PART TWO - THE APPROACH OF STUART HOLLAND

Stuart Holland wrote a major work in the mid 1970's which challenged the traditional LP emphasis on the Keynesian approach of increased public expenditure in order to achieve the aims of socialism. He argued that the increased power of the monopolies, or mesoeconomic sector, meant that it was necessary for the state to expand public ownership if the goals of socialist transformation were to be achieved. (1) The immediate problem that is apparent with his approach concerns how the existing state, which is defined by its relationship to the imperatives of the present system, can be made more amenable to the influence of organised labour. A revolutionary Marxist would contend that only with the transformation of the state in terms of the extension of the influence of labour would it be possible to promote the possibility of the economic transition to socialism. Holland attempts to resolve this issue by suggesting that what is necessary is for the working class to exert pressure on the state to act in accordance with its wishes.(2) This perspective will be plausible if the working class is able to exert sufficient mass strength that enables the transformation of the economic and political character of society. However, the question remains, which Holland is reluctant to tackle, does this process require for its success the role of revolution or change via the institutions of Parliament? He implies ambiguously that it is necessary to go beyond the simplicity of both Keynesian and Marxist dogmas, but what does this mean in terms of strategy?

He does want to go beyond the limitations of the managed economy of the post-war period, which has meant that the economy has not been changed in terms of the objectives of the LP. Instead it has been increasing complicated to control the monopolies, and it has been difficult to utilise their profits to the benefit of society. This means the task is to bring about the control of the monopolies within the strategic sectors of the economy so that the objectives of the LP can be realised. However, does this mean that the most obvious limitations of capitalism can be overcome, or will the actual character of society be changed by this development? Holland is categorical that the latter aspect will be realised: “As is argued throughout this work, progress to socialism would be an on-going process, but one in which the critical centres of capitalist power and class were transformed by socialist government, backed by the trade unions. It is a key premise of this analysis that such a transformation can be achieved through democratic processes. Without such a democratic change, transition to socialism could prove less a controlled transformation in the public interests, than an explosion of social resentment and political counter-reaction challenging freedoms which are rightly held dear even in an economically unjust society. On the other hand, democratic reforms must be effectively revolutionary in character. In other words, they must reverse the pre-dominance of the capitalist modes of production and capitalist motivation into a dominance of democratically controlled socialism. They must transform capitalist society rather than try ineffectively to alleviate its implicit injustice.”(3)

Hence the intention is be revolutionary in content, but the form of this process of change may express the promotion of accumulating reforms. This is in order to correspond to the premises of democratic transition to socialism, which is to be an orderly type of change that is supervised by a socialist government in Parliament. This is the theory, but the practice could be more complex. For example, the very attempt to introduce measures that advance the possibility of socialism will lead to the intensification of social tensions. In these circumstances the development of an effective mass movement in order to support the process of change will be vital. It will not be sufficient for this popular struggle to be merely supportive of the regulated actions of the government. Instead it will have to take the initiative in terms of becoming a focus of action and change. The workers will have to occupy factories, and initiate determined political strikes. Hence we are not considering that the labour movement has a merely supportive role in relation to the importance of the socialist government. Instead without mass action the process of change to socialism will not occur. However, Holland seems to consider this possibility with some suspicion and implies that militancy would represent uncontrolled anger. This is a dogmatic view that rejects the importance of the role of the mass movement.

This comment does not mean that revolution should occur without any forms of democratic accountability. The election of a genuine socialist government, with the intention to change society, would be a massive advance. In this context such a government would provide the mass of the people with purpose, and so enhance the socialist trajectory of their actions. Thus the question of the relationship between the government and the mass movement would become a crucial issue. The co-operation between the government and labour movement would be crucial if socialism is to be realised. Holland seems to understand this point. But he is being dogmatic if he considers that this process of change may not acquire extra-parliamentary forms. Instead in a dogmatic manner he can only conceive the possibility of democratic change, via the role of Parliament. Hence his perspective could become a schema. He does recognise that meaningful change cannot be the exclusive result of the actions of government, and in this manner he recognises the importance of the role of the labour movement. This relationship of co-operation between government and the labour movement will be vital if the process of the extension of public ownership is to result in the advance to genuine socialism rather than state capitalism. This point is very important. But it is also necessary to recognise that one result of the introduction of left-wing measures will be the intensification of the class struggle. This situation will raise questions about the continued validity of the democratic process of change. It is preferable for the process of change to remain democratic, but we cannot guarantee this possibility. Instead we must allow for the prospect of insurrection and militant methods of struggle.

The worrying aspect of Holland's perspective is that he considers that restricting the power of the unions, via the social contract, should be a legitimate part of the socialist programme. Hence he considers that discipline and acceptance of the dictates of the Labour government should be the position of the unions. This view implies that only when the unions are moderate and obedient servants of the administration will the process of transition to socialism by realised. Such a standpoint is surely illusory. Only the actual effective extension of the power of the unions will promote the possibility of transition to socialism. This means that wage restraint is a restrictive feature of a Labour government that has not yet promoted the possibility of socialism. Instead the most important task is for the Labour government to encourage the process of the development of workers control of production. In other words the effectiveness of the government should be defined in terms of its ability to encourage the ability of the workers to generate industrial democracy. This point is accepted by Holland, but it is qualified in terms of implying that the working class should merely follow the instructions of a socialist government. This standpoint makes no allowances for the fact that it is the very dynamism of the workers in action that will express the ability of the government to advance towards socialism. It is actually the workers who have to take the initiative if the government is to make advances towards the formation of a planned economy. Instead Holland implies that his approach represents socialism from above, or the impetus for change comes from instructions from above, such as with the role of the social contract.

Holland outlines how the perfect competition model of classical political economy has been undermined by the empirical influence of monopolies within the world economy. This situation has an effect on the development of inflation, because the few powerful companies can dictate a situation of high prices. Furthermore, the economic power of the monopolies means that they can locate in areas of the lowest wages, and their importance means that is difficult to control them using Keynesian techniques of increased public expenditure. The conclusion from this analysis is that government policy can express acceptance of the increased influence of the monopolies, and its logical relationship to globalisation, or instead become more radical and accept that previous attempts to establish state control of the economy have become increasingly inadequate. It is not sufficient to aim to expand the public sector; instead our goal should be to transform the very character of economic activity. This part of Holland's analysis seems to be perceptive and is able to anticipate the development of comprehensive globalisation. Unfortunately, his model for public sector expansion is based on the technocratic models adopted in France and Italy. He contrasts the limitations of the National Plan in the UK of the 1960's with the ambitious interventionism of post-war France. But he does admit that ultimately the process of increased state expansion in the economy of France has not resolved the grievances of the working class. Primarily, the development of public intervention has not resolved the issue of the domination of the monopolies. His answer is to call for nationalisation of the major strategic centres of the economy: “Without confronting this new domination with a major extension of public ownership and control, governments will be forced into an increasing confrontation with organised labour.”(4) But the point is that if this increased state intervention in any sense conciliates the power of the monopolies it will become subservient to them. The only effective expansion of the public sector is one that establishes its own

priorities in terms of promoting socialism. This means the nationalisation of the major monopolies. Hence this type of enhancing of the public sector will not have the goal of upholding capitalism, which is the task of state capitalism. In this context, the state intervenes in order to uphold the private sector, and is opposed to socialist objectives.

This also means the relationship between capital and labour is maintained in these circumstances. Holland identifies this issue as essential if the economy is to be transformed in a socialist manner: “In particular such governments have not sought to change the relations between management and workers in the new state capitalist planning....They have strongly resisted union pressure for major changes between management and workers which can transform rather than modify conventional labour relations.”(5) State capitalism can increase the power of government within the workplace, but is not socialism which requires genuine industrial democracy. Holland in an important manner defines socialism in the following terms: “The crucial difference between capitalist and socialist policies lies in the extent to which state power in a socialist system – or a system in socialist transition – serves rather than hinders the extent to which working people can exercise control over the conditions and results of their own activity.”(6) The problem in relation to this definition concerns the relationship of state and class. How do we ensure the transformation of the state to the extent that it is prepared to uphold industrial democracy within the relations of production? Is the election of a Labour government sufficient in order to bring about this type of transformation? Indeed, Holland is adamant that it is vital to differentiate between state capitalism and genuine socialism, and so many forms of public intervention are about the defence of the existing system rather than promoting a principled alternative. Thus it is necessary to reject partial reforms, but Holland does not reject more radical reforms. He considers that reforms can be considered to be principled in the following manner: “Essentially a strategy for revolutionary reforms means transforming the basis on which economic, political and social power is organized within society. It also means the irreversible reversal of this power. It would extend and reinforce democratic processes both at the national and regional level, and in the enterprise itself. In other words it would be a revolution within a democratic framework and not an undermining or overthrow of democratic processes.”(7)

This approach expresses radical phraseology. But it is only genuine and authentic to the extent that the role of working people is dynamic and significant. This means that the question of what should be nationalised should not be left to the socialist government, and instead should be decided by the initiative of the working class itself. Only in this manner is it possible to establish that state capitalism has been superseded and instead the development of genuine socialism is being realised. In this context the election of a socialist government should become the basis for the expression of the spontaneous initiative of the working class. Thus the programme of the government should be the guideline in theory to the promotion of the creative practice of the working class. Indeed in this sense Holland agrees that the process of change should not be dictated to by the role of the legislative institutions. He recognises that the impetus must be an expression of a combination and interaction of government and mass pressure. In this manner his approach is an improvement on the conception of democratic socialism articulated by Bevan and Benn. He is trying to justify the standpoint of socialism from below alongside an emphasis on socialism from above.

Holland contends that the basis of the process of socialist transformation requires the nationalisation of the most strategic monopolies, those companies that dictate the character of the economy and influence its development: “Such a transformation of the mesoeconomic sector does not need the extension of public ownership and control through the entire sector. But it does need decisive action to bring individual leader firms in the main industries and services into public ownership and control.”(8) This approach is a technical understanding of what is required in order to end the domination of private capital within the economy. His standpoint may be formally sound in that he is outlining how the conditions to end the domination of capital over labour may be developed. But what he is outlining is the policy of government from the standpoint of the objectives of socialism; he is not connecting this approach to the dynamics of the class struggle. It may be that the working class is determined to bring about the nationalisation of all of the major monopolies, or it is not. The point is that the question of nationalisation should also be connected to the ability to bring about the relevant company under workers control. If the given company is not considered by its workforce as a suitable basis for nationalisation, the government should be ready to accept that it should remain in private ownership. The point is that nationalisation should correspond to the dynamics of the class struggle. The readiness of the workers for nationalisation should be the primary basis for the carrying out of this measure. This criterion should not mean that nationalisation does not occur, because the very determination of the left wing administration to put the leading companies under public control should encourage the workers to support and even carry out this policy.

Furthermore, the ability of the socialist government to define the activity and objectives of the companies that were not nationalised would also be determined by the level of participation and enthusiasm of the workers in these organisations. The companies that were not nationalised would still have to be brought under workers control if they were to accept the objectives of the enlarged public sector. In other words the level of the activity of the working class would determine whether the process of nationalisation of strategic leading firms did result in the ability of the socialist government to define the policy of this enlarged public sector. If the working class was not involved in this process of strategic nationalisation, then the forces of capital would remain dominant. This would mean that the process of enlarged public ownership would become the consolidation of state capitalism rather than the dynamics of transition to socialism. Thus the effectiveness of the process of nationalisation of strategic companies could only be successful if it was connected to the dynamics of class struggle. Hence the willingness of the working class for the transition to socialism would be the primary basis for the possibility that this aim would be realised. In this context the policy of nationalisation could only occur if the workers were ready and eager to uphold this standpoint.

Holland does to some extent accept this point. He comments that: “At the level of democratization, little or no progress will result from state legislation alone. Workers in firms, industries and services in both the public and private sector must decide for themselves on the nature of any increased power they want to exercise.”(9) To this extent the question of movement towards socialism is dependent on the extent to which workers want to exercise self-management of companies. The character of socialism is related to the involvement of the working class in the process of change. But sometimes, Holland seems to ignore this aspect and does emphasise primarily the process of nationalisation by the government. In this sense the role of Marxism will be to encourage the self-activity of the working class and to connect the role of nationalisation by the government to the class struggle. However, if in the last instance the workers do not support the aim of industrial democracy this view will have to be accepted and as a result the government will have to adapt its objectives to that situation. But if a committed socialist government is elected it is likely that the working class will share its aims and aspirations. In this situation the possibility of nationalisation on the basis of workers control will become realistic. This perspective is shared by Marxists and Holland.

Holland argues that a peaceful transition to socialism is vital in a country with durable democratic traditions. We can share his concern that violence should be avoided. But the most important aspect of this issue concerns the attitude of the ruling class towards the prospect of socialism. Will they encourage the army to oppose the process of revolutionary change? The answer to this question is uncertain. This is why we need to support the formation of a people’s militia in order to provide the necessary self-defence of working people in relation to the struggle to realise the success of the revolution. The point is that whilst the act of developing industrial democracy can be peaceful, this does not mean that the ruling class will not try to coercively undermine the democratic character of the revolutionary process. In that context what has been a peaceful political development could acquire elements of confrontation. However, this possibility should be avoided if at all possible. This is because we share Holland's aim of a democratic process of change to socialism. It is to be hoped that a commitment to multi-party democracy can overcome any possible regression into coercive struggle.

Holland tries to ignore the significance of the role of the market within the socialist economy. He contends that this is a secondary issue when the state power is defined by a government that is intent on nationalising the strategic sectors of the economy. This view ignores the fact that under his own perspective much of the economy, including large companies, and small business, will remain in the private sector. Hence his standpoint does envisage that even with the development of socialism the economy will be a mixed one, or representing both public and private. But, this aspect will be secondary if the working class is genuinely involved in the process of decision making and displacing the domination of capital within the relations of production. In this context, the fact that production still occurs for a market, or the realisation of the demand of consumers, does not mean that the economy is capitalist. Instead it is socialist because its relations of production are based on the fact that labour is no longer a subordinated class and instead has displaced the hegemonic role of capital. It is possible to have both the market, and considerable sections of private industry, because the dominant aspects of the economy are based on the priorities of socialism, which is connected to the involvement of the working class in defining the role of the economy. However, there is a limit to this point. The leading companies do have to be under state ownership and based on the importance of workers control. In this manner it is possible to limit the private sector to the objectives of the public.

Ending the alienation of the workers within production by involving them in the process of management and the making of decisions is vital if the character of the economic system is to be genuinely changed. This point is more important than having some illusory and dogmatic system of income equalisation. The level of income should be differential because work itself is different, and has diverse levels of skill and hardship. Hence absolute equality is not a goal of authentic socialism. Instead what is more important is promoting the possibility for people to decide the priorities and objectives of work. Thus Holland is mistaken when he equates the end of the superiority of management with a policy of equalisation. (10) Instead equalisation is an aim of the limited process of the redistribution of wealth. But this aim does nothing to change the character of economic power, the capitalists remain capitalist and the workers are still under their thumb. What is important in terms of the promotion of genuine socialism is that the situation of economic power is transformed. The working class is no longer dominated by capital. If this situation is realised then people are no longer concerned with false illusions about equality. Instead the working class is able to define its own aims and to produce goods that realise its interests. Workers control means that consumption is in accordance with this situation, and the continuation of differentials in rewards for labour becomes an irrelevant question. In contrast, Holland has illusions in absolute equality which is a utopian aspect that represents the influence of the traditions of the LP. This standpoint is not shared by Marxism, which recognises that the different types of labour means that differential rewards are unavoidable. Holland's view represents the influence of utopian socialism within his generally sound approach.

Holland argues that the nationalisation of the leading monopolies would bring about the strategic control of the economy by the socialist government, and so generate the possibility of expansion of the economy in terms of the objectives of ending the domination of capitalism. This would mean the actual nationalisation of 25 major companies. Such a perspective is based on an economic analysis of what is considered necessary in order to bring about the transformation of the economy in the direction of socialism. However, this point has been strictly outlined in terms of the logic of economics and so the importance of politics is neglected. The forces of capital will resist this measure, and this opposition will be politically registered by the resistance of the Conservative party. In this situation, the socialist government can either capitulate to the opposition and dilute its measures of public ownership, or else it can increase its determination and be prepared to nationalise more companies than originally envisaged. The vital point depends on the level of support from the working class. Are working people involved in the process of nationalisation? If they are this would mean that the attempt to transform the economy was becoming successful. The real test as to whether socialism is being realised is not dependent on the level of nationalisation but is instead defined by whether the working class become involved and therefore transforming the relations of production in their favour. The promotion of workers control would be the most effective indicator that the situation was maturing in favour of socialism.

What is problematical is that the inspiration for the aims of Holland seems to be the interventionist activity of the Italian government in the post-war period. This development can only amount to state capitalism and the utilisation of the role of the state in order to make capitalism more efficient. The point it that there is not precedent for what is being prosed by Holland because in order to make it a success the working class has to share the socialist objectives of the government. The workers have to be fully involved in the process of taking companies into public ownership. Only then would this mean that the economic process has gone beyond the limitations of the extension of state capitalism. The reason that earlier nationalisation in the UK were not socialist in inspiration was because of its bureaucratic character, and the fact that the subordinate position of the working class was reinforced and not overcome. Furthermore, the problematical character of the approach of Holland seems to be reinforced by the fact that he considers that Italy is a model for planning agreements, and his definition of them does not involve the role of the workers: “Effective planning can only be achieved both through a major socialization of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and through ensuring that private firms in the mesoeconomic sector follow the public enterprise leaders in fulfilling strategic economic objectives.”(11)

The problem with this definition is that the role of the workers in participating in the process of planning is omitted. Hence it seems to be assumed that planning will be the task of government, management and executive authorities, and the importance of the role of the working class is implicitly secondary. There seems to be a contradiction or tension in the work of Holland. On the one hand he does outline the importance of industrial democracy and the involvement of the working class in the process of the development of public ownership. On the other hand he neglects this significance, and instead outlines in a technocratic manner the role of nationalisation and panning in terms of state centralisation. Thus it is not surprising that he defines planning in the following manner, with the role of the trade unions considered to be entirely secondary: “If such benefits are to stem from the socialist harnessing of mesoeconomic power, it will involve bringing the co-ordinated planning of that power into the centre of government decision making. In other words, socialist mesoeconomic planning must involve the main government departments concerned with the supply and demand of goods and services in the economy.”(12) The reason for this approach is that Holland is still influenced by the LP perspective of introducing socialism via the extension of public ownership by the government. This also means the major responsibility for planning belongs with the state. This is the standpoint of socialism from above, and the importance of the role of the working class and trade unions is not addressed. Instead it seems that socialism can be primarily brought about by determined and centralised government action. The role of the class struggle is not outlined, and instead the promotion of socialism is outlined in technocratic terms.

Thus it is not surprising that the emphasis of Holland concerns the important role of a National Enterprise Board in order to organise the public sector, and ensure that its objectives are orientated to the transformation of capitalism. This organisation could be very significant, but none of these proposals are relevant if working people remain indifferent to the attempt to realise socialism. In this sense, the very concept of 'socialism from above' is illusory. Instead socialism only becomes practical when it is an aim that motivates the objectives of mass struggle. It also is relevant in terms of the willingness of the working class to seize control of their workplaces and begin to organise production. Indeed, Holland contradicts his emphasis on 'socialism from above’ when he admits that new public enterprise and planning will only generate state capitalism without the involvement of the working class. Hence, his principled orientation is to justify a conception of 'socialism from below', but in an inconsistent manner he cannot resist the temptation to also outline how socialism can be realised by the exclusive action of government and its policy innovations. Nevertheless he also contends that the very prospect of realising socialism involves combining public ownership and state planning with the involvement of the working class in this development. Without this latter aspect, the economic situation is more likely to result in state capitalism.

However the process of negotiation which Holland considers suitable for consultation with the working class is found wanting: “Put simply, if government and management in the leading public and private companies in Britain are to bargain out the shape of things to come, workers representatives should have access to the same bargaining – all the way – to exert their own leverage on the shape of the resulting planning agreement.”(13) This apparently neat formula ignores the most vial aspect of this process, which is what constitutes the character of management. Is it an expression of the forces of capital or labour? If it represents the former it will act to define planning in accordance with the interests of capitalism. But, if it expresses the latter, the possibility to connect planning with genuine socialism becomes possible. The point is that an authentic socialist government should attempt to assist the workers to establish control over the forces of management. The management should become accountable to the workforce, preferably by a process of democratic election. This situation would mean that the character of the management becomes identical to the role of the workforce. Such a development is the only principled meaning of workers control. In other words, without this aspect, Holland's claim that workers would be able to take their concerns to the highest levels of government represents empty rhetoric. In this context only workers control of the process of management can ensure that the following claim that the wishes of the workers is realised in the planning process. Thus the following comment is not adequate: “If the new forward planning through leading companies made possible through planning agreements is to promote the economic transformation of society, it can only be through the consent of the majority of the workers in these companies.”(14) The point is the wishes of the workers can only be realised if they are able to establish majority influence in the management of either public or private concerns. Without this transformation of power, the workers are still effectively subordinate, even if they are formally democratically consulted about plans and other matters.

Unfortunately the importance of this point does not seem to be recognised by Holland. Instead he seems to conceive of a process of consultation involving the workers, the existing management and government. This implies the workers are still effectively in a secondary and subordinated relationship to management: “The main aim of this new dimension to democratic planning would be to open the door to workers taking part if they so choose in the negotiation with government and management of the main features of their companies’ programmes over the medium term.”(15) This formula provides no recognition of the necessity for the working class to become economically dominant if genuine socialism is to be realised. Instead it seems they are still conceived as the servile partners of the government and the unreconstructed or traditional management. The crucial point is that in the private companies, Holland does not envisage that the functions of management have been transformed. Instead the workers are still in a distinct, oppositional and secondary position in relation to the role of management. Whilst in the public sector, the government makes the major decisions as in relation to redundancy. Holland does consider that the workers may bargain on behalf of the management in a given situation, but the point is that this prospect does not alter the secondary status of the workers. Instead Holland seems to consider that the workers will continue to negotiate in the defensive terms of the role of the trade unions.

This criticism does not mean that Holland denies the possibility for workers control that would be the basis for election of the management by the forces of labour. The problem is that he does not recognise that this development is vital for the possibility of realising genuine socialism. In other words he does not accept that an authentic transformation of the economic system can only come about when the relations of production are revolutionised and therefore are based on the election of the management by the workforce. Instead to him the forces of the state still dictate the promotion of socialism: “Put differently, majority workers control can only contribute to the wider modernisation and socialization of society if pursued in the context of the revolutionary reforms....It depends on the power of the socialist government to transcend capitalist criteria in the heartland of the economy and harness the power of leading enterprises in an explicitly social context. Majority workers control in big companies will not necessarily serve the wider public interest unless accompanied at the same time by new public enterprise and strategic planning in the mesoeconomic sector.”(16)

Hence the dynamic and most important aspect of the economic transition to socialism is the role of the state, and in this context genuine workers control has an entirely secondary role. Indeed, he can envisage the possibility that workers control could result in defensive aims, and conservative reticence to support the aims of the socialist transformation of the economy. Only when the actual process of the advance of planning agreements and public ownership is realised does fully fledged workers control acquire a relevance: “However, if the wider context for transformation through a socialist planning strategy, with bargaining on the main outcome of investment, location and jobs through the tripartite Planning Agreements structure, the case for majority workers control becomes much clearer than before.”(17)

This standpoint represents a reversal of principled priorities. Only with the establishment of effective workers control, via the establishment of the democratic election of management, will it be possible for a left-wing government to ensure that the expansion of public ownership begins to fulfil socialist objectives. Without the active involvement of the workforce in the process of developing socialism, this attempt to change society will be a failure. Therefore nationalisation and planning can only become meaningful with the participation of labour in the process of this development. Thus the first step is effectively the realisation of workers control. The election of a socialist government is only the confirmation of this process of change. Only genuine socialism from below can bring about change at the level of the role of the state and economic policy. Holland disputes this standpoint and implies that a situation of workers control could result in situation similar to the de-centralised model in Yugoslavia. But this model was actually the result of the policy of the government, and was not the result of the initiative of the workers. There is no logical reason why workers control should be opposed to centralisation of the economy. It is still necessary for a plan in order to organise the production of various workplaces. Hence the following view of Holland is entirely compatible with the development of workers control: “In other words, a socialist government acting in the wider social interest should demand an expansionary long term programme from worker controlled firms whether or not they had required their management to formulate it in the first instance. In practice, or course, it would be very much to the interests of the workers to pressure for and support such expansion.”(18)

It may also be that the initiative for ambitious development originates with the workers control workplace. This impetus could then become part of the plan. But to Holland there may be many structural and organisational difficulties why it is difficult to realise workers control. He contends that it can only become effective in the context of the role of the state and planning agreements. There is some truth to this point, but he also underestimates the importance of transforming the relations of production and effectively ending the domination of capital over labour. But in the last analysis, Holland also admits that workers control is vital for the success of the process of the socialist transformation of the economy. (19) The problem is that this point is not elaborated in a satisfactory manner, and instead his emphasis is on the necessity of a centralised economy which may potentially be undermined by the de-centralising and defensive tendencies of workers control. The point is that he does not seem to have decided what is the precise importance of workers control in terms of the promotion of socialism. This hesitancy could be overcome if we develop a perspective in which it was outlined emphatically that without the generation of workers control the potential for socialism could not be realised. This means that it should be the initiative of the workers themselves which is crucial for creating the economic conditions for socialism. But this possibility is in turn dependent upon the intensification of the class struggle and the increasing willingness of the workforce to challenge the domination of capital. This perspective is never embraced by Holland, and instead his approach is based on the actions of government. But to a Marxist, the issue of government would be the culmination of the attempt by the working class to establish control over production. In this context, the promotion of class consciousness is vital if the possibility of socialism is to become a concrete issue. This point is not accepted by Holland, who instead conceives that the role of the working class is secondary, and so is a response to the initial actions of a left wing government.

Primarily Holland envisages the creation of a contract between the unions and a Labour government as the strategic basis for the promotion of planning and socialist objectives. (20) This may be an important aspect of the transforming process, but none of this is possible unless the working class is receptive to the message of workers control and the aim of overcoming the domination of capital. This development would depend in turn on the success of militant struggles, which then raise the issue of workers control. What is being prepared for is the basis for a left wing government to relate to this situation in terms of using the power of government in order to extend public ownership and planning. Instead Holland seems to imply that the initiative for movement towards socialism is dependent on the role of a Labour government: “This crucial interrelation between government initiative and the labour movement would not be necessary if the British working class was more aware of the gains open to it by pressuring for change in a positive, forward contest of socialist transformation.”(21) The apparent defensiveness and sectionalism of the working class would seem to be the major problem for promoting the transition to socialism. Certainly, this is an issue, but we should remember that all Labour governments have been committed to maintaining capitalism. The approach of Holland represents a minority view with the LP, and what he ignores is that the very credibility of his standpoint requires the intensification of the class struggle. If the conflict between capital and labour acquires the level of posing the question as to which class is dominant within society, then Holland's radical programme will become relevant. But without the generation of intense class struggle, his perspective will remain nothing more than a good idea without little practical relevance.

However, this does not mean that Holland's strategy has little practical significance. On the contrary, instead it could become the theoretical basis to guide and motivate the development of the class struggle. The aim of workers in struggle could become the formation of a left wing government with socialist objectives. But, in this context the success of workers control will become crucial. The more that workers establish a dominant role within the workplace, the more that they will attempt to advocate the formation of a government that reflects their aspirations. In this context the standpoint of Holland becomes relevant. The formation of a left wing government would reflect the militancy of the working class. Indeed, it is difficult to contemplate any other circumstances in which this government would be formed. This is why we should strive to revive the militancy of the working class in order that progressive possibilities can become part of the agenda. The problem that the Corbyn leadership of the LP are confronted with is that under the situation of a low level of class struggle, the majority of people are not receptive to a radical message, despite the austerity policies of the Conservative government. But we should strive to promote class struggle so that the strategy of Holland becomes on the agenda.

Holland suggests that the issue of international solidarity for the process of socialist change could be provided by the Communist and socialist parties of the European Union. Obviously, the Communist parties virtually exist in the present, and the Social Democratic organisations are generally linked to the process of globalisation. However, what could promote the development of international support would be the generation of class struggle within the UK. This could be inspiring for the people of Europe, and provide a reason for them to develop form of solidarity and support. However, the crucial issue is not whether socialism in one country is possible. This issue can only become important when the formation of a left wing government is created. Until that moment the most important question concerns how to revive the class struggle. We know that there is massive discontent within society, but the forces of capital are able to impose their discipline on the workforce. Hence we have to develop issues that could motivate people to oppose austerity and struggle to overthrow the rule of capital. In that context, Stuart Holland has outlined a useful contribution to the struggle for socialism.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Stuart Holland: The Socialist Challenge Quartet, London 1975

(2) ibid p16

(3) ibid p37-38

(4) ibid p134

(5) ibid p152

(6) ibid p153

(7) ibid p158

(8) ibid p159

(9) ibid p161

(10) ibid p174

(11) ibid p239

(12) ibid p246

(13) ibid p271

(14) ibid p271

(15) ibid p271

(16) ibid p285

(17) ibid p285

(18) ibid p287

(19) ibid p290-291

(20) ibid p305-308

(21) ibid p313