ADDITIONS TO PROGRAMME FOR THE CRISIS

(1)THE CHARACTER OF DEMOCRACY IN THE POST-CAPITALIST SOCIETY

It is important to clarify what democracy could be like in the process of transition to communism. The role of popular democracy will be crucial in facilitating the advance of revolution and this development should be crucial in relation to the construction of the political character of the post-revolutionary regime. The organs of popular struggle should have an important significance in how the process of democracy is organised and consolidated. This should mean that the institutions of Parliamentary democracy will be replaced by mass organs of participatory decision making as the expression of the process of political activity within the new society. However it is also entirely possible that actual developments within reality do not correspond to what would consider practical and principled in theoretical terms. Hence it is conceivable that the working people who have made the revolution would prefer to continue with the functioning of Parliamentary institutions, and therefore attempt to reconcile the popular character of the revolution with the role of Parliament that has been inherited from the representative democracy of capitalism. This possibility could occur because of reasons of culture, tradition and because the past experience of popular organs has apparently been compatible with the development of authoritarianism and the justification of state repression. In this situation the revolutionary party would present the arguments that it was possible to develop participatory democracy without regression into the formation of a bureaucratic regime, and that Parliamentary democracy was not the most effective form of democracy and instead created a stratum of professional politicians that were not accountable to the people who elected them. The Party would also suggest that because Parliamentary democracy was most compatible with capitalism it could become the focus of support for the process of capitalist restoration. However if people did not support these arguments the party would have to accept that the post-capitalist system would be based on the reconciliation of Parliamentary democracy with economic organs of workers control. This relationship would not be without its contradictions but because of the wishes of working people it would be necessary to try and develop the advance of socialism in these terms.

In other words, it is entirely possible that the process of transition to socialism would not conform to the theoretical premises established by Marxism. Historical experience has indicated that it is doubtful that the revolutionary transformation of society can be advanced by the utilisation of the role of Parliament. All the various socialist parties that have based themselves on a Parliamentary strategy have tended to accommodate to capitalism and renounce the objectives of socialism. This has meant the act of revolution has had an extra-Parliamentary character, and is based on the formation of popular organs of struggle that go beyond the limitations of the representative democratic character of Parliament. Hence the process of revolution is likely to involve some form of political antagonism between the institution of Parliament and the popular organs of mass struggle. The latter will have to realise a process of political domination over the former. This development would seem to suggest that Parliament would be a discredited institution in the period immediately after the proletarian revolution. However for reasons of political history and tradition it is possible that some form of respect for the institution of Parliament will be general throughout the population and the result will be that the importance of the organs of mass struggle will become transitory and be replaced by the re-emergence of the role of Parliament. However it will be the duty and obligation of the revolutionary party to insist that Parliament is not an ideal institution for the advance of participatory democracy and it could be considered to be a rival to organs of popular will. But the approach of the revolutionary party has to be based on persuasion and not coercion. An absurd situation would be created if the party insisted in a repressive manner that the organs of popular struggle should be retained and the role of Parliament be rejected. This situation would result in one party rule and the domination of the popular organs by the role of the party. The result would be the onset of the bureaucratisation of society rather than the flourishing of participatory democracy. Consequently it would be in the interests of democracy that the aspirations of the people for the restoration of the role of Parliament be accepted, and the task would be to reconcile Parliament with all its limitations to the process of the political and economic development of socialism.

The Bolsheviks had a difficult choice in relation to the significance of the popular vote for the Constituent Assembly because the aspirations of the peasantry outnumbered the wishes of the workers. The very split between the working class and the peasantry created tensions between the competing political claims of the Constituent Assembly and the Soviets. However these tensions were not adequately resolved by the act of the dissolution of the former institution. The closure of the Constituent Assembly meant the peasants were no longer politically represented and the process of the development of one party rule within the Soviets was not undermined. But if the Constituent Assembly had been allowed to continue it could have become a focus for reaction and opposition to the Soviet regime. In other words the contradictions of society did not allow for a satisfactory resolution of the problem of political representation. The tension between the Constituent Assembly and the Soviets could not be resolved because of the sociological character of society. This is not a problem for the present. Despite the limitations of Parliament it is possible that the co-existence of Parliament and the popular organs of struggle could occur in the past-capitalist regime. The influence of the working class would be expressed in both Parliament and the organs of popular will. Hence the task would be to bring about an accommodation between the role of Parliament and the popular organs that would not result in friction and tension. This means it is entirely possible that delegates to the popular organs could also be elected to Parliament. This point is that the relations between Parliament and the popular organs is not ideal but if the continuation of Parliament is an expression of the popular will then this relationship would have to be made to work effectively. Thus a division of powers between Parliament and the popular organs would have to be established. This division would be similar to the relation between the executive and the legislative.

What would be problematical is justification of a situation in which the importance of Parliament would become the pretext for the dissolving of the popular organs of participatory democracy. This situation would create the possibility for Parliament to become an independent political force with great powers of initiative that would enable it to potentially promote capitalist restoration. In contrast the continued influence of popular organs would mean they would be able to influence the actions of Parliament in a progressive manner. The role of the popular organs would be to act as the legitimate sanction of the decisions of Parliament. However this sanction would only be expressed as a last resort and it would be hoped that Parliament and the popular organs would normally be able to work together in a harmonious manner. What would be important to both Parliament and the popular organs would be the task of the promotion of the aims and tasks of the construction of socialism and communism. To this extent both Parliament and the popular organs would advance the development of workers control of production and the influence of economic democracy would have profound effects on the political system. If agreement between Parliament and the popular organs could not be established in a satisfactory manner it will be necessary to modify their relations in a manner that is most advantageous to the process of the development of socialism. This will require popular confirmation through the methods of universal suffrage. The result need not necessarily result in the disbanding of Parliament. What will be crucial are the views of the population about how to most effectively advance the political system of socialism. It will be necessary to ensure that in the process of political change any justification of state repression is rejected. Instead the most democratic decision will be the one that is most acceptable. However it is to be hoped that if the relationship between Parliament and the popular organs is established that it will be able to function smoothly and enhance the potential of participatory democracy. It will still be the success of participation in the political process that represents the superiority of socialism and confirms the disadvantages of the political character of capitalism.

But to repeat, the preference of Marxists is for a system of participatory democracy based on organs of popular will. This is what we will argue for as being most compatible with the development of economic democracy within the relations of production. Hence Marxists reject the argument that direct democracy promotes and advances the bureaucratisation of society and the rule of what became an elite. Instead it was the decline of Soviet democracy that was essential to the rise of the domination of the state over society. Thus we maintain that the democratic character of the revolution based on organs of popular will be continued and extended in the post-capitalist society. But for various reasons the people themselves may wish to dilute and modify the system of political participation. They may desire the role of Parliament as the ultimate decision making institution. In this context the role of the revolutionary party will be to accept this democratic decision and to modify their own conception of the political aspects of the process of transition to communism. If the party refuses to support the importance of parliament because of reasons of theory and doctrine the result would be a split between party and class that could be detrimental to the advance of socialism. Instead of this split the decisions of working people should be accepted and the conception of the political character of socialism modified in accordance with popular will. But this retreat from adherence to traditional conceptions of the politics of socialism is not an unacceptable compromise because the organs of popular will have not been dismantled. If people called for the dissolution of the organs of popular will this would constitute a crisis in relation to the prospect of advance of socialism. But it is doubtful that this would occur because of the very close relation of people to the organs of popular will that have made the revolution and so become indispensable to the task of building socialism and communism. The people are unlikely to reject the expression of their own political power in favour of what has often been an unaccountable institution. Instead the role of Parliament is likely to be in co-existence with the organs of popular will.

THE ROLE OF A WORKERS PARTY

The importance of a political party of the working class is relatively neglected in the original draft programme. This issue of the party is vital and is connected to the ability of Marxism to relate to the mass movement of the working class. At present the working class is not politically represented and instead the trade unions act as an inadequate instrument of the aspirations of working people. The major concern of the Labour Party is to be the expression of the interests of global capitalism, and in this context is supporting the austerity measures of the Coalition government. Most Labour local authorities are implementing public expenditure cuts and Ed Balls has made a speech that suggests it will not be possible to reverse the cuts in the future. In this situation the working people needs a party that can express its aspirations and be central to the struggle against the austerity measures. Despite various criticisms by the Union Leaderships of the role of the Labour party they still support the historic relationship and their major focus in on the re-election of a Labour government. This means they are prepared to dilute union actions in order not to undermine the prospects of the electoral victory of Labour. The result is that the situation is confusing, although some left-wing Union leaders have called for the establishment of a new political instrument of the working class. Many Marxist organisations have failed to provide a strategy for the formation of a new party, although in a feeble manner the Socialist party makes calls for the creation of a new workers party. But in general the Marxist groups do not campaign effectively for the promotion of a new workers party. Instead they argue in a sectarian manner that their particular organisation should be the basis for the development of a revolutionary party of the working class. This is the standpoint of the SWP, and the Socialist Party adopts this approach in practice.

The passive approach of the Marxist left represents a lagging behind the possibilities of the present. The economic crisis and the introduction of austerity measures indicate the potential to recreate a party of the working class. It would be entirely feasible to hold a historic conference of the trade unions in order to definitively make the break with the Labour Party and to create a new political organisation. The nucleus of this organisation is present in the local anti-cuts campaigns and in the forces of the renewed union militancy. Obviously the existing Union leaderships would resist this development and so the struggle for a new party would involve the attempt to transform the Unions and make them more responsive to the membership. The forces of the democratised Unions would become the expression of the dynamics of the process of the formation of the new party. This development of democratised unions is already partially expressed by the RMT and PCS, and they make tentative calls for new political organisation of the working class. Generalised success in the struggle to develop left-wing and democratic unions would greatly promote the struggle to create a new party. Until this process develops in a significant manner, the DSA would call upon the various anti-cuts campaigns to contest elections on the basis of opposition to the austerity measures. This process could create an important impulse towards the formation of a new party of the working class.

It has been argued that the formation of a party by the trade unions would represent the development of a half-way house that was incapable of upholding revolutionary and principled politics. Instead this organisation would be the latest form of an inconsistent reformism that would have a tendency for right-wing shifts in policy. The result would be the expression of class compromise and opportunism and an inability to provide leadership in the class struggle. Thus what is preferable to the creation of a worker’s party would be a united Marxist or Communist party. This standpoint has merits from the viewpoint of principles but it is ultimately inflexible and dogmatic. The creation of a party by the trade unions would be likely to be reformist and the rejection of revolutionary politics. But it is also possible that Marxism could represent a minority pole of attraction and so uphold the banner of revolutionary principles within what could genuinely be a mass organisation. Furthermore the influence of Marxism could grow because of the very limitations of the trade union leaders. Marxism in practice would be recognised as having a superior perspective in relation to issues of the class struggle. What will be crucial is whether Marxism has the opportunity to argue for its politics in an independent manner and is able to propagate its views within the organisation. If this is possible a situation could be created in which Marxism is able to contest for the leadership and its programme will rapidly become popular. This means that the reformist character of the new organisation is not stable and instead it has the potential to become revolutionary.

Consequently it would be sectarian to abstain from struggle within the new organisation. The formation of a Marxist party is not best advanced by the unity of small groups in isolation from what is happening within the mass movement. Instead it would be preferable if Marxism could relate significantly to the process of development of a new mass organisation. However if a worker’s party was not being formed because of the inertia of the trade union leaders or any other problems it would be a great advance for the various forces of Marxism to unite in a single Communist party. This is why we do not contrast the formation of a Marxist party with the creation of a worker’s party and instead will provide critical support for both of these developments. The Socialist Alliance in the past indicated the potential for the formation of a Marxist party, and the importance of the austerity measures in the present represents the possibilities for the formation of a worker’s party. In other words, the DSA tries to combine flexibility with principles in relation to what type of organisation can be created that will promote class struggle politics. The degeneration and decline of the Labour party provide an immense opportunity to recreate the party of labour. The fact that this organisation may initially be a half-way house is not grounds for pessimism because of the prospects for the principled transformation of this new party. What has to be recognised is that Marxism can have a crucial role in the evolution of this new organisation. This means what is primary is how effective Marxists can be in the promotion of a revolutionary programme within the new organisation of the working class.

Marxists should not fetishise one type of organisational form over another one. The issue is not that the workers party should take precedence over the Marxist party, or vice versa, but rather what organisation is presently most conducive to the promotion of class struggle politics. In this context we would argue that the introduction of the austerity measures creates the conditions for the formation of a broad working class organisation. While in the past, during an ebb in the class struggle, the situation was more favourable to the process of unification of Marxism. The point being that in situations of the isolation of Marxism from the class struggle the unification of Marxism would create an organisation that could relate to the future development of class conflict. However the fact that this opportunity was missed meant Marxism is still ineffective whilst the possibilities for the formation of a worker’s party are increasing. If a worker’s party was formed this would then create the political conditions for the unification of Marxism within this organisation. The point is that it is not an either/or between a worker’s party and the development of a Communist party. But what we have at the moment is the worst of all possible worlds. We have the fragmentation of Marxists within competing small groups and the void created by the lack of a worker’s party. This situation has to be overcome by some type of initiative, and to this end we call on the trade unions to make the break with the Labour party and form a new party. This prospect actually seems more likely than the unification of what are acrimonious Marxist groups, or organisations that seem to take pride in their self-isolation. Hence those that raise the call for a united Communist party do so as part of a dogmatic approach rather than the expression of what seems possible. This does not mean that attempts to create a united Marxist party should be criticised as being merely futile gestures, but we should be aware of the present difficulties in realising this aim. Consequently, the task at present is to argue with a new generation that there is an alternative to the Labour Party and that we can act together to realise this possibility. This means the emphasis should be on changing the character of the trade unions in order to advance the prospects for the formation of a workers' party.

We must emphasise that our preference is for the formation of a Communist party under ideal conditions. This would have the potential for mass growth and the establishment of connections to the mass movement. In these circumstances the relationship of the party to the class would assume an ideal character. However we are also aware that the prevailing circumstances are not ideal and instead are very complex and contradictory. At the present the forces of Marxism are historically weak and isolated, and so the political conditions for the formation of a Communist party are not favourable. But the possibilities for the formation of a Workers party are being expressed by the anger of the working class concerning the introduction of austerity measures. What is important to understand is the question of how we can promote the forces of communism under the given circumstances. In some situations it is possible to advocate the development of a communist party because of its mass potential and the traditions of the given working class. But in different circumstances it may be necessary to support the formation of a worker’s party because of the comparative weakness of Marxism. In other words the tactical approach has to be flexible and related to the particular circumstances and events, but the strategic aim is firm which is the establishment of principled relations between Marxism and the mass movement. We also have to recognise the apparent aspirations of the working class at any given moment. The present situation seems to have created the opportunity for the formation of a worker’s party because of the mood of opposition to the austerity measures and the limitations of the Labour party. There would be tremendous support for the re-establishment of a party of labour by the trade unions. Marxism should not oppose these possibilities because of dogma and an inflexible attachment to a given organisational form. Instead we should be flexible in relation to the type of organisation that could be developed in the near future, and this means our major aim should be about how to develop the influence of Marxism in the prevailing political conditions.

It has been argued by some that what is required is a united front of the various Marxist organisations and this promotion of unity would increase the prospects for the development of a mass movement with conscious purpose. The DSA is not against the development of any type of unity that can advance the interests of the working class in the class struggle. But we would suggest that this type of unity requires programmatic confirmation in terms of the creation of a common programme that could unite the various diverse forces in a principled manner. It would be problematical if the realisation of unity was at the expense of principles. This point was understood by the Socialist Alliance that was able to unite around its election manifesto. The Socialist Alliance had some sense of the politics required in order to promote the advance of the class struggle. In these circumstances it was the unprincipled action of the Socialist Workers Party that led to splits and the unity created by programmatic agreement was broken. In the present situation the recreation of this type of unity is not likely. The various forces of Marxism are intransigent in their hostility towards each other. This also means the formation of a united Marxist party is also unlikely for these reasons. However we must point out that the prospect of a united communist party could be realised if the various organisations were to reject their hostile attitudes towards each other. The prospects of unity in a united front or a common party could be realised on the basis of opposition to the austerity measures and capitalism and for communism. But the various organisations reject this prospect of unity created by the very economic and political situation. In these problematical circumstances created by the fragmentation of Marxism the arguments for the formation of a Workers Party are even more important. Indeed it could be that the formation of the Workers party would facilitate the renewal of the importance and influence of Marxism.

But we must recognise that the most important reason for the formation of a worker’s party is related to the requirements of the class struggle. Working people require a political organisation in order to promote the struggle against the austerity measures. The trade unions are not sufficient in themselves in order to facilitate opposition to the actions of the Coalition government. Instead what is called for is the formation of a party aligned to the trade unions that could develop the policy and strategy in order to defeat the government. The role of Marxists within this organisation would be to argue for the communist alternative to capitalism, and to suggest that militant action in itself is not sufficient for victory in the class struggle. The most important Marxist organisations have established their own organisations to oppose the cuts. But these organisations lack validity and are often recognised as fronts for political organisation. Most activists have not joined these organisations. But the mood in favour of the Workers party is articulated by disgust with the defeatist approach of the Labour party and the desire that the Unions should be more energetic in opposition to the cuts. This means most militants lack forms of political expression. Hence the situation could not be more favourable for the formation of a Workers party. Marxists should articulate the public mood in terms of the call for the establishment of a Workers party by the trade unions.

It has been argued by those that object to the creation of a Workers party that it would be reformist and so become a unsuitable expression of the requirements of the development of the class struggle. The DSA can agree that the approach of reformism represents a political perspective that generates limitations in relation to the prospect of realising socialism and communism. We can agree that historical experience has indicated that the standpoint of reforms has not generated a logic that has brought about the domination of socialism. Instead the result of reformism has been adaptation to capitalism and the increasing tendency for a right-wing logic within the parties dedicated to reforms. The result has been that the reformist parties have rejected the standpoint of reforms and instead become uncritical components of the existing system. However we can argue that the formation of a worker’s party in the present circumstances need not repeat this political history. It is entirely possible that the various trade union leaders involved in a worker’s party would constitute an explicit reformist right-wing. But the mass of the rank and file would have no definite commitment to either reformism or revolution. It would be the task of the Marxists to develop a coherent strategy and politics that could attract support for a revolutionary perspective. This would mean that the mass membership of the workers party could be convinced by coherent arguments of the superiority of a revolutionary approach. But if the forces of Marxism diluted their revolutionary politics in order to relate to the members of the Worker’s party in an opportunist manner, the result could be the consolidation of reformism. What is crucial in relation to the issue of the consolidation of the character of the Workers party is how Marxism interacts with the mass movement. Marxism can adapt to the influence of trade union politics in terms of the promotion of limited demands without explicit revolutionary content, or else it can wage intransigent ideological struggle for the promotion of a principled approach. In the present situation of the radicalisation caused by the austerity measures it is entirely possible that the revolutionary standpoint would prove popular within the Worker’s party.

If a Worker’s party is not formed in the near future the prospect will be that the trade union bureaucracy will remain politically dominant. This will mean that the approach taken towards the task of opposition to the austerity measures will be defensive and unprincipled. The Union militants will continue to consider that the actions taken are inadequate and limited, and so they will possibly become demoralised. The Union leaders will rely on the election of a Labour government in order to uphold the interests of the public sector. This approach is a recipe for the wasting of the potential for mass struggle to oppose the government and the denial of opportunities in relation to creating the conditions for the realisation of an alternative approach to the issue of the economic crisis. The formation of a Worker’s party would provide a tremendous impetus to the prospect of developing mass struggle against the measures of the government. This is why the issue of the political representation of the working class is of tremendous importance. Obviously the formation of the Workers party could create problems such as the consolidation of the influence of trade union politics and the approach of reformism. But there is also the prospect that Marxism could be renewed and its approach towards the economic crisis could acquire mass support within the Workers Party. In other words the formation of the Worker’s party could resolve the protracted crisis of Marxism, and the prospect will be present for the transformation of the Worker’s party into a revolutionary Marxist party. It would be defeatism to argue that this is not possible.

Consequently it would also be defeatist to suggest that the workers party option is not possible because it has not yet come into existence. It is a type of circular reasoning to suggest that what has not yet happened cannot happen. Instead we have to understand that the longstanding hegemony of the Labour party within the Labour movement has undermined any attempt to develop a principled alternative. However the increasing adaptation of the Labour party to the requirements of global capital means that it effectively refuses to oppose the austerity measures of the government. The working class can only oppose the actions of the government by rejecting the opportunist stance of the Labour party in the most emphatic manner. This means that the prospects exist within reality itself to form an alternative to the Labour Party, and this alternative could provide the focus for the development of struggle against the government. The Labour party’s approach and attitude means that it has definitively rejected any sympathy for the aspirations of working people, and so a huge vacuum has been created that can be filled by the development of a Worker’s party. It was necessary to organise a Worker’s party in the past, but this need was obscured by the fact that the regime of the Labour governments occurred in a period of economic boom and an alliance between the government and the trade union leaders. This situation has been replaced by economic crisis, and the increasing strains between the Labour party and the trade union leaders represents an expression of the necessity for the formation of a Worker’s party. The very right-wing decline of the Labour Party indicates that the formation of a Workers party would attract popular appeal.

Consequently, the major focus of agitation should be related to the call for the development of a Worker’s party. But Marxists are also not indifferent in relation to any attempt to develop a Communist party. The DSA will support any principled call for the promotion of a united Communist party. We would also be prepared to contribute towards the programme of this new organisation. Unfortunately the prospects for this development are slim and instead the conditions for the creation of a Worker’s party are more favourable. Hence our major efforts will be located in the attempt to form a Worker’s party and we call upon the trade unions to organise a conference that can establish the organisational procedures required in order to promote this development.

(3)SCOTLAND

The issue of the future of Scotland has become very topical. There is the prospect of a referendum that would decide this future in terms of the possibility of the realisation of some type of self-determination. The DSA would support the aspirations of the people of Scotland for independence. Indeed we would argue that this independent should represent a total break with the institutions of the UK state and so we reject the prospect of autonomy within the UK state as being unprincipled. The possibility of autonomy within a situation of the continued influence of the British monarchy should be rejected as an unacceptable compromise. However the DSA is concerned about the prospects for the unity of the working class in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, and in order to promote unity we would advocate that the people of Scotland remain within the existing Unions and still be prepared to be part of actions organised at the level of the structures of the Unions. Hence we reject the arguments in favour of Scottish based Unions as being nationalist, and this approach would promote the separation of the working class into small units that are not conducive to common action.

The DSA is aware that the unconditional development of a Scottish nation state would be based on capitalism and the domination of the trans-national corporations. This is why we advocate an alternative form of independence, whilst not rejecting the prospect of its likely regrettable capitalist expression. [NOTE - After discussion the DSA decided the word “unconditional” was problematic and instead of that we came to the conclusion that national self-determination for Scotland could have democratic and progressive possibilities in this concrete situation. This also means that we don't support national self-determination in every situation. For example, we would not support the effective independence of Northern Ireland because of the possibilities for it to be discriminatory. END OF NOTE]. The DSA would support the formation of a Scottish Workers Republic. We are aware of the controversy aroused by this demand because it is considered to be a concession to nationalist ideology and the perspective of socialism in one country. However the historical precedents of this demand are principled and were based on the perspective of the promotion of world revolution after the success of the October revolution. The Scottish working class was considered to be a vanguard that was capable of establishing a workers republic that could promote revolution throughout the UK, and be a prelude to international revolution in Europe. But this situation is not present in contemporary Scotland. Instead the bourgeois nationalism of the SNP is hegemonic and the forces of Marxism are demoralised and unprincipled. The likely outcome of the process of movement towards independence is the creation of a state that is based on the political domination of the SNP. In this context we raise the slogan of a workers republic as a propaganda demand that indicates what could be the alternative to independence established in bourgeois democratic terms. We argue for the Scottish Workers Republic in the principled terms of it being the prelude to revolution throughout Britain and the impulse to the formation of the Socialist United States of Europe.

The DSA also calls for independence for the people of Wales is that is the aspiration of the majority, and for the formation of a united Ireland. Our approach is that we do not want to deny the aspirations of people for self-determination, but we strive to relate this demand to the standpoint of socialism and the development of the class struggle. Our support for the demand of self-determination does not mean that we support nationalist ideology, and we reject any attempt to present Scotland or Wales in mystical and idealist terms. Instead our critical support is based on the importance of democracy, but we continually attempt to connect democratic impulses to the struggle for socialism. This is why we raise the demand of a Scottish Workers Republic even though it presently has little chance of realisation because of the limitations of class consciousness and the weaknesses of Marxist organisation. Furthermore we believe that the national question can be ultimately resolved democratically by the advance of the international proletarian revolution. Hence the national diversity of Europe can be reconciled with the perspective of the Socialist United States of Europe.

It is still necessary to discuss whether we should advocate the right of self-determination in all circumstances that it arises as an important issue. Marxists are generally agreed that national self-determination should be supported as part of the struggle against imperialist domination. In this situation the nation can be defined as oppressed and the right of self-determination is important in order to promote the possibility of political independence. But the era of struggle against imperialist domination is generally over in political terms and the present aspiration for self-determination refers to the desire of small units to become separate from the larger state formations of which they are a part. This explains the fragmentation of the Soviet Union into smaller national units and similar developments in Eastern Europe. It could also be considered questionable whether Scotland is dominated by the UK state in an imperialist manner and the aspiration for independence is because of a desire to end the implementation of Tory legislation in Scotland. In these circumstances it could be considered that there is a Marxist argument that the integrity of larger state formations should not be broken up because of the wishes of smaller territorial areas. Bu the logic of this standpoint is a type of imperialist economism that favours the interests of the dominant state formation at the expense of the smaller area. The crucial question is whether there is a democratic impulse for the realisation of national self-determination. IN Scotland we can definitely recognise the importance of a political and democratic impulse for national independence and this has already led to the realisation of autonomy. Hence Marxists can accept the right of self-determination in these circumstances even if we do not energetically advocate the exercise of this right.

In other words, Marxism will often recognise the right of self-determination but also maintain that it should not be exercised. We have good reasons why Scottish independence should not be exercised, such as the progressive character of centralised states and the ability to promote the unity of the working class in the UK state. But these reasons are outweighed by the democratic aspirations within Scotland for national independence, and so this aspiration should be critically supported. This means that we call for the realisation of the maximum amount of democracy possible within the limits of capitalism as the basis of the political structures. This means support for a Constituent Assembly, the creation of a democratic republic, and legislation to enhance the rights of women and any other group traditionally discriminated against within society. The aim of the creation of the democratic republic should be to enhance the prospect of transition to socialism. This is why we call for the introduction of important reforms like a shorter working week and the rights of workers to question the actions of management. We would also call for the formation of a Scottish workers party, which would be an integral part of a UK workers party. In other words, the realisation of Scottish independence could be an opportunity to overcome some of the political limitations of the UK state and to enhance the prospect of the influence of the working class within society.

However we recognise that the most likely situation is the creation of a bourgeois state that is influenced by the role of the transnational corporations. This prospect would mean that Marxists would point out the reactionary consequences of this possibility whilst still supporting the right of self-determination. We would argue that the democratic aspirations of the Scottish people has not been realised by the formation of a bourgeois state that is in a close relationship with powerful economic forces that uphold the process of capital accumulation. The aim of Marxists should be to outline the implications of this contradiction and to struggle to realise consistent democracy by a struggle for socialism. It is entirely possible that because of the radical traditions of the Scottish working class this approach will attract popular support. In this context the pro-bourgeois approach of Scottish nationalism will become discredited. Hence the formation of a Scottish bourgeois republic could become the prelude to the realisation of a Workers republic. But even if this short-term perspective is not realised Marxists should still support the formation of a Scottish republic for democratic reasons.

What Marxists should oppose is any suggestion of Scottish independence on the basis of the continuation of the ultimate influence of the British monarchy and state over aspects of policy such as foreign affairs and defence. This situation would not represent genuine independence and instead the political power of the UK state would remain dominant. Only the formation of a democratic republic would represent genuine independence. This is what Marxism can support within the context of our preference being for the formation of a Scottish workers republic. The creation of the democratic republic should not be the pretext for the dilution of class struggle in the interests of national harmony and instead we should argue that the attempt to realise revolution should be intensified. If the Scottish people did reject independence by means of a genuine referendum we should also respect that decision and elaborate policies for the continuation of the class struggle within the context of the UK state. The point is that it is not the character of national boundaries that is decisive but rather the question of how to develop the political independence and internationalism of the working class. We would not necessarily consider that the result of a referendum was permanent and that the national question could never be raised again, but we would argue that the referendum had resolved the national question for a given period of time. With these qualifications, the DSA would advocate a yes vote for a Scottish democratic republic. We would also reject the attempts of the Coalition government to dictate the character of the question on the future of Scotland and argue that the Scottish Parliament should define how the national issue should be presented. But if the Scottish Parliament advocate the independence of Scotland on the basis of acceptance of the ultimate role of the UK state and monarchy, the DSA would call for a no vote in these circumstances.

In other words in general the DSA is in support of Scottish national independence, but we are not indifferent to events and changing circumstances. This means the call for support of national independence is not unconditional and instead is critical and is related to the level of principles promoted by the major proponents of independence. Consequently the DSA would not support an opportunist attempt to realise self-determination that undermined democracy and the interests of the working class. It would be better to continue with the UK state as presently constituted in preference to supporting a type of independence that upheld separation in a diluted and unprincipled form. This is why a republic is the most principled expression of the aspiration for national independence. We are not concerned with the mystique of nation that is content to retain anachronistic relations with the monarchy, and accepts the economic instruments of the UK state. Thus the wording of the referendum is crucial to deciding the attitude that Marxists should take towards Scottish independence. But it is important to emphasise that if the Scottish Parliament accepts the traditional relationship to the monarchy it will have compromised its own commitment to independence. What is crucial is the question of whether the democratic republic is taken seriously by the representatives of Scottish nationalism. Only political consistency of the Scottish Parliament will ultimately decide the position that Marxist’s can have with regards to the issue of independence.

THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party was described by Lenin as a bourgeois workers party. This meant it had a pro-capitalist perspective but was based on a mass working class support and organisational relation to the trade unions. It could also be argued that this definition includes the commitment of the Labour party to the reform of society in the interests of working people. The 1924 and 1929 Labour governments combined socialist rhetoric with adherence to orthodox thinking about the economy and the necessity of balanced budgets. This approach led to massive public expenditure cuts and the reduction in unemployment benefit. However the Labour party split on these issues and Macdonald led a breakaway that resulted in him becoming the Prime Minister of a Coalition government. If the Labour party had not rebelled it would have proven to be the tame instrument of the bourgeoisie and no longer a bourgeois workers party. Instead the Labour party moved to the left and adopted a left reformist programme involving considerable nationalisation and planning and with the commitment to the transformation of society. However this radicalism did not last very long and the Labour party became involved in the war-time Coalition. The election of the 1945 Labour government enabled it to realise an orthodox Social Democratic programme of important reforms such as the creation of the National Health Service and selective nationalisation of important but declining industries. Hence the labour government combined support for the mixed economy with the creation of the welfare state and class compromise was considered to be the basis of a capitalism that would ultimately evolve into socialism. But the goal of socialism was secondary to the management of the capitalist economy in terms of the implementation of reformist goals. This period indicated that reforms did not have a socialist logic and instead represented the basis to promote the development of capitalism.

The 1960’s and 1970’s was the beginning of the protracted crisis of Social Democracy. A militant working class challenged the policy of wage restraint, and problems with the balance of payments and the stagnation of the economy meant that reformist goals such as the role of state intervention in the economy proved unworkable. In the 1970’s the Labour government’s commitment to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund meant that reformism increasingly was replaced by the primary commitment to the management of the economy in a manner that conformed strictly to the imperatives of capital accumulation. The result was public expenditure cuts and confrontation with the working class over incomes policy. This indicated the historical exhaustion of Social Democracy and the result was the election of a Tory government committed to end the post war consensus based on the role of the welfare state. This challenge led to a brief revival of Social Democracy based on support for left-wing politics. But a heavy election defeat under the leadership of Michael Foot led to his replacement as leader by Neil Kinnock. The result was a transitional period in which the Labour party adapted to the offensive of capital against labour and the demise of the post-war settlement of class compromise. It was increasingly understood that the Labour Party could only be re-elected if it recognised the importance of the measures being taken by the Conservatives. However the Labour party of Neil Kinnock did not establish electoral credibility and he was replaced as leader by John Smith. He acted to assure big business that it had nothing to fear from the prospect of a Labour government.

The major contradiction of this period was that the increasing pragmatic practice of the Labour leadership did not correspond to the effective continuation of important aspects of the traditional Labour party programme such as Clause IV of the Party constitution. Tony Blair, when he became leader of the Party, acted to resolve this contradiction and the result was a policy conference in order to change the wording of Clause IV. This meant the Labour party had rejected the reformist approach of the bourgeois workers party and the related commitment to the mixed economy, and instead had accepted the Neo-liberal agenda introduced by the Conservatives. The explicit goal of socialism was rejected and instead the Third way was adopted based on a commitment to fairness within market capitalism. Consequently the commitment to the welfare state was made compatible with the interests of the market economy and the role of state nationalisation was rejected as an instrument of policy. This standpoint has been apparent during the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown administration. Limited measures of reform like the introduction of tax credits and the minimum wage were introduced, but the basic approach was to allow the unregulated development of finance and industry. This approach was only modified by the nationalisation of banks because of the credit crunch crisis. The election of Gordon Brown as leader did not mean the return to the reformist values of the past and instead it effectively meant a change of style and not substance. What made the Blair administration relatively successful was that boom enabled material concessions to be made to the working class, and the role of credit compensated for the gradual rise of wages. The virtues of the market were enthusiastically supported by what had become New Labour.

It has been argued by many Marxist groups that the Labour party has remained a bourgeois workers party despite the approach of New Labour because of the continued relation to the trade unions. But this ignores the fact that the leaders of the trade unions have not struggled to support reformism and instead have tamely accepted the activity of the Labour government. In other words they have accepted the situation of the explicit support of market capitalism by New Labour in return for minimal influence. The inability of the trade union leaders to defend the interests of their members was motivated by the view that any disagreement with the government could promote the return of the Tories. Consequently the sociological character of the Labour party was not altered and it was still based on the trade union link, but it was radically changed in relation to ideology, policy and its explicit rejection of reformism. Tony Blair has often had a greater affinity with conservatives of other countries than with Social Democrats and his support for George Bush concerning intervention into Iraq was a logical expression of the transformation of the Labour Party into a political instrument of the forces of global capitalism. In contrast, Harold Wilson had avoided intervention into Vietnam because of the views of Labour party members, but Blair was an enthusiastic supporter of the aims of Bush. Blair developed an ideology of intervention in order to justify contemporary imperialist interventionism.

It has been argued by some that the election of Ed Miliband has meant the return of the Labour party to its old values, and so the period represented by New Labour was temporary. But there is nothing to validate this suggestion. Miliband has done nothing to challenge the policy of the recent past and has defined the Labour party as a party of business. His only suggestion of change is a vague commitment to the ethical regulation of capitalism. This standpoint is entirely vacuous but it is an ideological device to try and inspire support for his leadership within the Labour Party. But the main thing that vindicates the reactionary character of the Labour party is the commitment not to promise to reverse any of the cuts of the Coalition government’s austerity measures. This shows in relation to the practice of the class struggle that the standpoint of the present Labour Party is entirely compatible with the interests of capitalism and oppose to the interests of the working class. It is also important to recognise that the left-wing of the Labour party is historically weak and unable to challenge effectively the approach of the Labour leaders. In this context, the only expression of the standpoint of reformism is the trade unions, and the situation is favourable for a break with the Labour party and the creation of an alternative workers party.

Arguments have developed on the left in relation to the question of the relationship of the Labour party to the various anti-cuts campaigns. It is not democratically permissible to exclude various Labour party members and councillors from the anti-cuts organisations, but it would be expected that as members of these groups they would consistently support the policy of opposition to the austerity measures. If they refused to support this principled standpoint the case could then be made for their exclusion from the various campaigns.