most effective manner the importance of the perspective of the necessity for the workers to achieve revolutionary change. But this aspect seems to be ignored by Dunayevskaya who considers that Lenin in 1917 adopted the most convincing and principled perspective of change by the mass action of the workers organised in the Soviets. But the point is that this approach was not unique and was shared by the standpoint of Trotsky. In other words, the very events of the February revolution in Russia established the importance of the role of the Soviets as the major support for the bourgeois Provisional government. Hence Lenin was essentially reacting to empirical developments when he adopted the perspective of a struggle for political power by the Soviets. There was nothing profound about this development of a strategy of Soviet power, but instead a recognition that the Soviet had become the most important political agency of collective action within society. But it has to be suggested that Lenin was one of the most effective promoters of the perspective that the Soviets should reject their stance of support for the bourgeois government and instead assume the expression of the aim of achieving political power in order to achieve the possibility of progress towards socialism. However, it was Trotsky who expressed immense skill in terms of organising the role of the Soviets in terms of the aim of achieving political power. But Dunayevskaya does not seem to indicate this role and instead seems to assume that the revolutionary approach of Lenin would be realised in practice.

However, the problem is that the very success of the revolutionary process led to the role of the party acting on behalf of the working class. This could only mean that the Bolsheviks would be the most dynamic and effective expression of the interests of the workers and peasants. It could be argued that in the short-term the role of the party and class would not become problematical and that it could be suggested that the party would act in terms of the interests of the workers. However, in the long-term this aspect could not be the expression of the development of a genuine socialist society which would seem to require the aspect of the importance of the initiative of the workers. In other words, the tensions and problems of the post-capitalist society were inherent in the very character of the process of revolutionary change. But this understanding does not seem to be supported by Dunayevskaya who instead considers that a genuine process of proletarian revolution was increasingly undermined by the increasingly complex problems of the post-revolutionary situation: “The November, 1917 revolution was the first historical instance where the workers not only gained power, but held it in contrast to the Paris Commune, which was bloodily put down after two months of existence, the new workers state called the dictatorship of the proletariat or the Soviet state, survived the protracted civil wars launched against it by international capitalism. It left a ruined country facing starvation but there was no doubt at all that “the dictatorship of the proletariat” was there to stay. The two biggest tasks it faced theoretically were (1) how would labour assert its mastery over the economy and state and (2) since the dictatorship of the proletariat is supposed to be a transitional state – transitional to socialism would it achieve its own “withering away”? On these hinged the long-range aim of establishing a truly classless society….to end what was considered to be the pre-history of man.” (p194) This understanding of the character of the October revolution as an expression of an authentic process of proletarian revolution is problematical. It could be suggested that what occurred was the development of a situation in which the role of a Marxist party was very important for establishing the success of a revolutionary process. Hence from the very beginning of these developments in 1917 it was the role of the Marxist party that was crucial for ensuring the successful overthrow of the role of the bourgeois government. The only result of this development was that the revolutionary party ruled on behalf of the workers because of its dominant ascendency within the role of the Soviets. However, this development did not necessarily have an authoritarian logic because it could be suggested that the activity of the party was an expression of trying to realise the interests of the workers in the most effective manner. But the problem was that the difficulties posed by the economic and political situation meant that the government could not be the consistent expression of the popular rule of the people and instead it would have to act in terms of what it conceived to be the most effective manner in which the interests of the people could be expressed in terms of policy. But this meant that there was always a possibility that a contradiction would develop between what the government considered to be necessary and the alternative aspirations of the workers. For example, the Brest Litovsk treaty signed by the Soviet government with the German government was considered to be very unpopular. But ultimately the major problem was that the workers lacked the capacity to be able to establish a credible economic policy based on the principles of economic democracy. The result of these limitations was that the Soviet government had to impose an approach based on the elitist principles of one-man management, and the brief period of an expression of the economic democracy of the producers was ended because of an inability to develop production in an effective manner. However, what should have been recognised in this situation was that what had occurred should have been understood to be of a strictly temporary character and that the ultimate aim should have been to create the conditions which would have enabled a system of economic democracy of the producers to be established at the earliest possible moment. Dunayevskaya seems to contend that Lenin did have an approach based on the principles of economic democracy of the producers which could only be replaced with more elitist methods of the organisation of production for the exceptional period of civil war. It is also suggested by Dunayevskaya that Lenin contended that the actions of the party in government had to be accountable to the people, but the problem was that this understanding was not connected to a credible perspective concerning how to achieve a type of post-revolutionary society based on the principles and aspects of the democratic role of the producers in the organisation of the economy. Only the Workers Opposition led by Kollontai seemed to promote a credible perspective of economic democracy of the producers. In contrast the approach of Lenin was ambiguous about the issue of trying to re-establish a situation of workers control of production. Ultimately his approach did not consistently advocate the importance of the administration of the economy by the producers, a perspective which was considered to be the expression of the approach of syndicalism. This meant that what was not understood was that the situation of domination of the economy by the party elite and the role of one-man management of the producers could become a permanent expression of the creation of a hierarchical type of the economy. Obviously, Lenin understood the aspect of elitist organisation of the economy to be a temporary expression of the serious problems of the situation and so unavoidable if the development of production was to be realised in an effective manner. But what should have been promoted in a more effective and credible manner was the view that ultimately the aspect of one-man management should be replaced with the realisation of a situation of economic democracy in which the process of the organisation of production should have become expressed by the development of the primary role of the trade unions. However, unfortunately this perspective was never advocated because of the decline of the influence of the views of what had been the role of the Workers Opposition.

In other words, the approach of a type of socialism being promoted by the role of the party elite became increasingly important as the comments of Dunayevskaya indicate: “In a word, the two opposing conceptions of plan – which Marx in Capital had first analysed as the despotic plan of Capital and the plan of cooperative labour – were being fought out in life rather than theory in the most unusual circumstances of a workers state with bureaucratic distortions allowing private trade. After the death of Lenin, the development of the NEP proceeded according to its own dialectic. Begun as a limited measure to allow the workers state a breather, it ended in the usual growth of capital and the worsening of the conditions of the workers.” (p213) But this is a dogmatic analysis that is unable to recognise that under the approach of the NEP the workers were able to obtain cheap food because of the incentives provided to the peasants to increase their production. The result of this situation was that the workers and peasants were able to improve their situation in economic terms. However, the reactionary aspect of this development was the promotion of the ideology of ‘socialism in one country’ which meant an effective rejection of the importance of international revolution. But it could also be suggested that in economic terms it was not possible to promote a more ambitious approach of industrial development because the process of accumulation of capital was limited to the acceptance of what would be supported by the peasants. However, this situation ended in 1928 when the character of the economy was transformed into an expression of the development of the connection between industrial production and the establishment of collective forms of agriculture. This development is characterised by Dunayevskaya as the development of state capitalism. Therefore, this perspective is justified in terms of outlining the aspects of the increased economic domination of what is considered to be state capital over the forces of labour in order to extract an increased surplus from the producers. In this manner the process of accumulation is being carried out at the expense of the interests of the workers. But it could also be suggested that this type of economic system could also characterised what could be defined as a new type of bureaucratic exploitative society in terms of a distinct type of extraction of a surplus from the producers that occurred in accordance with a form of economy that did not have similar characteristics to capitalism except in terms of the importance of the exploitation of labour by a dominant economic class. The lack of the role of commodity production for a market was an indication that the economic system was different to that of capitalism. In this context the term state capitalism is problematical because it is implied that the state is a dominant force that is able to define the character of the economic objectives of society. But this situation cannot characterise any capitalist economy because the importance of the role of companies based on the role of private ownership means that the aspect of the state is subordinated to the importance of this situation. Hence the state acts to uphold the importance of the role of capitalist economic companies. But in the USSR under Stalin’s domination the state has assumed absolute economic importance, but there are no aspects of the expression of a capitalist economy such as individual companies. However, what is common in terms of the Stalinist society and capitalism is the exploitation of labour by a dominating ruling class. Therefore, it could be suggested that Stalinism represents a new type of exploitative society based on the supremacy of an elite party within society. But there is a contradiction between theory and practice because it is being suggested that socialism is being constructed under the leadership of the role of the communist party. This important aspect of ideology would imply that what is being established is a system of bureaucratic socialism in which the aspect of the development of an exploitative type of economy is being justified as an expression of the creation of a socialist society. In contrast if this situation was defined by state capitalism then the aspect of socialist ideology would seem to be essentially contradictory and not credible. The point is that the domination of the party is only credible because it is considered to be an expression of the realisation of the aim of the creation of a socialist society that will realise the interests of the people. In contrast it would be very contradictory for an effective state capitalist type of society to define itself as socialist. This situation would mean that the type of economy was not related to the aspect of the ideology that was utilised in order to defend this system. But the ideology of bureaucratic socialism is an expression of the connection of a distinct form of economy with the role of the ascendency of the party over society.

It is also suggested that the unrest in East Germany and Hungary is an expression of the development of the possibility for popular struggle to establish a democratic socialist alternative. But the problem with this vague prediction is that we know that it was not realised and instead the forces of Stalinism were able to re-establish control. However, ultimately the aspect of discontent with Stalinism became defined in terms of support for the restoration of capitalism. This development does not seem to have been contemplated by Dunayevskaya who can only envisage the possibility for the success of revolutionary struggles of the people that will as a result facilitate the potential to establish genuine socialist types of society. But what this perspective seems to underestimate is the importance of the fact that the very aspect of the socialist aspect of the ideology of the Stalinist bureaucratic system meant that increasingly any popular discontent became defined in terms of the rejection of socialism and instead support for the objective of capitalism as the manner in which the emancipation of the people can be realised. However, this possible development is not anticipated by Dunayevskaya who can only conceive of the prospect of the workers acting against the Stalinist bureaucracy in terms of the approach of a genuine revolutionary perspective of socialism. Hence the connection of increasing forms of popular discontent with support for the restoration of capitalism developed in the 1980’s with the situation of the increasing crisis of the Stalinist system. The point is that discontent with Stalinism also took the form of the influence of a standpoint of the rejection of the aim of socialism which was associated with the role of the Stalinist type of society. In contrast in dogmatic terms Dunayevskaya seems to have considered that people would be able to understand that Stalinism was a type of state capitalism and so be able to support the alternative of a genuine form of socialism. However, this type of understanding never became popular and influential. Instead, it seemed that the only possible replacement of the domination of Stalinism was expressed by the apparent connection of the role of democracy with a capitalist economic system. This understanding was to become increasingly popular and influential in Eastern Europe and it was connected to the apparent success of the defeat of the forces for progressive change in Western Europe. In other words, it would seem that the possibility of the successful realisation of a process of the transformation of society had been ended by the consolidation of capitalism with the ultimate demise of Stalinism in the 1990s’. The optimistic perspective of Dunayevskaya is unable to anticipate these possible developments because the successful realisation of socialism is taken to be an inevitable prospect. This is because the role of Stalinism is considered to be a temporary development which cannot ultimately undermine the continuation of the prospect of the successful realisation of the advance of a genuine type of socialism. However, this possibility has not been realised because of the success of the offensive of capital against labour beginning in the 1980’s. Dunayevskaya does not anticipate this development because of her generally optimistic perspective concerning the realisation of genuine freedom and communism. It is suggested that militant struggles in places like America in the 1950’s are creating the conditions for progressive change, but this understanding seemed to ignore the importance of the consolidation of the ideology of anti-communism which challenged the very ideology of socialism in what seemed to be effective terms. But it can also be suggested that the standpoint of Marxism is opposed to the realisation of the aim of communism. This is an issue that will be discussed in part two of this article. In other words the objective of communism will be evaluated in terms of whether it Is opposed to the principles of democracy and the genuine participation of the people in the organisation of society.