MARXISM AND STALINISM

It has often been suggested that Marxism is somehow responsible for the role of Stalinism and the development of an authoritarian political system that tried to suggest that it was the expression of the aims of socialism. One of the recent proponents of this view is the book by Alexander Yahovlev: “The Fate of Marxism in Russia” (Val-Ballou Press, New York 1993) He was a member of Gorbachev’s government and in this work he considers that it was effectively inevitable that the attempt to establish a type of genuine socialist democratic society would result in failure because of the authoritarian limitations of Marxism which could be connected to the views of Marx. He introduces his work with the following sober observation that the Bolshevik regime was always based on the justification of a utopian approach that could only be realised by authoritarian domination by the party elite of society: “Why were the masses seized by utopia, why did history not wish to find an alternative to violence except for more of the same violence? Why are people so weak and helpless? Why were the ideas of social justice and freedom trampled so crudely, inhumanly and ruthlessly? Why did the destruction of the peasantry and bloody repressions of one’s people become socially acceptable, along with ecological barbarism and the destruction of material and spiritual symbols of the past, which led to oblivion, the formation of a special caste of Party state rulers, the imposition of a state religion – a religion of struggle, violence and intolerance, and shameless parasitism on people’s eternal hope for a better life in the future? Could it really not have been any other way.” (p4) It is being suggested that somehow Marxism is responsible for these authoritarian developments. But it would be more appropriate to suggest that Marx would not have considered Stalinism to be a logical and principled expression of the type of post-revolutionary society he was advocating. The only major conception of a post-revolutionary society being supported by Marx was that of the brief period of the Paris Commune which was based on the expression of the role of a multi-party democracy which was based on the electoral support of the people. Hence Marx emphatically connected his conception of a progressive type of society to the expression of the highest standards of democracy and the genuine involvement of the people in the realisation of the objectives of the revolutionary government. There was no justification of a political system based on the domination of a single party, and which acted to realise the interests of the workers. In other words, it could not be said that Marx contemplated the necessity of the development of an authoritarian political system as the basis to realise the aim of socialism and communism. Certainly, it could be suggested that Bolshevism considered itself the practical expression of the objectives of Marx, but this does not mean that this relationship was actually being realised in practice. Indeed, the very difficulties of the situation meant that the possibility to connect principles and perspectives with what was occurring in reality would be problematical. But rather than acknowledging these complexities, Yahovlev suggests that the attempt to realise Marxism meant: “When the hypothesis began to be verified in practice, it produced nothing except Stalinism.” (p7) But this assumption is not connected to the indication of this connection between theory and an authoritarian practice. Instead, it is implied that Marx upheld an authoritarian approach in relation to the following vague comment that: “He began preaching universal, forcible redistribution, the abolition of property, and the achievement of paradise on earth.” (p6) Thus it is being argued that the very objective of the replacement of capitalism with communism is inherently coercive and authoritarian. But such a conclusion can only be upheld in terms of the problematical conclusion that the policies of the Bolsheviks are a logical and practical expression of the perspectives of Marx. It is not being contemplated in non-dogmatic terms that there could be a contradiction between the approach of Marx when compared to the policies of Bolshevism and Stalinism. In other words, it is actually being suggested that the very attempt to establish a post-capitalist society is inherently authoritarian and so the standpoint of Marx is being somehow a justification of this standpoint. But there is no attempt to outline reasons for this conclusion, except to imply that the apparent utilisation of the standpoint of Marx is an inherent aspect of apparent connection between his views with those of Bolshevism. But we would suggest that the very difficult conditions of the post-revolutionary society of Russia was the reason why it was actually problematical to implement the major Marxist aim of the emancipation of the proletariat in terms of the creation of a genuine socialist society. In this manner there was an actual contradiction between the objectives of Marx concerning the perspective of communism and the actual political practice of the Bolsheviks. However, Yahovlev contends that there is something inherently authoritarian about Marxism because of tendency to support authoritarianism: “The tragedy of Marxist teaching is that it is alien to any dialogue. Marxism only conducted a monologue and never listened. It was always right, always above reproach, always claiming to be able to do everything, thus proving its totalitarian essence.” (p8) But in an important sense, all the various ideologies attempt to establish that they are right and other views are wrong. This does not mean that they express intolerance, but merely that they are trying to establish that they can claim to be able to understand reality in a superior manner when contrasted with rival views. The point is that this aspect only become intolerant when it is consciously based on the suppression of the advocacy of rival standpoints. It could be suggested that this development started to occur in the period of the Bolshevik government of Lenin, but this was because of the polarisation created by the antagonisms of society rather than being a logical expression of the ideology of Marxism. The author claims that it is the doctrine of the class struggle that results in the development of intolerance, but instead it could be suggested that it was the aspect of civil war in Soviet Russia that led to the suppression of different political views which were opposed to Bolshevism. Until that point there had been the expression of the role of different political parties which ranged from support for the Bolshevik government to support for the capitalist system. However, this situation is ignored by the author who instead seems to insist that it is the incorrect character of Marxism which results in the justification of authoritarianism. He contends that: “The basic fallacy lies in this thesis. Opposition does not inevitably lead to conflict or contradiction. There is a harmony of opposition of opposites: cooperation of classes, solidarity of classes. And only because of this does society thrive and develop. Any organization is harmonious cooperation; any division of labour is a mutual complement of diverse and opposite functions.” (p9-10) In this manner it is being suggested that it is actually in the interests of the forces of labour to cooperate with the role of capital in the economy in order to improve its own material and social situation. Hence Marxism is defined as a doctrine that does not recognise this possible beneficial aspect of capitalist society and instead tries to uphold a situation of class struggle that only results in the undermining of the benefits from this possible aspect of cooperation between the different classes of society. But if Marxism was merely a dogmatic doctrine that was unable to understand contemporary society, why has this not undermined the development of popular support for this approach? This question is not addressed and instead there is continual insistence about the dogmatic character of Marxism which is apparently unable to understand society: “Marx and Engels did not understand the law of social differentiation and integration since they never proceeded from the integrity of national culture and spirit, but always from the interests of the proletariat. For them, the whole of a cultural people disintegrated into hostile parts.” (p10) In other words it is being suggested that Marxism did not understand the importance of the factors that generated the possibility of unity and so overcome the significance of the aspect of class struggle. But in actuality the complex interaction of the aspects of the nation and class struggle have been the two distinct aspects of social and historical development. Generally, it can be suggested that the aspect of the appeal of national unity has proved to be more influential and important than the class struggle, but this does not mean that class struggle is an unimportant aspect of social reality. Indeed, the role of class struggles led to the success of the October revolution in Russia in 1917 and was responsible for many social upheavals in twentieth century history. Only the apparent ascendency of capital in the contemporary period has undermined the development of the class struggle, but this does not mean that the social antagonisms of capitalist society has been resolved. Thus, the assumption of the author that capitalism is a logical and natural system is a dogmatic contention that cannot be established in relation to the complex character of the history of the last one hundred and fifty years.

In other words, the character of the past one hundred years of economics and politics has been characterised by the importance of the role of the class struggle, even if this development has not necessarily corresponded to the views and perspectives of Marx and Engels. The point is that it was not inevitable that capitalism would remain the dominant system and instead this development has been because of the success of the defenders of the present system in being able to overcome the possibility for discontent to become translated into a more conscious expression of opposition to the present system. But this aspect is not important to the author because he considers that the very practical experience of the problems of the post-revolutionary regime in Russia began to convince Lenin of the necessity to revise the views of Marx about communism in terms of accepting the importance of the empirical difficulties of the post-revolutionary Russian society: “I have already had to write about the fact that the very first encounter of the theoretical postulates and recipes of classical Marxism with the life of post-revolutionary Russia promoted Lenin to have new reflections previously unfamiliar to him…..Nevertheless it is a fact that Lenin began to have doubts about the certainty of the Marxist conception that personal interest could be reconciled with social interest. He had apparently begun to understand the destructive nature of war communism and had sensed with the instinct of a politician rather than a theoretician the reasons for the economic and political crisis of early 1921. In his article: “On Cooperation”, Lenin wrote that the answer to the question that had been a stumbling block for all of socialist thought must be sought in the teachings of the old advocates of cooperatives. The revisionist significance of this article is evident, since Marx and Engels were opponents of the old co-operators Fourier, Considerant, and the Saint-Simonists.” (p11) But this apparent ideological rejection of adherence to dogmatism was an indication that Lenin was concerned to be flexible about the character of economic policy, and was trying to establish an approach that was connected to the character of the situation. This concern resulted in the development of the New Economic Policy.

But this apparent flexible expression of policy in accordance with the requirements of the empirical situation is undermined by Stalin’s supposed rejection of the NEP in terms of an affirmation of the importance of a Marxist approach: “After Stalin’s liquidation of NEP in 1928-29, there were no political or ideological conditions for any serious discussion of the truth or fallacy of Marxism and its individual tenets. The more blood was shed in the war against the people, the more strongly official necessity dictated a blind faith in the truth and sacredness of Marxist doctrine. This belief in the inevitability of the coming communist world served to justify the numerous and senseless victims of the class struggle and, legitimize in a way the political behaviour of the prevailing powers that emerged in the civil war.” (p11) But the approach of Stalinism was only formally expressed by supposed adherence to Marxist doctrine. In actuality, its standpoint was based on the necessity to consolidate the economic and political power of the party elite. In this manner the effective extraction of a surplus from the producers was being defined as socialism because of the supposed continued affinity of the Stalinist government with these objectives. But the workers and peasants knew because of the empirical actuality of a situation of economic exploitation that this aspect meant that the very conception of socialism had become problematical. In other words, socialism had become the very ideological justification of the domination of the party and the development of an inegalitarian type of society. Instead, it is being claimed by Yahovlev that because the Stalinist party were suggesting that socialism was being created that this must be an accurate description of the situation. But this contention is essentially utilised in order to suggest that socialism was essentially an impractical type of society that could only result in its expression in the authoritarian manner of the domination of the party elite. However, this understanding is dogmatic because it is not based on an elaboration of a conception of socialism because this aspect is instead merely identified in dogmatic terms with the role of Stalinism. In other words, the character of the practice of the Stalinist party inherently defines what is socialism. But this conclusion can be challenged by an actual contrast of Stalinist practice with a conception of a more principled and emancipatory understanding of this objective of socialism. In other words, the perspective of class struggle is not the basis of the justification of the domination of a Stalinist system and is instead only the formal expression of an ideological expression of the rule of the party elite. In actuality the aims of class struggle and the realisation of genuine revolutionary regimes is not the objective of Stalinism which instead aims to establish the ascendency of the communist party. Hence in this context the actual role of the workers is to accept the domination of the party and to therefore act in accordance with its instructions. This means that genuine soviet democracy cannot be an aspect of this type of bureaucratic society. Instead, Marxism becomes distorted as an ideology which is utilised in order to justify the rule of the Stalinist elite and so is no longer based on the original aim of Marx which is that of genuine proletarian emancipation. But instead of this understanding the standpoint of Yahovlev is that these expressions of elitism are an indication of a connection between Marxism and the role of Stalinism. But this conclusion cannot be based on a credible interpretation of the character of Marxism, unless it is being suggested that Marx and Engels ultimately justified a perspective of the creation of an authoritarian society. However, we would suggest that Marxism if it is being faithful to the approach of Marx and Engels envisaged the role of the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the basis to emancipate society in terms of the expression of a process of the democratic involvement of the people in its organisation and administration. But this very objective is rejected by Yahovlev as a justification of the denial of the only basis of freedom which is the ability of people to be able to act in terms of individual interests and initiative. He comments: “In overlooking the entire aggregate of the mechanisms of social integration, the founders of “scientific socialism” failed to see that people’s motives for behaviour are contradictory and diverse. Conscience, solidarity, and charity operate along with economic interests. This is why the more the interest of the contemporary person and humankind grows grow’s in questions of spiritual hygiene, mora ecology and the mystery of individual existence and individual life, the more they are freed from illusions concerning the moral rebirth of humanity with the socialization of the means of production, with mono-power and mono-property, and the less they are attentive to and interested in the plain outlines of Marxism.”(p15) Thus it is being suggested that the basis of economic and social activity becomes individual freedom of expression and the role of autonomous choice and so this means that the aims of Marxism can only be imposed in an authoritarian manner by the role of a party elite. But if this description of reality was accurate it would mean that there would never occur the possibility of the development of a process of popular emancipation in terms of the activity of the people. However, it is the very importance of the exploitation of labour by capital which continues to create discontent within society and so the development of the possibility of change to a more cooperative type of society. The failure to realise this possibility is not because people are genuinely convinced by the superiority of the individual autonomy of a capitalist society, but instead the ideological hegemony of capitalism continues to undermine the possible feasibility to realise the revolutionary alternative, People are not convinced of the genuine superiority of capitalism, but instead they consider that it is too difficult and complex to try to realise a socialist alternative. It is being argued by the author that capitalism seems to have become a credible system because it realise the aspiration of individual autonomy: “As human civilisation reaches a higher level, the problem of freedom of choice and spiritual autonomy takes on greater meaning.”(p15) However, it could be suggested that instead of this apparent acceptance of capitalism as the expression of individual autonomy, people are instead resigned to the continuation of the present economic system because it seems to be very complicated and difficult to transform into an alternative. Also, the apparent failure of the Soviet Union would seem to contribute to the importance of the view that a socialist alternative to capitalism is not practical or credible. But this does not mean that capitalism has become invincible it instead indicates the importance to develop a more effective understanding of the reasons for socialism. This is because the Marxist would suggest that people can never be sufficiently satisfied by a system based on the expression of the importance of the exploitation of labour by capital. In other words what is being suggested by Yahovlev is that the aspirations of people can be most adequately realised by the role of the capitalist system in terms of the possibility to achieve individual autonomy in the context of the expression of the character of a system of private enterprise. But this ignores the fact that this very possibility is undermined by the importance of the process of capital accumulation which means that the very aspect of the activity of the individual is subordinated to the requirements of capital accumulation. Only the establishment of a different socialist system can express the possibility to connect the aspect of individual autonomy to the role of what has become genuinely collective economic activity. Therefore, the failure of the Soviet system to realise these aims is not an expression of the limitations of socialism but is instead because an authoritarian system has been established and so the possibility for genuine socialism has not been created. However, the author considers that these limitations are because the socialist alternative to capitalism is essentially impractical and unrealistic. Thus, it is concluded that the perspective of the creation of the conditions for the transition to socialism within the capitalist system is a dogmatic approach: “But unlike capitalism, socialism cannot take shape in the depths of capitalist society as a qualitative whole, as a system of mechanisms for self-regulation. Capitalism does not create the motives for a new collectivist method of production or its subjects, that is people prepared to build a new system of economic relations.” (p19) In other words the denial of the development of a genuine collective agency of change within the capitalist system means that the alternative of socialism is an ideological perspective based on the dogmatic views of intellectuals. Hence it is not considered that the workers represent a possible collective agency of change that could being about the creation of a socialist society. Instead, this perspective is the standpoint of ah intellectual elite that attempts to impose this view on the workers, but the result of this perspective is a general failure to realise a different type of society. Furthermore, in the exceptional situations when revolutionary change has occurred the result is failure concerning the attempt to create an alternative socialist society because this aim does not correspond to what is considered to be the general expression of human activity. In other words, Marxism is understood to be a false intellectual construct that does not express what is considered to be the ultimate capitalist character of social activity. Hence the attempt to impose socialism by an elite can only result in failure. Or it can be suggested that socialism can only be imposed by the role of coercion: “The logic is obvious. If something does not exist in life, it must be squeezed in from the outside. Something that shatters the natural forms of the historical process is forcibly imposed on society while passed off as a boon and inevitability.” (p19) Hence the Bolshevik revolution is ultimately understood to be the expression of the role of dogmatic intellectuals who attempt to impose on society the false ideology of Marxism. The only inevitable result of this development will be failure because the aim of socialism does not correspond to the logical and general character of society which is defined by the role of capitalism. Hence it is being suggested that the character of economic and political development has ended in capitalism, but the ideology of Marxism means that this understanding cannot be accepted and instead in a dogmatic manner they attempt to facilitate the realisation of a process of social change. However, this perspective does not account for the possible discontent of the people who can become the supporters of this aim of revolutionary change. It could be suggested that this is what developed in the Russia of 1917 and so the transformation of society was realised. The Bolsheviks only provided the leadership of a process of popular discontent, and so did not impose their views onto society in a dogmatic manner. But instead, it is assumed by the author that Marxism is a doctrine that is inherently dogmatic and so is the expression of the views of a revolutionary elite which are ultimately imposed onto society. But this understanding cannot explain the actual relationship of the Bolsheviks and the people in 1917 Russia which ultimately led to a process of revolutionary change. It was the general crisis of the capitalist system which created the conditions for this development to occur. This process cannot be explained by Yahovlev because he is unable to accept the possibility for the ideology of revolutionary Marxism to become a popular expression of the aspirations of the people which led to social change. In this context it is an important aspect of the history of the last one hundred and fifty years that unrest within society has continued to generate important struggles that ultimately aim to establish a different and socialist type of economy and political system. Not even the authoritarian limitations of Stalinism have sufficiently undermined the development of this mass unrest which has generated the possibility to establish a different type of system, or the realisation of genuine socialism.

However, it is argued that the very development of capitalism has overcome the economic basis of class antagonisms: “Another idea disproved was that it was impossible to secure the social guarantees for life in the framework of the capitalist method of production. Capitalism turns out to be more flexible and persistent; it learnt how to avoid severe aggravation of class antagonisms. A significant proportion of surplus value went into the pay-check. The minimum acceptable standard of living included a paid vacation, a car, housing, leisure, and a number of other social benefits. Capitalism did not turn into a society of barbarity and havoc…..The twentieth century illustrated how various types of interim compromise options for development were highly effective, involving a combination of mediated and unmediated forms linking personal interests with the interest of society.” (p22) But this situation has only been shown to be an expression of exceptional periods expressing the aspect of boom within the capitalist economy. The increasingly generalised situation of austerity has led to an undermining of the affluence of the workers and has meant that the interests of capital have been shown to be antagonistic in relation to the opposing interests of the workers. In other words, in order to develop the strength and importance of the workers within capitalism it will be necessary to develop their collective ability to oppose the attempt to impose the imperatives of capital within the economy. Ultimately this possible development can only be successfully concluded in terms of the establishment of the aims of the workers within society. But this conception of class struggle is opposed by the author who can only conceive of the essential harmony of interests of capital and labour. This dogmatic view means that he denies the empirical importance of the development of the intensification of the class struggle. Therefore, in opposing Marxism he rejects the most credible understanding of the antagonistic character of capitalist society. But this criticism is rejected because of adherence to the view that the role of technology within the capitalist economy is ultimately to the benefit of the workers. It is assumed that the very aspects that uphold the interests of capital will also ultimately enable the workers to achieve material and social benefits. But this observation is only credible if the workers can successfully organise in order to achieve this objective, such as achieving a shorter working week and relating the means of production to the creation of more consumer goods. Instead, it is assumed by the author that capitalism has an automatic tendency to act in terms of creating material benefits for the workers. This view underestimates the necessity of collective organisation by the workers if they are to achieve increased material gains within the capitalist system. Instead of the importance of the class struggle it is assumed that the technological progress of the capitalist economy will be to the benefit of all the different classes of society. Thus, the development of the productive forces will enable the affluence of the workers to be generated. But it could be suggested that this development is not an automatic process but is instead the outcome of the collective actions of the workers in terms of improving their material conditions. Only success in the class struggle will increase the material affluence of the workers. This is why in the period of the offensive of capital against labour there has been a development of the increased undermining of the material wealth of the workers. The period of prosperity seems to have been ended and is instead replaced by the situation of austerity. But this situation is not acknowledged by Yahovlev who instead can only consider the character of capitalism in terms of the automatic generation of the possibility to realise increased prosperity.

In this context he suggests that capitalism is a system that enables the workers to achieve an increased level of economic importance that enables them to be able to achieve increased affluence: “Moreover, there are various types of private property. And besides the proletarians, there are peasants, petty bourgeois, craftspeople, trades people and specialists in private practice. There are many examples of both bosses and workers.” (p25) Thus the complexity of the social situation of the relations between classes does not correspond to Marx’s rigid and abstract characterisation of a polarisation between the workers and peasants. This means that politics often does not correspond to Marx’s perspective of the intensification of the class struggle and increased support for the aims of revolutionary socialism. The result of this complexity is that history cannot be defined in terms of a situation of polarised class struggle that creates the conditions for transition to socialism. However, primarily Marx did not accept the apparent important argument that capitalism is the superior economic system because: “But experience proved something else: private property has been and will remain the most effective, productive, and dynamic system in the sense of self-development, self-improvement, and self-expression.”(p26) Thus if capitalism functions according to its apparent potential in most circumstances the possible development of popular aspirations for change to a different socialist system will not occur. This means that the development of the success of the October revolution in Russia was because of exceptional conditions of war and the fanatic effectiveness of the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin. But these circumstances were not repeated in the rest of Europe and so the development of revolutionary change did not occur in these countries. In other words, the apparent dogmatism of Marx was to suggest that class struggle would inherently result in the creation of an alternative international socialist system. But instead, this development only occurred because of the exceptional role of a revolutionary party in one particular country. Marx did not consider that there was an alternative to the role of class struggle and revolutionary change which was a process of the realisation of general harmony between the different classes of capitalist society: “Marxism absolutized the struggle of opposites and simply failed to see or did not wish to recognize the harmony of contradictions was peace and harmony. Without that end, the struggle is mutually lethal. The end and meaning of contradiction is the resolution of the contradiction itself. Struggle exists for the sake of peace, but peace does not exist for the sake of struggle.” (p28) In other words it is being suggested that in most circumstances the various classes under what has become a capitalist society will act to cooperate in order to realise what has become shared economic aims. This aspect of cooperation will only be undermined by the role of a Marxist party which attempts to undermine the possibility of the realisation of harmony between the different classes, and so reject the attempt to develop a consensus about how this situation of cooperation can be developed and realised in terms of shared material benefits. However, this possibility of harmony is undermined by the possibility of effective influence of Marxism which attempts to establish the importance of a revolutionary perspective of change. But the success of this approach can only result in authoritarianism. This is because Marxism is a doctrine that can only express itself in terms of the imposition of its revolutionary doctrine onto society. Hence Marxism inevitably becomes Stalinism.

This conclusion is elaborated in the following terms: “Marxism recognized only constant struggle, the very permanent revolution of Trotsky, which the Bolsheviks always followed. Ever since they came out on the barricades of the first Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks have been in a constant battle – first with Tsarism, then with the liberal bourgeois Provisional government, then with their own people. The results have been terrible. The peasantry, aristocracy, merchants and intelligentsia, and entire nations have been destroyed, and irreparable damage has been done on nature.”29) The reason is the apparently anti-ethical approach of Marxism: “The peculiarity of Marxism consists in its rejection of the moral, values orientated approach to studying society and the historical process…..Virtually all Marxist social doctrine, above all its teaching concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the expropriation of the expropriators, is aimed against universal human morality as the ethical basis of society. From Marx’s perspective, the proletariat’s realisation of its historical mission is impossible without a radical rejection of moral and legal norms that make the bourgeois economy, society, and the state function.” (p29) But this conclusion cannot be definitely suggested from the views of Marx. Instead, it could be suggested that the emphasis on the solidarity of the class activity of the workers would imply the development of a collection of ethical norms that would have to be applied if a genuine socialist type of society is to be created. This aspect is in contrast to the cynical and elitist assumption of the necessity of the party to rule on behalf of the workers that is outlined by the doctrine of Stalinism. Surely, Marx would oppose Stalinism because it rejected the moral character of the principles of solidarity and the genuine cooperative character of society in terms of the interests of the domination of a new ruling elite over society. But primarily it would be suggested by the criticism of Marx that only capitalism is ethical when compared to the alternative of socialism is the very view that is being rejected by Marx. Indeed, the author contradicts his initial views that Marx reject’s morality when he contends that he upholds a dogmatic conception of morality: “Moral criteria are simply not appropriate under the conditions of a revolutionary coup…….. they are revoked by the brutality and directness of class warfare. There abrogation is not a tactical, but a strategic question, and not merely because the proletariat is the bearer of new moral and legal norms. Rather, in liberating humankind through its own liberation, the revolutionary proletariat is from the point of view of the fundamental ideas of Marxism, the only bearer of morality. Therefore, everything the proletariat undertakes for its liberation is moral.” (p29) But this apparent perspective does not mean the rejection of an ethical approach because it could be argued that the actions of the workers are being evaluated in terms of moral norms that emphasise the importance of solidarity. Therefore, the role of the class struggle does not justify any forms of political action, but instead they have to be evaluated in terms of the principles of solidarity and cooperation. In this manner the aspect of ethics is important in defining whether the political practices of the workers are principled. For example, support of the role of the imperialist nation state is to be criticised because this could result in the justification of the imposition of a process of economic and political domination of countries by powerful capitalist states. Hence the aim of socialism corresponds to important ethical norms established by the principles of collective solidarity and the attempt to create a more just and egalitarian society when compared to the present domination of capitalism. The fact that these ethical norms are not outlined by Marx does not mean that they are not an implicit aspect of his approach. Hence the aspect of support for capitalism by the workers will be criticised because this would mean the justification of narrow aims instead of the upholding of the more progressive and egalitarian aims of socialism. In this manner the role of ethics cannot be differentiated from a Marxist approach.

But this understanding is denied by Yahovlev who contends: “There can be no talk of an extra class approach……everything is justified beforehand if serves the idea of total revolution. This special “class” morality, which flouts universal human norms, leads to indulgence of any actions…. Its justification comes from the special vision of the historical path of development, its final goals for the full renaissance of humanity. Marx views the real historical process not from the position of the self-awareness, happiness and suffering of individuals, but only from the point of view of the constant progress of social structures towards their given goal.” (p29) But this implies that all methods and policies are acceptable if they advance the progress of the class struggle. However, it can be suggested that this assumption is dogmatic because the very importance of the solidarity of the actions of the class struggle imposes serious ethical limits concerning the aspects of the actions of the workers. The very goal of socialism would imply that the connected importance of the collective mass actions of the class struggle implies that this aspect corresponds to important moral standards and so do not accept the narrow and empirical justification of the role of self-interest. This ethical approach may not be articulated but it is an important aspect for understanding the development of what could become revolutionary forms of the class struggle. In other words, the standpoint of support for capitalism implies the importance of self-interest which is opposed to the expression and realisation of moral aims which are most compatible with the attempt to realise socialism. Indeed, it could be argued that the very character of morality is based on the expression of the collective attempt to create a type of society based on the role of cooperation and in this manner, capitalism is being criticised and opposed because it does not uphold these types of ethical objectives. But it suggested by Yahovlev that the perspectives of Marxism are based on the connection of the class struggle with the aim of socialism and in this manner the importance of ethical values is being rejected: “This special “class” morality, which flouts universal human norms, leads to the indulgence of any actions…. Its justification comes from the special vision of the historical path of development, its final goal for the full renaissance of humanity. Marx views the historical process not from the position of the self-awareness, happiness, and suffering of individuals, but only from the point of view of the constant progress of social structures towards their given goal.”(p29) But this interpretation of the historical character of the perspective of Marx is one-sided and dogmatic because it denies the importance of the major ethical aspect of the emancipatory potential of the class struggle which is the role of the solidarity of the workers in the class struggle. Without this aspect the very possibility for labour to oppose the domination of capital in a collective and cooperative manner is inconceivable. But it is this very quality of the mass movement of the workers which indicates the development of the possibility to establish an alternative socialist society. Without the aspect of the collective ethics of the workers which is generated by their increasing opposition to the domination of capital the possibility to achieve the end of the domination of capital would be inconceivable and unrealistic. It is the capitalist system that upholds a rejection of the role of ethics in terms of its support for the generation of profit by the exploitation of labour, and so it is the opposition of the workers to this situation which indicates the development of the importance of a genuine and consistent form of morality. However, there is a contradiction because the importance of ethics for the development of the class struggle cannot express the aspects of a consistent and principled strategy of revolutionary change. Instead, it is necessary to subordinate the role of ethics to the development of an effective programme for the realisation of the success of the workers in the class struggle. But without this ethical aspect the generation of class struggle would be impossible. Thus, Marxism is not opposed to the importance of ethics, but it also understands that the role of ethics is not sufficient and adequate for the creation of a revolutionary programme of social change. Hence the aspect of ethics has to be subordinated to the development of a perspective that is able to understand the balance of class forces and in these terms is able to elaborate a programme for the generation of the victory of the workers in the class struggle.

However, Yahovlev considers that Marx opposes the importance of ethics in history because he contends that ethics are based on the development of the importance of the role of individuals who become increasingly influential in the expression of the character of society. But this approach is rejected by Marx who does not recognise that: “Society does not become enlightened all at once, especially a society that is living in nonfreedom but does not know it. Enlightenment begins with solitary individuals and then becomes massive and irreversible when life and circumstances begin to give birth, to reproduce on a mass scale the bearers of new consciousness. Such processes are produced from the coming into being of the individual. And this coming into being in turn is produced from the growth of economic freedom in society, from the accumulation of the results of labour. The history of capitalism attests to this…. All of these points are absent in Marxist analysis.” (p32) But Marx does not ignore the influence of the bourgeois concept of individual freedom but instead suggests that it is illusory because it is based in a one-sided sense in the denial of the realisation of the participation of the producers in the distribution of the wealth of the economy. Instead, freedom is exclusively ah expression of the interests of the capitalists and a denial of the genuine freedom of the producers. Hence the only manner in which a consistent type of freedom can be realised is by the transformation of society by the successful end of the domination of capital over labour. In these terms Marx would have denied that the Soviet Union became a faithful expression of these principles because the aspect of an alienating and dominating class of exploiters became the basis of the character of the mode of production. Indeed, it could be suggested that this is why it cannot be suggested that Marxism was being expressed by the role of the Soviet system. Furthermore, Marx was not opposed to the importance of individual freedom but instead would contend that this very aim could be most expressed by the connection of the role of the individual to the realisation of the emancipatory potential of the aspect of cooperative labour. In this context Stalinism could not be said to be a consistent and principled expression of Marxist principles because it justified and developed the continuation of the domination of an exploiting class within the new economic system. The very effective rejection of the emancipation of labour meant that Stalinism could not be the principled and faithful continuation of the application of Marxist principles and instead Marxism was distorted into becoming a type of ideological justification of the rule of a new type of ruling class. But it is the very argument of Yahovlev that Marxism is effectively the ideology of a new authoritarian type of ruling class. But this assumption is based on the apparent projection of the exploitative practices of Stalinism onto the approach of Marx. But there is nothing to suggest in terms of the views of Marx that he would have justified this type of Stalinism. Instead, it could be suggested that his approach was about how to realise the emancipation of the workers based on their dynamic expression in terms of the role of the class struggle and the end result of the development of a new type of participatory economic and political democracy. In this context the domination of a political party over society would be considered to be an expression of the undermining of the possibility to establish a genuine type of emancipatory society. Indeed, it could be suggested that the actual major criticism of the views of Marx is that his approach is unrealistic and naïve when concerning the issue of the revolutionary possibilities of the actions of the workers. But it is his ultimate perspective that the revolutionary activity of the workers can ultimately if successful only achieve the development of an emancipatory society in which all aspects of economic and social exploitation and domination are ended. However, what is being suggested by Yahovlev is that the apparent egalitarian aspects of the approach of Marx are subordinated to a more important expression of a programme for the realisation of a society based on authoritarian elitism. But Marx’s praise for the Paris Commune, which was an actual expression of egalitarian democracy, would seem to reject this assumption of an inherently elitist Marx. In other words, the practices of Stalinism were not a logical expression of the theory and practice of Marxism, but instead a rejection of this approach in terms of the actual pragmatic development of a new type of exploitative society. However, in order to provide the justification of this situation it was necessary for Stalin to argue that socialism was being built in accordance with Marxist principles. But this view could be shown to be problematical because there was no aspect of genuine economic and political democracy which would express the character of an authentic Marxist type of society. Indeed, the views of Marx were not really developed in order to justify the development of Stalin’s Soviet Union. Instead, a dogmatic interpretation of the views of Lenin was used in order to try and suggest that the USSR was a continuation of the government of Lenin. But in actuality the development of a system of exploitation of the workers and peasants indicated the falsity of this claim, and the aim of world revolution became entirely subordinated to the national interests of the Soviet Bureaucracy. However, a formal Marxist type of ideology proved to be useful for the bureaucratic ruling class of the USSR in order to claim that what was being created was the continuation of the legacy of Marx and Lenin. But in practical terms the approach of Marxism was being rejected and replaced with the pragmatic expression of the interests of a new type of ruling class.

In other words, if the actual policies of the Soviet Communist party since Stalin have been increasingly based on the expression of the interests of a new ruling class then it cannot be claimed that this situation represents adherence to the ideology of Marx and Lenin unless it is being claimed that in some manner, they actually advocated the regime of the domination of a new exploitative ruling class. But this development is not what they advocated and instead they suggested the necessity of the role of a revolutionary regime that would attempt to facilitate the development of a new type of emancipatory society that could be described as communism. Obviously, it could be argued that the approach of Marx and Lenin was impractical and so was unable to realise the aims of socialism and communism, but this claim is not the same as the contention that they somehow consciously attempted to realise the domination of the party elite over society. But Yahovlev essentially claims that this perspective of a new type of regime of the domination of the party is the ultimate outcome of the approach of Marx and Engels because the perspective of a socialist society is unrealistic because it is opposed to the actual economic aspirations of the people which are ultimately based on the expression of individual productive activity. Hence because of this effective utopian character of genuine egalitarian socialism the only result is the development of the regime in which the communist party becomes a ruling class that dominates the character of the economy. But this understanding is dogmatic and ignores the apparent fact that the Bolsheviks in 1917 were committed to the realisation of the role of Soviet democracy as the basis of the development of the character of the revolutionary regime. It was the opposition of the various political parties that led to a situation of polarisation that meant that a one-party regime became inevitable. But even this development was initially compatible with the role of soviet democracy and workers control of the economy. Only the adverse consequences of civil war and war communism led to the consolidation of a one-party regime. Thus, it was the unfavourable objective conditions that led to the development of a situation of authoritarian control by the exclusive ruling party. Therefore, the aims of the Bolsheviks were still about how to establish genuine soviet democracy and genuine workers control of the economy. But the development of civil war undermined the realisation of this perspective. Hence it was unfavourable objective conditions combined with the development of civil war that resulted in authoritarianism. This situation was not the outcome of the character of revolutionary Marxist theory.

Therefore, the views of Yahovlev can be challenged and considered to be a dogmatic interpretation of the supposed authoritarian character of Marxism. He contends that the Marxist conception of necessity does not result in freedom, but this understanding is a dogmatic view that only under capitalism is individual initiative realised and so in that manner is freedom genuinely being expressed. But the Marxist would suggest that only when the role of the individual is connected to the importance of the collective is the possibility to generate the effective conditions for freedom made possible. The point is that a situation in which the interests of some individuals are contrasted with the aims of people in collective terms is what characterises the character of capitalism. Hence it is necessary to attempt to realise a situation in which this type of opposition is replaced by a situation in which the role of the individual and the collective become reconciled. But this possibility requires the revolutionary transformation of society by the role of the working class. However, this perspective is being rejected by Yahovlev because he contends that this development has authoritarian possibilities and instead only the primacy of individual autonomy can express the genuine development of freedom. But this understanding means that he essentially considers that only capitalism is able to express the aspect of freedom. But a Marxist would contend that the situation of the exploitation of labour by capital means that genuine freedom cannot be realised, and so it is necessary to transform this relationship and instead establish the situation of the emancipation of the workers from the situation of economic domination by alienating imperatives of the process of capital accumulation. Therefore, on the one hand Yahovlev is claiming that socialism results in a situation of authoritarian domination over the individual, whilst Marxists claim that it is capitalism which results in this development. It would seem that the actual history of the USSR would seem to uphold the views of Yahovlev, but it could also be suggested that it was the effective rejection of the principles of revolutionary Marxism by the emerging Soviet elite which explains this situation of the consolidation of a regime of authoritarianism.

The point being made is that Marx was a strong advocate of the importance of a popular form of democratic regime based on his interpretation of the lessons of the Paris Commune. He was strongly supportive of the view that the development of a revolutionary regime has to be connected to its justification in terms of the expression of a political system of popular democracy. This would mean the genuine competition of different parties and so the creation of a revolutionary regime would be based on the exercise of a system of universal suffrage. Indeed, in this context it was the defenders of capitalism who acted in an authoritarian manner because they acted in a repressive manner in order to overthrow the revolutionary government of the workers. Hence the example of the Paris Commune represented a democratic model for the Soviets in Russia to emulate in 1917. Therefore, the creation of a one-party regime was not because this development expressed conformity with the political strategy of Marx, but instead was the result of the increasing polarisation between the revolutionary party of the Bolsheviks and the organisations that supported counterrevolution. This situation meant that it was not possible to develop a democratic system based on a system of compromises based on the role of a multi-party system. Instead, civil war developed which led to the consolidation of a one- party revolutionary regime which defended the gains of the revolution against those who wanted to establish a reactionary system that upheld the interests of capitalism. Hence it was the polarisation of the situation which meant that the approach of Marx concerning the Paris Commune could not be emulated. In other words, Marx had established how revolutionary politics could be opposed to authoritarian results in terms of the creation of a system of popular democracy, but the adverse consequences of the situation in Russia meant that this approach could not be upheld in consistent terms. Instead, only the effective formation of a one-party regime could ensure the continuation and consolidation of the revolutionary administration. But the important mistake of the Bolsheviks was not to recognise that this situation was unsatisfactory and could only be temporary. The one-party regime could only uphold the aims of revolutionary politics in a limited manner, and so the ultimate necessity was to create a genuine system of socialist democracy based on the role of competing parties. But it was the failure to develop this situation, or the inability to create a regime similar to that of the Paris Commune which meant that the problem of bureaucratic elitism became an issue for the politics of the post-revolutionary regime. Hence it was not adherence to the objectives of Marx which were responsible for this situation, but instead the actual inability to develop a type of political society that corresponded to the democratic principles he advocated. In other words, the consolidation of a one-party regime could not be considered to be a principled expression of the objectives of Marx, and instead were a pragmatic modification of his standpoint in terms of a response to an adverse situation. This is not to say that Marx would have rejected the policies of the Bolsheviks, who were responding to the difficulties of the political situation, but nor can it be suggested that his established political views provide justification for their approach. Instead, it can be argued that the political policies of the Bolsheviks represent a pragmatic response to difficulties that were apparent in the situation of increasing political polarisation.

It is argued by Yahovlev that an important theoretical aspect of the justification of authoritarianism by Marxism is the emphasis on the importance of necessity instead of freedom. But this view is rather one-sided because it could be suggested that to Marxists the understanding of the aspect of necessity is the approach by which it is considered that it is possible to realise freedom in a credible and realistic manner. In other words, the economic and political development of capitalism creates the material and subjective conditions that will enable freedom to be realised in terms of the expression of the objective of communism. Communism is the most consistent expression of freedom because only in this type of system will it become possible for people to participate in an effective manner in the organisation of the role and character of the economy and political system. Hence it can be argued that Stalinism cannot be the authentic expression of the aims of communism because it represents the rule of the political elite instead of being a system that involves the participation of the people in its development. But to Yahovlev the Stalinism system is consistent with the principles of communism because he considers that this type of system can only be expressed and developed in relation to the dominant role of the party elite. This assumption has to be contested because supporters of genuine Marxism can establish how the USSR became defined in terms of the authoritarian domination of the Stalinists over society. In this manner the role of Stalinism represents a counter-revolution directed against the genuine emancipatory objectives of Marxism rather than being an expression of its aims and principles.

But it is also being suggested by Yahovlev that Marxism is against freedom because it rejects the role of the individual and replaces it with a collective conception of necessity: “Necessity does not mean submitting to forces and laws outside human control but using this innate capacity for freedom to the maximum for one civilisation. This is what advances civilisation.” (p34) But this view seems to ignore the importance of the view that freedom is the recognition of necessity. In other words, it is the very ability of humans to develop an understanding of the importance of necessity that enables them to construct an understanding of what is required in order to bring about changes to the present situation in terms of the dynamic expression of practice. Hence if humans cannot comprehend what is meant by necessity under the given conditions it becomes difficult to develop a feasible practice for changing the situation in transforming terms. Therefore, it is not the expression of necessity to passively accept the limitations of the present situation and instead it is important to attempt to resolve the problems posed by the difficulties of the tasks involved in the transformation of reality. In this manner the aspect of necessity is connected to the importance of freedom and these two aspects are not counterposed, contrary to the implied view of Yahovlev. But he emphasises the aspect of freedom because in that manner he can contrast the significance of the role of the individual when compared to that of the collective. The aspect of individual autonomy is considered to be the manner in which the expression of history is realised, and so it does not correspond to the relation of the collective with the importance of necessity. But it could be argued in Marxist terms that the individual becomes genuinely important when it is able to connect with a credible conception of how this role is related to the significance of necessity. This development also means that the aspect of the individual generates a connection to the collective, and so for example Lenin was able to articulate the discontent of the people in 1917 in revolutionary terms of support for a perspective of social change. In other words, the approach of Yahovlev is not credible because he ultimately has to support the understanding that the relation of the individual must be connected to that of the collective if he is to uphold a feasible conception of history. But what this means is that he suggests that individuals generally make the decision to support capitalism and so the alternative of revolutionary Marxism is a standpoint that is being advanced by parties that lack genuine popular support. Instead, the capitalist system will be generally supported by the people because it represents their individual aspirations in a manner that is more credible than the socialist alternative. This popular and democratic sentiment is then considered to be the most effective expression of the support of the people for capitalism because it represents their aspiration to realise individual autonomy. In contrast Marxism is considered to uphold a problematical conception of autonomy which is based on the denial of the importance of the role of the individual and instead emphasises in authoritarian terms the aspect of the collective. This standpoint is being justified in terms of the view that the realisation of the collective is how the aspect of historical necessity is expressed. But it could be suggested that this interpretation of Marxism is a caricatured understanding. Instead, the approach of Marxism is to attempt to establish a perspective by which the role of the collective action of the workers is able to ultimately establish a situation in which the possibility of individual autonomy is able to be expressed in the most effective manner. This is because the outcome of success in the class struggle is the potential realisation of a form of society that is able to connect the aspect of collective action with the possibility to realise the potential of individuals. In contrast capitalism is based on the ideology of individual aspiration but its actual practice and result consists of the subordination of the interests of people to the interests of the economic system. Only communism is a system in which the relationship of ideology and actual social practice are in harmony. In contrast capitalism has the ideology of freedom but its economic character means that this objective cannot be realised. Only the successful struggle of the workers against the domination of capital can establish the possibility of genuine freedom. In this manner if Marxism retains its principled character as a perspective of revolutionary change it represents this programme of freedom. In this context the development of Stalinism does not represent the continuation of Marxism but instead its repudiation because the effective objective of the rejection of the emancipation of labour becomes an essential aspect of the practice of this standpoint. But Yahovlev denies this understanding because to him Marxism can only have an authoritarian character because it is based on the rejection of the only form of freedom which is expressed by the role of the capitalist system. Only under capitalism can individuals achieve a level of autonomous decision making that enables them to realise freedom. Therefore, it is being suggested that the aim of socialism must be authoritarian because it is based on the aim to end the continuation of capitalism. But in actuality the authoritarian degeneration of the Soviet communist party was not because it attempted to develop a socialist society but instead because it rejected adherence to this objective. The adoption of what were elitist aims meant that an authoritarian type of society became deliberately constructed and in this manner the perspective of socialism was being rejected. If instead socialism had continued to be the aim of the Bolsheviks this would have meant the revival of the importance of Soviet democracy and the development of an effective management of the economy by the producers. But instead, it was the rejection of these aims which meant that the Bolsheviks began to uphold the aim of socialism in the contradictory terms of the development of the regime of the party elite. Hence there was a contradiction between theory and practice. The formal objective of socialism was based on the expression of the creation of a type of state that was based on the promotion of a new type of exploitation of the producers. However, Yahovlev insists that these developments can be understood as being a manifestation of socialism because he cannot conceive of the possibility to establish a genuinely democratic and participatory conception of socialism. Indeed, he considers that Marx, Engels and Lenin essentially supported this type of authoritarian conception of socialism. Thus, it is being suggested that only capitalism can realise individual freedom because it is the only system that attempts to realise the aspiration of both the capitalists and producers. In other words, socialism is not a system that can be realised in accordance with the presumably false expectations of its major theoretical defenders and instead it can only be practically realised as a denial of the possible importance of the individual autonomous actions of the people. It is the dogmatic character of socialism which means that it can only be sustained in terms of a coercive political system. It is because capitalism corresponds to the importance of the role of individual autonomy which means that it can be expressed in terms of the role of political democracy. But such a view does not explain the importance of class struggle within capitalism and the continual generation of the aspiration for the realisation of an alternative to this system. The point is that the situation in the twentieth century has been characterised by the continual development of struggles for socialism. Only the development of austerity and recession over the last forty years has undermined the generation of effective struggles for overcoming capitalism and establishing socialism. However, the author is indifferent to the lessons of the history of capitalism because his dislike of Stalinism makes him an uncritical defender of the capitalist system.

Ultimately it is being suggested that because Marx had an unrealistic perspective of change that did not correspond to the actual aspect of economic activity which was expressed by the role of capitalism, this error meant that because of this dogmatism socialism could only be established in authoritarian terms: “The programme to renew human life that was guided the Left Communists during “war communism” was resonant with Marx’s dream that the idea of getting rid of the “selfish person”, the “accidental person” with all his “private property garbage” and “selfish life” was only a step away from the ideas of Bukharin and Preobrazhensky about completely overcoming the old “society”(p53). Thus, it is being suggested that the very perspective of communism is inherently authoritarian because it does not correspond to the individual character of productive activity which is most associated with capitalism. Thus, only capitalism is compatible with the expression of a situation of democracy and the possibility to establish the genuine support of the people for the economic and political system. This is why Marxism was a ‘deceptive utopia’ that could only result in the expression of ‘revolutionary intolerance’(p54) In other words it is being suggested that only capitalism is compatible with the expression of individual freedom, and so in this manner is an indication of the possibility to establish a democratic political system based on the expression of these values. Hence the very conception of socialism, as a collective and cooperative alternative to capitalism has to be defined as an authoritarian aim. Thus, the fact that Marx and Lenin outlined the perspective of revolutionary change and the establishment of the socialist alternative to capitalism must have been implicitly justifying an authoritarian standpoint. In other words, the approach of Marxism implied the domination of a given revolutionary class over the supposed reactionary class and this meant the justification of authoritarianism. However: “But what gives anyone the right to divide society into reactionary and revolutionary classes: to insist that the former are doomed and must leave the stage and the latter “represent the social mind and social heart”. Where is the guarantee that a mistake will not be made…. before the real course of historical events is known? What gives the revolutionary class the right to decide the destiny of another class called “reactionary”? Can everything be justified in the name of progress? And is it really progress?” (p56-57) This objection to the supposed inherently immorality of the process of revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism would seem to ultimately be a view that is based on the defence of capitalism as being an expression of the only possible type of society that can represent the values of democracy and tolerance. In contrast the process of revolutionary change is connected to the justification of the development of an authoritarian regime. It is based on the establishment of the rule of the revolutionary party and so the perspective of the democratic involvement of the workers and peasants in the organisation of this new type of society is an illusion. Hence the very success of the aims of the revolutionary party can only be to establish its authoritarian domination over society and this means that the perspective of the establishment of a genuine democratic form of society is an illusion. But this type of critique implies that Marxism must be authoritarian because of the very fact that is connected to the objective of ending the domination of capitalism over society. In this manner it can be suggested that the proposed alternative of socialism can only result in the expression of a type of authoritarian domination of an elite over society. But why is not a democratic form of socialism possible? In other words, why is it assumed that only capitalism is a genuine expression of the possibility for a democratic type of political regime? Furthermore, in this context the actual character of the authoritarian regime in the Soviet Union meant that it was not possible to establish a genuine form of socialism, but it is being assumed by the author that this is the only manner in which socialism can be expressed. Hence it is effectively suggested that the character of authoritarianism is to indicate the development of a socialist society. This observation means that only capitalism can express the possibility for the expression of genuine political democracy. But the point is that the one-party regime of Bolshevism did not create an authentic form of socialism, and instead represented the domination of the elite over society. This was not an expression of the apparent authoritarian character of Marxism, but instead expressed a pragmatic rejection of the aims of Marx which were essentially considered to be impractical in terms of the adverse circumstances after the Bolshevik revolution.

In other words, there was actually nothing to suggest that Marx justified the development of an authoritarian regime as the expression of revolutionary principles and objectives. Instead, his analysis of the Paris Commune outlined the conception of a socialist regime based on the role of participatory democracy. It was the forces of reaction which acted in an authoritarian manner in supressing this regime. Therefore, it cannot be suggested that the Bolsheviks tried to develop the approach of Marx concerning the character of a revolutionary regime. Instead, the objective of one-party rule was dominant, and this development became inevitable because of the acute character of the class struggle after the revolution. Hence the Bolsheviks responded to the difficulties of the situation after the revolution, and this meant that empirical problems undermined the possibility to establish an effective and genuine system of democracy. This pragmatic response meant that they could not have established the basis of their political policies by a supposed expression of the approach of Marx. Instead, there was a distinct difference between the objectives of Marx when contrasted to the policies of the Bolshevik government. Indeed, it could be suggested that Marx may have supported the attempt to establish unity between the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries, in order to establish a socialist government with the widest level of democratic support. Hence it could not be suggested in convincing terms that Marx would have supported the essential elitist logic of the Bolsheviks in terms of their development of a situation in which they ruled on behalf of the workers and peasants. Indeed, this situation was not the preference of the Bolsheviks who would have preferred the more effective functioning of the Soviets in order to develop the most democratic expression of the role of the revolutionary regime. Hence the Stalinist justification of the governmental role of the party acting on behalf of the workers is not something that has theoretical support in the works of Marx. Instead, it could be said that Marx always upheld what could be considered to be the naïve view that the emancipation of the workers and their development of revolutionary government should be an act of self-organisation and democratic activity. It could be suggested that this approach failed to sufficiently appreciate the problems of the post-revolutionary period, but this criticism does not necessarily undermine the credibility of the approach of Marx. The point is that it is the democratic conception of socialism elaborated by Marx which is actually the criteria by which to analyse the role of the Bolshevik governments of Lenin and Stalin. Therefore, the formal adherence to Marxism by Lenin and Stalin does not suggest that they inherently adapted a position that was compatible to the perspectives of Marx concerning a post-capitalist society. Instead, an important issue to address is whether the various Bolshevik governments were able to act in accordance with the approach of Marx concerning the aspect of participatory democracy that was deemed necessary for the development of a genuine revolutionary regime. It is considered by Yakovlev that Marx is inherently authoritarian because the very basis of revolutionary politics has to justify this standpoint. But we would suggest that Marx has a consistent approach of the importance of the development of a democratic socialist regime. Therefore, the authoritarian character of Stalinism was an effective rejection of this standpoint. However, Leninism can be considered to be a complex issue because it could be argued that the complex economic and political problems of the situation after the revolution led to an empirical undermining of the importance of democracy. It is entirely possible to envisage that if Lenin had continued to be the leader in the situation of the increased economic prosperity of the mid 1920s that it would have been possible to regenerate the importance of soviet democracy and so undermine the development of authoritarianism.

In other words, there was a theory and practice contradiction in terms of the relation of the views of Marxism and Bolshevism concerning the issue of democracy. Marx and Engels envisaged the role of a multi-party type of democracy within a post-revolutionary society that was aiming to realise the objectives of socialism and communism. They did not justify the role of an exclusive revolutionary party that would define the political character of the post-capitalist society. Instead, it was considered that various parties would engage in friendly competition in terms of trying to obtain popular support for their given conception of the process of the realisation of socialism. This aspect would mean that it would be a matter of the expression of the democratic views of the people that would decide which view become of primary importance in relation to the expression of the task of the attempt to create a democratic society. Indeed, it could be argued that this approach did not necessarily deny the possibility for pro-capitalist parties to be able to promote their opposing views concerning how society should be developed. However, the political polarisation produced by the October revolution meant that the approach of Marx became modified in terms of an increasing acceptance of the situation of the development of the supremacy of the exclusive revolutionary party. However, this development was not inevitable and instead was effectively created by the opposition of some of the most important socialist parties to the October revolution. Hence the creation of the one-party rule of the Bolsheviks was not based on an adherence to Marx’s views but was instead because of the political polarisation created by the political process of change. But it could be argued that after the civil war there were new possibilities for the development of a revolutionary coalition of political parties. But such a prospect was not realised because of the continued polarised character of politics in Russia. Hence what occurred was the result of empirical circumstances rather than being an expression of faithful adherence to the approach of Marx. Furthermore, the effective degeneration of the Bolsheviks into becoming an elitist Stalinist party was because of the defeat of the Left Opposition by the leadership of the Communists. It could have been entirely possible that the victory of the Left Opposition may have resulted in the renewal of popular democracy. In other words, Stalinism was the result of adverse political circumstances rather than being the outcome of the supposed authoritarian character of Marxism. It could be argued that there was a fundamental difference between authentic Marxism and Stalinism because the latter did not realise the aim of proletarian self-emancipation. Marx connected the interests of the workers with the establishment of a communist society. But instead, the outcome of Stalinism was to consolidate the regime of the domination of the party elite.

However, Yahovlev considers that Marx’s views resulted in Stalinism because of the apparent perspective of the imposition of a monolithic conception of the communist society which denies the diversity and plurality of different forms of society: “Marx’s theory of communism, just as Hegel’s dialectics, did not provide for a simultaneous coexistence and interaction of various social states, various forms of property, organisation of labour, various values, the simultaneous coexistence of alternative forms of life, various methods of the social organisation of labour.”(p67) But in actuality the character of the economic and political system is not based on a possible mutual collection of different types of society, and instead is defined by the attempt of capitalism to maintain its supremacy within the world economy. Hence the genuine alternative of socialism can only thrive by attempting to overcome the domination of capitalism. The point is that there is an antagonistic contradiction between the character of capitalism and socialism, and this aspect can only be resolved by the consolidation of the supremacy of one or other of these two types of social system. This approach was promoted by Marx in terms of his perspective of world revolution. It was Stalin who essentially recognised the possibility of co-existence of socialism and capitalism with his perspective of socialism in one country. The point is that it was Marx who understood the importance of international class struggle in order to resolve the issue of which type of social system can be dominant, capitalism or socialism. Hence it was Stalin who effectively rejected this approach and essentially suggested that the increasing economic and political power of the USSR would enable it to establish a situation in which this society would be able to co-exist with the capitalist states. The expansion of the USSR after the second world war was the actual empirical expression of this approach rather than the adoption of a perspective of world revolution. But primarily the difference between Marx and Stalin is that the former upheld a standpoint of proletarian self-emancipation in order to create a new type of society in which the people would be liberated from all aspects of exploitation and oppression, whilst the latter aimed to consolidate the domination of a new privileged ruling class. It was this aspect which generated the authoritarian character of Stalinism rather than any supposed adherence to the ideology of the aim of communism.

However, the approach of Yahovlev is to suggest that it is not possible or feasible to develop an objective of the future. It is not possible to construct a conception of an alternative to the present: “But even today there is still no unified theory of socio-historical development in the strict scientific meaning that concept. And without it, a universal social model of historical scale and significance cannot be constructed, as the entire experience of Marxism has proved.” (p68) Hence the apparent authoritarian character of Marxism is expressed by the attempt to impose a conception of society in an elitist manner, and this very aspect has to end in authoritarian policies because this development is not based on the genuine expression of the people concerning their aspirations for society. In other words what is a process of socio-historical engineering has to be based on the attempt to impose values and policies on the people in a dogmatic manner and so the only outcome can be an authoritarian society. This is why it is suggested that the rigid doctrine of Marx can only result in Stalinism. But this approach is considered to have only resulted in practical failure because it expresses an attempt to impose a doctrine in a dogmatic manner rather than expressing the practical complexity of social reality. Hence this problematical standpoint of Marxism can only be upheld by an authoritarian state when contrasted to the democratic character of most capitalist societies. However, it could be suggested that this aspect of authoritarianism is not because of an allegiance to Marxism by these Stalinist regimes because this ideology has been reduced to a formality, whilst in practice a new type of exploitative society is being created. The practice of Stalinism must mean the rejection of the Marxist objective to develop a society based on the self-emancipation of the people. In other words, the development of a system of systematic exploitation of the producers cannot be the expression of what can be considered to be the realisation of the aims of Marx concerning the character of a post-capitalist society. However, this is the very view being argued by Yahovlev because he considers that any attempt to end the role of capitalism will result in authoritarianism and economic inefficiency: “The Marxist programme of eliminating the market and market relations proved in fact to be a programme to destroy the pillars of human civilisation. Nevertheless, despite all efforts, the programme failed to be fully implemented. Not because of insufficient will and purpose – there was actually an abundance of that. It failed because the market, which had been the optimal form and essence of economic existence since time immemorial, was destroyed.” (p73) But this conclusion does not establish that various Bolsheviks, such as Bukharin, opposed the attempt to end the importance of the market because it was actually an expression of a type of economic irrationality that would not contribute to the development of socialism. Instead, this approach was effectively about the interests of the Stalinist elite rather than being about the attempt to consolidate the socialist economy in a principled manner. In other words, the major problem was not the effective end of the role of the market but instead the issue was the consolidation of the domination of the Stalinist elite in economic and political terms. It was this aspect that justified the development of economic inefficiency as being an expression of the supposed development of socialism. The point is that socialism could not be consolidated because of the very problems of the role of Stalinism. However, what is being argued by Yahovlev is that this development is the logical outcome of the supposed inherent authoritarian character of socialism as advocated by Marx.

What is ultimately being suggested is that the authoritarian model of socialism is n longer credible because people no longer support it: “The old Marxist model of socialism is no longer attractive. It was orientated toward the simplification of social life, to an equally modest poverty for everyone and called on people to part with many of the joys of their existence. Modern individuals find it hard to understand why a world without the market, without money, without freedom of choice is supposed to be more comfortable for them. All of the most general determinations of how to bring about the socialist transformation of public life have lost their power to orient and their practical life. They were deduced by Marx from the negating features of the pre socialist stage of society and served as a source of political activity for the first pre-revolutionary generations. But when their ideas became reality, they revealed their futility as well as their destructiveness” (p83) Hence it is being suggested that the ultimate limitations of Marxism is that it not possible to implement its ideas in a practical manner. The vey experience of Soviet Russia is an expression of this failure. Hence the ultimate limitation of Marxism is that its very objective of socialism is said to be unrealistic and so any attempt to realise its conception of communism is said to result in failure. However, it could be suggested in reply that the actual problem in relation to understanding the history of the USSR is that its leadership effectively rejected the importance of the Marxist aim of communism and instead acted in a different manner in order to consolidate the economic and political domination of the party elite. Hence the problem was not the failure of socialism, but instead that a genuine type of socialism was never realised in the Soviet Union. Therefore, it cannot be considered that what has resulted is the failure and limitations of Marxism, but instead that Marxism was reduced to a formal ideology that lacked genuine practical expression. This was because it could not be said that the workers were able to exercise effective management and organisation of the economy. In other words, the actual issue was the contradiction between the role of Marxist ideology when compared to the actual practice in economic and political terms of the Soviet system. In other words what had occurred was not the failure of the Marxist conception of socialism, but instead the inability to realise this approach. This mean thee was a contradiction between theory and practice in the character of the system which ultimately compromised the credibility of the Soviet regime. It was the increasing understanding that socialism had not been realised which led to the development of cynicism within the public. This very development created the conditions for counterrevolutionary change that led to the restoration of capitalism. Gorbachev failed in his attempt to regenerate the system in terms of the application of democratic reforms, but it was not inevitable that this would be the result of his policies. It may have been possible to create the influence of popular opinion which could have generated the possibility to establish support for the genuine reform of the Stalinist system.

But what is being argued is that all these empirical events indicate the apparent historical demise of the importance of Marxism: “Sonner or later, the moment had to come when socialism, the dream – would have to exhaust itself. If humanity did not have an instinct for self-preservation it would have perished long ago. The ideas of the new person, paradise on earth, and a fundamentally new historical stage have compromised themselves. The idea of a leap, which caught the imagination of nineteenth century philosophy, primarily Marxism, is alien to the contemporary person.” (p88) But it could also be suggested that the crisis of Marxism has contributed to the influence of the view that it is no longer of importance. But even this aspect has not undermined the development of mass struggles which have posed challenges in relation to the issue of the continued domination of the capitalist system. Therefore, what has occurred is a theory and practice inconsistency. In theoretical terms it would seem that Marxism is becoming antiquated, but in actuality its relevance is still indicated by the development of mass struggles which continue to indicate a process of challenge to the domination of capitalism. Hence Marxism would still seem to have a relevance despite the effective demise of the importance of Stalinism. Furthermore, the influence of the view that there is an alternative to capitalism has not been ended by the apparent decline in the influence of Marxism. The various manifestations of the activism of the struggles and protests against capitalism still generate the aspiration that there is the necessity to try and establish an alternative type of society that is based on the ending of the aspect of the subordination of labour within the economic system. But this discontent is of a disorganised character and is not connected to the role of a revolutionary party which can express this spontaneous aspiration to develop a different type of social system. In other words what has been most effectively discredited because of the legacy of Stalinism is the aspect of the importance of the revolutionary party as being necessity to the realisation of social change. Instead, it has become a popular assumption that the dynamics of mass struggle will somehow automatically generate the possibility of a form of emancipatory change. But this reliance on spontaneous change has proved to be problematical because it is generally shown that this approach is not able to develop the conscious conditions which express the possibility for the undermining of the domination of capitalism. Instead struggle becomes considered to be an end in itself and the aspect of ultimate aims are reduced to the attempt to prolong the forms of mass activity. In other words, it seems to be accepted that the aspiration to realise socialism is defined by its apparent connection to Stalinism and so this approach has to become reduced to making protests against capitalism. The various mass movements know what they are against, but they are generally not able to establish what they in favour of in more constructive terms. In other words, in an implicit sense the activists seem to accept that there is a connection between Marxism and Stalinism and so they have to effectively reject this standpoint in terms of a more vague and populist ideology of anti-capitalism. The result is forms of protest against aspects of capitalism and so the aim of socialism has been replaced by an activist emphasis on the role of struggle that apparently has no definite objective or aim except in terms of realising various limited changes within capitalism. Ironically this approach represents a type of reformist standpoint that ultimately seems to accept that all that is possible is limited progressive changes within the capitalist system. It would seem that it is the responsibility of those remaining Marxists to oppose this development in terms of outlining the continued importance of the aim of communism. But instead, they often adapt to this perspective of vague anti-capitalism and aspire to only become the most militant advocates of this approach. This means that it is implicitly being accepted that the traditional objectives of Marxism to create a communist society has led to the problem of Stalinism and so the only alternative is to become a limited form of a protest movement against aspects of capitalism. This means that in contemporary terms Marxism is defined by its emphasis on the importance of mass struggle, but the issue of what it supports in terms of social objectives becomes an obscure issue.

However, it is suggested by Yahovlev that this increasingly irrelevance of the objectives of Marxism is because society no longer corresponds to the necessity to its traditional aims. He comments: “But I think the natural exhaustion of the mobilizing and orientating possibilities of the Marxist project of the future is not the only issue. This project fell under attack not only because it had become outdated and no longer met the needs of the age, or new, more rational and grounded thinking. It had more to do with the laws of economy, sociology and politics, the means of reproducing the life of society than the laws of psychology. Now it is impossible to hide the indisputable fact that at a certain moment…all efforts to realise the original project of socialism did not so much bring about the achievement of the “ideal” humane goals of the social order so much as each time push back the very opportunity to approach the horizon of modern historical vision. Real economic and social life did not confirm the original premises.” (p86) But this view implicitly assumes that capitalism is a consistently superior system that is adequate for the realisation of the demands of contemporary society whilst Marxism represents an increasingly elitist doctrine that can only be realised in authoritarian terms. In other words, it is being suggested that only capitalism expresses the possibility to realise the social requirements of the present period. This means that Marxism becomes an antiquated doctrine that is only supported by small groups of intellectuals. In empirical terms this view would seem to be vindicated because it seems that the standpoint of revolutionary politics has been reduced to the role of very small and ineffective groups. But it could be argued that this development is not because Marxism has proved to be antiquated but is instead the result of the apparent inability of these organisations to promote what could be genuinely popular programmes and views. In other words, the situation does not express the inherent superiority of capitalism and is instead about the problems involved in trying to create genuinely influential Marxist parties. Part of the problem is the continued association of Marxism with the authoritarianism of Stalinism. It could be suggested that Marxist groups have not sufficiently attempted to develop a perspective that is able to indicate that they are committed to democratic aims rather than authoritarianism. This problem does not indicate that Marxism is authoritarian but instead that its theory has not sufficiently developed a standpoint that outlines that it is opposed to elitism and the creation of repressive types of societies. Instead, it is suggested in dogmatic terms that genuine Marxism is opposed to Stalinism and so by implication that it is opposed to authoritarianism. However, this dogmatic assumption is not sufficient in order to reject the views of people like Yahovlev who suggest that Marxism has an inherent connection to an authoritarian standpoint. In other words, it is necessary to try and outline the understanding of why Marxism is not authoritarian which has not yet been elaborated in a satisfactory manner. This means trying to establish why socialism is not a justification for the domination of the elite over society.

In order to try and outline the understanding of a democratic form of revolutionary Marxism we need to suggest that the only possibility for change according to Marxist principles is when the workers are organised in collective terms, and they develop because of this aspect a consciousness of the possibility to change society. The problem is that the combined influence of bourgeois ideology and the imposition of the domination of capital over labour undermines the possibility to realise this potential. This is precisely why it is necessary to create a revolutionary party that is able to advocate the perspective of radical change. However, increasingly it has been difficult to create effective and popular Marxist parties, but it suggested by Yahovlev that an important reason for this failure is the dogmatic inability to recognise how capitalism can undergo important economic changes that make it receptive to the realisation of the aspirations of the people. It is a system of progress and development: “The founders of Marxism did not see the opportunities to transform the social order, its living potential, its ability to create under the influence of the scientific and technological revolution, economic and social processes, new management structures suitable not only for the industrial, but for the post-industrial, information society.”(p87) Thus it is being suggested that capitalism is an adaptable economic system and so as a result is able to realise the interests of the people in an effective manner. This implies that the alternative of socialism would not represent a genuine alternative, and so this meant that the system in the USSR could only be maintained by the aspect of an authoritarian regime. But was the development of Stalinism a logical outcome of the theoretical limitations of the supposed dogmatic character of Marxist theory, or instead a pragmatic response to the problems of a complex situation? Indeed, it could be suggested that the application of Marxist theory for understanding these developments was able to indicate that Stalinism was not the logical expression of the role of Marxism but was instead the conversion of a formal type of Marxism into the pragmatic justification of the importance of a Stalinist elite that was developing the possibility to create a new type of authoritarian society. Hence it could be suggested that the Marxist commitment to the emancipation of the workers in a post-revolutionary society was being opposed rather than confirmed by these developments. However, the possibly most important objection of Yahovlev to Marxism is that it is both dogmatic and impractical and so does not recognise that the dynamism of a contemporary economy can only be realised in terms of the application of the principles of capitalism. It is this view which would certainly be contested by Marx. He would suggest that the very possibility for the workers to act within a capitalist economy in cooperative terms is an indication that a superior and more efficient alternative is possible, and so the aspect of the domination of labour by capital becomes unacceptable for this very reason. It is being suggested by Yahovlev that the very practical experience of the USSR is an indication that this approach of Marx is illusory. However, it could be suggested that the actual problem was the failure of the Soviet party elite to apply Marxist principles in an effective and principled manner. The ultimate result of this situation was a new type of exploitative society which was inferior to capitalism. But this does not indicate that socialism is not a credible alternative. Instead, it is still important to strive for a genuine socialist society which can be able to develop the economic aspects of a new type of economic organisation and genuine expression of the initiative of the workers. But Yahovlev rejects this possibility, and instead considers that socialism failed because it is considered to be the logical expression of a Stalinist approach. Marxists would reject this view and claim that socialism is an emancipatory aim that has nothing in common with Stalinism.

But what is being suggested by Yahovlev is that the development of a system of state ownership of the aspects of the economy cannot replace the dynamic aspect of the expression of the role of the market within the system, and so the concept of progress associated with the socialist approach is shown to be a dogmatic perspective: “The notion of progress bult into the idea of socialism has failed, prompting the re-evaluation of many of the normative criteria of communist and social democratic thought in the last one hundred years. The question of a new philosophy is on the agenda.” (p88) But this view can only be sustained by associating Stalinism with socialism, but this is the very connection that is questionable. In other words, there is nothing concerning the principled conception of socialism that would define this objective in terms of the justification of the domination of a new type of elite. Instead, it is about the democratic participation of the people in economic and political terms. Hence it could be suggested that Stalinism was the actual undermining of the emancipatory objectives of socialism as advocated by Marx. But instead of this understanding it is being assumed by Yahovlev that only capitalism represents genuine historical progress, and so this means that the objective of socialism should be rejected because of its inherent connection with dogmatic reasoning. In other words, the association of socialism with the conception of historical progress has been shown to be false because this system can only be maintained by the role of a party elite. Therefore, genuine progress is defined by improvements to capitalism rather than the unrealistic and inherent authoritarian attempt to create a socialist society. But this view does not recognise the importance of the problems associated with a capitalist economy such as the development of mass unemployment caused by the imposition of policies of austerity in order to generate increased accumulation. The point is that the problems associated with a Stalinist society do not establish the supposed superiority of capitalism. Instead, what is indicated is the necessity to realise a genuine form of socialism as the only alternative to the domination of capitalism. But it is being suggested by the author that the very problems of a Stalinist society indicate the inherent superiority of socialism. However, we would suggest a different conclusion, that what is being established is the necessity to realise an authentic form of socialism instead of its false expression in terms of the role of Stalinism.

In other words, because of the association of Stalinism with socialism it is being concluded by Yahovlev that: “The internal antagonisms of socialism proved to be more dangerous than those under capitalism. Marxism is no longer able to satisfy the urgent need to rethink the unique spiritual experience of the twentieth century. With its focus on class differences, the external economic side of life, it does not meet the new higher demands for a quality of social thought.” (p89) The very approach of Marxism is considered to be inherently dogmatic and rigid. Hence it is being suggested that the Marxist emphasis on the importance of class antagonisms does not explain the apparent tendency for society to generate the possibility to resolve these issues within capitalism because of the increased development of a common interest in economic development. However, within socialism this aspect of the importance of unity between classes is apparently lacking because of the problems caused by its economic limitations. Instead, a difference develops between the privileged situation of the administrators of the economy when compared to the position of the workers. These aspects are problematical because the ideology of socialism aspires to end all distinctions caused by the role of economic activity. In contrast capitalism is more ideologically consistent because it is based on the importance of the role of the employers in order to motivate the workers to produce goods in an efficient manner. Hence it is being suggested that these distinctions of class are actually of mutual benefit for all the members of society. It would seem that capitalism is more ideologically consistent because it seems that the distinctions of class are actually of benefit for all the members of society. Thus, the ideological inconsistencies of the Stalinist conception of society are contrasted with the apparent convincing claims of the ideology of capitalism that the aspect of class distinctions are to the mutual benefit of all the people. However, these problematical features of the Stalinist conception of socialism can be contrasted with the Marxist approach which outlines the importance of the development of a society based on the expression of democracy in economic and political terms. The very criticism of capitalism is that it cannot realise democracy and instead has to effectively uphold the authoritarian domination of capital over labour. To Marx only socialism can realise a genuine form of democracy and this is an important reason why capitalism has to be replaced with this alternative form of society. This development is made possible by the realisation of the connection between the overcoming of the autocratic domination of capital over labour with the related development of a political system of genuine democracy. Only the accountability of the revolutionary government to the people can ensure that this administration is able to act in accordance with genuine socialist principles. Hence Stalinism cannot be the continued expression of Marxism because this aspect of democracy is replaced with the effective role of a form of authoritarian government. However, this distinction is denied by Yahovlev because he considers that this aspect of authoritarianism is the logical expression of Marxism. But he can only justify this standpoint by effectively suggesting that the very attempt to replace capitalism with an alternative type of economic and political system results in the expression of authoritarianism. In other words, it is his pro-capitalist standpoint that means he has to be critical of the supposed authoritarian logic of the attempt to establish a different type of socialist system. However, Marx attempted to outline the democratic logic of the role of revolutionary class struggle. The aims of socialism could only be realised if people were able to develop the possibility to define and express the character of their aims in relation to the role of democratic participation in the attempt to achieve these revolutionary objectives. In this context the party could not instruct people in the achievement of these aims, and instead its leadership would be about facilitating the possibility for people to be able to achieve goals in the most popular manner. Hence Stalinism was opposed to this approach because it was based on the necessity of autocratic leadership and the expression of instruction of the workers about how to achieve political objectives. Thus, on the one hand Marxism was about generating the possibility for workers to change society in a democratic manner, whilst Stalinism was concerned to subordinate the role of the workers to the aims of the party. This means that there is a basic difference between Marxism and Stalinism, but this is what is denied by Yahovlev because he considers that the Marxist aim of socialism can only be realised in terms of the elitist role of the revolutionary party. He does not consider that the relationship of party and class can express democratic principles involving the aspects of interaction and participation. Ultimately his approach is based on the view that the aim of socialism can only be realised by the authoritarian role of the Marxist party. He cannot conceive that this objective requires the importance of democratic principles such as the influence of the popular views of the workers in relation to the actions of the Marxists. Indeed, it could be suggested that only when there is the expression of the importance of democratic principles in the process of the attempt to create an effective socialist society can it be suggested that this objective of overcoming all aspects of domination within the social formation has been achieved. Hence there is an integral connection between the role of democracy and the attempt to construct an authentic socialist society. Only when the people are able to act in terms of the principles of popular participation in the making of decisions concerning the character and objectives of the post-capitalist social formation can it be said that this type of society is being developed in an effective manner. If instead an elite becomes the important agency of the making of decisions, then what is likely to occur is the creation of a new type of system based on the exploitation of the producers. This is what ultimately developed in the Soviet Union. Hence the objective of socialism was not discredited, but instead it was unable to be realised in an effective and successful manner. However, the view of Yahovlev is that the authoritarian character of the USSR could only be because of the dogmatic attempt to establish socialism, and so this meant that the actual inclinations of the people to create capitalist forms of economic activity had to be repressed. It is because socialism is considered to be an artificial and problematical type of social system that meant it could only be expressed in terms of an authoritarian system of the rule of the party. But we would suggest that it was actually the effective rejection of the objective of socialism which meant that the system was upheld in terms of the repressive role of the party elite, and in this manner the exploitation of the producers was justified. Therefore, it was not socialism, which was responsible for the system of authoritarianism, but instead it was the rejection of this aim that led to the consolidation of the regime of the party elite.

However, this defence of a perspective of genuine socialism against the Stalinist distortion of this aim is dismissed by Yahovlev because he considers that this very objective has to be of an authoritarian character because of the assumption that only capitalism can effectively express the potential of people as individuals. Therefore: “Subsequent misfortune essentially stems from this. The triumphant revolution in Russia did not have a scientific premise for creative activity, to maintain what had to be maintained, and to create what had to be created.” (p90) The reason for this problem is: “What tenet on the all-round developed individual can be conceived if the individual is first squeezed into class and other social structures? Marx never saw the whole problem of the mechanisms of social integration, the role of religion, universal human morality, the state, the family with its whole series of institutions, their role in the preservation of humanity, and social integrity. The idea that the entire history of human society is a history of class warfare……has overshadowed a more important problem: why has society been preserved as an integral whole? A social philosophy orientated toward Marx keeps answering this question with the usual conundrum: unity exists through struggle and opposition that is, through disunity and division.” (p90) In other words because Marx emphasised the importance of the aspect of class struggle for changing society, it was also assumed that the realisation of the domination of the workers would have to be based on the exercise of repression over the former capitalist class. In other words, a functioning socialist society could only be maintained as the result of the exercise of repression by the newly dominant revolutionary class. In contrast the concept of the attempt to develop a unity of purpose between the different classes that was considered to be characteristic of capitalism would imply the importance of the expression of democracy and the principles of consent rather than the role of repression. However, the class struggle approach of Marxism would suggest the necessity to impose the aspect of coercion in order to ensure the domination of the revolutionary forces. Thus, the system of capitalism was more conducive to the expression of the principles of democracy because this aspect was connected to establishing a unity of purpose between the different classes of society. But the expression of socialism was connected to authoritarianism because it meant the ascendency of the workers as the outcome of the aspect of social antagonisms. In this manner the ability to maintain the domination of the workers implied the expression of a system of coercion. But Marx would deny this interpretation of his approach and instead suggest that it is the very interests of the workers to create an economic and political system that is maintained in terms of the expression of the principles of democracy. Indeed, the most effective manner in which the ascendency of the workers can be maintained is because the former capitalist class should lack popular support for its attempt to restore the former capitalist society. But if for various reasons the attempt to develop socialism is unsuccessful then the capitalists will be able to develop support for the realisation of their reactionary objectives. Hence it is in the interests of the workers and the revolutionary regime to try and develop a successful economic system based on the principles of the participation of the people. In these terms it is not likely that support for the restoration of capitalism will be developed. In other words, a genuine socialism can only be created in terms of the expression of the role of popular democracy. This means that Stalinism cannot be that type of system because it effectively rejects the authentic Marxist principles of the importance of the expression of democracy and instead constructs a type of social formation based on the authoritarian domination of the role of the elite party.

But possibly the most important objection to Marxism that is being outlined is the view that its objectives express dogmatism because capitalism has proved to be a system able to overcome its crisis and instead enter into new periods of growth and prosperity: “From the very beginning the likelihood was great that the historical process would deviate from Marx’s prediction. Each crisis of overproduction, with which hopes for the beginning of a proletarian revolution was linked, was resolved peacefully, moving capitalism to a new stage of expanded reproduction.” (p90) But this comment does not explain the often radical possibilities of the history of the twentieth century. There was often the development of the potential of proletarian revolutionary change, and it was the very reactionary role of Stalinism to undermine the possible realisation of these developments in Europe. In other words, capitalism did not have an ascendency because of the implicit superiority of this system, and instead because of the generation of economic crisis the radicalisation of the working class often occurred. However, it was the reactionary role of Stalinism and Social Democracy which ensured the continuation of the domination of capital in Western Europe which ultimately ensured the possibility to realise the consolidation of the domination of the capitalist system. Hence the potential for revolutionary change was not realised because of the opportunist limitations of the party of the working class. But instead of acknowledging the importance of these aspects it is being suggested by Yahovlev that capitalism is a superior system that is almost impossible to undermine and replace with an alternative. Hence: “Now from the vantage of historical experience of the twentieth century, from the vantage of contemporary knowledge and the science of management, it is clear that Marx’s dream of the growth of capitalism into a new society was impossible to realise”(p91) Therefore: “By absolutizing the antagonism of the classes, overturning the physical consensus, and interpreting these as the fundamental source of progress, our thinkers have greatly postponed investigation of the original reasons why the individual has been preserved as a human being as a spiritual creature, and how a psychologically healthy individual is formed. They have failed to see thar it is the exception rather than the rule for the transition from one social state to another to be achieved through class revolution and the psychical annihilation of the vanquished by the victors.”(p91) Hence it is being suggested that the October revolution was an exceptional event in which the supremacy of the revolutionary party was established, but that in general terms there are important economic and political reasons why capitalism continues to be the dominant system. Indeed, this is the very reason why Marxism is ultimately discredited because it cannot explain the general character of historical development which has been based on the increasing importance of the role of the capitalist system as the most effective manner in which the aspirations of the individual can be expressed. Therefore, the only hope of revolutionary change is to rely on the role of an essentially authoritarian type of Marxist party, which being concerned with change by an elite is not concerned with the importance of developing popular support for its actions. Thus, it is suggested that Marxism becomes Stalinism because this is the only manner in which capitalism can be overthrown and the development of an alternative type of society is expressed. But in actuality it has been the lack of popular support for a genuine Marxist party which has undermined the possibility to realise the prospect for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Hence it is not that capitalism is the inherent and necessary expression of the economic activity of the people which has maintained this system, but instead the important problems involved in trying to develop an effective and popular revolutionary party. In other words, it is the subjective issue of the difficulties involved in trying to develop class consciousness which has resulted in the creation of important problems connected with the attempt to overcome the domination of capital. Hence contrary to what is being claimed by Yahovlev there is not an inherent superiority of capitalism which has led to genuine and consistently popular support for the capitalist system but instead there is a scepticism about the possibility to establish a successful process of revolutionary change. This aspect is expressed in the marginal role of the various revolutionary parties and the increasing adaptation of Social Democracy and Stalinism to the domination of capital. In this context it is the very reactionary role of Stalinism which has contributed to a general scepticism about the emancipatory possibilities of socialism, and s in this manner this aspect has immensely contributed to the expression of the apparent credibility of capitalism when contrasted to the socialist alternative. Hence it is not that capitalism is supported in enthusiastic terms by people, but instead it becomes accepted because it does not seem possible or feasible to strive to realise the aim of socialism. In this context it is certainly the fact that the reactionary role of Stalinism has enhanced the credibility of capitalism as the only feasible type of social system. It is not the ideological limitations of socialism when contrasted to capitalism which has led to the influence of the view that this system is superior, but instead it is the Stalinist interpretation of the aim of socialism which has led to this development It is being argued by Yahovlev that socialism is a inferior and dogmatic doctrine because of its supposed inherent relation to Stalinism, but we would reject this connection and instead suggest that Stalinism is a distortion of socialism in terms of interpreting this aim in terms of the interests of the party elite rather than that of the workers and of society in general. Indeed, the Communist party of the Soviet Union never realised a genuine conception of socialism but instead advocated and defended a distorted version which attempt to reconcile this aim with that of the role of the party elite.

However, Yahovlev considers that the actual major reason for the authoritarianism of Stalinism are the limitations of Marxist theory. It is said not to have a plausible perspective for the emancipatory liberation of humanity, and so instead what occurs is the justification of authoritarianism: “That is the paradox of Marxism, that it tries to link progress with the abolition of the naturally formed institutions of human culture, of all social existence, without ever saying what exactly can and should replace them. Marxism has a detailed programme for emancipation from the old but says nothing about what has to be done immediately after the desired revolutionary coup d’état has come to pass. No wonder many revolutionary Marxists could not foresee the immediate consequence of their own policy, could not juxtapose the logic of the movement of a concept with the logic of the movement of everyday life.”(p93) However, it could be suggested that people like Kautsky and Lenin did outline perspectives about the character and aspects of a socialist society, but it was the complex difficulties of the situation in Russia which meant that it was difficult to realise them in effective terms. Instead, pragmatic policies replaced the attempt to realise what were the theoretical conceptions of a socialist society, such as the outlined by Lenin in his ‘State and Revolution’. Indeed, it could be suggested that if the practical situation had allowed the possibility to realise the progressive objectives of this conception of socialism, this could have mean that this post-revolutionary society could have made genuine advances towards the realisation of an emancipatory system. Ultimately the problem was that the complex difficulties of an adverse economic and political situation meant that the objective of socialism became pragmatically compromised by the apparent necessity of authoritarian measures as the only basis to ensure the continuation of the revolutionary regime in Russia. However, it could also be suggested that the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 was an indication of the willingness of the party leadership to recognise the importance of compromise and the necessity to develop a consistent process of agreement between the objectives of the workers and peasants. In this manner it was accepted that if socialism was to be created it would be connected to the importance of the development of popular support of this aim. Hence the economic measures of the Soviet government were intended to create this level of agreement about the importance and validity of the standpoint of socialism. Thus, it could be suggested that the NEP was the approach that was attempting to develop a popular and democratic form of support within the people for the aim of socialism. Therefore, the bureaucratic manner in which Stalin effectively ended the role of the NEP expressed a change to the establishment of an elitist form of government which was no longer concerned to create the conditions for socialism in a genuine manner. Instead, socialism became merely a formal ideology that was no longer connected to the actual developments that were occurring within society.

However, it is the view of Yahovlev that the actual problem was adherence to a perspective of socialism which did not have the popular support of the people. He makes this conclusion because he considers that capitalism is the dominant system that will be supported in a popular manner. Therefore, it is only possible to maintain socialism in authoritarian terms. Ultimately this approach is untenable because the popular impetus to create capitalism becomes inevitable. Indeed, in this manner, the events in the Soviet Union are merely a confirmation of the inevitable domination of global capitalism. This situation has apparently been confirmed by the developments of the twentieth century. The fact that this apparent domination of global capitalism has only occurred after a prolonged period of international class struggles does not seem to be acknowledged by Yahovlev. Instead, he seems to claim that only this type of economic system can express the capacities of humanity to make genuine social progress: “Now we can state with certainty that capitalism as a system of social and productive relations has shown an ability to put to its service literally everything that has even a particle of usefulness, even a grain of common sense. On the whole, it has successfully integrated not only scientific and technological innovations but also achievements in social organisation and the political process, new social and other movements, institutions and new socio-political ideas and theories; but also achievements in culture and art.”(p94) But these developments do not overcome the importance of the continued exploitation of labour by capital in the relations of production and so establishing the possibility of change to a more progressive type of economic system. It is still the situation that capitalism both establishes the material conditions for a better and more progressive type of social system and does not end the exploitation of labour within the character of its relations of production. This means the aspect of class struggle can still occur within the present economic system, and the potential for change to a more progressive type of system is expressed in these terms. But it is this very aspect which is being denied by Yahovlev because he considers that the very progress that occurs within capitalism resolves this outstanding issue of class antagonisms. However, the point is that the economic progress expressed by the development of capitalism does not generally benefit labour and is instead an aspect that is monopolised by the capitalists because of their domination of the economic system. In other words, it is still the situation that the inequality expressed by the character of capitalism can only be overcome by the realisation of the alternative of socialism. The failures of Stalinism do not change the importance of this aspect of the inherent inequalities of the present economy of capitalism.

In opposition to any criticism of the limitations of capitalism it is being suggested by Yahovlev that the alternative of socialism is more inefficient and does not realise its promise of achieving the aim of material prosperity and equality. This problematical issue is an indication that capitalism is a superior economic system and so the only manner in which an alternative can be realised is by the success of the realisation of change by a party elite. But such a development cannot be successful because the economic system that is created to replace capitalism is more inefficient and is not able to meet the needs of the people in a superior manner. The view being outlined is that capitalism is the only system that is able to realise the material interests of all the people in the most effective manner. Obviously, the history of the USSR would seem to vindicate this view. But it could be argued that the actual reason for this situation was because a genuine socialist society was not created and instead a ruling elite extracted a surplus from the people in relation to the role of economic activity. In other words, it could be argued that a genuine socialist system would have had a different character and so in this context it would have become possible for the people to be able to benefit from the role of a nationalised economy that was organised in genuinely democratic terms. This possibility would have indicated that the actual practice of a Marxist approach is different to that of Stalinism. But the identification of Marxism with Stalinism by Yahovlev means that he suggests that the situation that occurred was inevitable. Hence the practice of Stalinism was the logical outcome of Marxism, and so the only manner in which genuine freedom can be realised is in terms of the development of a capitalist economy which enables the autonomy of individuals to be genuinely expressed. In this context it is suggested that the workers are able to benefit from the role of an efficient economic form of activity. Thus, it is implied that the workers are actually exploited more systematically and ruthlessly by the bureaucratic character of the Stalinist type of economy. This is precisely why the workers considered the restoration of capitalism to be a victory and the end of socialism was not considered to be problematic. But the actual problem was not the imposition of supposed Marxist dogma by the Stalinist elite, but rather that this system could not realise Marxist principles in an effective manner. The Marxist aim of the classless society was not established because the domination of society by the Stalinist elite was the manner in which the stratification of society in terms of opposing interests was developed and perpetuated. Only the end of Stalinist domination could facilitate the possibility to realise a genuine form of socialism. But unfortunately, the false identification of Stalinism with socialism led to support for the imposition of capitalism as the expression of the political character of an anti-Stalinist revolutionary process. Ultimately the process of the restoration of capitalism has led to the authoritarian regime of Putin, but this very development is an indication that bureaucratic and elitist regimes are not the monopoly of the supposed socialist character of Russian society. Instead, the important issue that is considered by the ruling elite, whether Stalinist or pro-capitalist, concerns the necessity to impose authoritarian regimes in order to maintain the domination of the rule of a privileged ruling class. Hence it is not Marxist ideology which produced the Stalinist regime, but instead it is considered by the elite that dominates society that it is necessary to create the coercive domination of the state in order to consolidate its rule. This understanding has been continued by the present elite that dominates Russian society despite the restoration of capitalism. In other words, the actual reason for the development of authoritarianism is that the various elites that have dominated both Soviet and Russian society could not envisage any other alternative to this situation. This meant that the expression of genuine and effective forms of democracy could not be allowed to be expressed. Hence the progressive possibilities of the democracy of the Soviets of 1917 were not realised, and this problem has never been overcome in a progressive manner. But this does not mean that the October revolution had an inherently authoritarian character, rather the aspect of Soviet democracy which creates the political conditions for this vey event was not continued because of increasingly adverse economic developments. The result was the establishment of elitist and repressive regimes. However, the durability of this situation has meant that even with the restoration of capitalism the role of authoritarian regimes has continued to be important in Russia. This very situation is an indication that the problem is not Marxism, but instead the various elites have not established a more effective type of political regime in order to perpetuate their domination over society.

But instead of this type of conclusion it is suggested by Yahovlev that because only capitalism is an expression of the possibility to develop an efficient economic system that is able to realise the material needs of the people, this aspect means that it is most conducive to the realisation of a democratic political system. He comments: “Private property is the matter and spirit of civilisation. Private property is invincible because it is efficient. Only private property, through the action of the law of value and competition, raises the productivity of labour, establishes the parameters and reduces the expenditures of socially necessary labour in the production of a given product.” (p154) This expression of economic efficiency means: “Without property, the human being cannot be free. No one can abolish this axiom in the historically foreseeable future. It is enough to deprive a person of property, great or small, to have totalitarianism become unavoidable. The inevitable logic of events gradually destroy society’s buttresses of values – freedom, law and order, inviolability of the person, and freedom of conscience – which in the long run leads to the death of civilization.”(p154) Hence the issue is not primarily the authoritarian role of Stalinism but instead the apparent fact that Stalinism acted in terms of the aims and objectives of an inherently authoritarian ideology of socialism which replaced the character of capitalism which is based on economic freedom of the individual and the importance of political democracy. Thus, it was the supposed expression of the standpoint of socialism which is considered to be responsible for the authoritarian character of the Soviet system. However, this view ignores the fact that Marx outlined an understanding of the principles of socialism in terms of the importance of the expression of the participatory democracy of the people. It could also be suggested that Lenin considered the development of one-party rule as the expression of the empirical difficulties of the post-revolutionary situation and so he ultimately considered that the role of Soviet democracy would be the expression of the political character of the society that was attempting to create socialism. It was only Stalin who definitely justified the role of the single exclusive communist party as the personification of the political system of socialism, and Trotsky as the major advocate of the revolutionary socialist alternative envisaged the restoration of a genuine Soviet democracy which would involve the development of competition between different parties. Thus, it was the Stalinist distortion of Marxist values which led to the most explicit defence of the one-party regime. However, it is being suggested by Yahovlev it was because the Soviet Union represented the objectives of Marx that this meant it was authoritarian, and so only capitalist type societies can genuinely express the role of democracy. This view is based on the dogmatic assumption that socialism can only be upheld in an authoritarian manner. But this type of society, as in the USSR, lacked any expression of economic democracy or even political democracy, and instead was the expression of the repressive rule of the party elite. Therefore, it could not have been the expression of Marxist values because such a repressive society was not capable of expressing the values of socialism. Indeed, the restoration of capitalism since the end of the Gorbachev era has indicated that the authoritarian legacy of Stalinism has been effectively continued in new forms. There is still no genuine expression of the political importance of a multiparty democracy.

Therefore, the perspective of Yahovlev has not been realised. He contends that the progressive alternative to Stalinism should express: “The time has come to say yes. Yes to democracy and personal freedom. Yes to fraternity and equal rights for people and nations. Yes to happiness and justice for all. Yes to an economy and a state that serves the people, is under their control, and is accountable to them.” (p168) But these objectives based on a conception of the importance of ethics and the necessity for their realisation do not explain the effective continuation of a system of authoritarianism within the Russia that has replaced the role of the Soviet Union. Instead, it has proved to be necessary for the ruling elite to uphold an authoritarian type of political system in order to facilitate the possibility to extract a surplus from the workers. In other words, the economic limitations of the past hundred years have meant that it has not been feasible to develop an effective system of genuine multi-party democracy after the demise of Stalinism. This situation has expressed the relation of the continuing problems of the economy with the necessity to attempt to create a viable type of political system that can generate the possibilities for economic development. Ultimately it can still be suggested that only a genuine type of socialism would be the most appropriate in relation to trying to resolve these outstanding issues. Hence contrary to the views of Yahovlev the demise of Stalinism has not meant the demise of the relevance of socialism. The resolution of the economic problems of Russia does not mean the consolidation of an effective form of capitalism. Instead, it can still be suggested that what is required is the creation of a genuine type of socialism which would be based on the attempt to realise the economic potential of the people. Indeed, it could be argued that the problem has been that this type of society has never been realised, and so there has been the issue of continual economic limitations. However, it is being argued that the aims of Bolshevism represent an illusion that can never be realised: “Bolshevism is, above all, the attractiveness of the proclaimed goal…The constant conjugation of this dream with an utterly low level of existence produces a special type of consciousness, both individual and social, based on that lumpen mentality so prone to utopia. The consciousness of poor people is known to fall for the fascination of idealistic dreams.” (p191) Therefore the Marxist view that the aspirations of the workers are connected to the importance of the cooperative character of labour is rejected and instead replaced by the contention that the popular aims are the result of ignorance, and so are inherently unrealistic. The Bolshevik party is assumed to develop its support by accommodating to the simplicity and naivety of the workers. But this understanding ignores the fact that the development of class struggle results in increasing the knowledge of the workers about capitalism and so creates a higher level of class consciousness that makes them capable of supporting collective aims of mass struggle. This is precisely why the workers in 1905 and 1917 in Russia created Soviets which expressed sophisticated forms of popular democracy. Without these organisations it is quite possible that the October revolution of 1917 would not have been successful. Hence to define the importance of this radical development of class consciousness as an expression of ignorance is an insult which completely underestimates the capacity of the workers to support the complex objectives of Bolshevism. It was the creation of increased levels of understanding of society which led to the support of Bolshevism by the workers. For example, complicated issues such as the character of capitalism as imperialism and the limitations of the bourgeois government because of its inability to carry out democratic reforms. In other words, the development of support for the Bolsheviks in 1917 could not be an expression of naivety and ignorance but was instead the expression of the development of the capacity of the workers to understand the complicated perspectives of revolutionary Marxism. Therefore, without the development of class consciousness it is questionable whether the October revolution would have been realised. In other words, contrary to what is being suggested the aspect of ignorance cannot explain the radicalisation of the workers in 1917. To suggest thar this was the situation is to merely consider the character of the workers in insulting terms. Instead, there was a dynamic development between a process of interaction of Marxist theory and programme with the aspirations of the workers that led to the genuine revolution of October 1917. To define this development as an expression of the influence of ignorance is merely a biased view that is unable to accept the support of the workers for revolutionary Marxism in this period. The point is that the actual tragic character of the result of the Russian revolution was that the aspirations of the workers for the realisation of a better type of society was not realised. However, the point is that this outcome could not be established in advance of actual developments. Hence the justification of the October revolution was that it represented the potential to establish an emancipatory type of society. The fact that this outcome was not realised could not be predicted in advance of actual developments. Only the ascendency of Stalinism ensured the ultimate failure of the potential of the October revolution.

However, Yahovlev considers that the Bolshevik regime as an expression of unrealistic aims could only result in the imposition of an authoritarian government: “And the other reservation: a utopia that takes control of large numbers of people who continue to act in a state of well-intentioned error is one thing. But it is another thing when this utopia is imposed by force, moreover by the most inhuman means.” (p238) The question that obviously arises is whether this development was inevitable because of the apparent relation of Marxism to elitism and authoritarianism. It could be suggested that the realisation of the ascendency of authoritarian Stalinism was not the logical outcome of Marxism and Bolshevism and was instead the empirical result of the victory of Stalin in the struggle to become the uncontested party leader. This development led to the creation of a centralised economy based on the role of state enterprises. Hence the creation of a new situation of the exploitation of the producers was not the logical outcome of the role of Leninism and Marxism. But it is argued by Yahovlev that there is a connection between Marxism and Stalinism which suggests the necessity to develop a different and more flexible conception of a society that is able to utilise aspects of capitalism and socialism in terms of the expression of flexible principles of pragmatism. In opposition to this view, we would suggest that Marxism is still relevant for providing the most principled alternative to the exploitative limitations of capitalism. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to learn the lessons of the October revolution and to develop a perspective of how a genuinely democratic type of post-revolutionary society can be established. Only if the principles of democracy are consistently realised by any popular expression of opposition to capitalism will it be possible to create a society that is able to combine the aspects of socialism and the popular participation of the people. In this manner the problem of Stalinist authoritarianism can be resolved in progressive terms and so result in the creation of a genuinely socialist social formation. Such a development would conclusively indicate that there is no inherent relationship between Marxism and Stalinism.