STALINISM AND SOCIALISM

The conception of the character of the Soviet Union has often been developed by many Marxists. But this understanding has generally not been compared to the various interpretations of the USSR that have been made by people who are not sympathetic to Marxism. Hence the aim of this article is to try and develop this type of comparison of a Marxist and an anti-Marxist understanding of the character of the USSR. Archie Brown has outlined in his ‘Rise and Fall of Communism’ (Vintage books, London 2009) what could be considered to be a critical understanding of the attempt to develop socialism in the USSR. Brown suggests that Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks was always motivated by an elitist conception of the objective to establish a process of successful socialist revolution. Hence the development of the October revolution led by the Bolsheviks meant: “Although 7 November entered history as the day of the successful Bolshevik revolution, in many respects it was more of a coup than a revolution. It supplanted the regime that had been established as a result of the earlier (February) revolution, which had initially commanded widespread support. At the time they seized power, the Bolsheviks were not the most popular party in Russia. This was made abundantly clear by elections for the Constituent Assembly, which were held in December 1917. The Bolsheviks had earlier in the year supported, for propaganda purposes, the holding of these elections, and allowed them to go ahead. The SR’s won 299 seats compared with the Bolsheviks 168. Of the other parties, the Left SRs with 39, the Mensheviks with 18, and the Kadet’s with 17 were the largest. When the Constituent Assembly opened on 18 January the Bolsheviks broke it up. Its first day was its last.” (p51-52) Therefore it is being suggested that the Bolsheviks represented an authoritarian type of administration that was opposed to the genuine expression of the role of democracy. There claim to be the party of the workers had become the basis to justify the domination of a party elite and the denial of the expression of the role of a credible form of democracy. But the problem was that it was not possible to reconcile the competing claims of legitimacy that was being made by the Soviets and Constituent Assembly. The issue was that the Constituent Assembly did not recognise the political legitimacy of the role of the Soviets and so effectively suggested that the Soviet government should accept the more important political expression of governmental power that was implied by this parliamentary institution. In other words, the Soviet government was being asked to subordinate its influence to the apparently more democratic institution of the Constituent Assembly. There was a conflict of interest between two rival political institutions. Essentially the Soviets were being asked to subordinate themselves to the role of the Constituent Assembly. But this development would have meant the end of the supremacy of the Soviets, or the reversal of the gains of a popular revolution which aspired to advance the aim of the achievement of socialism. Brown suggests that Kautsky was right to suggest that the Bolsheviks had undermined the expression of the principles of democracy in order to uphold the realisation of the objective of their primary political power. But it could be argued that the Bolsheviks had an importance because they represented the majority support of the workers as expressed in the character of the Soviets. It was this connection which enabled the revolutionary process to occur in a successful manner. In this context the Constituent Assembly was a potential expression of opposition to this development of the role of the Soviets. However, it could be suggested that this dissolving of the Constituent Assembly did result in the effective justification of the political supremacy of the Bolsheviks because of this apparent emphasis on the importance of the Soviets as being the most important expression of the role of the revolutionary regime. But it could also be suggested that these developments did not mean the undermining of the importance of the aspect of Soviet democracy because this very aspect was connected to this expression of the primary political role of the workers as represented by the politics of the Bolsheviks.

However, this development is not considered to be a genuine expression of the principles of democracy by Brown. Instead he suggests that Kautsky was right to suggest that Bolshevism was based on the rejection of the role of democracy: “As Kautsky had noted, the Bolsheviks had begun calling themselves Communists in 1918. From that time onwards the gulf between socialists who accepted the principles of democracy and Communists who rationalized dictatorship in the name of the class power of the proletariat grew even wider.” (p52) But the point was that Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not consider that there was a contradiction between the aspect of dictatorship and democracy. Instead, they suggested that the dictatorship of the proletariat would be expressed in terms of the democratic role of the Soviets. However, this perspective it could be suggested was based on the minimisation of the importance of the role of the vanguard revolutionary party. The fact was that the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat was based on the importance role of the Bolsheviks, who were considered to be the principled expression of this system. But what is not explained is how the workers could ensure that their relationship to the Bolsheviks was one of democratic accountability. In other words, it could be suggested that what Lenin was ultimately justifying was the absolute power of the revolutionary party over society. Hence the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be envisaged in another other manner. This situation meant that the principled character of the regime could only be guaranteed as long as the party continued to express the interests of the workers in a principled manner. But it could also be suggested that the very primary political power of the party could result in a situation of absolute domination which would mean the principles of democracy would become compromised. Hence the aspect of genuine democracy could only be expressed as long as the party was able to express the interests of the workers and peasants in a principled manner. But the very aspect of absolute power could result in a situation in which the party began to misuse its situation and so acted as an expression of the development of new forms of domination within society. Lenin was aware of this problem, but it could be suggested that he did not develop policies that could effectively tackle this issue. Hence the continuation of the democratic and popular character of the regime depended on the integrity of the role of the party. However, Brown implies that the Bolsheviks never had satisfactory answers to these types of problems and so the possible misuse of the role of power was inherent in the supreme role of the revolutionary party. But it could also be suggested that problems were caused by the opposition of the other parties to the role of the Bolsheviks and so because it of this polarised situation it was not possible to establish aspects of the role of an effective multi-party democracy. Indeed, Brown implies that this development was inevitable because the Bolsheviks contrasted the primary importance of the aspect of dictatorship when compared to the role of democracy. But in actuality the Bolsheviks did not consider that there was a contradiction between these aspects and instead suggested that the political supremacy of the workers could be expressed by the importance of Soviet democracy. In this context the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly was justified because it was opposed to the role of Soviet democracy rather than the aspect of the important role of the revolutionary party. However, critics of the Bolsheviks would suggest that the aim of one-party dictatorship was being justified in the name of the role of the Soviets. This is effectively the view of Brown. But we would contend that there was no logical reason why the primary importance of the Soviets should mean the logical undermining of the role of democracy. Instead, the ultimate problem was the development of a situation in which the role of a single and dominant political party became an expression of the system. But this was the outcome of important economic problems and the civil war which could not necessarily have been anticipated. Hence the initial aim of the Bolsheviks was to develop a system based on genuine economic and political democracy of the people. Thus, it was adverse circumstances that led to a situation in which this perspective was undermined and increasingly replaced by the empirical justification of a system of bureaucratic rule. It could not be suggested that this development was the outcome of the system and was instead the result of unfavourable circumstances. The initial perspective which was based on the influence of Lenin’s ‘State and Revolution’ envisaged a system of genuine participatory economic and political democracy. It was primarily the adverse circumstance of civil war that led to the undermining of the possibility to realise this perspective. Hence it is questionable whether it can be credibly suggested that the Bolsheviks expressed an inherent authoritarian and elitist logic.

This point is also indicated by the fact that the opposition to the Bolshevik regime was not based on the expression of the principles of democracy but was instead motivated by the attempt to restore the elitist Tsarist type regime. In other words, the opposition to the Bolsheviks was motivated by the attempt to restore the autocratic form of society and was not in any manner based on an expression of the principles of democracy. Instead, only the Bolsheviks supported the role of democracy in terms of their adherence to the importance of the soviets and the connected commitment to the participation of the people in the organisation of society and the economy. Only the Bolsheviks were committed to the objective of establishing workers management of the economy and the increased involvement of the peasants in the organisation of cooperative forms of production. In contrast the opposition expressed a nostalgic support for the role of Tsarism and the importance of a society based on the supremacy of an aristocratic elite. It could be argued that the expression of soviet democracy was never consistently realised, but the importance of government by the Bolsheviks was necessary in order to oppose the possibility for the restoration of a counterrevolutionary type of regime. In this context the workers tended to support the Soviet government and to recognise that the only alternative would be the restoration of an aristocratic regime. Hence there was never the possibility that a democratic system based on the role of a capitalist economy could be realised. Instead, the choice was between the Soviet regime based on the primary role of the Bolsheviks or instead the restoration of an elitist type of aristocratic regime. The type of democracy that was practiced in Western Europe was never an option for Russian society after the revolution. Instead, the major issue was about how to realise democracy in a consistent manner in the post-revolutionary regime. But there was a major problem concerning the realisation of this objective because the development of a situation of economic decline and political upheaval meant that the possibility to establish stability would become connected to the role of the revolutionary party in being able to realise this aim. This situation was not problematical as long as the party was able to represent the interests of the workers and peasants in a consistent manner. But this situation of the party acting on behalf of the people could only be a temporary situation because the long-term expression of this situation would mean that the party could develop its distinct interests that could undermine the possibility to establish a democratic socialist society. Lenin was aware of the problems that could be posed by this development. He was aware that what was the party state could evolve in terms of developing its own interests. But he does not seem to have elaborated a conception of the revival of soviet democracy in order to try and overcome the development of this tendency towards bureaucratic elitism. Instead, he outlined concern about the problems of the dominant political power of the Bolsheviks. In other words, there was an awareness that the aspect of supreme political domination of the party could create the possibility of the utilisation of political power in an authoritarian manner. However, Brown rejects this understanding about the character of Lenin’s politics and instead contends that Lenin’s approach was essentially to promote the consolidation of the power of the party elite over society. But was Lenin’s emphasis on the role of the party was connected to the objective of facilitating the possibility to enhance the participation of the people in the organisation of the economics and politics of society. It could be argued that there was a contradiction in his approach and that the apparent contradictory aspects of democracy and the role of the dominant party was never resolved. But it would be questionable to suggest that Lenin’s conscious aim was to establish the long-term supremacy of the party as an elite that should inherently organise and supervise society. Instead, the role of the party was to facilitate the development of economic and political democracy. In this context the unavoidable aspects of the domination of the party were only a temporary situation that was necessary in order to create the conditions for the development of a more effective form of soviet democracy and the participation of the people in the organisation of society.

But Brown contends that Lenin’s opposition to the aims of the Communist Left opposition was an indication that he was reluctant to support the demands for a society based on popular economic and political democracy. However, did this opposition mean that Lenin was against the principles of democratic socialism? Instead, it could be suggested that Lenin believed that a period of economic and social development was necessary in order to develop the economic and political conditions that would enable the workers to be able to organise the role of the economy in an effective manner. He was never against the aspect of the role of one-man management of the enterprises being connected to the influence of the workers within the process of production. Indeed, the accountability of the managers to the producers would be a necessary aspect of the development of the economy. In other words, there had to be an expression of interaction between the aspect of the expertise of the managers combined with the democratic influence of the role of the producers. In this manner the aspect of democracy would be connected to the objectives of achieving economic development in the most effective manner. However, it has to be questioned whether this possible situation could be reconciled with the continuation of an effective expression of the monopoly of political power of the Bolsheviks. At a certain point the expression of economic democracy would result in the development of demands to end the one-party domination of the Bolsheviks and to restore a system of multi-party democracy. However, these issues were never resolved and instead the development of the Stalin regime resulted in the consolidation of the one-party regime. In a formal manner the Stalinist regime seemed to be the continuation of the role of the Leninist state and the establishment of the supremacy of the party. But it could be suggested that this formal similarity also expressed an important difference. This is because it is possible to maintain that the Leninist regime was an elite political system that still attempted to act on behalf of the workers and peasants. This point was expressed by the fact that it was accepted that the economic approach of war communism had become unsatisfactory and was no longer able to realise the aspirations of the workers and peasants, and so it was necessary to adopt an alternative of the New Economic Policy that utilised the role of material incentives in order to increase the production of the workers and peasants. In other words, despite the aspects of bureaucracy and elitism it could also be suggested that in the last analysis the party government was responsive to realising the aspirations of the workers and peasants. Hence, whilst the party government was a form of bureaucratic elitism it was also in some limited but important sense responsive to trying to realise the interest of the workers and peasants. In this manner it could be suggested that the character of the social formation under Lenin’s leadership represented a type of deformed or bureaucratic worker’s state. This society was not a genuine worker’s state based on the expression of popular democracy and the accountability of the government to the workers and peasants, but in a bureaucratic and elitist manner it still tried to uphold and realise the interests of the people. There was no genuine alternative to this development because in political terms the various opposition parties represented the potential for the restoration of capitalism. Instead, the revolutionary party in a bureaucratic and elitist manner still attempted to uphold and realise the economic and political interests of the workers and peasants. The leadership of Lenin and Trotsky was an expression of this situation, and it could be suggested that given the unfavourable economic situation there was no progressive alternative. Indeed, Lenin and Trotsky were aware of the unsatisfactory aspect of this situation, and this is why they promoted the aim of world revolution in order to develop the possibility to establish a more democratic and prosperous society within the Soviet Union. However, Brown considers that this approach was essentially an expression of elitism and that the Bolsheviks were expressing their sense of superiority about ruling society. Hence: ‘Only the communist party could be in the vanguard of the proletariat, for otherwise the ‘working masses’ would fail to resist ‘petty-bourgeois wavering’s’ and fall prey to their ‘trade union prejudices’. (Brown p58) But this is a caricature of the approach of Lenin, which did not represent this form of elitism. Instead, it was suggested by Lenin that the role of the party is to encourage the development of the participation of the people in the organisation of the economy and society. It could be argued that this approach was problematical because the party still insists on its dominant position within society in order to be able to supervise what is considered to be the most principled and practical manner for the development of socialism. But this contradiction is resolved by the fact that the party attempts to encourage the initiative of the workers and peasants to be able to develop their capacity to organise the economy and society in general. Hence the party attempts to facilitate the possibility for the self-organisation of the social formation in terms of the development of the participation of the people in the creation of a successful economy and political system. It could be suggested that this aim is contradictory because the dominant role of the party is assumed as being necessary in order to achieve the objective of the creation of an effective socialist society. But this very role of the party is connected to the attempt to encourage the participation and importance of the people in the organisation of the economy and political structures. However, there is an obvious problem with this approach in that the dominant role of the revolutionary party is not being questioned by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. But they would suggest that this hegemonic aspect of the activity of the party is necessary in order to encourage the development of the ability of the workers and peasants to be able to organise society. The major objection to this perspective is that the dominant role of the revolutionary party is assumed to be a constant aspect of the situation and so this aspect does not contradict the possibility for the workers to be able to freely express their opinions and to be able to organise society in an effective manner. Hence the role of the party is that it is based on the promotion of the capacity of the workers to organise society in a popular and democratic manner. This was the aim of the Bolsheviks under Lenin and so it could be suggested that the very aspect of the dominant role of the party was considered to be compatible with the development of the organisation of society by the people in a democratic manner.

However, Brown considers that this objective was unrealistic. He comments: “The ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was also a misnomer. The proletariat as a whole could not dictate. It was the communist party which did this in the name of the proletariat. The party leadership simply assumed that they represented the will of the workers – or at least, their ‘real will’, if only they recognised where their true interests lay – and substituted itself for the real proletariat. For a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to be compatible with even a minimal notion of democracy, one would have to assume, first, that the proletariat constituted an absolute majority of the population, which in the USSR of the 1920’s was far from being the case…and second, that within the proletariat itself there were no real and persistent differences of opinion, something that has never been true in Russia or anywhere else. The notion of unity of opinion within any working class, however sociologically defined, is scarcely less fanciful than the idea that a universal consensus of opinion would be achieved in the communist society of the future.” (p62) But this dogmatic view denies the possibility that majority opinions cannot be developed that would enable decisions to be made about how to develop and sustain the role of a socialist economy and society. The aspect of the popular participation of the people would enable consensus to be developed that would enable a socialist government to act in a democratic and popular manner. But instead of recognition of this possibility Brown is suggesting that a type of popular democracy is not a practical and credible expression of a functioning socialist society. But in actuality the role of the soviets was an indication that it was possible to develop the possibility for a genuine type of democracy as the basis of the political system of socialism. Indeed, the expression of an effective form of democracy would mean that the connection between this aspect and the aim of achieving a socialist society was being achieved.

But the increasingly authoritarian and elitist measures of Stalin indicated that a process of the possibility to develop a genuine type of socialist society had been ended. Instead, Stalin introduced the authoritarian approach of collectivisation of agriculture and the end of any influence of the producers within the economy. This meant that the possibility to advance the realisation of objectives connected to a credible form of socialism had been ended. However, Bukharin upheld a plausible conception of an economic policy for a socialist society based on the cooperation between the workers and peasants in the development of the economy. The approach of the New Economic Policy should have been continued in order to ensure that the level of prosperity of the workers and peasants was the basis for the development of what was a genuine socialist type of society. This alternative indicated what was genuine socialism and so indicated that the approach of Stalin had nothing in common with the objectives of socialism. Instead, Stalin effectively promoted the process of the intensification of state control over the economy so that the workers had to develop production in order to create a surplus for the elite and new managerial class. Indeed, Brown defines this system as communist in order to differentiate it from genuine socialism, in that there was not genuine participation and involvement of the workers in the taking of decisions about how to organise the economy and instead as labour they were subordinated to the objectives of a centralised economic system. Brown defines this system as communism in order to differentiate it from genuine democratic socialism. But we would suggest that it would be more accurate to define this system as a bureaucratic social formation in which the party elite would supervise a process of the extraction of a surplus from the workers and peasants in terms of their domination of the relations of production. This development represented a situation of the role of a counter-revolution in which the bureaucratic workers state, which in some limited manner attempted to express the aims of the workers and peasants, had been replaced by a more reactionary and elitist type of social formation. In this situation the party elite had developed into a distinct stratum that attempted to impose its objectives onto society via the role of the dictatorship of Stalin. It is quite possible that the party still ideologically believed that this situation was the expression of the role of a genuine socialist society, but the actual practice of the elite in economic and political terms indicated that their priority was to try and establish a consolidation of domination over society. In this context there was no possibility to realise the economic and political democracy of the producers. Instead, the workers and peasants had to act in accordance with the objectives established by the party and managerial elite.

Trotsky defined this type of society as a degenerated workers state because of the importance of a nationalised economy. But the problem with this definition is that it is based on an apparent denial of the importance of the subordination of the workers within the relations of production. In contrast Brown utilises the term communism to define the Stalinist system, but this seems to transform the conception of communism as a definition of a new type of emancipatory society into an ideological justification of the role of a society based on the domination of the party elite. We would suggest that this definition is problematical because the concept of communism is essentially coherent when it refers to the objective of trying to achieve an emancipatory alternative to capitalism. In other words, the attempt to establish the domination of a bureaucratic elite over society cannot have anything in common with the emancipatory character of the aim of communism. This means there is a contradiction between the definition of the supreme political power as communist and its actual practice which is to uphold the subordination of the producers within the economy and society. Instead, it is necessary to establish the role of a different definition which can more accurately describe the character of the social formation. We would suggest that the term bureaucratic collectivist is more credible because it indicates the role of the party elite in the organisation of a new type of exploitative society that is based on the subordination of the producers within the system. It is correct that this situation is justified in terms of the ideology of socialism and communism. But we would suggest that this understanding is only credible if socialism is defined in terms of the expression of the domination within society of the communist party elite. The role of the party is defined as the expression of socialism, and so the aspect of the importance of the participation of the people in the organisation of the economy and society is effectively being ignored. It is true that the party elite may have considered that this system was socialist, but in practice their domination had to be based on the subordination of the producers within the economy and society in general.

It is quite possible that the party elite believed that the society they were attempting to create was a genuine expression of society. But this only indicated that there was a difference between theory and practice. In terms of the actual situation the workers and peasants were being subordinated to imperatives in economic terms that were not based on the expression of genuine democratic values. This meant society could not be socialist and instead the only matter of dispute was about how to define the character of the social formation. Furthermore, the imposition of systematic state repression in the 1930’s indicated that society was not based on the expression of democratic and accountability to the people. Instead, the only expression of political power was the dictatorship of Stalin. Brown can only define this system as communist because he rejects any credibility to the Marxist conception of communism and instead implies that such a type of social formation can be connected to the domination of a party elite. But we would suggest that the Marxist understanding of communism as an emancipatory society is the most credible and that this definition is able to establish the difference between this objective and the empirical situation of the domination of the Stalinist elite. In ideological terms it is correct that the Stalinists suggested that socialism was being built in one country, but the supremacy of an elite within the relations of production was an indication of the false character of this claim. It could be suggested that this was bureaucratic socialism, but this would imply that socialism can be made compatible with a system based on exploitation and domination. Instead, the only issue was whether a new type of capitalism was being developed or was the USSR an expression of what could be defined as bureaucratic collectivism. We would suggest that the lack of the role of what would represent a capitalist class was an indication that a new system of exploitation and domination was being established. In ideological terms this situation was justified as the creation of socialism, but there was a contradiction between theory and practice. In actuality the supremacy of the Communist party was connected to the end of any expression of the importance of the workers within the relations of production. Instead, the dynamism of the workers was subordinated to economic aims established by a new dominant class within the relations of production. In ideological terms this aspect was justified as the creation of socialism. Only the origin of the regime in what had been an authentic proletarian revolution could explain the difference between theory and practice. If the regime had openly suggested that it was presiding over a new type of exploitation it would have been discredited and the development of popular opposition to the system would have been generated. Instead, by defining the system as socialist the domination of the communist party could be justified as being both progressive and necessary. However, Trotsky’s definition of the USSR as a degenerated workers state does not seem credible because this seems to deny the importance of the aspect of the subordination of the producers within the relations of production. But, in contrast the conception of state capitalism also seems to ignore the ideological importance of the definition of the USSR as socialist by the party elite. In other words, if the aspects of theory and practice are to be reconciled it is necessary to indicate the specific and still exploitative character of the relations of production of the USSR. This type of definition is most convincingly expressed by the term bureaucratic collectivist. However, this term is not entirely satisfactory because it ignores the importance of the aspect of ideology which is expressed by the attempt to justify the character of the USSR as socialist. Hence it might be more credible to define the USSR as bureaucratic socialist, if we also understand that this type of system is based on the exploitation of the producers within the relations of production. In contrast the definition by Brown of the USSR as communist would seem to be based on an explicit rejection of the view of Marx that this type of society would be an expression of a genuine classless society. Instead, the ideology of the Stalinist party is being considered to be a direct expression of the character of the social formation and so there is no recognition of the difference between ideology and actual economic and political practice of the elite. The party elite claim to be creating socialism and communism, but in practice they are developing a different society based on the exploitation of the producers.

Brown suggests that the character of the Stalinist system was based on the domination of the communist party which presided over the role of a command economy, which was defined as socialism. It is also necessary to connect to this understanding the lack of the importance of democracy and that instead the system was based on the imposition of the domination of the party in an absolutist manner. The primary role of the party was justified in terms of the perspective that it was attempting to lead the development of a social process that would result in the creation of a communist society: “The final goal was the justification for all the toil and hardship that might be encountered along the way. Once that goal was abandoned, communist regimes were in danger of being judged - and found wanting – on the basis of their capacity to deliver more immediate results. Without that goal of communism, the ‘leading role’ of the party would become far harder to legitimise. The moment leaders were to come clean on the fact that their aspirations were for more mundane improvements and that communism was a mythical heaven on earth, communist parties could no longer be perceived as the possessors of sacred truth, and political religion would give way to secularisation.” (p111) But the standpoint of the communist parties was not simply this conception of self-justification. Instead, they had to believe that the role of the party was to facilitate the possibility of the realisation of socialism and communism. Their leadership was vital if the successful attainment of socialism and communism was to be achieved and developed. In other word the ideology was elitist in that only the party could develop a programme that would achieve the liberation of the workers and peasants. The Leninist character of the party would ensure that the perspective of socialism and communism became expressed and realised. But Brown is indecisive about whether the role of the communist party is able to develop a feasible socialist society and instead defines the system in terms of the hegemony of the Marxist organisation. He therefore utilises the conception of communism in order to ambiguously suggest that a democratic socialist society was not created, but that capitalism was still replaced by an alternative system that he defines as communism. But this definition makes nonsense of the Marxist conception of communism which is based on the understanding that a genuine classless society is created without the aspect of exploitation within the relations of production. The point is that whilst capitalism and a market economy had been replaced by an alternative it was not possible to define this as socialism and communism because these types of society have to be based on the expression of the capacity of the producers to be able to define the objectives and character of the economy and political system. Hence the ideology of socialism was actually a justification of the actual aspect of the domination of society by the role of a privileged elite. The workers and peasants remained in a subordinated and exploited position within the relations of production and instead the generation of a surplus was under the control of what was a new ruling class. This society could not be defined as socialist. Instead, socialism was an ideology that was utilised in order to justify the domination of a communist party that had originally been socialist. It was not possible for this party to openly justify the new system because this would amount to the recognition that the party had betrayed its original aims and had instead become the expression of a new ruling class. Instead, its domination had to be based on the advocating of a false doctrine that a classless communist society was being created. There was a contradiction between the ideology and the practices of the ruling elite in order to uphold its domination and to therefore undermine the development of discontent within society. But Brown does not seem to recognise these contradictions. Instead in a vague manner he implies that the system was communist because the ruling elite defined the objectives of their rule in this manner. In actuality this aspect was necessary in order to try and gloss over the fact that the ruling elite had betrayed the original socialist objectives of the revolutionary process. It was necessary to suggest that socialism was being built in order to justify the rule of a privileged elite that in practice upheld the development of a new system of exploitation in economic terms.

However, Brown has to reject this understanding because in practice he cannot consider socialism in terms that are not related to the development of an authoritarian Stalinist type of system. But in practice Stalin had to oppress the Bukharin and Trotsky factions within the Bolshevik party in order to establish his political supremacy. He had to carry out a process of counter-revolution in order to undermine the importance of the alternative conceptions of socialism which were based on the understanding of the necessity to create a worker and peasant alliance in order to realise this progressive objective. However, because Stalin was still part of the communist party, he had to justify his essentially anti-socialist objectives as being an expression of the genuine aim to construct a socialist type of society. But the political integrity of Bukharin and Trotsky meant that they were the most faithful proponents of a genuine socialism. In other words, the ambitious programme of Stalin for political domination could only be expressed in terms of the formal ideology of socialism. But in practice he was developing a type of society that had nothing in common with the objectives of socialism. The aspect of the exploitation of the producers within the economic system meant that in practice there was a contradiction between this situation when compared to the role of the formal ideology of socialism. But Stalin could not admit to this situation because it would have meant an acceptance of the fact that he had betrayed the principles of Bolshevism. Instead, he had to suggest that his domination of the party was an expression of the objective of creating socialism and communism. But the lack of credibility of this claim was expressed in the fact that in order to establish his domination within the party and society he had to reject the alternative programmes for the development of socialism that were expressed by Bukharin and Trotsky. It could be argued that there may have been practical problems with their approach concerning the development of socialism, but we cannot doubt the sincerity with which they attempted to justify their perspectives. Instead, Stalin was motivated by the ambition of personal power, and this meant the aim of socialism was subordinated to the realisation of this individualist objective. In other words, socialism became an ideological formality and what was important was the consolidation of the political power of the Stalin elite. In practice this meant the development of an authoritarian type of economy which was connected to the expression of the economic and political power of the party led by Stalin. Formally, this situation could be defined as the construction of socialism, because Stalin could not openly accept that he had betrayed the aims of the revolution. But in terms of the character of the relations of production it was based on the consistent extraction of a surplus from the workers and peasants. This development could only be defined as socialism because in formal terms the Bolsheviks were still the major party in the social system. But in practice the character of the party had changed because it was no longer genuinely concerned to create socialism and communism and instead was about the development of a new system of exploitation in which the role of the party was dominant. Stalin could not openly admit to this development because it would express the admission that the aims of the revolutionary process had been betrayed. Instead, a system of the exploitation of the producers had to be conceived as the expression of the development of a socialist economy. In this context the role of the party was unconvincingly conceived as the expression of the aims and objectives of socialism. In this formal context there was a formal connection between Stalinism and socialism because the party leadership could not openly admit that the objectives of the revolution had been betrayed. Instead, a false conception of the creation of a socialist type of society had to be defended in order to suggest that the leading role of the party was still a necessary and principled expression of the aims of a post-revolutionary social formation.

Therefore, the view of Brown that a communist society was being created is an effective denial of the ideology of the Stalinist regime that maintained that socialism was being created in order to establish the conditions that would make communism possible. In the sense that the system of capitalism had been replaced with an alternative this perspective seemed to have been accurate. But in actuality the workers and peasants had no significant economic power and instead had to act in conformity with the objectives established by the party and managerial elite. The fact that the production of commodities for a market had been ended was an indication that the system was no longer capitalist but there was still a situation of the subordination of the role of labour to the mangers and the party elite in order to create a surplus and establish a process of accumulation of wealth. Hence the system could not be defined as communist, except in the ideological terms that the party elite claimed to be creating a system that would realise communism. But this perspective implied that the part leaders considered that their domination of the economy and society was necessary in order to overcome capitalism and establish the basis of socialism and communism. Hence it was suggested that the party had an inherent capacity to establish the possibility to achieve a different type of society without economic exploitation and inequality. Only the party knew how to establish the possibility to realise the aspirations of the workers and peasants for the formation of an egalitarian society. But in actuality the party was in a situation of supreme economic and political domination and because of this situation the workers and peasants were subordinated to the objectives established by the party elite. Therefore, for Brown to define this system as communist is based on a rejection of the understanding that this aim is based on the end of all forms of exploitation and domination. Hence the actuality of the imposition of a situation of economic domination of a new elite meant that the issue was not that socialism was being created and the conditions for communism were advanced, but instead what type of system of domination had been established. The effective end to capitalism meant that what had been established was a new system of economic exploitation, and this was ideologically justified as being a form of socialism. Hence there was a contradiction between the role of ideology and the actual economic practices, but this difference was necessary in order to deny the view that the elite had betrayed the initial objectives of the revolution of 1917. In other words, the political legitimacy of the regime had to be based on the understanding that it was the continuation of the values and aims of the October revolution. Hence a contradiction between theory and practice had to become the expression of the character of the Stalinist regime. In theory it was claimed that socialism was being crated but this standpoint was not connected to any expression of the popular participation of the workers and peasants in the creation of that type of society. In other words, the communist party was the primary expression of the view that socialism was being created, and this standpoint implied that the role of the workers and peasants was not a sufficient aspect of the realisation of this aim. Instead, the party had become the exclusive agency of the promotion of the attainment of these socialist objectives. However, formally this approach was still denied in terms of a continued emphasis that the people were involved in the creation of this type of society. In other words, there had to be a contradiction between theory and practice in order to justify the rule of the party which was considered to be the expression of the aspirations of the people to create socialism. Hence the elite role of the party was justified because this was based on the interests of the workers and peasants in the development of a socialist society. The party was the expression of the aspirations of the people to create a post-capitalist society. But in actuality there was a necessary contradiction between theory and practice. This was because the theory of the emphasis on the objective of socialism could only be practically expressed in terms of the dominating role of the party, and in this manner the workers and peasants could only act in terms of this objective by supporting the programme of the revolutionary organisation. In other words, the formally dominant class could only act in a progressive manner by supporting the polices of the party. The workers had to be subordinated to the communist party in order to achieve socialism. In this manner the connection between the objectives of socialism and an authoritarian political system was established. But the contradiction of the system was that socialism could not be created in these terms, and so this meant socialism was not established which could become the basis of communism. Instead, a nationalised economy would mean the control of the process of productive activity in terms of the imperatives established by a bureaucratic elite. The only question was what type of system based on exploitation and subordination had been created. This meant the ideology of the system was only formal and instead the actual situation was expressed by new relations of domination and subordination. Hence socialism and communism could not be created.

Brown contends that the system was communist. He indicates the various aspects of a communist society. Firstly, the monopoly of political power of the communist party: “Indeed, this was what ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ meant in practice since it was the party which dictated policy in the name of the proletariat.” (p106) But this situation could not mean the effective expression of communism because instead a society was being created in which the interests of the party instead of that of the workers and peasants was of primary importance. Hence the classless society of the general conception of communism was not being created and instead the actual issue was what new type of system of domination was being realised in relation to this dominant role of what had become an elitist communist party. Indeed, Brown indicates that the various communist parties justified the principles of democratic centralism which was a type of political ideology and practice that enabled the elite leadership of the various organisations to have a dominant role. But such a situation of the supremacy of an elite could not be expressed in terms of the importance of genuine democracy which would be part of a genuine communist system. Instead, Brown can only justify the equation of Stalinist societies with communism in terms of the importance of the ideology of these organisations to establish a system that was post-capitalist. But the point is that if the perspective of communism is to have any genuine meaning it must mean the expression of an emancipatory system that is a genuine progressive alternative to capitalism. To define the authoritarian domination of society by the party elite with communism is to effectively deny the theoretical importance of this aim which had been established by Marx and Lenin. Instead, the concept of communism is considered to be the expression of the domination of society by the Stalinist party. The fact that this situation cannot result in the creation of a communist society as defined by Marx and Lenin is not evaluated by Brown. Instead, the economic and political practices of Stalinism is understood to be an expression of communism. Hence the aim of communism is defined as being nothing more than the economic and political practice of an authoritarian Stalinist party. Thus, it is suggested that communism cannot be realised in any different manner. Instead, the economic and political practices of the Stalinist governments is sufficient to indicate the expression of communism. This conclusion actually ignores the fact that the various Stalinist administrations claimed to be building socialism and had not yet realised communism. But we would contend that this situation cannot express the creation of communism because the domination of a party elite can only result in the development of a new system of economic and political privilege. In other words, Marx is still correct to suggest that only the importance of the genuine revolutionary activity of the workers can establish the basis to realise socialism and communism. But the Stalinist degeneration of the Bolsheviks meant that this revolutionary character of the situation in the Soviet Union was undermined and replaced with the rule of a new economic and political elite. This development cannot be defined as the expression of communism unless the definition of this perspective is to be completely changed. Indeed this is what Brown has carried out in order to justify the view that the aim of communism was being realised under the leadership of Stalinism.

Brown considers that the aspects of a communist system are based on firstly the political domination of a communist party. This is connected to the role of democratic centralism which explains the aspect of the organisation of the party, which generally justifies the domination of a dictator. In economic terms: “The third defining feature of a consolidated communist system is non-capitalist ownership of the means of production, and linked to this is the fourth – the dominance of a command economy, as distinct from a market economy.” (p108) This aspect is connected to the aim of creating communism and the ultimate objective is that the USSR is part of a world communist movement that aims to replace international capitalism with world communism. But the point is that to describe this situation of the effective authoritarian role of the Soviet communist party with communism because it is establishing a command economy and ending the domination of capitalism is problematical. Marx, Lenin, Kautsky, and Luxemburg, had established that a genuine post-revolutionary society would involve the importance of popular participatory democracy in economic and political terms. But the character of Stalinism did not correspond to any of their conceptions of a democratic socialist system. Instead, it was based on the justification of an authoritarian regime that upheld the importance of the subordination of the workers and peasants to a party and managerial elite. In this context the objective of principled and authentic socialism could only be justified in terms of opposition to the Stalinist domination of the Soviet Union. An authoritarian regime could not in any genuine manner advance the realisation of the aims of socialism. Instead, the only manner in which socialism could be advanced was by the replacement of the domination of the Stalinist party in the USSR with the genuine revival of the Soviet system. However, Brown upholds an alternative view that effectively defines communism as an authoritarian political system that is connected to the role of a post-market command economy. But this situation has no correspondence to the conception of communism as upheld by Marx or Lenin. Indeed, the ideology of Stalinism would only claim that socialism was being created in the USSR and that the goal of communism was not a short-term objective. Therefore, the dispute between Stalinism and the various Marxist oppositional forces was about whether socialism was being created in the USSR. But Brown seems to ignore the importance of these differences and instead equates any post-capitalist society with being communism. In this manner he can define the aim of communism as being inherently authoritarian. We would deny this viewpoint and instead suggest that there is an inherent incompatibility between communism and Stalinism which is actually expressed by the fact that Stalinism cannot create a socialist society. Instead, what is a situation of post-capitalism is actually defined in terms of the creation of a new social formation based on the exploitation of the producers by a new ruling class. Formally this situation is ideologically justified as the building of socialism in one country but the subordination of the role of the workers and peasants within the relations of production means that the ideology about the building of a new type of economy and system is only of a formal importance. The actuality is the creation of a new type of system based on the exploitation of the producers. Brown can define this system as communist because he seems to ignore the contradictions of the system and instead considers that any type of post-capitalist regime that is dominated by a Stalinist party can be defined in these terms. But we would suggest that this perspective means that the conception of communism no longer has any meaningful validity and instead in a vague manner is equated with the domination of a Stalinist party. The connection of communism to the realisation of the emancipation of labour is being rejected and replaced with a new definition that merely equates communism with the situation of the domination of a Stalinist party. However, we would suggest that the understanding of communism as an emancipatory type of society is still the most credible definition of this objective. It indicates the character of an alternative to the domination of capitalism. In this manner it can be suggested that Stalinism cannot realise the aim of communism. Instead, it can essentially create the basis of a new type of system of exploitation and the domination of labour within the relations of production. This is primarily why Brown’s equation of communism with the Stalinist societies is problematical.

Brown outlines the aspects of the struggle of the USSR against fascism in world-war two. But this situation does not indicate that the USSR was a communist regime. Instead, the USSR was motivated to defeat an aggressive fascist power that was attempting to invade and dominate the Stalinist regime. There was no suggestion that the Stalinist leadership or the people were motivated by the objective of upholding the role of a communist system and instead were motivated to oppose the possibility of foreign invasion and domination. Nor did the Stalinist leadership appeal for international working-class support and instead was content to establish an alliance with the UK and USA in order to oppose the threat posed by the fascist powers. But it is also argued by Brown that the ultimate result of the second world war was the creation of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and so this indicates the communist character of the USSR. However, the USSR was motivated by the objective of extending the influence and power of the Stalinist system and this was the most important reason for the ultimate expansion of the Soviet regime. If the Stalinists had been motivated by communist objectives, they would have attempted to promote the aim of the development of a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe. In other words, only the genuine mass actions of the workers could have created the economic and political conditions for the establishment of communism. But instead of this understanding Brown concludes that: “The single most important reason for the establishment of communist regimes in Eastern Europe following the second world war was the success of the Soviet army in ending Nazi rule in the region.”(p148) But the problem with this conclusion is that it is based on the rejection of the important criteria of what is necessary to establish a genuine communist inspired regime which is the role of the mass activity of the workers and peasants. Instead, the Soviet red army acted to impose regimes based on the elite rule of the communist party in the various countries of Eastern Europe. There was never the genuine expression of the role of popular organisations of the workers and peasants, and instead the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism was carried out. This development could not in any sense be described as an authentic type of communist inspired revolution and instead represented the expansion of the Stalinist system of the USSR. Only, in Yugoslavia was there an expression of a form of popular struggle to achieve the realisation of a type of revolutionary government that was in some sense responsive to the aspirations of the people. The point is that the bureaucratic character of the Stalinist system could not allow the possibility for the only credible basis of the establishment of a genuine revolutionary regime which would have been based on the role of the popular struggle of the people. Therefore, what occurred was the creation of regimes that were a replica of the bureaucratic system of the USSR. In this manner the role of genuine revolutionary struggle was discouraged and instead the process of change was strictly controlled by the Soviet bureaucracy. What had been expressed was a process of imperialist expansion of the economic and political power of the Soviet elite. In other words what these developments indicated that the overthrow of the domination of capitalism need not be progressive if it was based on a process of bureaucratic and elitist change. The role of the Soviet communist party and armed forces was to ensure that the people could not act in a popular and democratic manner in order to achieve an expression of what would be genuine revolutionary change. Hence the only result of this development would be the establishment of a situation of replicating the situation in the USSR. Indeed, the Soviet bureaucracy acted to ensure that there was no possibility of democratic self-organisation of the people in order to realise the development of democratic socialist societies. The role of capitalism had been ended but the outcome of this situation was the expansion of the bureaucratic system of the USSR. Hence genuine socialism based on the role of popular democracy was still a possibility that had not been realised in this situation. This development could have been possible if the Soviet Union had been socialist, but instead the major objective of the Stalinist forces was to expand the power of the bureaucratic elite. The only possibility for genuine socialism would require the development of effective opposition to Stalinism. But this development could not be realised in the conditions of the importance of the power of the Stalinist forces when compared to the lack of influence of the workers and peasants of Eastern Europe.

Brown analyses the process of the end of capitalism in Eastern Europe after the second world war and concludes: “However the Soviet imposition of Communist regimes on the countries of east-central Europe, with no regards for the wishes of their peoples, was the cause of the division of Europe – and that was the single most important manifestation of what became known as the cold war.”(p178) But there was an important exception to this development which was expressed by the situation in Yugoslavia. In this country it could be suggested that there was an expression of genuine economic and political change which meant the regime was in a limited manner responsive to the aspirations of the working class. The result was the creation of an economy in which there was a limited expression of the role of workers control of the process of production. This connection between the party and workers in terms of the aspect of a democratic type of economy was an indication that the aspects of socialism and democracy could be connected if the situation was connected to a principled role of a revolutionary party which attempted to promote the role of the workers in the organisation of the economy. Hence it could be suggested that Yugoslavia was an expression of a degenerated workers state because in a limited manner the character of the economy was based on the popular participation of the workers. This situation was an indication that it was possible under specific circumstances that the Stalinist character of the Communist party could become modified in terms of the acceptance of the importance of trying to realise the interests of the workers. In this manner it could be suggested that in a limited manner a genuine proletarian revolution occurred in Yugoslavia that led to the creation of a type of workers state which in an important sense was based upon trying to realise the aspirations of the workers for developing effective control over the character of the economy. But there was a problem in that the Yugoslav communist government did not relate the aspect of workers management of the economy to the creation of a genuinely democratic political system. There was still a situation of one-party rule. This is why this contradictory situation can be defined as an expression of a degenerated workers state. Such a situation could only be temporary and so be resolved in terms of the consolidation of the domination of the bureaucracy, or else the development of a genuine system of socialist democracy. Ultimately the former prospect occurred, and this ultimately led to the restoration of capitalism and the development of ethnic divisions within Yugoslavia that led to the emergence of a reactionary Serbian regime. But what Yugoslavia had initially indicated was that a social formation based on ending capitalism could be compatible with the development of economic and political democracy. In other words, a communist party need not justify the role of an authoritarian regime. Instead, it could even in a limited manner promote the importance of economic and political democracy. But it has to be suggested that the continuation of the domination of a single socialist type of party meant that all aspects of Stalinism had not been overcome because democracy was only expressed in a limited manner. In other words, the reactionary ideological role of Stalinism meant that it was difficult to develop an alternative conception of a socialist society that was connected to the role of democracy. Instead, it seemed that only the domination of the exclusive Marxist party was still necessary in order to promote the realisation of the objectives of socialism. In this context the influence of Stalinism in the Yugoslav communist party had not been effectively ended, and instead it was still assumed that only the rule of a single Marxist party could guarantee the development of socialism. The ultimate problem was that nobody was able to articulate a conception of socialism that could be based on the role of a multi-party democracy. In this context the system of Yugoslavia was a contradictory relationship of socialist type objectives, such as the aim of a democratic planned economy, which was still combined with political elitism. This situation ultimately had to be resolved in terms of the development of the possibility of a democratic socialism or alternatively an authoritarian regime had to be consolidated. Ultimately it was this latter possibility that was realised with the transformation of Yugoslavia into a collection of rival authoritarian regimes.

The ultimate historical importance of Yugoslavia was that this society indicated that it was possible to differentiate the objectives of socialism from the role of Stalinism. In other words, the development of a regime that in some important manner attempted to realise the economic aspirations of the people in terms of the role of the democracy of the producers was an indication that so-called socialism need not be associated with Stalinism. Instead, the regime of a communist government could under specific circumstances become in some sense the expression of the aspirations of the workers and peasants. But in order for this development to occur the particular communist government had to end its relationship with the Soviet Stalinist administration and instead adopt independent policies that in some sense indicated that the aspiration to try and realise a type of democratic socialist society had been adopted. However, the experience of China was an indication that it was necessary to not only establish political independence from the USSR but that the ideology of Stalinism had also been rejected. In other words, the history of China indicated that the development of independence from the USSR need not be connected to the rejection of the role of Stalinist elitism. Instead, it was necessary for the Yugoslav communist party to adopt a programme based on the transformation of the economy in terms of the role of workers management of the process of production. In other words, there was a genuine attempt to try and reconcile the role of the communist party with the attempt to express the aspirations of the workers. In this manner a type of economic democracy had been adopted. Therefore, the situation in Yugoslav indicated that a Stalinist party under given economic and political circumstances could adopt at least some aspects of a programme of democratic socialism. But this development meant that the Stalinist character of the Yugoslav communist party had become transformed into an expression of bureaucratic centrism, in that this organisation in a limited sense was trying to express the aspirations of the workers. But this development was exceptional and did not indicate that Stalinism had acquired a general possibility to become the expression of a genuine socialist perspective. Instead, Stalinism was primarily based on a relationship to the USSR, which meant that the ideology of socialism became a justification of authoritarian economic and political perspectives. Hence the development of differences between the Yugoslav communist government and Soviet leaders facilitated the possibility to make a break with a bureaucratic form of socialism. But the limitations in this situation meant that the Yugoslav communists never entirely supported a programme of revolutionary democratic socialism. They still adhered to the concept of one-party dictatorship, but within these limitations they also suggested that it was necessary to develop aspects of economic democracy. In other words what had been created was a genuine degenerated worker’s state. In this limited manner the Yugoslav communists indicated that there was no inherent relationship between Stalinism and socialism.

But instead of this conclusion, Brown contends that there was no essential difference between the Yugoslav regime when compared to the typical Stalinist regime. He comments: “The Communists in Yugoslavia achieved in 1945 the monopoly of power which took most East European parties several years to attain. The Yugoslav power structure followed closely that of the Soviet Union, which meant that key decisions were taken in a small Politburo chaired by Tito, endorsed by the substantially larger central committee of the party, and rubber stamped by the parliament, which was entirely obedient to the communist party.”(p153) But the point is that this aspect of authoritarian elitism was combined with aspects of genuine democracy and the expression of a limited accountability of the government of the party to the workers. In this manner there was a limited attempt to realise the aspirations of the workers as indicated by the role of aspect of economic democracy. Therefore, what had been created was not a typical Stalinist regime. Instead in important forms the government was to some extent accountable to the workers ad tried to realise its aspirations. This is precisely why differences developed between the Soviet leadership with the Yugoslav government. In other words, democratic reform could have resulted in the creation of a genuine democratic worker’s state in Yugoslavia. Hence a type of revolutionary regime had been established which contrasted with the authoritarian regimes of Stalinism. This situation indicated that democratic socialism was a possibility and that the development of Stalinism was not the inevitable result of the overthrow of the domination of capitalism.

Brown outlines how the realisation of the political power of the Chinese communist party was connected to a close relationship to the Stalinists of the USSR. This meant the character of the new regime was based on the expression of the system that had been created under the leadership of Stalin within the USSR. There was no popular expression of a popular revolutionary process and instead the situation was based on the dominating role of the communist party under the leadership of Mao. Hence the regime could not be defined as an expression of a genuine revolutionary process and was instead based on the dominating role of the communist party elite. Indeed, this revolution was connected to the continuation of capitalism for a number of years until the ‘great leap forward’ of the late 1950’s. The lack of the popular participation of the workers in the process of change meant that the situation could not be defined as an expression of genuine revolutionary change that would be able to create a system based on the principles of socialism and democracy. Instead, a nationalised economy was established under the bureaucratic domination of the communist party elite. Thus, the development of differences between the Chinese communist party and the Soviet leadership was not about the principles and aspects of what was defined as socialist objectives but was instead concerned with the assertion of the independence of the Chinese regime. Hence it could not be suggested that the Chinese communists were trying to create a genuine socialist society. Instead, they still copied the Stalinist approach concerning economic development and there was a lack of democracy within society. But ultimately the significance of the Chinese regime would result in differences with the Soviet leadership after Stalin. In other words, we would suggest that the authoritarian character of the Chinese regime meant that it was essentially a replica of the Stalinist character of the USSR and Eastern Europe. However, China also represented a type of national Stalinism that was increasing able to assert its independent interests and so ultimately break with the Soviet bloc. But this development did not represent any expression of genuine anti-Stalinist revolution and instead was about the assertion of the independent interests of the leadership of the Chinese communist party.

Brown indicates that the major genuine charge that developed within the Soviet bloc was the process of radical change in Yugoslavia that led to the limited development of workers control within the economy: “In principle, social ownership by the workers of their own factories was to replace bureaucratic state ownership and control. Tito introduced a new law to this effect in 1950, and much was made of it, although the state continued to possess most of the functions accorded to it by the Soviet style command economy, and the factory manager remained an agent of state control. The move in the direction of ‘workers control’ was, in part, an ideological counteroffensive against the Cominform, but it was also the beginning of a process by which works councils did gradually acquire greater powers. After their creation in June 1950 ‘workers self-management took its place alongside the Partisan war as one of the two basic sources of legitimation of the regime.” (p209) But this understanding seems to underestimate the importance of the aspect of the role of economic democracy. The point is that in important terms the role of a bureaucratic command economy was being radically transformed and an aspect of the democracy was introduced as an important aspect of the relations of production. This development represented important progress towards the realisation of what could be defined as a genuine socialist type of economy. But there was still a problem that the absolute domination of the communist government could not be challenged. Therefore, there were aspects of bureaucratic elitism combined with an expression of genuine economic democracy. But this advance of the role of democratic values meant that in a limited manner it could be suggested that the system in some respects expressed aspects of a genuine type of socialist society. However, the absolute domination of the communist party could not be challenged and so in this manner there were important aspects of what could be described as bureaucratic elitism. However, the situation in Yugoslavia still contrasted favourably with the continuation of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR. The autocratic character of the Soviet Union meant that it could not be described as a type of workers state and instead there was an authoritarian social regime.

It could be suggested that the onset of the Khrushchev regime meant a profound process of change that led to important developments in the character of the USSR, which some would suggest led to the revival of socialism. But in actuality the Stalinist system was consolidated and opposition to any genuine political change was expressed by the repression of the popular Hungarian revolution in 1956. The commitment of Khrushchev to the system was indicated by the fact that the 1961 programme of the Soviet communist party suggested that communism would be realised by the 1980’s. In other words, it was being argued that only under the leadership of the present communist party would it become possible to establish a classless type of society. Thus, the fact that the reality was that of an authoritarian regime presided over by the communist party was considered to be unimportant and that instead only this type of society could express the aims and principles that would create a classless society. What was not being explained was how a bureaucratic political elite would be able to advance the realisation of the process of the creation of a genuinely emancipatory type of society. Furthermore, when popular mass unrest developed in countries like Hungary, Khrushchev had no hesitation about sending in Soviet troops in order to repress this expression of discontent. Hence the fact that any expression of popular democracy was considered to be against the interests of the Soviet system was an indication that the regime had no relation to the genuine expression of the principles of socialism. Instead, what was of primary importance was trying to maintain the domination of the party elite over society. In other words, the interests of the party actually determined that society could not be organised in accordance with the expression of genuine democratic principles. Instead, it was assumed that the party had the exclusive and privileged capacity to act in accordance with the interests of the workers and peasants. In other words, the party knew better than the workers what was in their interests. This is precisely why it was not possible to have a genuine democratic system because of the possibility that the workers might not vote according to their ‘true’ interests. Instead, only the role of the communist party could define what was the genuine expression of the objectives of the people. In other words, the dominating economic and political activity of the communist party was considered to be the only authentic expression of a socialist society. It was implied that the workers if they had a free vote may support the restoration of capitalism. But it was actually the repressive domination of the communist party which generated illusions about the apparently superior freedoms of capitalism. Hence the most effective manner in which the influence of this bourgeois ideology could be overcome was by the realisation of the hegemonic importance of the workers within society. This point was indicated by the Hungarian revolution in which Soviet type organisations emerged in order to create support for the view that democratic socialism was a possible alternative to the Stalinist system. In other words, the issue of the independence of Hungary was connected to the implicit view that a genuine socialism was an alternative to the authoritarian limitations of the present Stalinist society. Hence the issue of establishing the independence of Hungary was connected to the influence of the view that democratic socialism could be an alternative to the authoritarian Stalinist system. This aspect was connected to the character of the mass struggle which was based on the role of the organisations of the workers. In this context the objective of the restoration of capitalism was never a popular issue, despite the fact that this view has often become popular in Western society. Indeed, the view that the events in Hungary represented the attempt to realise a democratic type of socialism is upheld by Brown who comments: “The Hungarian revolution was anti-Soviet but not anti-socialist. It became a national – indeed nationalist movement, but its leaders were members of the communist party. There was, however widespread support to the kind of Soviet style communist system which had been constructed under the leadership of Rakosi.” (p288-289) In other words there was an attempt to realise genuine and principled socialism by connecting the objectives of the communist party to the attempt to realise the role of democracy. It was recognised that the possibility for the development of genuine socialism would require the development of the importance of economic and political democracy. Hence from within the Stalinist elite a leadership had emerged that had as its aspiration the aim of achievement of a genuine and democratic type of socialism. This indicated that under certain circumstances the forces of Stalinism could evolve in favour of support for the realisation of a more emancipatory type of society which would presumably be similar to that which had been established in Yugoslavia. Hence under specific circumstances the forces of Stalinism could evolve in favour of the establishment of a genuine democratic type of socialism. This indicated that even the Stalinist elite could under the circumstances of the influence of popular pressure evolve in favour of the expression of the aims of a democratic type of socialism. In this context some Stalinists were not absolutely opposed to the perspective of genuine popular socialism. But the leadership of the USSR was still opposed to this development because it undermined the expression of their domination over society. Hence change had to occur in the USSR if the possibility of progressive change was to be effectively realised in Eastern Europe.

In other words, there is not an absolute opposition between the perspective of democratic socialism and Stalinism under exceptional political circumstances. Some of the forces of Stalinism, as in Hungary of 1956 could evolve in favour of the aims of democratic socialism but what was required was the development of a process of dynamic interaction between the workers and communist party that would enable this process of transformation to occur. Hence the role of mass struggle was crucial if some sections of the dominant communist party were to become sympathetic towards the aims of the achievement of the objectives of a genuinely democratic type of socialism based on inter-party democracy and the increased role of the workers in the organisation of the economy. However, under usual circumstances in which mass struggle had not developed the communist parties of Eastern Europe would generally support the continuation of the Stalinist system. Hence in order to promote socialism it was necessary to try and create an alternative political organisation within the working class.

Brown describes the development of the Cuban revolutionary process and how the Castro regime increasingly became a part of the world communist system and with the intention to create a socialist society. He comments that Cuba has made impressive advances in terms of education and health provision but considers that this is an expression of the relationship of Cuba to the world communist system. However, it could be suggested that the popular character of the Cuban regime is because it is effectively an expression of the role of a bureaucratic workers state which has been able to realise the material needs of the people in terms of the importance of a nationalised economy which was motivated to realise the interests of the workers and peasants. The alliance with the Soviet Union did not undermine the fact that Cuban effectively had a different type of society from that of the USSR which was an expression of a genuinely popular process of revolutionary change. Hence the character of the elite in Cuba was different to that of the USSR even if the Cuban regime developed a close economic and political relationship with the Soviet Union. But in order for genuinely democratic socialism to be established it was necessary that the workers organise in order to try and realise this development. However, it can be suggested that since the demise of the USSR the effective isolation of Cuba has resulted in the development of the effective economic and political conditions that has led to the restoration of capitalism. The ideology of Marxism and socialism was not able to uphold a communist alternative in increasingly unfavourable circumstances.

Brown outlines the role of the Solidarity movement in Poland in brining about the demise of Stalinism in this country but he suggests that this movement did not facilitate a similar development in Eastern Europe: “For Poland itself, the significance of Solidarity can hardly be overstated. There was, however, a causal link between the political achievement of Solidarity at the beginning of the 1980’s and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of that decade.”(p436-437) But Solidarity represented a contradiction because on the one hand it was a genuine mass movement of the workers who promoted the principles of trade unionism but on the other hand it had a leadership who had illusions in the restoration of capitalism as a progressive development. Ultimately this relationship was resolved in terms of the support for the aim of the establishment of a bourgeois regime. Hence despite the aspirations of the workers in Solidarity for material progress these objectives were betrayed by the opportunist leadership of this movement. Hence developments in Poland indicated that change need not be progressive and instead could result in the restoration of capitalism which undermined the possibility to develop the influence of the workers within society. In other words the lack of a credible programme of democratic socialism led the leadership of Solidarity to support the regressive process of change that resulted in the restoration of capitalism. The revolutionary possibilities of solidarity had been undermined by the actions of its increasingly opportunist leadership. This development indicated the necessity to try and establish a genuinely principled Marxist leadership of Solidarity. This was because change need not be progressive if it results in the reintroduction of capitalism as an alternative to Stalinism.

Brown outlines how the Gorbachev era led to the promotion of economic and political policies that led to the demise of the communist system: “In the long run, it was often argued before 1985 the communist system could not survive without being reformed. That was doubtless true, and China is an example of a state which has introduced radical economic reform and has -thus far preserved many of the essential features of a communist polity. What perestroika demonstrated, however, was that communism could not survive with radical reform of its political system. By the time political pluralism had been introduced, it was quite simply, no longer meaningful to describe the state as communist…. Once democracy had affected the ruling party, it could not be confined to it…..In the absence of strict limitations on political debate and of tight control over the flow of information, the Communist party’s grip on the levers of power was seriously weakened. Even before other political parties were legalized, democratising reform of the Soviet political system led to the speedy erosion of the CPSU’s ‘leading role’” (p598) But the ultimate problem was that the Communist party leadership could not envisage the renewal of socialism as the most necessary development in this context of the recognition of the importance of reform. Instead, they effectively accepted that the restoration of capitalism was an inevitability in relation to the introduction of aspects of a democratic political system. This development indicated that there was no genuine connection between the role of a Stalinist communist party and the objectives of socialism. Instead, it became accepted that the restoration of capitalism would be an inevitable aspect of the process of democratic political change. Hence the forces of Stalinism are not defined by the primary importance of the objective of communism, contrary to what Brown claims, but instead the aim of upholding dominant political power of a political elite. To define this objective as the expression of the standpoint of socialism or communism is a caricature that does not explain the elitist objectives of Stalinism. These very developments indicated that it was still necessary to advance the importance of the role of socialism and communism. Hence the various post-capitalist societies based on the domination of the Stalinist types of communist party could not genuinely express the objectives of democratic socialism. The authoritarian limitations of Stalinism indicated that it was still necessary to strive to achieve the objectives of what would represent a more convincing and principled conception of socialism. Hence there was no connection of Stalinism to socialism except in formal and contradictory ideological terms.

Hence Brown is suggesting that there was no alternative to the authoritarian and elitist expression of the aims and character of communism because of the limitations of this approach when contrasted to a democratic capitalist system. But we would suggest that the ascendency of Stalinism was based on the repression of what was a genuine alternative of a more democratic and principled expression of the aim of socialism and communism. Hence Stalinism was a counterrevolution against the attempt to realise what could have been a genuine socialist society. Formally Stalinism may have utilised aspects of a socialist ideology but in practice it expressed objective that could only result in the undermining of the successful development of socialist societies. Hence it represented an ideological justification for the process of domination of the producers in a new exploiting manner. In this context Stalinism has more in common with the approach of capitalism than that of socialism. Therefore, the only issue of discussion is whether Stalinism represents a new type of capitalist system or is instead a distinct social formation which is still based on the exploitation of the producers. Hence Stalinism can have no genuine connection with the approach of socialism and communism even if it still claims to be an expression of these objectives because of the formal connection of its role with the legacy of the October revolution of 1917. However, Brown tries to establish the connection of Bolshevism and Stalinism because he effectively considers that any alternative to capitalism will result in authoritarian economic and political developments. He defines Stalinism as the approach of communism in order to establish that this type of society is a repressive objective when contrasted to the political freedom of capitalism. We would reject this conclusion and suggest that Stalinism is the effective rejection of the approach of Bolshevism as elaborated by Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin. Obviously, there were problems with the one-party rule of the Bolsheviks that facilitated the authoritarian development of the political process in Russia, but this was not an intention of the major leaders of the revolutionary system. Instead, they attempted to establish genuine Soviet democracy as the basis to create socialism. Stalin’s political domination undermined the attempt to realise this perspective and instead consolidated the domination of the party elite. This development could not be considered to be an expression of the realisation of communism and instead expressed the creation of a new type of society based on domination of the producers. Therefore, we would suggest that Brown’s intention to define this system as communist only has validity in terms of the formal ideology of communism. In actuality what was being created was a society based on the power of a new ruling class. In this context the success of a new revolutionary process would be required in order to restore the importance of the original aims of the October revolution of 1917. However, Brown cannot conceive of a difference between this revolution and the authoritarian regime of Stalin. Hence, he effectively defines Marxism and Leninism as elitist and repressive. We would reject this conclusion and instead suggest that the expression of genuine socialism and communism is different to the role of Stalinism. Indeed, this is precisely why Trotsky opposed the domination of Stalin. It is significant that Brown does not discuss the views of Trotsky when justifying his view that the USSR was communist. We would conclude that the attempt to genuinely realise socialism and communism meant the struggle against Stalinism. But this is the very issue that is not systematically addressed by Brown.