**MESZAROS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR SOCIALISM**

Meszaros defines the character of socialism in the following terms: “Production is either consciously controlled by the associated producers in the service of their ends, or it controls them by imposing its own structural imperatives as the inescapable presuppositions of social practice. Thus, only self-realization through the wealth of production (and not the alienating and reified production of wealth) as the aim of the social individual’s life-activity can offer a viable alternative to capital’s…self-reproductive spontaneity and its destructive consequences. This means the production and actualization of all creative human potentialities no less than the continued reproduction of the material and intellectual conditions of social interchange.”(Istvan Meszaros, Beyond Capital Merlin Press 1995 p529) The apparent complexity of this task involved in the realisation of socialism is not the major problem involved that undermines the successful ability to establish this new type of society. Instead the primary issue is the role of ideology which continually asserts that socialism is not a practical option and instead despite its limitations the only realistic system is that of capitalism. However, the consistent development of class struggle can indicate that the possibility to establish this alternative type of social system is becoming a feasibility. In this context the role of a revolutionary party is to agitate in favour of the practicality of this alternative to capitalism. Marxists can support the perspective of Meszaros that the only progressive transformation of the present system is based on the establishment of the ability of the producers to be able to organise and manage the economy without the influence of the role of capital. An important aim of socialism will be to realise human need without the intervention of the role of the mediating mechanism of capital. This means that labour is emancipated in a complete manner, and so a political revolution that does not result in the effective transformation of the relations of production is inadequate in this context: “It is not possible to restitute the alienated power of command over labour to labour itself by simply targeting the private capitalist personifications of capital, but only by replacing the established ‘organic system’ as the all-embracing and dominating controller of social reproduction. And that requires the substantive self-emancipation of labour, in contrast to the juridical fiction of emancipation tragically pursued in dependency to the inherited fetishism of capital – as a mechanism and material entity capable of ‘socialist accumulation’ – under the Soviet type post-capitalist systems.” (p535?) But this possibility to be able to overcome the limits of capital are not considered to be feasible and possible in national terms. This seems to imply that socialism is an unrealistic project because of the inherently uneven and national character of the revolutionary process. But Meszaros tries to resolve this strategic dilemma in his standpoint by suggesting that the development of capitalism itself generates increasing contradictions and limits to its process of expansion which implies the possibility of the realisation of a process of universal change: “In sharp contrast to predominantly productive social articulation of capital in Marx’s lifetime, contemporary capitalism has reached the stage where the radical disjunction of genuine production and capital’s self-reproduction is no longer some remote possibility but a cruel reality with the most devastating implications for the future. For the barriers to capitalist production today are overcome by capital itself in the form of securing its own reproduction – an already large and growing extent – inescapably as destructive self-reproduction, in antagonistic opposition to genuine production.”(p599) But how a situation of the increasing limits to the possibilities of capital accumulation be translated into the success of the class struggle. The apparently increasing objective conditions for the realisation of socialism do not mean that this development is directly expressed in terms of the generation of a consciousness of support for revolutionary change. Instead the limits of capital, which is defined by the policy of crisis and austerity, has become the basis of an offensive of capital against labour, and the result has been the creation of a balance of class forces that favour the continuation of the present system rather than being expressed in an increasing possibility for the realisation of socialism. In this context the major issue to develop effective revolutionary parties that can acquire popular support for a strategy of change. Therefore, there is an important contradiction between the significance of the increasing regressive character of capitalism alongside a capacity for capital to be able to take the initiative and so be able to develop the success of a strategy to maintain its economic and political power. Any objective maturing of the system for change is not directly expressed in subjective terms. Instead the situation still seems unfavourable for the possibility of the success of the attempt to realise revolutionary change.

However, there is another issue which is mentioned by Meszaros. The very task of overcoming the domination of capital and establishing a genuine alternative of workers management of the economy is very complicated because of the durability of the continued influence of the legacy of what is a system that has been political undermined and overcome and yet retains its economic importance: “Thus the historically specific form of domination and exploitation of labour characteristic of the capital system ultimately rests on foundations with very deep roots in history. This is why emancipating labour from its formal and real subsumption under capital is unthinkable without radically challenging and overcoming domination and exploitation in general, which assumed so many different forms in history while retaining their subjugating substance. No wonder, therefore that the juridical displacement of private capitalists could not even scratch the surface of the problem. If anything, this problem was further complicated by a change in form from the directly economic extraction of surplus value under capitalism to the politically controlled and enforced extraction of surplus labour under the post-capitalist system.”(p608) But this problem was not merely because of the complexity involved in establishing a genuine socialist system, but was instead because of the degeneration of the revolutionary Party that led to the domination of the Stalinist bureaucratic elite. It may have been possible to establish an alternative based on the connection of nationalisation and the plan with the development of an effective form of economic democracy. But Meszaros is right to suggest that the primary aspect of the character of capital is its ability to establish command over the role of labour. In this manner the role of capital was continued in a new form under the Stalinist system. The extraction of a surplus from the producers was the manner in which the continuation of capital continued.

Meszaros contends that: “No juridical device can by itself remove capital from the social metabolic process as the necessary command over labour under the historically long prevailing and after the revolution unavoidably inherited circumstances. It is not possible to restitute the alienated power of command over labour to labour itself by simply targeting the private capitalist personifications of capital, but only by replacing the established ‘organic system’ as the all-embracing and dominating controller of societal reproduction. And that requires the substantive self-emancipation of labour, in contrast to the juridical fiction of emancipation tragically pursued in dependency to the inherited fetishism of capital – as a mechanism and material entity capable of ‘socialist accumulation’ – under the Soviet type post-capitalist system.”(p610) But what is precisely meant by the self-emancipation of labour? The problem is that this very development requires the role of a revolutionary party to encourage and facilitate the ability of labour to act to realise the process of workers management of the economy. It could be argued that without this interaction of party and class that it will be even more difficult to establish the completion of the emancipation of labour. Therefore, the view of Meszaros that what is required is a spontaneous process of the liberation of labour by itself would seem to be unrealistic. However, if the party is sufficiently dedicated to the interests of the working class then its role need not be bureaucratic and elitist. Instead the party should be able to interact with the working class in a principled manner that does uphold and realise the aim of the emancipation of labour. The problem with the Bolsheviks was that they never recognised the importance of workers management of the economy, and the inability to realise this aim was also complicated by the adverse economic circumstances. However, this historical situation need not mean that the role of the revolutionary party is ultimately reactionary in relation to the objective of workers management. Indeed, the very lessons of history should have indicated the primary importance of the realisation of the aim of self-emancipation of labour. But the issue of how this possibility is to be established remains of importance. The view of Meszaros is that the revolutionary party can only ultimately justify the continuation of the influence of capital in the form of its bureaucratic rejection of the importance of the self-activity of labour which is considered to be not relevant to the establishment of a socialist economy under the control of the party. This is a problem, but we would also suggest that the role of the party is vital for the very task of encouraging the working class to strive to establishment self-management of the economy and in that manner overcoming the influence of the role of capital within the economy. What is vital is that the revolutionary party rejects the conception of socialism based on the importance of state planning and nationalisation and instead recognises the significance of the development of workers management of the economy. However, this very development requires a process of principled interaction between party and class in order to realise the objective of the ability of the workers to manage the economy. The party can utilise its leading role within society in order to encourage the workers to formulate the process of organisation of the economy, and in this manner the hegemonic role of the party is not in contradiction with the expression of the aspiration of the workers to be able to manage the economy. Indeed, the party would outline a perspective of workers self-management and this would encourage the generation of the ability of the workers to realise this aim. But, for some reason, Meszaros does not consider that this principled relation of party and class is possible. The party, according to him, can only act in a manner that upholds the continued influence of capital within the economy because its elitist character. However, such an outcome is because of the influence of a flawed conception of socialism combined with unfavourable circumstances. But it is the very possibility to overcome the errors of the past and to develop a more principled relationship of party and class that could result in the realisation of workers management of the economy.

Meszaros outlines the problems of the process of trying to overcome the influence of capital in the following terms: “For the fundamental stake is an remains the internal social dynamics of the social reproduction process and capital’s command over labour. By removing the capitalists from a country’s economic decision making framework – whether we have in mind one isolated country or any number of them – the command over labour is by no means…..restituted to labour. The capitalist owner of the means of production functions as the personification of capital. Without capital the capitalist is nothing: a relationship which obviously does not hold the other way round. In other words, it would be quite absurd to suggest that without the private capitalist owners of the means of production capital itself is nothing.” (p615) How is it possible to overcome the influence of the role of capital given the complexity and durability of its role within economic activity? This continuation of capital within revolutionary societies would seem to imply that it is almost impossible to overcome the exploitative role of capital, and so its influence is continued in a situation in which the party and class are committed to the objectives of socialism. Meszaros indicates that the resolution of this problem is the realisation of workers management of the economy, or the process of self-emancipation of labour. But what does this mean in detail? It could be argued that this development is not sufficient to overcome the influence of capital because the workers could decide to exercise their new ability to define and organise the process of production in a manner that enables the aspect of work to continue to be defined by the coercive aspects of the imposition of functionaries elected by the workers such as managers. The urgency of the necessity to organise the process of production in order to meet the needs of society could result in the imposition of forms of economic coercion that ensure that the workers act in accordance with the imposition of alienating forms of compulsion. Therefore, it is not sufficient to create a type of workers management of the economy, instead the quality and character of this role has to be defined in a manner that does not result in the influence of external and coercive economic forces that means that the workers still act in accordance with the objectives of externally imposed directives that would represent the continued influence of the process of capital. Instead what is vital is that the workers define their ability to be able to organise production in a manner that ensures the possibility to be able to develop economic activity without the influence of imposed forms of discipline and the role of tyrannical managers expressing the objectives of production in an authoritarian manner. Instead the managers should be elected by the workers and the targets of production should be defined in a manner that is consistent with a form of production that is defined and controlled by the workers themselves. Only in this manner could it be said that the influence of capital within the economy has been effectively overcome.

But for the above possibility to be realised requires that the party has a detailed conception of socialism that is based on the principles of the expression of the genuine self-activity of the working class within the process of production. If it lacks this understanding, then this situation of ideological ignorance could become the justification of the imposition onto society of an authoritarian conception of socialism that did express the generation of the continued influence of capital within the relations of production. If the party is able to advocate and promote a programme for the liberation of the workers within the process of economic activity, this aspect will enhance the ability of the workers to be able to realise the possibility to establish genuine forms of self-management of the economy. Therefore, contrary to the views of Meszaros, it would be dogmatic to imply that the party can only have an elitist role that results in the formation of a post-capitalist society that is not socialist. Hence it is quite possible for the party to be aware of the following problem outlined by Meszaros: “Capital as such is inherent in the inherited adversarial structuring principle pf the labour process. If that structuring principle is not radically superseded in the course of a viable practical articulation of the socialist project – which anticipates the control of the social metabolic reproduction through the autonomous self-determination of the associated producers – capital is bound to reassert it power and find new forms of the personification required for keeping recalcitrant labour under the control of an ‘alien will’.”(p616) But it could be the very theoretical role of the party to develop an economic policy that upholds the principles for the realisation of the ability of labour to organise production without the influence of any alienating an imposed imperatives that would represent the continued influence of capital within the economy. This process would be consolidated by the ability of the workers to elect managers who expressed their interests, and by the role of the factory councils which would represent the principles of participatory democracy in the organisation of the economy.

In this manner the aspects outlined by Meszaros concerning the continued influence of the role of capital in an aspiring socialist economy can be overcome. He outlines how firstly, the importance of the separation and alienation of the objective conditions of the labour process from the role of labour. Secondly, the superimposition of an external form of command as a sperate power which dominates labour. The role of the bureaucrat as the personification of the imperatives of capital in the post-capitalist society. The subordination of labour to imposed targets of production. However, all these aspects can be tackled and overcome if there is a genuine process of consultation between party and class about how to organise production in a manner that is compatible with the principles of the self-organisation of economic activity about the character of the process of production. In this manner the issue of targets of production have been voluntarily accepted by the workers and do not undermine their ability to be able to express themselves in the process of economic activity. Therefore, the character of economic activity is defined by the aims of the workers and is not based on the imposition of economic imperatives by an authoritarian state. Instead the principled character of the relation between party and class ensures that there is no indication and expression of the imposition of alienating imperatives onto the producers in the manner of a form of coercive compulsion that has to be accepted despite the opposition of the workers to this situation. In this context it is vital that the character of the party continues to be principled and based on an empathy with the interests of the workers. If the party becomes elitist, then this is a situation in which the party begins to justify the imposition of alienating and exploitative imperatives on the workers. Hence it is also the task of the workers to ensure that the party consistently upholds the realisation of the principles of workers management of the economy. But Meszaros seems to suggest that the possibility of the realisation of the genuine ability to overcome the influence of capital depends on the self-activity of labour: “The political defence of the socialist revolution is of course, always important. But no political or military force alone is capable of resisting the internal disintegrative and restoratory power of post-capitalist capital in the absence of profound positive transformations in the social metabolic order itself….Irreversibility depends primarily on the ability of the associated producers to turn their alternative social reproductive order into a truly organic system whose parts reciprocally sustain each other.”(p617-618) In this emphasis on the role of the working class it would seem that the party can only have a retrograde role in the process of the generation of the possibility of genuine socialism based on the realisation of the self-emancipation of the working class. What this rigid standpoint seems to ignore is that the situation was unfavourable in the USSR for the realisation of socialism because of the isolation of the regime and the adverse economic and political circumstances in which the attempt to maintain the power of the Bolsheviks occurred. But also, the Bolsheviks lacked a perspective for recognising the importance of the role of workers management of the economy. These various unfavourable aspects could be overcome in the attempt to advance the realisation of socialism in more advantageous circumstances. Also, it would be entirely possible for a party to have a principled programme for the realisation of the liberation of the producers because it will have learnt from the mistakes of the elitist influences of the Bolshevik organisation between 1918-30.

Meszaros does not seem to recognise the possible principled and progressive role of the party in the context of advancing the ability of the working class to be able to achieve emancipation from the role of capital. Instead he is adamant that only the producers can overcome the influence of the capital relation. The supersession of capital can only be realised by the force that creates capital which is labour. But we have learnt from history that there is a problem which Meszaros does not seem to recognise, which is the limitations of class consciousness. The very ideological influence of the role of capital seems to imply that the system is durable and cannot be challenged and overcome in a progressive manner by the action of the producers. The importance of this ideological situation is precisely why the role of the Marxist party is crucial in order to promote the influence of the development of support for the perspective that the task of the overcoming of the domination of capital is both feasible and possible. But Meszaros does not recognise the importance of this ideological task and instead contends that the historical role of the revolutionary party has been to undermine the initiative of the workers to be able to act to overcome the domination of capital. He comments: “Thus the question of going beyond capital hinges on the ability or failure of the associated producers to create a new -genuinely and sustainably socialist – ‘organic system’. a coherent social totality which not only breaks the vicious circle of capital’s self-sustaining organic totality but puts an irreversible open-ended development in its place. The tragedy of Soviet type post-capitalist societies was that they failed to orient themselves towards the realization of this difficult historic task. They followed instead the ‘line of least resistance’ – by positing socialism without radically overcoming the material presuppositions of the capital system – which condemned them to failure. Marginalizing the private capitalists as the old type of the personification of capital is still very far from being enough to secure success. For the socialist revolution – not as a hopelessly insufficient political act, but as the constantly renewed ‘social revolution’….of the associated producers – must ‘subdue all elements of society to itself’.”(p621-622) But the problem was that under a situation of economic dislocation the attempt to establish workers management of production was a failure because it could not result in the development of the productive forces, and in that manner met the needs of society. Therefore, the Bolsheviks considered that there was no alternative to the task of introducing the authoritarian policy of war communism in order to try and resolve the issue of creating sufficient food for the people. But the ultimate result of this situation was the creation of a centralised economy in which the possibility to establish forms of workers management of the economy was undermined. The point being made was that the adverse economic circumstances meant that the possibility to overcome the influence of the forces of capital in a progressive manner could not be realised. Any attempts to introduce forms of workers democracy within production only seemed to contribute to the undermining of the cohesion and development of the economy. Indeed, in this situation the Bolsheviks realised that socialism could not be established in national terms. What was required in order to achieve the success of this aim was the advance of international revolution. It was the increasing rejection of this principled perspective which led to the justification of the conception of a national form of socialism in terms of the authoritarian domination of the bureaucracy over the economy. However, there was a primary ideological limitation in the approach of the Bolsheviks in that they did not recognise the importance of the development of workers management of the economy if socialism was to be realised. Instead they quickly resorted to the role of one-man management and the importance of the accountability of the managers to the trade unions was not resolved in a principled manner. Therefore, the increasing elitist conceptions of socialism meant that it was not possible to develop the influence of an alternative and more principled understanding of the importance of self-management of the economy by the producers. In this context, Meszaros is right to suggest that the influence of capital was not overcome in the post-capitalist society. Ultimately the working class was too weak and disorganised to create a situation in which the economy was based on the realisation of its interests as an expression of self-management of the producers. This meant the party had an ideology in which it defined the character of the interests of socialism in terms of it acting on behalf of the class. The character of the dictatorship of the proletariat was effectively defined in terms of the dictatorship of the party. In these substitutionist terms it was considered that the aims of socialism were being upheld and promoted. Thus, in adverse economic circumstances the party rejected the validity of any conception of the importance of workers management of the economy. Such a development was facilitated by the fact that the party never elaborated any coherent conception of socialism based on the role of workers management of the economy. In theory and practice the party lacked a perspective that could facilitate the possibility to overcome the role of capital within the economy. But primarily it was the unfavourable national isolation of the revolution that generated the conception of a bureaucratic and triumphalist view that socialism could be built within the nation state based on the guiding role of the party. This development expressed the consolidation of the formation of a bureaucratic caste that was opposed to the realisation of what would be genuine socialism. This situation was promoted by the fact that the party never had an effective conception of socialism apart from Lenin’s vague perspective of the commune state outlined in ‘State and Revolution’. But it was quickly admitted that Lenin’s approach was unrealistic and that the only valid standpoint was a policy of empirical accommodation to the situation in terms of the intensification of the process of the domination of the party. Such a development was connected to the increasing alienation of the working class from the role of the party, which led to the discontent of 1921. In this context the primary aim of the party was to create a situation in which the cities could obtain food via the introduction of the New Economic Policy. This meant allowing the role of a limited form of capitalism so that the people could obtain supplies of food. There was no sensible or coherent alternative to this policy under the given circumstances. The only manner in which this economic retreat could be overcome was by the international advance of the proletarian revolution, which did not seem to be occurring after the period of upheaval of 1918-23. In these circumstances the isolation of the revolution meant that the continuation of the NEP was the only feasible option. But this policy was ended because Stalin put the interests of the formation of a bureaucratic class as the primary objective in the period of the late 1920’s. This led to the creation of a new exploitative society.

Meszaros contends that there always was a contradiction between the national character of the revolution and the international objectives involved in the construction of genuine socialism. He comments: “They had to claim the viability of their strategy in a form which necessarily implied anticipating revolutionary developments in areas over which their forces had no control whatsoever. In other words, their strategy involved the contradiction between two imperatives: first, the need to go it alone, as the immediate (historical) precondition of success (of doing it at all); and second, the imperative of the triumph of the world socialist revolution as the ultimate (structural) precondition of success of the whole enterprise.”(p634) But to some extent this contradiction was temporarily resolved by the adoption of the appropriate New Economic Policy which established principled and realistic relations between the workers and peasants in order to establish common objectives which could promote the possibility of the realisation of socialism. In this context it would be possible to achieve a situation in which the economic interests of the workers and peasants in terms of material improvement and the ability to obtain food was being realised, and this created the situation of political stability that encouraged the expectation that it was possible to maintain an isolated revolutionary regime until world revolution progressed. However, the promise of this situation was betrayed by Stalin’s rejection of this approach and the adoption of a bureaucratic economic policy based on the collectivisation of the peasants and the imposition of the extraction of a surplus from the workers. Therefore, the most important problem was not the national isolation of the regime, but rather the interpretation of this situation by Stalin as the justification of the imposition of an authoritarian economic policy. But Meszaros implies that failure to overcome the problem of the creation of a society in which the influence of capital is important is unavoidable because of the objective immaturity of the economic conditions for the process of transition to socialism. However, we have to reject this conclusion because the NEP represented the possibility of a successful realisation and consolidation of the worker-peasant alliance or the creation of a genuine revolutionary regime that could have promoted the formation of the basis for advance towards socialism in conjunction with the progress of world revolution. So, whilst the adoption of the doctrine of socialism In one country was an opportunist formulation that did undermine the development of the class consciousness of the Russian and international working class it did not immediately undermine the continuation of what was a principled approach concerning the continuation of the Soviet regime in a situation of international isolation. Indeed, in the mid 1920’s it was still expected that the aim of the Soviet Communist party would be the generation of the aim of international revolution. But it was developments concerning the British general strike and the Chinese revolution which indicated the practical creation of a contradiction between the aim of socialism in one country and the aim of world revolution. These opportunist policies indicated the beginning of an acute contradiction between the interests of the Soviet Communist party leadership and the aim of world revolution. The result of this situation was the rejection of the principled policy of the New Economic Policy, and so the effective end of the worker-peasant alliance and instead the adoption of an authoritarian economic approach that led to the formation of the Communist party as an exploiting bureaucratic class. In this manner the aim of socialism was rejected. But this development was not inevitable there was a policy that was being implemented that could have temporarily resolved the tensions between the limitations of socialism in one country and being able to maintain a principled revolutionary regime with the standpoint of world revolution. However, the pressures of the international class struggle led to the justification of opportunist policies that led to the impetus for the increasing bureaucratisation of the Soviet economy. The result of this situation was expressed in an authoritarian economic approach that represented accommodation to the limitations of the situation. It could have been avoided if the Soviet Communist party had had the integrity to maintain the NEP and to also uphold an internationalist foreign policy.

The problem with the approach of Meszaros is that he considers the process of degeneration inevitable because it was not possible to develop the possibility of overcoming the limitations of a nationally based revolutionary regime. This implies that because of these contradictions there was nothing that could be done to maintain the regime in a principled manner until the possibility of the development of world revolution. But the strength of the NEP meant that it was feasible to establish a revolutionary regime with a plausible economic approach that could consolidate the validity of the economy and so creating a basis of progress towards genuine socialism in connection to the advance of the world revolution. Therefore, the process of regression was the result of the conscious and deliberate rejection of this relation of the Soviet regime to the possibilities of world revolution, and the related rejuvenation of the Soviet economy, because of the deliberate choices of Stalin. He acted to impose an authoritarian economy, and in that manner impose the imperatives of capital onto society because of this rejection of the possibilities of the advance towards socialism because of the progressive character of the NEP. In other words, the only alternative to the NEP was a system in which the surplus labour of the workers and peasants was exploited by the mechanisms of the newly developed authoritarian character of the economy. In order to introduce this measure, Stalin had to repress the role of Bukharin and Trotsky. Thus, it would be false to suggest that the bureaucratic economy had been established by Lenin. Instead the economy went through a process of constant change under the leadership of Lenin, and eventually acquired a form of stability with the introduction of the New Economic Policy. The result of this development was the creation of genuine mass support for the regime because the NEP led a situation of increased prosperity in terms of rising income for the peasants, and increased wages for the workers. The dislocation of the workers was replaced with the opening of new factories and the process of state planning became increasingly effective under this situation. Therefore, the NEP meant the realisation of the interests of the workers and peasants and so indicated that there was in power a revolutionary government that was responsive to the needs of the people. So, for Stalin to undermine this situation in terms of forced collectivisation and the increased supervision of the workers by management, was an indication that the class character of the polices of the government had changed. Indeed, Meszaros recognises this change and contends that under the Stalin regime meant the imposition of a hierarchical economy based on the imposition of the imperatives of the influence of capital. But this was a change from the previous situation which had represented a process of steady progress for the workers and peasants under the NEP. Stalin’s actions represented a process of counterrevolution in which all aspects of the possibility of socialism were overcome. This also meant the end of the relationship between the USSR and the interests of world socialist revolution. Instead the USSR was a reactionary competitor of the forces of global capital but not in terms of the interests of socialism. This meant the ideology of the construction of socialism was completely illusory, but it was useful in order to justify the regime. So, what had occurred was the overcoming of the role of a degenerated workers state, which had still in some sense upheld the interests of the workers and peasants, and instead was created a regime based on the aims of a new bureaucratic class led by Stalin. It would have been quite possible to have continued with the principled alternative of the approach of the NEP. Despite their differences this standpoint was upheld by the approach of both Bukharin and Trotsky. Thus, it is not surprising that because of the economic counterrevolution it was also necessary to carry out a political counterrevolution that led to the effective end of all remnants of the old communist party. Instead Stalin created a new communist party based on the creation of a new ruling class with little relation to the ideology of original Bolshevism. This new party was amenable to accommodation with the forces of world imperialism and rejected any suggestion of the continuation of the promotion of world proletarian revolution. The result of this situation was the creation of an imaginary ideology which attempted to promote the achievements of socialism whilst in actuality imposing the imperatives of the exploitation of labour in order to create a surplus, or the form of capital in the new society.

The success of the realisation of the Stalin regime based on the introduction of collectivisation and forced industrialisation could not be an expression of any form of socialism because as Meszaros outlines this development was based on the denial of the influence of labour within the process of production. Therefore, the only discussion of importance was the question as to the character of society. Meszaros defines what that occurred was the formation of a post-capital society in which the role of capital was still present in the form of the imposition of alienating imperatives on the economy and as an expression of the subordination of labour within the process of production. The point being made is that the influence of capital must be in a certain sense important because labour is subordinated to economic imperatives that it has not in any manner been involved in establishing. The fact that there was no genuine consultation with the workers about how the system could be organised and developed meant that the possibility of its development could only be conceived in terms of a process of regression towards the establishment of the realisation of capitalism, or the generation of the logical regression of the system towards the full establishment of the power of capital over labour. However, the only progressive possibility of advance was in terms of the establishment of the ability of labour to be able to organise and define the character of the relations of the process of production, but such a possibility could not be accepted by Gorbachev and the leaders of the Communist Party. Instead they could only contemplate a situation in which the party would be able to define the situation in terms of the elite introducing measures of market reform that prepared the basis for the restoration of capitalism. Meszaros considers that there is a contradiction between the idea of the restoration of the role of the market and the aim of genuine socialism. But this view is dogmatic because the introduction of the market in a progressive manner means that the economic freedom of the consumers has been enhanced, and this situation requires that the producers have more freedom to be able to create goods in accordance with their own initiative, or on the basis of the role of co-operatives that have the aim to produce in terms of the realisation of the demand of the consumers. Such a situation can only be realised in terms of the ability of labour to be able to define its own economic conditions of work. This possibility is not realistic as long as the Stalinist bureaucrats retain their political power, which means the continued generation of a centralised and hierarchical form of economy. Therefore, the ability to create a genuine form of market socialism required the overthrow of the rule of the bureaucracy, because only in that context would labour acquire the ability to define the conditions of production and in that manner be able to create goods in order to met the needs of the consumer. However, Meszaros is right to suggest that the conception of the restoration of the role of the market could only mean for the bureaucracy the restoration of capitalism because they could not envisage the development of a genuine form of socialism based on the dominant role of labour. Indeed, the major reason for the emphasis on the return of the market was the necessity to intensify the process of domination of labour within the relations of production in the interests of accumulation. But this very aspect undermined the continuation of the political rule of the Communist party because this process led to a situation of discontent and increasing questioning of the system: “As mentioned…..the implosion of the Soviet capital system was due above all to the contradiction between the Soviet’s state role in forcefully enhancing the socialisation of production by political means during almost seven decades after the revolution, and the post-Brezhnev regimes need to bring recalcitrant – but by the party itself collectively organised and managed – labour under the firmest possible control of a quasi-automatic mechanism of within the framework of perestroika.”(p662) This means that the contradiction between the continuation of the political supremacy of the party when contrasted to the increasing necessity to ensure the economic efficiency of the system in terms of the generation of capital via the exploitation of labour, was becoming acute. The result was that the party aimed to restore the importance of the market in order to provide the basis of the generation of the possibility of economic efficiency. But the result of this situation was that the formation of tendencies towards the restoration of capitalism was created by this situation which meant the possibility to bring about the demise of the post-capital system of Stalinism.

This development indicates that there was no principled alternative to labour establishing its control over the process of production and in that manner enhancing its ability to be able to overcome the domination of capital within economic activity: “Against this socioeconomic background, given the actually isolating and mystificatory power of the material reproductive process itself, only socialist consciousness – provided it ‘gripped the labouring masses’ – could produce a viable alternative mode of controlling social metabolic reproduction. Thus in the original socialist project the organization of fragmented and atomized labour and its transformation into an effective class conscious force was – and remains for us to the end of the capital system – a vital historic task which the reformist social democracy of the West failed to realise.”(p665) But it has to be suggested, contrary to the views of Meszaros, that the Russian proletarian revolution did create the potential for the realisation of the emancipation of labour. This was expressed in the influence of popular democracy and the importance of the creation of forms of workers management of the economy. The Bolsheviks were influenced by the view that socialism should be based on the attainment of types of participatory democracy within the economy, and in this manner the managers of the enterprises should be accountable to the workers. But there was the problem of the acute economic situation which meant that the central aim was to obtain food for the cities, and this understanding initially led to the introduction of the flawed approach of war communism which led to the imposition of a situation of coercion in economic relations. However, this mistake was corrected with the introduction of the New Economic Policy that led to the possibility to construct an alliance between the workers and peasants in terms of the creation of a situation of trade. This situation could have created the possibility for a new stage of the process of advance in the generation of socialism based on the advance of economic democracy within the process of production in conjunction with the role of planning. Instead a form of bureaucratic planning controlled by the party elite was introduced by Stalin. This meant an important regression in the advance of the aims of genuine socialism because of the success in the creation of a regime in the USSR that was no longer committed to the effective liberation of the role of labour. Such a reactionary development was accompanied by the reformist role of Social Democracy which acted to stabilise capitalism and opposed all attempts for the realisation of revolutionary change. Thus, both major parties claiming to express the interests of the working class had become dedicated to the establishment of either a society in which the influence of capital was not overcome, or else to ensuring the continuation of capitalism on the basis of the introduction of reforms.

Meszaros seems to consider that the October revolution never expressed the possibility of success of a genuine process of proletarian revolution and instead it was always a post-capitalist expression of the domination of an elite over labour: “The political mode of extracting surplus labour became necessary in the Soviet type capital system because it was structurally incompatible with the objective requirements of setting up and maintaining in operation a post-revolutionary labour market. This is what made it genuinely post-capitalist, in that the socioeconomic reproduction process could not be regulated in it by a clearly identifiable and effectively functioning plurality of private capitals. State power was conquered in 1917 by the Bolshevik party which remained after the revolution not only the controller of direct state functions but also in charge of supervising – in its totality and minute details – the material and cultural reproductive process.”(p667) This perspective implies that there never was a genuine process of proletarian revolution and instead what occurred in 1917 was a party revolution that resulted in the formation of the domination of the party within the economy, and in society in general. The only outcome of this situation could be the formation of a regime that was based on the continued domination and exploitation of labour in a new post-capitalist form: “This created a unique capital-labour relation in post-revolutionary society. On the one hand, the new Soviet – type of personifications of capital, subject to the absolute authority of the central plan enshrined in law, could not exercise even a limited authority as individual decision makers in control of the reproduction process, in contrast to their capitalist counterparts.”(p667-668) This development certainly occurred as a result of the Stalinist counterrevolution, but it has to be questioned whether such an approach is accurate for describing the character of what was a genuine proletarian revolution under the leadership of the Bolshevik party. The point is that the authentic popular character of the revolutionary process led to the influence of the view that socialism could be created based on the aims of the realisation of the principles of participatory democracy in terms of the role of workers management and the soviets. Only the adverse economic and political conditions led to the increasing justification of what could be considered to be a more authoritarian standpoint. But even in these circumstances of the increasing elitism of the role of the party, it still in a bureaucratic and distorted manner upheld what could be considered to be an expression of the aim of socialism, even if this approach had become expressed in terms of the role of an elite. Thus, in this sense it still required a process of counterrevolutionary change for the character of the party to change to one in which its aims became the creation of a society that no longer had any genuine connection to socialism. Indeed, this process of change occurred because the actual gains of the workers and peasants between 1917-28 had become an aspect that undermined the consolidation of the bureaucratic aspects of the party regime. The influence of the workers and peasants had become too important and this meant that the objective of intensifying the process of accumulation had become undermined. Instead the peasants were able to establish the level of prices of goods, and the influence of the trade unions had become important in the enterprises. It was necessary for this balance of class forces to be changed if the Stalinist elite was to be able to create a situation in which it could realise the development of the systematic extraction of a surplus from the producers. The result of these contradictions and tensions was the creation of an offensive against the peasants in 1929 and the end of the influence of the trade unions and instead the realisation of the total economic power of the enterprise managers. This development meant the end of the role of the degenerated workers state, in which the party elite was to some extent, accountable to the workers and peasants, and instead the establishment of a regime of accumulation via the increased development of exploitation of the producers. Such a new situation seemed to imply that capitalism had been restored, but Meszaros is right to suggest that what had occurred was the creation of a post-capitalist society in which capital is important, because a fully- fledged capitalist society requires the role of private ownership and the personification of capital by the role of the capitalist. However, in terms of the imposition of the forms of exploitation in order to extract a surplus from labour, this society was similar to that of capitalism. The point was that a process of political counterrevolution had created the ability to realise an economic counterrevolution. The Bolsheviks had become transformed from a party which was in some respects accountable to the interests of the working class into a party which had antagonistic interests and was no longer responsive in any manner to the aspirations of the producers. The expression of the process of counterrevolution was the end of the influence of the Bukharin and Trotsky factions within the Bolsheviks. Hence the total victory of Stalin meant that it was possible to impose reactionary objectives which expressed new and regressive aims that consciously had nothing in common with the aims of socialism. But before 1929 it could be argued that in some distorted manner the Bolsheviks still had a connection with the interests of the workers and peasants, and this relationship was indicated by the success of the NEP. The reactionary regression of the Bolsheviks was expressed by the adoption of sectarian politics that could not in any manner advance the progress of the aim of international proletarian revolution. Indeed the perspective of world revolution became subordinated to the interests of ‘socialism in one country’, or the continuation of the economic and political power of a bureaucratic class.

Meszaros contends that the present period is an indication of the development of the structural crisis of capitalism which indicates the necessity of an offensive for socialism: “The present ‘crisis of Marxism’ is largely due to the fact that many of its representatives continue to adopt a defensive posture at a time when we have historically turned an important corner and should engage in a socialist offensive, in keeping with the objective conditions available to us. Indeed paradoxically, the last twenty five years that increasingly manifested capital’s structural crisis – and hence the beginning of the necessary socialist offensive in a historical sense – also witnessed a greater than ever willingness to many Marxists to get involved in all kinds of wholesale revision and compromise, in search of new defensive alliances, and nothing really to show as a result of such fundamentally disorientated strategies.”(p673) This point may be true in terms of the indicators of a situation of increasing economic problems for the capitalist system. But this point is recognised by the very representatives of capital, and as a result they have embarked on an offensive against labour in order to undermine the social gains of the workers. Therefore, in this context the very possibility for the creation of a genuine socialist offensive means that it is vital that a defensive struggle be waged by labour in order to oppose this offensive of capital. Only the success of this defensive struggle will enable a genuine offensive for socialism to occur in more favourable conditions. The point is that labour needs to create a favourable balance of class forces that would enable the offensive struggle for socialism to become a credible perspective. But, in contrast it is the very success of the offensive of capital against labour that is causing the demoralisation of the workers to occur and so is undermining the creation of any possibility to achieve political changes that would make an offensive for socialism to become a feasible prospect. In this context of the continuous offensive of capital against labour since the 1980’s, the result has been to regenerate the economic situation of capitalism despite the continuation of aspects of decline like the tendency of the falling rate of profit. Therefore, what is vitally required is the elaboration of a defensive strategy that would encourage the mobilisation of the workers on the basis of minimum programme in order to defend their social gains, such as a rejection of the policy of austerity and the defence of the role of the welfare state. If success is obtained in terms of the defeat of the forces of capital by the role of mass action, it would then become possible to encourage the development of struggle in terms of the advocacy of more ambitious demeans such as the call for the realisation of workers control of production. But instead of recognising this dynamic of relation between the defensive and the offensive character of struggle, Meszaros can only contend that the emphasis on the role of the defensive will result in the limited character of struggle: “And since the new historical phase inevitably brings with it the sharpening of the social confrontation, the increased defensive reaction of the give institutions (and strategies) is to be expected and not to be idealized – under the circumstances. Sadly, however, the existing defensive structures and strategies take their own presuppositions for granted and look for solutions which remained anchored to the conditions of the old, and now surpassed, historical phase.”(p673) But this view implies that it is possible to go beyond the limitations of the defensive because of the implications of the structural crisis of capitalism which objectively indicates the necessity of the realisation of socialism. However, this aspect of historical necessity cannot transcend or overcome the importance of the level of class consciousness and the related influence of the ideas of the primary significance of the role of the defensive struggle. Therefore, it is necessary to start with the importance of the defensive if it is to become credible that workers will be willing to engage in forms of mass action against capital. Only the success of these defensive struggles will transform the character of consciousness and so encourage the influence of the view that the defensive is no longer sufficient to uphold class interests and that instead it is necessary to engage in offensive struggles, which will pose the question as to whether socialism can become possible. Only in this manner will there be a progressive and increasingly ambitious character to the dynamics of the class struggle. However, if defeats occur in relation to the attempt to uphold and extend defensive gains then a process of momentum and movement to struggles of a more offensive character will not develop.

Indeed, it would be a massive advance if people became willing to become engaged in struggles to defend existing gains. Instead there has been a reluctance to support this type of action because the offensive of capital against labour has led to generalised demoralisation within the working class and the related increased influence of reactionary views. In this situation it would actually be an expression of important progress to develop support for a perspective of determination to defend present gains, and to oppose capital in this manner. However, there is nothing inevitable about this possibility. What is essential is that a revolutionary party, or the process of unity of different revolutionary organisations, is developed in order to promote the importance of a strategy of mass action in order to defend and extend the gains of the working class. Unfortunately, the problem is that the influence of a revolutionary party is not present in the countries of advanced capitalism, and in this context the spontaneous limitations of the working class will not generate spontaneous mass actions because of the supposed imperatives caused by the decline of capitalism. Instead it is vital that revolutionary forces emerge that can develop the popularity of a programme of struggle, even if that develops in initially in defensive terms. In a contradictory manner, Meszaros implies that the structural limitations of capitalism will generate the potential of the required response from the working class. He comments: “To say that we are contemporaries of the new historical phase of socialist offensive does not mean in the slightest that from now on the road is smooth and victory near. The phrase ‘historical actuality’ does not imply more than it explicitly states: that the socialist offensive confronts us as a matter of historical actuality, in contrast t our objective predicament not so long ago, dominated by inescapably defensive determinations. Consciousness does not automatically register social changes, no matter how important, even if eventually (in the last analysis) they are bound to filter through the prevailing channels and modes of political and ideological motivation. But before we reach the stage of the ‘last analysis’, the inertia of the previous mode of response – as articulated in determinate strategies and organisational structures – continues to dominate the way in which people define their own alternatives and margins of action. In this sense, the discourse on ‘class consciousness’ that reproaches the proletariat for ‘lack of combativity’, so long as the instruments and strategies of socialist action remain defensively structured, announces only its own vacuity.”(p673-674) But this view only indicate two polarised opposite views that are both of a limited character. Firstly, the objectivist approach of Meszaros that implies that ultimately the contradictions and dynamics of the structural crisis of capitalism will produce an offensive of labour against capital despite the present defensive orientation of the working class. Secondly, the voluntarist view that primarily blames the leadership of the working class for the failure to develop an offensive of labour against capital, and so implies that the situation would be dramatically transformed merely by the creation of a revolutionary leadership able to promote mass action. Both the objectivist and subjectivist approaches are one- sided. On the one hand the objective situation will not inherently result in a process of mass struggle that acquires an offensive dynamic without the influence of the role of revolutionary leadership, or the overcoming of the subjective limitations in relation to the issue of class consciousness. On the other hand, the problem is not merely about the subjective limitations of the workers and the lack of revolutionary leadership. Instead there has been an unfavourable political situation which has undermined the possibility of the generation of mass action against capitalism. This aspect is connected to the success of the offensive of capital against labour which has created an unfavourable balance of class forces that has undermined the possibility to develop mass struggle. Instead we can suggest that the basis for the realisation of the potential of an objective situation of the decline of capitalism has been undermined by the success of the offensive of capital against labour. It is necessary to develop support for a strategy that will encourage the mobilisation of the working class against capitalism. On the other hand, this possibility requires the increasing role of a revolutionary party. In this manner the contradictions of the discrepancy of a favourable objective situation and the limitations of the subjective can start to be tackled.

In other words, to Meszaros the defence of the welfare state by the methods of defensive action is futile and will not be successful. The only perspective that can be effective is to develop an offensive for socialism. But this ignores the importance of the defence of limited gains, and indeed this is the basis for the initial mobilisation of the workers because people can recognise the importance of trying to maintain the role of the welfare state, and other measures which have benefitted working people. This means that struggle at the level of the defensive can be popular and will result in the possibility to develop more ambitious forms of mass action that increasingly pose the question as to whether it has become possible to aim to overcome the domination of capital. Therefore, successful struggle at the level of the defensive will generate the basis to establish the possibility of mass actions that have a more offensive character. But if it is not possible to develop effective forms of defence of the gains of the welfare state, which means that the workers remain in a defeated condition and so unable to oppose the offensive of capital against labour, there will be no possibility that this demoralised working class will be able to take increasingly ambitious measures against capital. It is necessary that the workers re-group and so organise to oppose the offensive of capital in terms of the role of defensive yet militant actions, and in this manner try to change the balance of class forces in favour of working people which will then create the possibility of more ambitious actions of an increasingly offensive character. Instead of this understanding Meszaros seems to suggest that there is something futile about the role of defensive struggle because it is not able to recognise that only offensive action will overcome the domination of capital. This point has general validity, but what is not understood by this standpoint is that successful defensive struggles can improve the morale of the workers and so encourage the possibility of advances to more offensive type actions that challenge the very domination of capital over labour. The point is that will be little support for offensive actions without this prior role of the defensive attempt to uphold the gains the workers have made within capitalism. In this context the ability to defend the welfare state and undermine the offensive of capital against labour would be tremendous victories for the working class, and in this manner prepare the basis of the advance to more ambitious and advanced forms of an offensive against the very domination of capital.

However, Meszaros contends that the acceptance of the importance of upholding defensive gains means accepting the limitations of capitalism which is inadequate in contrast to the necessity of an offensive in order to transform the system. He comments: “The historical actuality of the socialist offensive in the first instance amounts to no more than the uncomforting negative fact that – due to the changed relation of forces and circumstances – some earlier forms of action (the politics of consensus, the strategy of full employment, the expansion of the welfare state, etc) are objectively blocked, calling for major readjustments in society as a whole. From this initial ‘brute negativity’ it does not follow, however, that the readjustments will be positive ones, mobilising the socialist forces in a conscious effort to present themselves as carriers of the alternative social order fit to replace the society in crisis. Far from it. Since the changes are so drastic, the probability is that people will follow the ‘line of least resistance’ for a considerable period of time, even if it means significant defeats and imposing major sacrifices on themselves, rather than accept the ‘leap into the unknown’. Only when the options of the prevailing order are exhausted, only then may one expect a spontaneous turn towards a radically different solution.(The complete breakdown of the social order in the course of a lost war and the ensuing revolutionary upheavals from past history well illustrate this point.)p674” There- fore Meszaros can only consider that the acceptance of the importance of the aspect of defensive gains is an expression of a situation of the defeat of the working class by the offensive of capital. But what this standpoint seems to ignore is that people will being at the level of the defence of existing social gains. In this context the strategic issue becomes how is it possible to defend and therefore extent these gains in the most effective manner? The answer to this question is the development of a minimum programme which outlines the various aspects of the defence of the class interests of the working class and how these aspects can be defended by various forms of militant action of the workers. Only success in these terms will then crate the level of class consciousness and confidence that becomes supportive of the possibility of more militant actions of an offensive manner. In contrast Meszaros seems to suggest that it is an expression of resignation and defeatism for the workers to be pre-occupied with defence of their gains, and so he seems to reject the importance of struggle to maintain the defence of the concessions that have been obtained within capitalism. But this absolutist and unrealistic standpoint means that he cannot outline the dynamics of how it can be possible to go from a situation of upholding defensive gains to becoming more receptive to the aspirations of an offensive form of struggle. The point is that there is a dynamic interaction between the defensive and the offensive types of activity. It is the ability to effectively defend gains of a defensive character that creates the greater level of confidence within the working class to strive in favour of the realisation of the strategic aims of the offensive struggle that poses the issue of the very continuation of capitalism. But this point is not accepted by Meszaros who instead has a determinist and catastrophist approach that argues that the increasing crisis of capitalism will ultimately result in the generation of offensive opposition to the domination of capital. This standpoint ignores the actual complexity of the class struggle which is caused by the very implications of the offensive of capital against labour. The result of the offensive of capital against labour has been the undermining of the gains of the working class such as the erosion of the role of the welfare state because of the policy of austerity. Therefore, it would both improve the morale and confidence of the working class if it could successfully carry out a struggle in favour of the defence and enhancement of its gains within capitalism. The success of this struggle, in terms of the effective defence of the role of the welfare state, would then generate the political conditions to generate support for an increasingly more ambitious perspective of opposition to the very continuation of the domination of capital. It would have been the changed balance of class forces in favour of the interests of the working class which would have created the possibility for the development of this possibility of changing the perspective to that of the development of an offensive against capital. Instead of recognising this dynamic, Meszaros seems to suggest that a defeated working class would ultimately respond to the increasing crisis of capitalism in terms of the generation of an offensive form of struggle. This is wishful thinking that seems to ignore the dynamics of the class struggle, which involves the importance of the success of defensive struggle if the possibility of an offensive against capital is to occur.

Meszaros outlines the validity of his perspective in the following terms: “It is the objective character of the new historic conditions that ultimately decides the issue, whatever delays and diversions may follow under the given circumstances. For the truth is that there is a limit beyond which forced accommodation and newly imposed sacrifices become intolerable not only subjectively for the individuals concerned, but objectively as well for the continued functioning of the still dominant socio-economic framework. In this sense, and none other, the historical actuality of the socialist offensive – as synonymous with the end of the system of relative improvements through consensual improvements -s bound to assert itself in the long run.”(p674) This view implies that it is the role of the process of increasing economic crisis that defines the possibility of the success of the class struggle that will be expressed in terms of the objective dynamic of the increasing contradictions of the system. But it is quite possible that increased crisis will only demoralise the working class, and so undermine its ability to struggle against the system, unless there is the generation of the ability of the workers to engage in mass action that begins to oppose and undermine the domination of capital. If the workers do not act to oppose the effects of the imposition of the situation of economic crisis the result of that situation will only be increased demoralisation within the working class, which creates the increased influence of reactionary ideas. Instead the only effective and principled response to the dynamics of the crisis of capitalism is to develop an initially defensive forms of struggle to uphold the social gains of the workers, and in this manner, it will become possible to generate more confident and increasingly ambitious forms of action that assume an offensive character. In contrast a defeated and demoralised working class is not likely to engage in militant forms of action that uphold its class interests. This means the increasingly serious economic situation will not generate the opposition of the working class if capital has been consistently successful in its offensive against the gains of labour. Therefore, Meszaros’s hope that the socialist offensive will ultimately assert itself is an expression of wishful thinking that seems to ignore the importance of the role of the class struggle. Only by the prospect of increasing success in the class struggle will it become feasible and possible to oppose capital in revolutionary terms. But such a development requires the prior importance of the success of the defensive actions of the workers. It is also vital to suggest that this possibility requires the importance of the role of a revolutionary party with a strategy that is able to promote the development of mass action. But the historic weakness of the various revolutionary organisations is a serious problem in this context. The lack of the role of the subjective aspect means that the objective conditions for the generation of the class struggle is not realised. Instead the crisis of capitalism becomes increasing acute, but this situation does not promote the possibility of the role of the working class engaged in mass actions because of the serious subjective issues.

However, Meszaros seems to consider that the necessary role of the revolutionary party as being essential to the success of the class struggle is an expression of mythological reasoning that express the limitation of voluntarism. Indeed, he considered that Lenin recognised that the most that could be expected from the October revolution was the success of a political revolution, which could only be ultimately successful in terms of the triumph of the world revolution. But these dilemmas are not present in relation to the situation of advanced capitalism. The victory of the revolutionary process in the advanced capitalist countries would mean that the situation was more favourable to the possibility to create a genuine socialist society based on the principles of workers management of the economy. It is the very progressive character of advanced capitalism that it has created the basis of transition to the formation of economies that could be an expression of serious advance towards socialism and this situation would also generate the possibility for the immediate advance and success of proletarian revolution in other countries. But in order for any of this to become possible requires that the revolutionary party is able to develop popular support for its programme of change by means of the generation of mass action. Without the interaction of party and class the relations of the objective situation of the structural crisis of capitalism with the promotion of the generation of the subjective possibilities for revolutionary change may become more favourable. But there is nothing inevitable or automatic about this development because of the increasing serious character of the objective situation. Instead Meszaros seems to consider that the workers will ultimately respond to the increasing problems of the objective situation in terms of a militant response that will pose the possibility of the overthrow of capitalism by the spontaneous action of the working class. But such a dynamic is not likely to occur because of the influence of bourgeois ideology which continually undermines the ability of the workers to realise revolutionary conclusions. But the most important aspect of the situation is the ideological effect of the offensive of capital against labour which seems to suggest that the system is invincible and cannot be challenged in an effective manner. However, instead of recognising these important aspects of the situation, Meszaros instead implies that the situation is objectively maturing for the possibility of transition to socialism, and so he implies that the subjective recognition of this possibility will be created as an expression of this development. But what is ignored by this determinist perspective is that the capitalist class is also aware of this situation and so acts to develop a counterrevolutionary situation in order to uphold its economic domination in adverse circumstances. The result of the success of the offensive of capital against labour raises serious questions about the possibility of revolutionary change because the result of this situation is to create a balance of class forces that favours the continuation of capital and against the interests of labour. But this does not mean that change is not possible because the situation will also increase unrest within the working class and so develop the possibility to promote defensive struggle against the offensive of capital. This development will not occur spontaneously but will require the development of the influence of a revolutionary party with a strategy for mass action. Hence class struggle is not an automatic response of the present situation but nor is it ruled out by the apparent difficulties involved in trying to develop the adequate class consciousness that could connect to the requirements of the situation.

Meszaros’s position is also connected to his view that the possibility for social revolution could not occur in the period of the social expansion which was occurring from the 1870’s to the 1970’s. This standpoint seems to ignore the significance of the serious crisis of capitalism expressed by the first world war, and which led to the Russian revolution. This event influenced the process of revolutionary developments which lasted until 1945. With principled leadership it could have been possible to overthrow capitalism in Germany, France and Spain. Such a possibility would mean the serious advance of world revolution and so placed the very continuation of capitalism into question. The major reason why this development did not occur was not because of an inherent durability of capitalism which increasingly underwent periods of crisis but was instead as a result of the reactionary political role of Stalinism and Social Democracy. The objectively favourable conditions for the overthrow of capitalism was because of the limits of the subjective factor. However, by 1945 the period of crisis of capitalism was replaced by the onset of a new boom which lasted until the 1970’s and led to the success of the welfare state. The onset of the crisis of capitalism since the 1970’s generated the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism, but this possibility was undermined by the inability to create effective revolutionary parties because of the continued crisis of the organisations of the Fourth International. This meant the workers had to oppose the offensive of capital under the limited and often unprincipled leadership of the role of the trade union bureaucracy. The result of this situation was often defeated in the class struggle because of the tentative role of the trade union leaders and the failure to establish effective forms of rank and file organisation. Indeed, Meszaros indicates that the problem is that the Social Democratic Parties and the trade unions have a self-defeating strategy based on orientation to trying to establish the support of Parliamentary institutions for their claims. Bur is this issue the major problem or is it rather that the connection between trying to obtain the support of Parliament for addressing the grievances of the working class is not connected to the aim of socialism. The point is that it is not inherently unprincipled to try and obtain the support of Parliament for the attempt to tackle the issue of the concerns of the working class, but this approach should not mean that the strategic primacy should be given to Parliament as the expression of the limits of how the interests of the workers will be realised. If this latter standpoint was adopted, it would mean accepting the validity of the connection between capitalism and the role of Parliament. The result of this standpoint would be a reformist approach that rejects the possibility of revolutionary change.

But the problem with critique of the role of Parliament made by Meszaros is that he concludes that the very aspiration for making limited gains within capitalism is insufficient and unprincipled: “The nature of the overall institutional framework determines also the character of the constituent parts, and vice versa, the particular ‘microcosms’ of the a system always exhibit the essential characteristics of the ‘macrocosm’ to which they belong. In this sense no change can become other than the purely ephemeral in any particular constituent, unless it can fully reverberate through all channels of the total institutional complex, thus initiating the required changes in the whole system of reciprocal totalizations and determinations. To win ‘guerrilla fights’ as Marx insisted, was not enough since they could ultimately be neutralized and even nullified by the assimilative and integrative power of the ruling system. The same was true of individual battles when the issue was ultimately decided in terms of the condition of winning the war itself.”(p680) This view implies that it is not possible to utilise in any manner the institutions of bourgeois democracy in order to try and uphold and realise the interests of the working class. But this standpoint is dogmatic because it seems to imply that the legislation of a bourgeois parliament cannot have progressive implications in terms of the realisation of the interests of the working class. However, it could represent a considerable victory if the working class is able to utilise its social influence in order to obtain the realisation of legislation in a parliamentary institution, such as the introduction of a minimum wage. The success of this process can only encourage the workers to strive to realise increasingly ambitious aims, which culminate in the attempt to overcome the very domination of capital over labour. Therefore, there are merits to the role of legislation that is in the interests of the workers, despite its limited character, because the realisation of such policy by parliamentary assemblies can only inspire and motivate the workers to become more confident and ambitious in relation to the demands they raise. The ultimate result of this development is to go from defensive to increasingly offensive struggles against capitalism. This possibility means that it is not illusory to strive to realise reforms in Parliament, but instead to utilise any success in this regard to become more ambitious and militant and so increasingly inclined to promote measures that can no longer be accepted by bourgeois political institutions. The very success of the defensive struggle, and the achievement of reforms, can become the necessary prelude to the struggle for what is the aim of the revolutionary transformation of society. In this manner, Meszaros is wrong to dismiss the importance of the struggle to achieve limited measures in terms of what is possible within parliament. Instead this very dynamic can become the basis to encourage the development of an explicit opposition to the domination of capital.

Meszaros considers that there is a structural and global crisis of capitalism that is so acute that it calls into question the continued validity and feasibility of the present system. The only principled conclusion in this situation is the necessity of an offensive for socialism. But the problem with this analysis that because of the offensive of capital against labour in order to try and resolve the structural crisis at the expense of the working class, there has been a succession of defeats of the working class which have undermined class consciousness and led to demoralisation. This means that what is realistic in this situation is to develop an effective defensive strategy that can promote the possibility of victory around limited demands, and in this manner create the basis to establish the political conditions for the generation of the possibility of the socialist offensive. The most important immediate aim is to defend the role of the welfare state, and in this manner generate the possibility to increase the importance of militant mass action in increasingly more ambitious terms. But without the initial development of the success of the defensive struggle the balance of class forces will not be created that enable the possibility of movement to higher forms of activity, and the related expression of what has become an offensive for socialism. Meszaros considers that the development of a socialist mass consciousness is the pre-condition of common and effective class activity. But the point is: how is this socialist consciousness to be attained? The answer is that the success of what begins as defensive mass actions in order to maintain past social gains becomes the basis to create the basis of a higher form of struggle based on the realisation of a socialist mass consciousness, which has been formed because of the success of these limited actions. Only the confidence created by the success of the defence of social gains within capitalism can create a dynamic in which socialist mass consciousness begins to define the character of mass actions. The point is that we do not start from a situation in which socialist mass consciousness is apparent. Instead it has to be developed and encouraged by the increasing ambition expressed by the character of mass action, which starts as an expression of defensive intentions and if successful can become the struggle for socialism. But what we have to understand is that the forces of capital presently have the initiative because of the success of an offensive against the gains of labour. The result of this situation is that the balance of class forces favour, the interests of capital, and seem to discredit the very attempt to defend the interests of labour by mass action. Therefore, the intervention of revolutionary forces is vital in order to indicate the feasibility of a minimum programme of mass struggle in order to defend gains. But what has to be primarily understood is that the generation of working-class action will not be objectively or inherently created by the situation of the structural crisis of capitalism. Indeed, at present the very notion of militant mass action is seemingly discredited by the apparent success of the forces of capital to maintain a situation of domination. Meszaros admits that the unity of the working class is a difficult thing to establish, but the point is that this very notion of unity and solidarity is continually undermined by the ability of capital to undermine the social conditions of labour. It seems that the very notion of collective struggle to defend class interests has become futile, and instead all that is possible to try and uphold a sense of individual self-interest. But it is possible to overcome this disarray in the working class if a sense of unity is initially created in terms of some specific and limited aims, such as ending austerity and defending the welfare state. The practical result of success in the regeneration of a sense of united class interest is to promote the role of collective class struggle in terms of the realisation of these limited objectives. The solidarity generated by this struggle can then advance the possibility to establish a sense of class unity that can then become the basis of developing more ambitious forms of opposition to the domination of capital. What is being understood is the importance of trying to challenge the influence of demoralisation in the working class which has been caused it’s the success of capital in its prolonged offensive against labour. Such a possibility will not be automatic or simple to realise but instead requires the re-establishment of the virtues of solidarity connected to the possibility to develop united forms of mass action against the offensive of capital. It is necessary to challenge the influence of the ideological view that capitalism is supreme and cannot be opposed. The acceptance of the apparent invincibility of capitalism will be effectively undermined by the restoration of the sense of a collective self-purpose as a result of the success of the mass actions of the working class. This realisation of social cohesion, or what Meszaros defines as the unity of the working class, should as a result generate the possibility of increasingly united and determined actions of an increasingly ambitious character and aimed to oppose the very domination of capital. However, if this development does not occur then the strength of capital will not be opposed, and it will seem as if the system is invincible. This situation will generate a situation that is unfavourable to the possibility to develop effective mass actions against the system. In this context capital will be solving the crisis of its system at the expense of the working class because of its success in intensifying the conditions of the exploitation of labour. But such a situation need not be permanent because it can be undermined by the revival of the class struggle. Therefore, capitalism is ultimately an untenable system because its continuation depends on the ability to intensify the exploitation of labour. In other words, the moment that labour rejects its subordination is capital is the moment that calls into question the continuation of capitalism. This development is not inevitable, but neither is it impossible. Ultimately the continuation of capitalism is contingent on the ability of capital to undermine the development of the opposition of the forces of labour. The weakness of the present system is that labour is never permanently reconciled to the continuation of the domination of capital. The political conditions are always present for labour to reject the dominating role of capital. But whether the discontent of the forces of labour becomes effective depends on the promotion of a strategy that will generate mass opposition to the system. In this context there is no end to history under capitalism. Instead the crucial question remains: will the forces of labour begin to oppose the domination of capital?

Meszaros suggests that what is required in order to uphold a perspective of common action against capital is the practical expression of the principles of pluralism, or unity of social interests in terms of the aim of mass struggle around agreed objectives, which also ultimately uphold the principles of socialism: “For the meaning of socialist pluralism – the active engagement in common action, without compromising but constantly renewing the socialist principles which inspire the overall concerns – arise precisely from the ability of the participating forces to combine into a coherent whole, with ultimately inescapable socialist implications, a great variety of demands and partial strategies which in and by themselves could not have anything socialist about them at all.”(p700) This standpoint seems to be correct in that it combines the role of principles about the importance of the aim of socialism and yet establishes the practical importance of the role of the united front in terms of the defence of limited and specific concerns. But what is of primary importance is to establish a mass movement initially in defence of the gains achieved under capitalism, such as the welfare state. If this aim is realised it would then establish the momentum and dynamics to develop support for struggle concerning more ambitious and radical demands based on the aspiration of socialism. But in order that this logic is established it is necessary to outline in detail what we mean by socialism and why it is superior and more emancipatory than capitalism. The point being made is that it is necessary to develop explicit support for the objective of socialism because people sincerely believe in this objective because it could express the possibility to overcome the exploitative limitations of capitalism. The point being made is that there is not some inherently spontaneous dynamic of the generation of socialism because of the logic of mass struggle. It is entirely possible that the role of mass action may be merely based on the defence of gains within existing society unless there is the promotion of the ideas of socialism, and as a result they become the expression of the aspirations of the mass movement. However, this development has often not occurred because the various revolutionary organisations have been content to promote the role of mass struggles and in this activist manner have neglected to try and obtain support for the primary expression of this development in terms of neglecting to elaborate the perspective of the realisation of socialism. The result of this situation is that the various struggles have been based on the understanding that what is of primary importance is the process of struggle itself, and so the issue of concern about its ultimate objective has become obscured and not clarified. The result of this situation means that any mass struggles have not expressed a consciousness of socialist objectives. Meszaros tries to resolve this problem by suggesting that the increasing structural crisis of capitalism will objectively generate increasing support for the aim of socialism. But actual developments do not correspond to this objectivist schema. Instead if there is no effective promotion of the aim of socialism then the result of this situation is that people will not support this objective. Instead their aims will be limited to applying pressure on governments to change policy in a radical manner. The result of this situation will mean that the domination of what is a reformist consciousness is not challenged. The only manner in which this influence of reformism can be overcome and transformed is by the intervention of a revolutionary party with explicit socialist objectives that it attempts to make popular in terms of the apparent credibility of its conception of this alternative society. In this context there could become an apparent connection between the militancy of the class struggle and the ultimate aim of socialism. But without this influence of the aim of socialism it is entirely possible that the mass movement will lack coherence and definite objectives. Instead it will seem that activism is a goal in itself, and indeed this has been the problem of many forms of struggles in the recent period. In other words, there is no direct connection between mass action and the objective of socialism. It will require the intervention of a revolutionary party in order to generate the possibility of popular support for the objective of socialism. But this very possibility means that a conception of what is meant by socialism has to become influential.

However, Meszaros seems to deny the importance of the role of the revolutionary party because he can only envisage the detrimental results of direct political influence on the mass movement, but this view implies that the in a spontaneous manner the dynamics of the class struggle will generate the possibility of support for socialist objectives because of the importance of the limitations expressed by the structural crisis of capitalism. But this approach is very optimistic and determinist and is not in correspondence with the general results of struggles which indicated that they tend to support limited objectives without the influence of the role of a revolutionary party. Unfortunately, this issue of the role of the revolutionary party is the very question that Meszaros is reluctant to address because he assumes that the various aspects of the development of a revolutionary perspective can be generated by the influence of the importance of the structural limitations of capitalism. This approach is unrealistic because the spontaneous dynamics of the class struggle do not necessarily create the dynamics of an increasingly ambitious and radical expression of the aspiration for socialism. Instead the views of participants in the various struggles is generally limited to the question of the realisation of the immediate objectives of the mass movements. Furthermore, the possibility of the defeat of these struggles also contributes to the undermining of the ambitions of the participants in the struggles. Therefore because of the limitations of the spontaneous approach of the people involved in mass actions it is vital that a revolutionary party intervene in a principled manner and show how the aims of the struggle require the realisation of socialism if their objectives are to be consistently established. Indeed, in this context it is important that the party indicates the connection between the possibility to achieve a minimum programme of reforms and the ultimate objective of the maximum aim of socialism. The success of the mass actions in defending the minimum programme will generate the possibility to strive to the realisation of the maximum programme. But without the influence of a revolutionary party this connection will not be comprehended. Meszaros seems to consider that this connection is established by the apparent political imperatives of the increasing structural crisis of capitalism. But this very crisis has been manifested by the offensive of capital against labour which has generally resulted in a balance of class forces which favours capital and so undermines the possibility of the effectiveness of the mass struggles. In this context the working class has often been demoralised rather than expressing the dynamics of the increasing possibility of socialism. Hence it is vital that intensive ideological work be carried out by the revolutionary party in terms of the promotion of the aim of socialism and the related undermining of the view that capitalism has become an omnipotent system. It is necessary to promote the development of class consciousness if mass actions are to become connected to the aspiration for socialism. However, this development will not be generated in some objective sense by the influence of the limitations of capitalism. The interaction of party and class is vital if the objective of socialism is to acquire significance.

Meszaros outlines how the past gains of the forces of labour were made possible because of the structural expansion of capital which has now become a situation undermined by the crisis of the system which results in the attempt to end these gains. Therefore, the perspective of defence of these gains must be connected to a strategy to realise socialism. This point is true, but it will be the success of the struggle to uphold the various gains that will then inspire and generate the possibility of more ambitious struggles that attempt to overcome the domination of capital over labour. The point is that success in the defence of the gains of labour will create a more favourable balance of class forces that is able to encourage the development of more ambitious struggle against the system. But if defeats occur in terms of the attempt to defend reforms then the result will be to lower the motivation and willingness to generate the continued momentum of mass struggle. Instead the result will be a process of ending the mobilisation of the mass movement, and this will generate defeats in the attempt to promote the possibility of class struggle and so ending its potential to create movement to more ambitious and offensive forms of action. But Meszaros contends that the role of defensive struggle is limited because it seems to suggest that the capitalist system cannot be challenged in any effective and fundamental manner. But this view ignores that without success in terms of upholding gains of a defensive character it will not be possible to establish the possibility of movement to a higher and more offensive form of mass action. It will be success in terms of the defence of the existing gains of the working class that will provide the confidence and motivation to become more ambitious in regard to the character of political perspectives. Therefore, the issue of the perspectives of the class struggle is connected to the relationship between the role of the defensive and offensive character of the class struggle. It will not be possible to advance to the generation of a perspective of the offensive of socialism without the prior realisation of more limited victories in terms of the defence of social gains of labour. In this context the present adverse balance of class forces is caused by the victories that capital has gained in being able to reverse important social gains of the working class, such as the undermining of the role of the welfare state. Therefore, it is vital that the process of struggle against the domination of capital begins with the process of opposition to the offensive of capital against labour which has taken the form of austerity and the related undermining of the importance of the welfare state. Success in terms of the effective ability to defend important social gains then creates the political dynamic to develop more ambitious actions of an offensive quality. The point is that if the working class is able to effectively oppose the offensive of capital against labour by means of the success of defensive action it would then be able to establish transformation of the balance of the class forces and so prepare the possibility of movement to an offensive for socialism. This is because success in the class struggle, however modest, prepares the basis for progressive movement to the higher stage of the socialist offensive. But defeat at the level of the defensive struggle will only result in the consolidation of an unfavourable balance of class forces that results in the ability of capital to intensify its potential to impose its objectives onto labour. Therefore, it is not unprincipled for the forces of labour to initially adhere to a minimum programme that is able to outline a collection of demands that if realised will generate immediate victories in the class struggle for the forces of labour. Only in these terms will it then be possible to achieve the possibility of further gains and the ability to engage in what will be an offensive for socialism.

It has to be indicated that the actions of the working class to defend social gains has nothing in common with the adherence of the reformists of the Labour party with the aim of achieving limited gains through the institution of Parliament. The activity of the working class has to take an extra-parliamentary character in terms of the role of militant mass action and is based on imposing on the ruling class the aims of labour. The militant action of the workers is not dependent on the goodwill of the role of Parliament and is instead about exerting the social power of the working class in order to create a situation in which its demands have to be accepted by the forces of capital. This development represents the aspect of progress in the class struggle. In contrast the approach of reformism is based on conciliation of the forces of capital and the promotion of a perspective of class conciliation. Reformism represents the acceptance of the domination of capital in order to try and realise the introduction of reforms. In contrast the class struggle represents an approach of the dynamics of the irreconcilable character of the role of class antagonisms, and so this means that the policy of militancy is utilised in order to try and create the success of even the most modest demands of labour. This is why capital opposes virtually all of the demands of the working class, unless forced by the effectiveness of militant action to introduce the immediate aims of labour. This is why even in relation to the most modest demands of labour, the process of mass action expresses the character of irreconcilable class struggle. In this manner there are important differences between the political role of reformism when compared to the defence of a minimum programme by the mass action of the workers. The realisation of the success of the militant programme in this context represents advance in the class struggle, and so creates the basis for an offensive for socialism. In contrast the character of reformism is based on perpetual reconciliation with capitalism in the name of socialism.

However, Meszaros rejects the importance of the struggle for the maintenance of the defensive gains of the working class because he considers that the era of the importance of this aspect has been transcended by the structural crisis of capitalism, and so the only viable perspective is the approach of an offensive for socialism: “When the historical phase of defensive gains is exhausted, labour as the structural antagonist of capital – can only advance its cause – even minimally – if it goes on the offensive, envisaging as its strategic target the radical negation and the positive transformation of the mode of social metabolic reproduction also when fighting for the realization of more limited objectives.(p723) This point would seem to be valid but it is the very success of the attempt to uphold what are defensive aims that creates the political and ideological conditions to achieve support for the attempt to develop an offensive for socialism. This is why the basis of the generation of the possibility of a maximum approach of the socialist offensive is based on the development of the prior acceptance of the aspiration to strive to realise the successful realisation of the defensive aims of what is a minimum programme. Success in this context then creates the political conditions to achieve the popular support to become more ambitious in aims and so to develop the popular basis to attempt to achieve the more ambitious approach of the socialist offensive. But failure in the attempt to achieve the successful defensive success of the minimum programme will also discredit the aspiration to develop the more ambitious approach of the offensive for socialism. Only the realisation of the defensive aims of the minimum programme then creates the political conditions or level of class consciousness that is compatible with the attempt to strive for the more ambitious aims of the socialist offensive. In this sense the following comment of Meszaros is one-sided and incomplete when he contends: “Under the circumstances of actually existing ‘advanced capitalism’ the worsening condition of the labour force cannot be countered – let alone the painful structural dependency of labour challenged – without a fundamental re-articulation of the socialist movement from its defensive posture to one capable of offensive action.”(p729) This ignores the fact that under the structural crisis of capitalism the present situation takes the form of an offensive of capital in order to undermine the defensive gains of labour, and so the issue of immediate success of labour in the class struggle requires the adequate adherence to the maintenance of the gains of the workers, such as defence of the welfare state. Only if success is achieved in this context will the balance of class forces become more favourable to the possibility of the effectiveness of an offensive for socialism. But these flaws of the perspective of Meszaros does not mean that he is wrong to suggest that the working class has to challenge the role of Parliament because of its indispensable connection to the continuation of the domination of capital. Only if the workers are able to develop forms of mass action that occur outside of Parliament will it be able to oppose effective the social power of capital, which is expressed by the role of its political representatives within Parliament. In this context he is right to contend that the idea of reforms can result in socialism is a delusion that has to be opposed, but it is also necessary to suggest that if the workers obtain reforms via the role of extra-parliamentary forms of mass action this can create a balance of class forces that become favourable to the onset of the development of an offensive for socialism. Victory in terms of effective opposition to the offensive of capital against labour becomes the basis of the creation of the political conditions that would make workers more willing and receptive for supporting the offensive for socialism. Whereas it has been defeats in relation to the defensive aims of the forces of labour which has undermined the development of the political conditions which would make an offensive for socialism a feasible option. This is the point that Meszaros does not seem to comprehend, instead he considers that the limitations of a capitalism in crisis will create the process of historical necessity that could make an offensive for socialism a certain development. This standpoint seems to deny the necessity to create a favourable balance of class forces in order to make an offensive for socialism a credible possibility.

Meszaros does make the point that the success of the offensive for socialism is not certain: “It must be emphasised again that……the historical actuality of the offensive for socialist offensive – due the exhaustion of the self-serving concessions which capital could make in the past to a defensively articulated labour movement – does not mean that success is assured and its realization is in our immediate vicinity. Being ‘historical’ here indicates, that on the one hand, that the necessity of instituting some fundamental changes in the orientation and organization of the socialist movement has appeared on the historical agenda; and on the other, that the process in question unfolds under the pressure of powerful historical determinations, pushing the social agency of labour in the direction of a sustained strategic offensive if it wans to realize not only its potentially all-embracing transforming objectives but even its limited ones.”(p737) This point would seem to be true, but it seems to ignore the tactical complexities of how an offensive for socialism is to be developed. This offensive will not occur automatically because of the increasing crisis of capital, and the success of the offensive of capital against labour has created an unfavourable balance of class forces that discourage the development of the dynamics of the generation of a process of support for the aim of socialism within the working class. Therefore, if favourable political conditions for an offensive for socialism is to be developed it is initially vital that the working class achieves success in its attempts to defend social gains and in this manner successfully oppose the attempts of an offensive of capital against labour. The point is that an offensive for socialism will not occur as long as the working class has to ensure a succession of defeats imposed by the forces of capital. Instead only when modest victories are obtained by labour will it become possible to develop popular support for an offensive for socialism. But this possibility also requires ideological changes that result in increasing adherence to the aim of socialism which has been promoted by the theory of genuinely Marxist parties.

However, despite these criticisms, Meszaros is right to suggest that what is ultimately required is the development of an extra-parliamentary mass movement with the aim of socialism. But in this context, it is vital that the role of a revolutionary party be developed in order to interact with and influence the character of the objectives of the mass movement. Unfortunately, Meszaros has nothing to suggest with regard to this important issue, and instead seems to imply that the dynamics of the structural crisis of capitalism can result in the formation of an offensive for socialism. If this is his approach, then it would seem to be an expression of determinism that is not likely to be realised. Instead only the creation of a popular Marxist party that is able to articulate the aim of socialism in a convincing and popular manner can create the political situation in which the mass movement becomes influenced by the aim of socialism. This theoretical development has to be connected to the elaboration of a strategy that is able to express a conception of tactics and demands that can encourage the development of mass opposition against capitalism. In other words, the possibility for the generation of a principled offensive for socialism requires the development of a process of interaction between the revolutionary party and the working class. But on this issue, Meszaros seems to have little to contribute and instead assumes that the increasing contradictions of the structural crisis of capitalism will generate the tendencies for the development of class consciousness and related support for an offensive for socialism. The assumption being made is that the experience of the class struggle will have revolutionary implications in terms of the radicalisation of the working class and the development of related support for socialism. But these assumptions cannot be made. Instead without the influence of the revolutionary party it is quite possible that the workers will remain on the defensive and will not support the aim of an offensive for socialism. Only the interaction of party and class can create the political conditions for the promotion of support for the objective of the offensive for socialism. In this context the increased influence of Marxism will have important political and ultimately revolutionary implications.

Meszaros contends that the issue of the success of the realisation of defensive objectives can only be established within the context of the ability to achieve the aims of the socialist offensive: “The socialist movement has no chance of success against capital by raising a set of partial demands. For such demands must always prove their viability within the preestablished limits and regulatory determinations of the capital system. To talk about parts makes sense only if they are related to the whole to which they objectively belong. In this sense only within the overall terms of refence of the socialist hegemonic alternative to the rule of capital can the validity of strategically chosen partial objectives be properly judged. And the criteria of assessment must be their suitability (or not) to become lasting and culminative achievements in the hegemonic enterprise of radical transformation.”(p812-813) This point may be true in general terms but what is ignored is the possibility of the advance in the development of class consciousness caused by the success of the realisation of defensive objectives, especially in the context of the offensive of capital against labour and the attempt to end the defensive gains of the working class. It is victory in terms of the ability of the working class to be able to maintain and extend defensive gains that enhances the ability of labour to be able to establish the increasing confidence and ability to aspire to the realisation of more ambitious aims. Hence if the forces of labour are able to organise in order to uphold the importance of defensive advances within capitalism the result is the creation of a level of class consciousness and militancy that becomes connected to increasing support for the perspective of the offensive for socialism. In contrast defeats in relation to an inability to uphold defensive gains results in the undermining of class consciousness with the result that the possibility for the offensive for socialism is defeated because of the creation of what is an adverse balance of class forces. The point being made is that we start from the situation of the necessity of the defence of the immediate and limited gains of the working class in the context of the attempt of the aspiration of capital to overcome these gains in terms of the role of an offensive of capital against labour. In this context it is necessary to elaborate a minimum programme that is based on the importance of the attempt to maintain these limited gains, and in this manner overcome the immediate aims of the offensive of capital. Only the possibility of success for labour in this context in terms of the role of militant mass action can then create the potential for movement to a higher level of class struggle in terms of an offensive for socialism. But this perspective is not upheld by the notion that the role of the defensive is merely an expression of an inadequate form of class consciousness that is not adequate to the needs of the class struggle. Instead we have to establish the connection between the defensive and the offensive in that only the possibility of success in relation to the role of the former creates the balance of class forces that favours the process of movement to the higher stage of more offensive action. The point is that it is the very aspect of success of the working class in defending social gains that creates a consciousness that this very development is not sufficient and that it is instead realistic to aspire to realise more ambitious and higher aims in terms of an offensive for socialism. The point is that there is an integral connection between the defensive and offensive aspects of the class struggle. If success is not achieved in terms of the effective defence of past gains the possibility and momentum to strive for more offensive aims will not be generated. Thus, in this sense the role of the defensive is not an inadequate expression of class interests but is instead an integral aspect of the possibility to create the momentum for the generation of an offensive for socialism. Indeed, without success in the ability to maintain and extend defensive gains within capitalism the very conception of an offensive for socialism is inconceivable. This point does not seem to be recognised adequately by Meszaros because he can only emphasise the limited character of the role of the defensive when compared to the more ambitious and revolutionary character of the role of the offensive for socialism. Therefore, his approach does not sufficiently recognise the connection between the defensive and offensive aspects of the class struggle.