MORE ASPECTS CONCERNING THE CREDIBILITY OF SOCIALISM

The approach of David Selbourne in his book ‘Against Socialist Illusion’ (Macmillan Press: 1984) is to suggest that people generally support the ethical values that uphold the domination of the capitalist economic system: “Among them, for instance is the fact that right-wing ‘anti-statism’, in the name of ‘freedom of the individual’, is no automatically seen by working people as an alibi for the unleashing upon them of exploitative forms of ruling class licence – even if socialists are perfectly justified in fearing it as a consequence. More damaging still to socialist, and in particular collectivist, versions of the politics of freedom is that historically, the very core of radical working class libertarianism has been essentially conservative….But the bitter and incontrovertible truth for socialists remains that in our popular political culture, ‘liberty’ has much more to do with claims to individual economic independence than the fond prospect of socialist transformation; whilst ‘equality’ has above all signified equal citizen rights (including to private property), and equality of opportunity rather than of outcome.”(p39)But surely the influence of this approach is continually challenged by the possibility and actuality of the development of collective struggles by the workers that results in the prospect of the undermining of the influence of this standpoint. In other words, it is the balance of class forces that indicates the level of importance of a view that is uncritical of capitalism. Any development of the collective struggle of the workers against aspects of the domination of capital could result in the undermining of the influence of this standpoint. Hence it is the level of the balance of class forces which explains the importance of an attitude that is uncritical of the domination of capital rather than this situation being a genuine expression of support for the present system. Indeed, it could be suggested that important successes in the class struggle could result in the undermining of the influence of the views of capital. In other words, the development of a credible strategy to create success in the collective struggles of the workers could transform the general situation of a popular acceptance of the domination of the present economic system. Therefore, it is an unfavourable balance of class forces that results in the acceptance of the supremacy of capitalism rather than this situation being a genuine expression of support for a type of society that seems to be uphold the aims of individual autonomy. The point is that it is the very domination of capital over labour which must continually result in the situation in which the issue of individual freedom is being subordinated to the aspect of the interests of the supremacy of the present economic system. But Selbourne would seem to be more credible when he contends that the approach of socialism is often undermined by the apparent fact that it seems to undermine the realisation of the objective of individual aspirations and so as a result the ideological supremacy of capitalism as the system of the expression of opportunity is being consolidated. Indeed, it can be suggested that this very standpoint is what undermines the influence and importance of socialism more than any other factor. But what Selbourne cannot establish in a connected manner is the capacity of capitalism to realise the aspirations of people as individuals. Instead, it still has to be a system that is based on the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital and so as a result of this situation it is possible to ensure the subordination of people as workers. This is the aspect that is ignored by Selbourne because instead of an objective analysis of the capitalist system he has to emphasise the apparent popular support of capitalism by the people as a realisation of individual aspirations. However, it could be more accurate to suggest that what is apparent is the acceptance of the domination of capital as an inevitable aspect of the character of society which seems to be defined in terms of the permanent character of this social system. But a Marxist would contend that this situation is not necessarily durable because the forces of labour will never accept the domination of capital in a long-term manner. Instead at some point a development will occur in which labour will oppose capitalism and attempt to establish the socialist alternative. However, Selbourne reject this conclusion and instead contends that the workers are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the present social system. In this manner he would contend that the Marxist approach is illusory.

How can a Marxist reply to this type of criticism, given that empirical developments would seem to confirm the validity of the approach of Selbourne. Marxists have to rely on the hopeful view that ultimately people will not accept the situation of the domination of capital within society. There are various limitations to this situation that will result in the development of forms of mass struggle that can generate the possibility of alternative possibilities. But it would be a mistake to then suggest that the outcome of this situation means that the realisation of socialism is inevitable. Instead, it has to be accepted that the result of the development of class struggle can mean the victory of capital rather than labour. But this prospect does not mean that the role of mass activity is futile and even limited victories can result in the improvement of the situation of the workers. Therefore, the dogmatic confidence of Selbourne that the capitalism system cannot be effectively challenged is a view that represents his ideological preference and is not connected to the actual possibilities to realise a process of change. It is quite possible that a strategy for radical action can be developed that leads to the prospect for transforming society. However, Selbourne would suggest that this pessimistic has become dogmatic because increasingly people support the continuation of the system. But the issue is whether people accept this situation because they consider that capitalism is an expression of their interests in a genuine manner, or do they reluctantly accommodate to what seems to be the inevitability of the continuation of the present economic system? Selbourne contends that people have become ardent defenders of capitalism as an expression of their interests, and that this is an expression of the actual situation. But Marxists would reject this conclusion as being without justification because the present social system is based on the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital. The point is that Selbourne is an anti-Marxist and so he cannot accept the credibility of the Marxist perspective. Instead, he has to assert that capitalism is in the interests of the majority of the people and indeed they act accordingly to support the realisation of the objectives of the economic and social system. However, Marxists would contend that this development is because of the influence of the ideology of capitalism and so people can be persuaded to act in terms of the rejection of the attempt to express their actual interests. It is the ideological hegemony of a system that is actually opposed to the realisation of the interests of the majority of the people that is able to maintain its domination over society. Hence Selbourne would suggest that there is no contradiction between the influence of the dominant ideology and the actual interests of the people. Instead, people accept the ideology because they consider that it represents the expression of their genuine aims. In this context Marxism can be considered to be dogmatic approach that does not recognise that the support for capitalism is a genuine acceptance of the values and aims of the system. Hence Selbourne would suggest that he is not being dogmatic by indicating the importance of this situation. Hence, he is not defending capitalism in a rigid manner and is instead implying that people support it because they consider that it is the most feasible possibility to express their social interests. But this approach means that Selbourne cannot envisage a situation that would emerge in which the continued domination of capitalism becomes challenged. Instead, he is only able to envisage the ultimate permanent character of capitalism and the connected futile attempt to realise an alternative. This means that his defence of the present economic system is based on the assumption that is inherently durable and is able to achieve popular support for its continuation. Therefore, he is implying that the approach of socialism is a futile objective and indeed has been discredited by the history of the Soviet Union. He would also suggest that the acceptance by the Labour party of this situation is an indication of the credibility of capitalism when compared to the supposed socialist alternative. Hence the only conclusions that can be made from this analysis is that capitalism cannot be effectively opposed by a socialist alternative and instead is based on the ultimate durable character of this system. In other words, it is not possible to oppose the continuation of the system by the development of a radical alternative. Indeed, people will not support this development including supporters of the Labour party.

This approach of Selbourne is connected to the view that the perspective of emancipation of the working class is effectively a projection of intellectual aspirations that do not correspond to the character of social reality. Hence: “If it is true that individual liberty or a ‘free society’ can have no ‘real’ meaning without the ‘liberation of the working class’, and yet the working class itself refuses its ‘world historical mission’, then the socialist alternative is ideologically disarmed in the face of the right’s down to earth conceptions of freedom, whether of the market or any other.”(p73) But the issue of the credibility of socialism is not decided merely by the expression of the immediate consciousness of the working class. Instead, it can be outlined, as Marx indicates, that the system of the process of the development of capital accumulation is based on the extraction of a surplus value from the workers in terms of the role of labour power. It may be that the working class fails to understand this situation and so is content to accept the continuation of capitalism. But this is precisely why it is important for people like Marx to outline the aspects of the capital-labour relation and how this situation is connected to the process of an extraction of a surplus value from the workers. It is significant that the supporters of capitalism are not able to intellectually refute the credibility of this analysis but instead have to emphasise the apparent support of the workers for the present economic system. In other words, the credibility of Marxism is not connected to the supposed flaws of its analysis of capitalism but is instead related to the apparent difficulties involved in trying to develop support for socialism. Indeed, it is significant that the various defenders of capitalism have not been able to provide a convincing rejection of the views of Marx but instead have to suggest that in some manner the workers become reconciled to a situation of the role of the process of exploitation within the relations of production. But to Selbourne he ultimately maintains that the workers do not have a specific revolutionary character that will be caused by the development of opposition to the domination of capitalism. Instead, this very perspective is an expression of the illusions of Marxism which will not be realised in terms of political developments. Therefore, he suggests that Marxists will ultimately be disappointed by the failure of the workers to realise what is an illusory political role of being the social force of the process of ending the domination of capitalism. In other words, he contends that the assumption of historical necessity of a process of self-liberation by the workers in order to end the situation of exploitation by capital is a perspective that has proved to be false by the actual events of history which has proved that the workers have become reconciled to the role of the capitalist system. Marxists can blame the situation on the influence of the reformist ideology of the Labour party, or the apparent limitations of the existing level of class consciousness of the workers, but this view according to Selbourne is a justification of dogmatic reasoning about the failure to achieve socialism. He contends that people are able to develop aspirations that cannot be reduced to the supposed logic of the role of class struggle: “It is clear, too, that humans as workers see their interests in ways which rarely accord with the narrow politico-economic presumptions of the theory of ‘class struggle’, and that as a further consequence, many of the ends which humans-as-workers seek in practice do not, and are not intended to, advance such a struggle.”(p77) This point may be essentially true but the often prevailing forms of class consciousness do not in and of themselves explain the character of the capitalist system. The point is that Marx has convincingly indicated that the workers as labour are exploited by the forces of capital, and this explains the possibility for the development of class struggle. This situation cannot be overcome because of the dependency of capital on the situation of the necessity to realise the exploitation of the workers as labour power if the process of capital accumulation is to be achieved. Obviously, this situation does not mean that the workers will be able to successfully achieve the demise of the domination of capital, but it does mean that class contradictions are an inherent aspect of the present system. However, this is the very conclusion that Selbourne is trying to reject because he implies that the workers are reconciled to the domination of capital because for various reasons they are reconciled to the continuation of this system. But we would suggest that this is a dogmatic assertion because the very importance of the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital means that the workers can only accept the continuation of capitalism in temporary terms. In other words, struggles will develop that result in the generation of opposition to the system. However, the lack of influence of Marxism can undermine the development of popular struggles against capitalism. Hence the lack of support for Marxism can mean the generation of political problems in connection to the issue of developing the influence of the aim of socialism.

But Selbourne would suggest that this situation is because of genuine popular support for capitalism. He would contend that there is a mass sentiment in favour of the continuation of the capitalist system and that as a result the Labour party has to adapt to this situation. This point may be credible, but it does not mean that capitalism is the only possible feasible system. Instead, we would suggest that the very aspect of the domination of capital over labour means that people cannot become genuinely reconciled to the continuation of this situation in a permanent form. Instead, the workers as an exploited class will develop forms of mass opposition to the domination of capital, and this development can pose the possibility of creating a situation which generates the possibility of social transformation and the creation of an alternative system. However, what is apparent is the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology which results in the marginalisation of the standpoint of the socialist alternative. Hence what this means is that the political situation does not seem favourable for the possibility of being undermined by the development of a popular alternative that poses the issue of socialism. But what this also means is that it is necessary to try and develop the importance of a left-wing alternative that would attempt to promote the standpoint of socialism in a popular and effective manner. If this development is to occur, then the situation could become transformed and it would seem that there have emerged more favourable possibilities to realise the objective of socialism. However, the various differences between the rival socialist parties would seem to undermine the possible development of effective opposition to the continued domination of capitalism. Hence it is not the apparent advantages of capitalism which primarily explain the continuation of the present social system but instead the limitations of the various socialist parties that facilitate the possibility to develop capitalism. Selbourne does not seem interested in the importance of this point because he instead emphasises the various merits of capitalism which create genuine popular support for the system. However, this standpoint means that he ignores the importance of the effective offensive of capital against labour in the 1980’s. The point is that it was not the sentiment of the workers that led to the imposition of austerity but instead the deliberate policy of the Conservative government in the 1980’s that led to this development. Hence it was necessary to engage in the Falklands war in order to create popular nationalist support for the Conservative administration that enabled the possibility to facilitate the introduction of an economic policy of austerity that was based on the deliberate weakening of the role of the trade unions and the role of the workers. Indeed, only the method of class struggle enabled the Conservative government to introduce this policy, and this meant that the economic and social influence of the workers was undermined in order to enable the successful introduction of an approach of austerity. Therefore, contrary to the view of Selbourne there was no genuine popular support for austerity and instead the situation was defined by the success of the government in the context of the role of an offensive of the forces of capital against labour.

In other words, in the context of the role of class struggle can it be credibly suggested that there was genuine popular support for the objectives of a capitalist economic system? Instead, would it be more precise to suggest that people had to reluctantly accept the results of the introduction of an approach that represented the consolidation of the domination of capital over labour. In other words, there was no genuine popular support for this development of what could essentially be defined as the introduction of austerity. Indeed, the miners strike of 1984-85 and the anti-poll tax struggle of the late 1980’s was an empirical indication of the development of popular opposition to the attempt to implement an approach of austerity and whilst this situation did not result in success in relation to the expression of this discontent what was indicated was the lack of a genuine consensus in favour of the attempt to implement austerity. In other words, it is inaccurate and dogmatic for Selbourne to consider that the very expression of Conservative government policies in the 1980’s was an expression of the acceptance of this situation by the majority of the workers. It could be suggested that there was support within the working class for Conservative policies but there was also opposition as indicated by the popular support for the miners in 1984 and the effective expression of discontent in relation to the role of the Poll tax struggle. Only the role of the Falkland’s war led to the development of a popular nationalism which in a limited manner undermined the expression of this discontent of the workers with the government. But ultimately the Conservative government had to act in a determined and offensive manner in order to impose the economic policy of austerity. Thus, Selbourne’s view that the workers had become supporters of the economic objectives of the Conservatives was only true in a partial manner. Only the approach of an offensive of capital against labour enabled the realisation of this objective of consolidating the economic system at the expense of the interests of the workers. Indeed, it was the defence of capitalism at the expense of the interests of the workers which meant that the working class could never become convinced supporters of this perspective of the introduction of austerity. In other words, the acceptance of the Conservative policy of austerity was because people generally reluctantly considered that it had become an inevitability and could not be opposed in a popular and effective manner. But it is the view of Selbourne that the Conservatives were able to introduce policies based on the expression of individual self-interest because they corresponded to the popular aspirations of the workers: “In its combination of respectability with duty, and modest social progress with individual self-improvement, it points us into a working class world discomforting to the (middle class) socialist intellectual…..But it is from this standpoint alone – that we can see – with whatever distaste – that ‘Thatcherism’, as well as representing the power and interests of capital, can also simultaneously recall labour to some of its own half-forgotten virtues.”(p82) But the success of Thatcherism was not merely because of an important level of support within the working class for its standpoint. It was also based on the effectiveness of an offensive against the interests of labour in terms of the implementation of the approach of austerity.

However, this importance of the role of class struggle is denied by Selbourne because of this justification of a conception of shared ideological values between the workers and the supporters of capitalism: “It is because the legitimacy of the individual appropriation, which is at the very heart of the capitalist system, is also at the heart of the ethic of labour self-reliance and self-determination….Thus to a socialist illusionist, ‘the primacy which Mrs Thatcher gives to self-help’ becomes the expression of ‘business liberalism’ rather than of this common ethic.”(p84) But the point is that even if we can accept that there is often some support for the economic policy objectives of Thatcherism within the working class the actual effect of the attempt to implement this approach is to undermine the influence of the workers within the economy. Hence this perspective is connected to the expression of the introduction of economic and political policies that aim to undermine the collective strength of the workers within the economy. Therefore, any popular support for the approach of Thatcherism was an expression of illusions that actually undermined the possibility to defend the interests of the workers in what was a situation of an offensive against their collective strength. Selbourne cannot recognise this empirical situation because he can only consider that the character of Thatcherism has the expression of the possibility to reconcile the interests of capital and labour. But if workers did support Thatcherism this essentially represented political illusions because they were effectively defending policies that could only result in the undermining of their collective strength. However, Selbourne can ignore this type of critique because he assumes that popular support for Thatcherism can only be an expression of what corresponds to the interests of the workers. In other words, this approach denies the importance of opposing class interests and that this means the Conservatives after 1979 were able to obtain the support of sections of the workers even though this was a standpoint that undermined their capacity to express and uphold their actual class interests. Hence the popular acceptance of austerity could not be in the interests of the workers despite the illusion that this approach could be considered to be compatible with their economic and political objectives. But Selbourne can ignore the importance of this critical standpoint because he can equate popular support for Thatcherism within sections of the workers with the expression of their interests even if it can be shown that this approach led to an objective undermining of the influence of the working class within society.

In other words, the spontaneous consciousness of the workers does not always express their interests in the most effective or principled manner. This is precisely why Marxism is important in order to promote the credibility of a perspective for the realisation of the emancipation of labour from the domination of capital. But this is an aim which Selbourne considers to be unrealistic because he contends that the workers voluntarily accept this situation of the importance of the present economic system. He contends that the aim of the emancipation of labour is not possible because: “Indeed, since the whole structure of society, whether under socialism or capitalism, must always rest on the backs of working-class labour, the working class can only be more or less exploited. And of the two major forms of economy which historical evolution has produced, one does precisely this in the name of capital, the other in the name of labour.” (p89) But this is a conclusion that suggests that the possibility to end the situation of economic domination by an elite over labour is not possible. But such a view is based on the implication that the role of a capitalist type economy is the only feasible possibility. In other words, there is scepticism that the workers are able to achieve their liberation from the domination of capital. What is actually being suggested is that the only feasible economic system is that based on the primary importance of the role of capital and so the workers have to accept this situation in empirical terms. This standpoint is justified in terms of the empirical importance to achieve the liberation of the workers from the domination of capital, or the only alternative has been the development of the domination of a new economic elite such as the role of Stalinism. This is indeed the history of the contemporary world, but it could be suggested that the aspect of failure does not mean that democratic socialism is not possible. Instead, it could be suggested that what is necessary is the development of a more credible strategy of progressive change and the connected role of a genuine socialist party that is dedicated to the realisation of the aim of the liberation of humanity. Hence the failure to achieve the objectives of democratic socialism does not mean that this aim is futile or unrealistic. Instead, what could be indicated is the problems involved in developing an effective and popular socialist party with a principled strategy of change. Hence if this task of the creation of the influence of Marxism is to be realised it is necessary to develop a more credible perspective for the transformation of society in contrast to the unrealistic perspectives that are presently being promoted by various left-wing parties.

However, Selbourne would deny the credibility of this viewpoint because he considers that there is no socialist culture for the various Marxist parties to try and relate to and instead the workers are motivated by a sense of national interest which is essentially connected to the aspect of the legitimacy of the present system. This issue obviously represents a challenge for Marxists, but does it mean that the aim of trying to realise socialism is unrealistic? This is obviously the conclusion made by Selbourne but we would suggest that what is required is the development of a programme that attempts to establish the possibilities for the realisation of socialism in a more credible manner. But this means that we have to begin with the importance of the aspect of the present marginalisation and lack of popularity of the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism. Hence the important task to tackle is how this situation can be transformed. How will it become possible to develop support for the Marxist aims of the transformation of capitalism into socialism? In this context it is necessary to try and tackle the issue of the present marginalisation of Marxism and what is the reasons for this situation. Is it the programme of Marxists which people do not support, or is the aspect of disunity which means that people do not take the politics of the competing groups seriously? We could suggest that both these issues are of importance and the result is the self-marginalisation of Marxism that creates problems about the credibility of revolutionary socialist objectives. Hence it is necessary to try and promote the unity of the various Marxist groups on the basis of agreed support for a common programme of revolutionary change. The realisation of this type of unity would mean that it would become possible to promote a united perspective of how to achieve the objective of socialism. Obviously, this situation would not necessarily result in the expression of the credibility of socialism, but what would have been established is the generation of the potential to at least develop a plausible programme for the attainment of transforming capitalism into socialism. This development would not automatically create more support for the aim of socialism, but it would at least mean that this aim could no longer be rejected as being unrealistic or unfeasible. Instead, it would seem that the parties favouring revolutionary change had begun the process of trying to create the political conditions that would mean that their objectives were no longer unrealistic. In other words, instead of an emphasis on the limitations of the various left-wing groups there would be a different emphasis on the issue of the merits of what seems to be a serious programme being advocated in order to try and achieve the aims of socialism.

Obviously, this development would not in and of itself resolve the present problem of the marginalisation of the role of the Marxist parties, but it would mean that the aspect of unity would become connected to the possibility to achieve a genuine increased influence of the approach of socialism. In other words, it would become possible to try and achieve a situation in which it becomes possible to establish a common and agreed perspective of change that could be advocated within the working class. Hence the limitations of the present confusion caused by the differences between a collection of parties claiming to be socialist would be ended and instead it would become possible to establish a united situation in which a collection of left-wing parties were attempting to uphold and promote what could be considered to be a unified programme. This very development would increase the level of credibility of the forces supporting the aim of radical socialism. In other words, the major limitation that undermines the development of the influence of a principled socialism is not the apparent credibility of capitalism but is instead the result of the disunity between the various socialist groups. In this situation it seems that the common programmes of the major political parties supporting capitalism appear to be more credible and feasible. Hence the possible most important aspect in upholding the continuation of capitalism is not the superiority of the political parties supporting the system and is instead the result of the various important limitations of the left-wing organisations. In this context it still seems to be more credible and practical to continue to support the Labour party as the expression of the aims of progressive change even if this party generally has a right-wing leadership. Hence the actual major issue concerning the credibility of socialism concerns the failure to create an effective and popular revolutionary party. Instead of this development it seems to be more practical and realistic to support a right-wing reformist party like the Labour party. In this manner the major aspect of the present lack of credibility of socialism is caused by the failure to achieve the development of a left-wing party that is able to create a challenge to capitalism in a principled and effective manner.

In other words, it could be suggested that the major aspect that maintains the capitalist system is not caused by the strengths and dynamism of the economy but is instead the result of the failure to create a credible alternative party of socialism. In this context it seems to be more feasible to support reformist parties that do not have any intention of trying to achieve a socialist alternative because at least they seem to promote the interests of the workers, even if this aspect is of a limited character. Hence the major aspect of the domination of capitalism is not the inherent economic strength of the system but is instead the result of the failure to create an effective political alternative. This situation was historically the result of the limitations of Social Democracy and Stalinism, but increasing this problem is related to the failure to build effective socialist parties by organisations of the Fourth International tradition. Indeed, it seems to be more effective to promote the role of popular single- issue campaigns such as opposition to austerity or the foreign policy of various bourgeois governments. It has been noticeable that these types of movements have been able to achieve practical success when compared to the general failures of various left-wing parties. But the problem is that any victories of single-issue campaigns has ultimately not been able to achieve the advance of the realisation of the aim of socialism. Instead, the domination of capitalism has not been challenged. However, we can challenge the view of Selbourne that suggests people are generally convinced supporters of the capitalist system. Instead, people accept the continuation of capitalism because they cannot envisage the possibility to realise a left-wing alternative. In other words, people essentially consider that capitalism is credible whilst socialism is an impractical objective. They often have this viewpoint even if they are not convinced by the supposed merits of capitalism. This situation is connected to the apparent historic failure to create popular parties of socialism. Instead, the reformist parties have remained in the ascendency, but they are often led by people who accept the domination of capitalism in uncritical terms. Hence there is a historic crisis of socialism, and this is expressed by the evolution of conservative type parties into populist parties that are able to appeal for the support of the people in convincing terms. In other words, socialism has been marginalised in a manner that represents a historic political crisis. This issue is referred to by Selbourne but in actuality the situation has become more acute since the writing of his book. In most countries of Europe, the aims of explicitly pro capitalist parties are no longer seriously challenged. This situation occurs in terms of the continual decline of the role of social democratic parties. Furthermore, the influence of revolutionary Marxism is very marginal and continues to decline. It would seem that the invincibility of capitalism is connected to this adverse political situation. Indeed, the situation only gets worse with the continuation of the intensification of differences between the various competing socialist parties. The point is that a person does not have to be a committed supporter of capitalism in order to conceive that the possibility to realise socialism does not seem to be realistic. Instead, the continual decline of the left- wing parties is an indication that the domination of the capitalist system is no longer being challenged in an effective manner. Therefore, the important issue arises concerning whether this adverse situation can be transformed? It would seem that the domination of capitalism cannot be challenged because of the very limitations and marginalisation of the left-wing parties. Thus, the obvious question arises concerning whether this situation can be changed? In other words, Selbourne seems to be right that capitalism has popular support and so it is not possible to end its domination over society. But a Marxist would suggest that the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital is not an expression of a satisfactory or progressive system. Therefore, there is still the necessity to try and realise the alternative of socialism which can express the possibility to end all forms of domination and subordination within the economy and society. Indeed, this very necessity means that the aim of socialism will never become antiquated or irrelevant. Hence what is still necessary is to end the marginalisation of the aim of socialism and instead achieve popular support for this aim. But we have to accept that in relation to this objective there has been more failure than success in the recent period. Hence, we have to develop a more effective manner in order to achieve the increased popularity and influence of the aim of socialism.

However, we have to accept that in the recent period the approach of socialism has become very marginalised, and it has even become difficult to elect moderate social democratic governments. This situation does not mean that there is popular support for the aims of upholding the domination of capitalism but instead that there is a scepticism about the feasibility of the role of left-wing administrations. This popular sentiment is consolidated by the failure to elect reforming parties to governmental office and the result of this situation is that it seems that the objectives of defending the interests of capitalism cannot be challenged. But this situation does not mean there is popular support for the aims of upholding capitalism but instead that it seems to be impossible to achieve the success of a radical alternative to the present system. Selbourne would define this situation as an expression of popular support for capitalism but instead it could be suggested that there is a pessimistic sentiment concerning the possibility to realise alternatives to the domination of capitalism. In this context we have to suggest that the introduction of the approach of austerity since the 1980’s seems to express the success of an offensive of capital against the interests of labour. In this context it appears that the only realistic approach is to accommodate to this situation and so acceptance the domination of capital over society. However various popular struggles have challenged the credibility of this acceptance of the hegemony of the present social system. For instance, the miner’s strike in Britain between 1984-85 indicated the possibility of the challenge by workers to the continued domination of capital and the popular opposition to the Poll tax represented a challenge to the supremacy of the Conservative government in 1989. There have also been expressions of opposition to the foreign policy of the forces of international capitalism and the struggle to try and realise peace and social progress. In other words, the domination of the present social system has always been contested in various terms. But this situation is essentially denied by Selbourne who considers that the majority of people accept the continued supremacy of capitalism. This point may be generally valid, but there have been periods in which the present social system has been challenged by the development of forms of popular protest. However, the continued marginalisation of Marxism in these situations means that the influence of the alternative of democratic socialism has not been expressed in a popular and effective manner. Instead, the spontaneity of mass struggle has not led to the development of explicit forms of support for the only credible alternative of democratic socialism. Instead, people often know what they are against, but they do not uphold the importance of a form of opposition to capitalism.

In other words, Selbourne is being dogmatic when he contends that people support the ascendency of capitalism in a genuine manner, but he does seem to be correct to suggest that the various protest movements have not represented an explicit opposition to the domination of the present social system. We also have to suggest that this situation is connected to the marginalisation of Marxism and even the decline of reformism. In this context it is also necessary to accept that the forces of socialism have often been becoming increasingly marginalised and that the only result of this situation is the apparent increased domination of the role of capitalism. Hence the majority of the working class seems to have accepted this situation and indeed expresses its pessimism about social change by increasingly voting for conservative parties. The result of this development is that even the various reformist parties are on the decline. But contrary to the views of Selbourne we would not suggest that this situation is an indication of genuine support for capitalism. Instead, there is an attitude of resignation about the apparent domination of the present social system and a connected scepticism about the possibility of change. But we would suggest that if the continued forms of social discontent led to the development of successful struggles to realise the aims of those involved in such actions then the situation could become transformed. In other words, the possibility of radical developments is not ended by the apparent ascendency of the forces of capital. The point is that because this situation is connected to the aspect of the consolidation of the exploitation of labour within the economic system the workers can never become definitively reconciled with this situation. Instead, the possibility for discontent to become transformed into mass action is always a possibility. However, the influence of the invincible domination of capitalism means that this development is undermined. This situation is connected to the marginalisation of Marxism and other supporters of radical change. It seems that this present unfavourable balance of forces in favour of change cannot be altered in radical terms because the majority of people have apparently become sceptical about the possibility of progressive developments. But this situation does not mean that people have become reconciled to the domination of capital. Instead, they have a pessimistic attitude about the prospects of successful mass struggle. However, we could suggest that this situation could become transformed by the development of militant action in order to challenge the domination of capital. It will be argued that this possibility is remote because people have become accustomed to the supremacy of the present system. But this very aspect is because of the failure to develop credible programmes of radical change. Hence if someone is to elaborate a perspective of change that is able to explain the importance of resolving problems concerning the aspects of social transformation then it could be possible to develop mass support for this approach because the influence of dogmatic reasoning has been rejected. However, this approach is not elaborated because the various left-wing parties prefer to elaborate a perspective based on what they would like to occur instead of being based on a realistic understanding of the present unfavourable balance of class forces. In other the starting point of a convincing programme of change has to be based on the importance of changing the present unfavourable situation for the supporters of socialism. How can the present ideological hegemony of the supporters of capitalism be ended so that a more favourable situation is created for the generation of the increased influence of the aim of socialism? In the past people like Gramsci addressed this situation but increasingly this issue has been ignored despite the enduring unfavourable political conditions for facilitating the possibility of the socialist transformation of society. Therefore, we need to develop a programme that begins with tackling the issue of the complexities involved in trying to achieve social change and so as a result the possibilities of the progressive transformation of society seem to become more credible. However, the various programmes of the left-wing groups generally do not tackle these issues and instead in a dogmatic manner elaborate a collection of demands that do not seem to be connected to the problems involved in trying to change society. This perspective does not seem convincing to those people who have not become supporters of the various Marxist parties. Instead, what seems to be a more convincing perspective is to adapt to the apparent stable domination of capitalism and so attempt to realise demands within the present limits of the system. Bute even this approach has been undermined and marginalised by the continued expression of the situation of the durability of capitalism. This means that scepticism results about even the prospects of limited change. Instead, it would seem that the only historical certainty is the unchallenged supremacy of the capitalist system. This situation seems to have been prolonged in terms of the success of pro-capitalist policies of austerity and the connected development of popular scepticism about the possibility of progressive change.

However, does this situation mean that people have genuinely accepted the values of the capitalist system as Selbourne suggests? It can be suggested that this conclusion is dogmatic because it is based on the equation of a pessimistic acceptance of the domination of the system with the expression of genuine support for the objectives of capitalism. The point is that most people have a resigned acceptance that the domination of capital cannot be challenged by an expression of popular unrest. Indeed, the continued election of conservative type governments would seem to suggest that people have accepted the apparent credibility of the perspective that it is not possible to challenge the domination of the present system. in this context people often have only a vague notion of what is meant by the socialist alternative to capitalism. Furthermore, the right-wing trajectory of Social Democratic parties means that they explicitly promote a perspective of only implementing limited change to the present capitalist system. Indeed, it could be suggested that the majority of the people no longer have any conception of what is meant by the alternative of socialism. Instead, they are motivated by vague forms of opposition to capitalism which is generally connected to the most specific grievances with the present social system. Furthermore, the various alternatives being promoted by the Marxists are not influential or popular and indeed these organisations often limit their approaches to the expression of specific criticisms of the capitalist system. In this context it is difficult to develop the popular importance of Marxism which seems to be an expression of an antiquated doctrine. Hence it would seem that the era of Marxism has come to an end because of the apparent durability of capitalism. Therefore, whilst Selbourne is wrong to contend that there is a genuine expression of support for the present system within the working class, it could be suggested that there is a resigned acceptance of what seems to be an inevitable situation. In other words, the influence of the view that there is no alternative to capitalism seems to be dominant and in this context the importance of the alternative of socialism has become insignificant. To Selbourne this situation is because the majority of people support the values of capitalism, but it could be suggested that what has occurred is the resigned acceptance of the domination of the present system. In other words, people cannot acknowledge the importance of an alternative to capitalism and instead accommodate to what seems to be the inevitable ascendency of this type of society. This situation seems to be expressed by the increasing marginalisation of various socialist parties and indeed increasingly people have only a vague notion of what is meant by socialism. This situation is expressed by the decline of the influence of the Marxist approach of revolutionary change and in this context the supremacy of capitalism seems to be uncontested.

How can this unfavourable situation be changed so that the importance of the aim of socialism becomes more popular? There is no short-term approach that would resolve this issue in a satisfactory manner. Instead, it would seem that the forces supporting socialism have to develop long term strategies in order to try and generate increased influence within society. An immediate task would be to try and develop political unity within the presently competing socialist groups. This process would be connected to the adoption of a convincing strategy of social change. Related to this task would be the attempt to develop the influence of socialism within the various reformist parties and to try and convince them to support a more radical approach. In other words, the process of adaptation to capitalism would be challenged and instead it would become an important task to try and develop the support for what is a genuine perspective of social change. Obviously, this development would not make the prospect of socialism an inevitability, but it would mean that the most important left-wing parties were no longer primarily motivated by an approach of adaptation to the domination of capitalism. Obviously, these developments would not mean an inevitable improvement in the possibility to achieve socialism, but people would increasingly be aware of the development of a political choice which meant the expression of the option of radical change. The point is that such a choice has been denied by the increasing accommodation of left-wing parties to an acceptance of the domination of capitalism. In other words, the right-wing trajectory of the various social democratic parties in Europe has meant the acceptance of a politics of accommodation to the domination of capitalism and this development has been accompanied by the increasing marginalisation of a radical alternative. Hence the revival of the influence of a socialist ideology within the left wing parties could represent the renewal of the development of the influence of a perspective that is genuinely committed to the transformation of capitalism into socialism. But in the recent period the very right-wing trajectory of the formally socialist parties has undermined the development of this possibility. It has not been the inherent credibility of capitalism which has undermined the influence of socialism but instead the right wing trajectory of the various left wing parties.

In other words, the marginalisation of the Marxist parties has not expressed a situation of a genuine popular support for capitalism in terms of an expression of justification for its various merits. Instead, the domination of the present system is because of the marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism which is connected to scepticism about the feasibility of establishing an alternative social system. Thus, it could be suggested that there is no genuine popular support for capitalism but there is enduring pessimism about the viability of an alternative society. In this manner the various socialist parties are marginalised and only an approach of modest reformism acquires some influence. In general people accept the supremacy of the various parties that uphold capitalism because they cannot envisage the credibility of a genuine radical alternative. But possibly the most important aspect is the lack of unity between what are competing socialist parties and so it has not been possible to advocate a common programme of radical change. In this context it seems to be more credible and practical to vote for an explicit pro capitalist party and hope that they will introduce economic and social improvements to the present system. Indeed, in the era of austerity this would seem to be the logical option because the only credible approach seems to be the defence of the role of a capitalist economy. Indeed, this development seems to have occurred because of the continued decline of the influence and popularity of the various socialist type parties. In other words, Selbourne’s defence of capitalism seems to have been confirmed by empirical political events. Indeed, the various left-wing parties often fail to address the unfavourable character of the present situation and instead promote programmes that seem to have little relationship to the challenges for the aim of socialism. Therefore, it would seem that Selbourne’s defence of the credibility of capitalism is confirmed by the expression of the apparent difficulties involved in trying to realise the aims of socialism. But an important point is that it could also be suggested that people cannot become ultimately reconciled to the supremacy of capital. This situation means that as labour people are exploited under the relations of production connected to the domination of capital. Hence discontent is an inherent aspect of the economy and of society in general. Therefore, the issue is whether this discontent can become transformed into an expression of opposition to capitalism in terms of a connection between the workers and the influence of a revolutionary programme of change. Presently the various Marxist parties are marginalised and so are unable to become politically effective. Therefore, the issue is whether this situation can be changed in terms of the development of a genuine political relation between a Marxist party and the workers. Such a prospect is not inevitable, and the recent situation has been characterised by failure which means that the successful expression of the influence of socialism is not an inevitability. But nor can we accept that the domination of capitalism is inevitable. However, what is important is the task of the development of a credible and popular revolutionary party is necessary if the task of trying to achieve the transformation of society in a socialist manner is to be realised.

But Selbourne would suggest that this approach is unrealistic because people accept the validity of capitalism in a genuinely popular manner, and in contrast to this situation the approach of genuine socialism is marginalised. Indeed, it could be accepted that this is an essentially accurate description of the present political situation. But the point is can we consider that this is an inevitability that cannot be transformed and changed? Is it virtually impossible to attempt to develop support for socialism through the advocacy of a programme for the transformation of present society? Selbourne would contend that this is a futile task because people do essentially support the continuation of capitalism. Indeed, he would suggest it is an illusion of Marxists to not accept this development and so they advocate a programme of change in a dogmatic manner. It can be accepted that Selbourne has outlined a convincing understanding of the present durability of capitalism. But does this mean that change cannot occur. This is the very issue that we will have to address. Our starting point has to be that it seems that the situation seems to favour the continuation of capitalism. It would seem in countries like Britain that the perspective of Selbourne is confirmed by the increasing election into government of parties of a conservative character. In this situation even the approach of a modest reformism seems to be rejected. Furthermore, the organisations that uphold Marxism are of diminishing importance and are unable to contest elections in an effective manner. Thus, in terms of popular consent the justification of capitalism seems to be established in democratic terms. In this situation it would seem that it is not possible to establish the credibility and effectiveness of a genuine socialist alternative. Indeed, reformist parties have to accept the domination of the present system in terms of the expression of very moderate political programmes. Furthermore, the trade unions seem to be declining and of decreasing importance within society. In this context there is no apparent challenge to the continuation of the domination of capital and the very importance of socialism is being undermined in this unfavourable situation. Hence the question arises about how to revive the role of a popular socialism given the increasing success of populist forms of conservatism. It would seem that this prospect is very difficult given what seems to be this very historic failure of the challenge of socialism and the inability of this ideology to oppose the domination of capitalism in an effective manner. But demoralisation regarding the difficulties of this task can only contribute to a justification of pessimism that results in the creation of additional problems regarding the attempt to achieve progress in the struggle against capitalism. Many Marxist organisations have tried to evade discussion of these difficulties by the justification of a false optimism which attempts to ignore the problems involved in the attempt to develop an effective challenge to the domination of the present social system. But this false optimism can only result in illusions that do not attempt to tackle the problems of the present situation. In other words, there seems to be a historic crisis of socialism which cannot be resolved because of its apparent increasing insignificance. The only result of this situation is the process of the continued decline of the organisations of socialism and in contrast the consolidation of the hegemony of bourgeois parties within society. Furthermore, the reformist parties like the Labour party are not able to develop an effective opposition and increasingly they are defeated in general elections. It would seem that there is no expression of popular opposition to capitalism and instead it is the defenders of the system who acquire the support of the majority of the people. Therefore, supporters of capitalism like Selbourne seem to have the only credible perspective when they claim that the present system is supported by the majority of the people and that the workers uphold the ideological values of capitalism.

But to make these points does not mean the justification of a form of defeatism which suggests that the continued supremacy of the present system is an inevitability that cannot be challenged in a convincing manner. Instead, we have to understand the problems and challenges of the present situation for socialists and to try and develop a perspective that can promote the possibility of a radical transformation of society. However, if this programme of change is to be credible, we have to begin with a recognition of the present unfavourable situation. The forces of radical socialism are presently very small and marginal, and the parties of a reformist character are presently in an historic crisis and are generally unable to be elected to government. It would seem that there is no possibility to change this unfavourable situation in a progressive manner and therefore the various socialist parties seem to have become essentially marginal and unable to influence the political situation in a progressive manner. However, we have to reject any pessimistic view that suggests the continued domination of capitalism is something that cannot be challenged or altered. Instead, we have to elaborate a perspective for radical social change that is able to comprehend the challenges and difficulties of the present situation in a realistic manner. Hence, we have to begin with the present marginalisation and unpopularity of the aim of socialism and the connected supremacy of the ideology and economics of capitalism. Hence, we have to suggest a credible perspective of how this aspect of marginalisation of the forces of socialism can begin to be tackled and overcome with the promotion of socialist aims in a more convincing manner. Obviously, there is no simple guarantee of success but the limitations of capitalism in terms of the continuation of exploitation and inequality will still indicate the importance of a social alternative to the present system. In other words, the only effective manner in which the marginalisation of the forces of socialism can be resolved is by the attempt to provide new reasons why the aim of progressive change has not become unrealistic or no longer feasible. Thus, people are not enthusiastic supporters of capitalism, but they cannot envisage the possibility of radical change occurring that could create the possibility to realise the socialist alternative. Therefore, it is necessary to challenge this scepticism with the promotion of a programme for the transformation of society in terms of recognising the difficulties involved if this objective is to be achieved.

However, this perspective will be criticised as being unrealistic because of the continued marginalisation of the forces in support of socialism. Indeed, it has to be accepted that this programme of change is difficult to realise because of the continual decline of the popularity and influence of the approach of socialism. It would seem that the present system has achieved complete supremacy and so cannot be undermined by opposition which seems unable to become effective. Therefore, it could be suggested that most people have become content to accept the role of capitalism and so the aspect of opposition is limited to the role a few small left-wing groups. This is certainly the present situation But, does this mean that radical change is not possible? In the short term this would seem to be the only possible conclusion. Nevertheless, it Is not impossible to develop the role of a popular socialist party. The point is that capitalism remains historically problematical because it has to be based on the aspect of the exploitation of the role of labour. Therefore, the workers have an interest in supporting the attempt to end this situation and so establish a progressive alternative. Hence the major problem is not that the majority of people seem to have a genuine support for the present system but instead that there seems to be important difficulties in trying to realise an alternative. In this context the marginalisation of Marxism undermines the possibility to establish the credibility of a socialist objective. But the point is that such difficulties could be overcome if an effective revolutionary party with a principled programme of change is able to emerge. Presently the differences between the various Marxist groups undermines the development of a popular socialist organisation. But if these problems could be resolved it could become possible that a united and influential party emerges that is able to appeal for support in a credible manner. In other words, the most important problem is that of the sectarian differences between the various Marxist groups. If these issues could be resolved it might become possible to create a united organisation that is able to appeal for support in an effective manner. However, the continuation of differences means that the rival Marxist organisations presently contribute to their own marginalisation within society. There would seem to be no credible reason why people should become supporters of one of the many small groups of socialists. Hence it is the Marxists who contribute to their own marginalisation because of their sectarianism. Therefore, it is necessary to try and create a united socialist party that would attempt to develop popular support in a more effective manner. Hence it is the present sectarian rivalry of the various socialist groups that contributes to their continued marginalisation. Furthermore, the advocacy of a credible left-wing programme could begin the process of trying to establish increased support for the aims of revolutionary socialism. But it would seem that this task has not been developed in an effective manner and so the various left-wing groups contribute to the continuation of their own marginalisation. Hence the aspect of the influence of sectarianism is one of the major reasons why the Marxist groups are unable to begin to tackle the problem of their marginalisation. Indeed, it seems that they are satisfied to remain small groups with a low level of influence. Hence it is the durability of the organisation that seems to be more important than attempting to develop the progress of realisation of the aim of socialism. How can this situation be transformed?

In attempting to answer this question it has to be accepted that the political situation does not seem to be favourable for the adherents of a radical socialism. In the recent period the domination of the forces of conservatism seemed to have become almost invincible and the support for the aims of socialism have become increasingly marginalised and unpopular. Indeed, there has been a decline in the influence of even modest reformist parties. Hence the primacy of the parties that defend the interests of the capitalist system seem to have become invincible and it has been increasingly difficult to try and undermine this domination. Indeed, it has proved to be a problematical issue concerning the attempt to create left wing parties with even a limited level of popular support, whilst the traditional reformist organisations seemed to have become increasingly marginalised and unable to achieve electoral success. In this context it would seem that the defence of capitalism by dominant political parties has become an inevitable aspect of the present situation. In other words, the ability to defend the system by dominant organisations has become a durable aspect of the past forty years. In this context if anything Selbourne has underestimated the extent of the capacity of establishment parties to be able to defend the present system. But it could be suggested that an important problem is that the various reformist parties no longer seem to be able to develop the support of the workers who increasing prefer to vote in favour of the established parties that uphold the supremacy of capitalism. This development has occurred despite the prolonged imposition of a policy of austerity which would seem to be a situation that should discredit the credibility of capitalism. In other words, there has been a prolonged decline of the influence of the standpoint of reformism which has resulted in the development of the increased credibility of an approach that is based on an uncritical defence of the role of capitalism. Hence it would seem that the perspective of socialism has ultimately become problematical because it seems to be rejected by the working class who should be its most ardent supporters. But the problem started with the right-wing evolution of the social democratic parties who become the explicit critics of the aim of socialism and instead upheld the perspective of the most limited reform of the capitalist system. Therefore, when this reformist approach became discredited people did not become supporters of genuine socialism but instead became essentially uncritical adherents of the supremacy of capitalism. The result was the prolonged ascendency of the parties that upheld the interests of the present economic system. Furthermore, the standpoint of genuine socialism became reduced to being the belief of a few intellectuals whilst the people became increasingly sceptical about this approach. Hence the continuation of problems of the capitalist system did not result in the generation of increased support for genuine socialism but instead led to the influence of a pragmatic process of adaptation to the viewpoint of capital. Therefore, when reformist parties were elected in-to power, as with New Labour in the 1990’s, they acted to impose what had become the orthodox doctrine of the approach of austerity. Some reforms were still possible, but what was of primary importance was the expression of the interests of capital in an uncritical manner. It seemed that the very reformist parties had become the most uncritical supporters of capitalism. However, the marginalisation and unpopularity of Marxism meant that these right-wing developments could not be challenged in an effective manner. Instead, it seemed that the uncritical acceptance of the domination of capital had the support of all the major political organisations. The result of this situation was that questions about the very credibility of a socialist alternative became increasingly raised because it seemed that the interests of capital had acquired an unchallenged supremacy. In this situation how could it still be possible to develop popular support for the realisation of the socialist alternative. Indeed, could it be suggested that socialism was still a feasible perspective given this apparent unchallenged domination of capital?

In order to address this issue, we have to begin with the actual situation of the apparent marginalisation and lack of popularity of the forces of socialism. The various parties that support socialism are very small and are often divided in sectarian terms. Indeed, it could be suggested that socialism is a political tradition that has been in a process of serious decline and so its aims and objectives no longer have popular support. In this context it would seem that the ascendency of capitalism cannot be challenged. However, we cannot deny the importance of this unfavourable situation. We have to begin with the unpopularity and marginalisation of the forces of socialism. Indeed, it could be suggested that many people no longer have any coherent conception of what is meant by socialism. In contrast it would seem that the domination of capital is a natural aspect of the social situation, and this is accepted by people as being an expression of the very character of social development. In this context it is not surprising that the various socialist parties seem to have undergone a prolonged period of decline and in contrast the approach of defence of capitalism has acquired popular electoral support. Hence there is an immense challenge for the supporters of socialism to try and create a situation in which this unfavourable situation can be transformed so that more people become adherents to the aims of radical change. But the very splits between the left- wing groups would seem to suggest that this problem of marginalisation cannot be changed in a progressive manner. Instead, it is an increasingly durable aspect of the political situation that the left- wing groups seemed to be undergoing a process of inevitable decline and marginalisation. Therefore, in this context it would seem that radical aspirations become expressed by various single-issue campaigns, but this very development would seem to confirm that the attempt to achieve socialism has become unrealistic. In other words, the aspirations of people are about changing aspects of the capitalist system and are no longer concerned with the total transformation of the character of society. Indeed, it could be suggested that in the contemporary era most people have no conception of what is meant by socialism. Instead, the domination of capitalism is accepted as an inevitability and the role of left-wing politics is reduced to being an expression of forms of protest about aspects of the capitalist system. For example, the attempt to oppose the foreign policy of the various pro capitalist governments. This situation is also expressed by the prolonged decline of the various left-wing parties and the aspect of rejection of the present system is reduced to the role of mobilisation around issues like the aggressive foreign policy of various bourgeois powers. Indeed, it would seem that the various socialist organisations have become irrelevant or at least they continue to be marginalised and become insignificant. Therefore, it could be suggested that increasingly people have no distinct conception of what is meant by socialism and instead they are only able to articulate various forms of discontent with aspects of the capitalist system. It would seem that the very aim of socialism has become antiquated and irrelevant in the present era. Hence the crucial question arises as to whether this development can be changed. Is it possible to re-establish the relevance of socialism?

In order to begin to address this issue we have to begin with the apparent fact that people often do not know what is meant by socialism. Therefore, it is necessary for the supporters of left-wing parties to address this issue and to try and develop a conception of socialism that seems to be relevant to the people of contemporary society. In this context we have to elaborate a convincing understanding of why socialism is a progressive and emancipatory alternative to capitalism. This means we have to develop credible reasons concerning the possible capacity for people to be able to organise an economy and society without the domination of capital. In other words the perspectives of socialists can no longer be limited to making protests about problematical aspects of capitalism and instead we have to establish convincing reasons concerning the capacity of people to be able to organise the economy in a democratic and progressive manner that is able to realise the interests of society. But this means trying to address the problems involved in the general marginalisation of the forces of socialism and to suggest a programme that could facilitate the development of popular support for its standpoint. Hence, we have to address the problem created by the various divisions between the various parties that claim to be socialist. In other words, the lack of unity between the various left- wing parties means that people become sceptical about the possibilities to change society in a progressive manner. Instead, it seems that the major parties that defend the capitalist system seem to be more popular and effective. In this context there would seem to be no valid reason why people should support parties that are declining and lack popularity. Consequently, there is no apparent alternative to the present system that is able to become popular and effective. Instead, it seems to be logical to support the dominant parties that express the interests of the capitalist system. Furthermore, the various reformist parties no longer seem to be credible given the supremacy of the parties that defend the interests of the present system. Indeed, it could be considered that the only credible policy is to continue to implement the approach of austerity in a situation of economic crisis. Hence this apparent decline of capitalism has not resulted in the development of increased support for a socialist alternative. Instead, this situation has only contributed to the continued decline of socialism and the related increased domination of the parties that explicitly defend the interests of capitalism. Indeed, it could be suggested that the majority of workers no longer support reformist parties like the Labour party and instead have become consistent supporters of the Conservative party which is the traditional organisation that defends the interests of capitalism. In this unfavourable situation how can it be possible to create popular support for a socialist alternative. Indeed, most people no longer have any conception of what is meant by socialism and instead accept the domination of capitalism as an inevitable aspect of reality. In contras the reformist parties are unable to win general elections and the various parties that support the system seem to be dominant and unchallenged. Hence the confidence of Selbourne in the credibility of capitalism seems to be justified. It would seem that people no longer know what is meant by socialism and indeed they consider that there is no alternative to the continued supremacy of the present system. In contrast the forces of Marxism continue a protracted process of decline and they are no longer of importance in the major capitalist countries. But this unfavourable situation does not mean that the continued domination of the present system is an inevitability. We have to suggest that the importance of the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital means that it could become possible for socialist forces to develop support for a programme that aims to develop a situation in which this situation is transformed. But if this development is to become possible it is necessary that the various competing socialist groups try and unite in terms of the advocacy of a common programme of change. This development would indicate that there influence within society need not be insignificant and instead it could become possible to establish the increased influence of an anti-capitalist perspective. This programme would also have to be based on the only aspect that could generate the possibility of change which is the development of a perspective of militant struggle in order to challenge the domination of capital. But the problem is that the various socialist groups do not attempt to address the problems and challenges of the present situation and instead often advocate programmes that are dogmatic and not related to the importance of trying to transform the present unfavourable balance of forces. In other words, various abstract programmes are promoted that have little relationship to the importance of an unfavourable political situation. Hence the importance of the issue of the marginalisation of socialism is not being addressed in a convincing manner. Therefore, the result of this situation is that the various left-wing groups advocate programmes that are based on the elaboration of illusions about the possibilities to achieve change. Indeed, they attempt to recruit members in terms of promoting the suggestion that the potential to achieve socialism is inherent favourable. The result of this development is the expression of illusions by the various left-wing parties. It would seem in this situation that the domination of capitalism cannot be challenged by the limitations of its opponents. But what this situation indicates is the necessity for the attempt by socialist forces to try and development a programme of change that is based on the understanding of the important problems that undermine this possibility. This type of programme has not yet been developed but this does not mean that it is not possible to achieve the elaboration of a credible perspective of change.

It could be suggested that the most important aspect why people do not support the aim of socialism is because they associate this objective with the authoritarian role of Stalinism. Therefore, it is necessary for socialists to elaborate why they do not support the present system in terms of the elaboration of the connection between the aim of socialism and the importance of the role of genuine democracy. Hence the attempt to realise socialism has to be shown to be compatible with the expression of genuine democracy in terms of the acceptance of the importance of the role of democracy. It has to be shown that even revolutionary socialists attempt to realise their objectives by the acceptance of the importance of a process of democratic political practices, or the accepting of competition between rival parties in terms of the role of the electoral process. Therefore, socialist parties have to establish why their programmes have become increasingly unpopular and so have led to the domination of parties that defend capitalism. How can the socialists adopt policies that could facilitate the success of their objectives? In this context it would seem that the socialists have to outline their views in terms of the expression of a democratic process of change, or the genuine involvement of the people in trying to bring about the transformation of society. But for this prospect to occur it is necessary that the various socialist parties elaborate more convincing reasons why people should support their objectives. In this context the socialist parties would have to establish that they reject any association with the authoritarianism of Stalinism and that they reject any approach that is based on elitism. Instead, they would have to elaborate in more convincing terms a programme of change in which the role of the people would become important in trying to realise the process of the socialist transformation of society. However, it would seem that this perspective is unrealistic because of the present marginalisation of the various socialist parties. Instead, it seems that the popular aspiration of the people is to try and obtain improvements within the present capitalist system. In other words, there would seem to be no simple and short-term manner in which the prospect of socialism can be expressed. Instead, it would seem to be a lengthy historical process in order to realise the possibility to transform what are presently marginal socialist parties into effective and popular organisations that could become able to facilitate a process of change. Indeed, in this unfavourable situation we have to accept that the demise of capitalism is not an inevitability. It could be suggested that this unfavourable prospect for socialism may not be altered and so the present system continues to be dominant. But socialists should not become pessimistic and so accept this defeatism as the most likely expression of the present situation. Instead, we have to suggest the continued domination of capitalism can be undermined by the development of a successful and popular revolutionary party. Hence the emphasis of Marxists should be about the possibility to achieve this development, and so we should advocate a political approach that attempts to advance the prospect of achieving this aim of developing an effective and successful socialist party. If this objective can be realised, then the situation would become transformed.

What the creation of a popular revolutionary party that was able to perform well in elections would indicate was that important sections of people had become committed to supporting the transformation of capitalism into an alternative progressive type of society. However, for this development to occur it would mean that the socialists had to establish that socialism is not necessarily an expression of the aims of Stalinism but is instead about the connection of the role of popular democracy with the achievement of the ending of the domination of capitalism. Hence it has to be shown that socialism is not the inherent justification of the ascendency of a political elite to power. This approach has to be connected to outlining the importance of the role of the people in changing society and that the aspect of elections is still necessary in order to provide democratic legitimation for the system. Therefore, it is not sufficient to suggest that socialism is about the role of workers councils, but it is still necessary to indicate that the election of a socialist government would not mean the ending of the importance of the democratic process. In other words, it would still be possible to elect a party that supported capitalism into government. However, unfortunately the present marginalisation of most socialist parties means that this issue has not become a problem. Instead, the lack of popularity of the various socialist parties is the outstanding issue. Hence what is of immediate importance concerns how to challenge and overcome the political supremacy of the various parties that support the continued domination of capitalism. Indeed, this would seem to be a crucial issue given the present marginalisation of the forces of radical socialism. It could be suggested that people presently support parties that uphold the interests of capitalism and so reject the politics of socialist organisations. The prolonged character of this situation would seem to mean that the possibility to facilitate the overcoming of capitalism is not a credible perspective. However, this apparently unfavourable situation should not make us pessimistic. Instead, we have to try and establish the reasons why the socialist groups have become increasingly marginal. An important issue is the apparent connection of revolutionary socialism with the role of Stalinism, it would seem that radical Marxism is related to the standpoint of authoritarian elitism. However, this issue is not tackled because it tends to be ignored because the Marxist groups are often influenced by a form of politics based on illusions rather than attempting to tackle the challenges of the present political situation. Therefore, an immediate task is to address these problems in a complex manner and in terms of trying to overcome the traditional rejection of the importance of this problem of marginalisation. Obviously, the development of a politics that was based on an understanding of the issues of the situation in a more convincing manner would not resolve the problem of marginalisation but at least a beginning would have been made concerning the lack of success of the Marxist groups. In other words, the major political problem of the left-wing groups is the justification of illusions and the connected inability to try and develop a type of politics that would attempt to tackle this marginalisation. Instead, the Marxist parties are influenced by perspectives that are based on the illusion that they are more important than their actually marginal situation would justify. The result of this self-deception is the expression of the politics of delusion instead of the development of a credible approach that is based on a perspective that is not based on a credible understanding of the balance of the class forces.

But what is the programme that would attempt to address the issues created by this unfavourable situation in a more effective manner? In order to begin to address these issues it would be necessary to try and accept that the situation of Marxism has become historically unfavourable. There has never been a situation in which the left-wing groups are more unpopular and insignificant. Indeed, it could be suggested that most people no longer know what is meant by socialism and so accept the domination of capitalism in an uncritical manner. But this unfavourable situation is ignored by the left- wing parties that tend to justify various unrealistic perspectives for the development of social change. Hence the very importance of the marginalisation of the Marxist groups is being denied by this justification of various forms of dogmatism concerning the issue of the marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. Hence it would seem that the socialist parties are unable to overcome the influence of an approach of illusion. Therefore, it could be suggested that they continue to the justification of their own decline and marginalisation. In this situation it could be suggested that there is no possible perspective that could facilitate ending this situation of the expression of the politics of self-delusion. But we have to reject any pessimistic conclusions and instead attempt to develop an approach that would begin to tackle these problems in an effective manner. In order to begin this process, it is important to try and establish a form of credible politics that could facilitate the expression of unity between what have been competing socialist groups. This process could be connected to the elaboration of a simple programme of radical change that could facilitate the expression of this possibility of unity. It could be suggested that the ultimate aim of this programme would be a perspective for the realisation of a democratic socialist society. Such a development would be connected to the expression of a programme to express the aims of this standpoint.

However, the apparent problem is that the majority of the people of the major capitalist societies tend to be convinced by the ideology of the superiority of the present social system. In contrast they are not influenced by the aims of the standpoint of socialism. There would seem to be no possibility to change this situation because of the regular election into political power of parties that uphold the interests of the capitalist system. Instead, it would seem that the influence of the approach of even reformism is in decline when contrasted to the apparent supremacy of the adherents to the present social system. However, this situation should not justify pessimism and instead we have to elaborate the approach of a socialist alternative in a more credible and convincing manner. (This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next article) If it can be shown that socialism is a possibility then at least discussion can begin about to achieve this objective. But the problem is that the various reformist parties have adapted to the situation of the apparent ascendency of the forces of capital and so this aspect seems to confirm that the supporters of the present system have achieved a situation of invincibility. In other words, the domination of capitalism is connected to the apparent demoralisation of its opponents and the connected expression of political confidence by its defenders. Hence the people increasing seem to have the limited choice between various policies that ultimately accept the continued supremacy of capitalism. Obviously if a party was to emerge that genuinely did advocate the importance of a socialist alternative this development would not mean that the realisation of this aim has become more favourable, but at least people would have a genuine choice between the merits of rival social systems. Instead, what were the socialist parties have adapted to the continued domination of capitalism and this means it seems that the supremacy of the present system is something that cannot be challenged. Therefore, a new dimension would be developed if a new situation in which the people were able to express support for socialism in a more effective manner. Obviously, this development would not mean that the realisation of socialism had become an inevitability, but at least people would have a definite choice between support of one or other of rival social systems. However, the continued adaptation of the major reform parties to the domination of capitalism means that this expression of support for a radical alternative cannot be established. But it also has to be accepted that there has been a historical difficulty in relation to the attempt to create a principled party of socialism. This issue will be discussed in terms of a study of the history of Trotskyism in the next article.

Hence, we can conclude that Selbourne seems to be correct in suggesting that there is popular support of the majority of the people for the upholding of the domination of the capitalist system. However, contrary to his implicit assumption that this is the only possible type of society we would suggest that capitalism is based on the exploitation of the role of labour and so there is the necessity to realise an alternative type of society. But we also have to accept that there have been historic difficulties concerning the attempt to create a credible party for the promotion of the realisation of the aim of a socialist society. Selbourne would suggest that the unfavourable potential for socialism is because of the lack of mass support for this objective and instead people accept the continued supremacy of capitalism. However, we would suggest that ultimately there has been an historic failure to create a popular revolutionary party that is able to generate the possibility for the transformation of capitalism into socialism. This issue will be analysed in the next article in terms of a study of the history of British Trotskyism. In other words, the major problem is not that people support capitalism in a genuine manner but that instead there does not seem to be the credibility of a possible revolutionary alternative. In this situation people have to reluctantly accept the continuation of the capitalist system. It is not that people accept the ideological values of capitalism in a genuine manner, contrary to the views of Selbourne, but instead that they have to adapt to a situation which does not seem possible to be changed into the realisation of a socialist alternative. However we also have to suggest that this issue of the political supremacy of capitalism is connected to the difficulties of creating a credible revolutionary party, which will be discussed in more detail in the next issue.