THE PRINCIPLES OF REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY – by the Democratic Socialist Alliance

(1)The League for the Fifth International has outlined its principles for the advance of Trotskyism in the 21st century.(1) This document is an attempt to establish the principles and strategy of the class struggle in the present, and also outlines how an intransigent international organisation can be built. The DSA has broad support for some of the arguments presented but we also have important differences that we outline below. In the process of critique we hope to outline an understanding of revolutionary Marxism in the present.

(2)The LFTFI maintains that revolutionary Marxism is based on the legacy of the First International, and the Second International before 1914. It also supports the decisions of the First Four Congresses of the Comintern and defends the initial two congresses of the Fourth International. This heritage becomes the basis of principled Marxism in the present.

(3) We believe that this approach represents a narrow conception of the legacy of revolutionary Marxism and it ignores the possibility of creative development in the present. The flourishing of Marxism was not limited to the contribution of outstanding revolutionary and intellectual figures of the past. Furthermore, revolutionary Marxism cannot be exclusively defined by the role of what is considered to be principled Trotskyism in the present. Marxism was originally the development of historical materialism, political economy and revolutionary strategy in order to advocate the perspective of the communist transformation of society.(2) One of the most outstanding exponents of Marxism was Rosa Luxemburg who was an originator of the transitional method that connected the immediate objectives of the working class to the ultimate aim of socialism via the role of the mass strike.(3)She also contributed to the conception of world revolution.(4) Hence what is considered to be revolutionary Marxism must acknowledge the contribution of Luxemburg and recognise that principled Marxism cannot be limited to the significance of Bolshevism, the Comintern and the early years of Fourth International.

(4)The DSA upholds the October revolution as an authentic expression of the aspirations of the working class. However, we also understand that because of the objective conditions and the limitations of Bolshevik ideology the Soviet regime could not be anything else than a deformed workers state with bureaucratic distortions. The result was a party state that was justified by Leninism.(5) This situation meant that the Communist International was a contradictory organisation. It originally advanced the perspective of world revolution at its first four congresses but this organisation was also capable of justifying an understanding of the relationship between party and class that was elitist and bureaucratic.(6) Ultimately the contradictions between the bureaucratic opportunism of the Soviet state and Comintern and the impulse for proletarian internationalism was resolved in favour of the former aspect with the victory of Stalinism. This meant the struggle of the International Left Opposition and then the Fourth International was historically vindicated in order to oppose the opportunism of Social Democracy and the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and Communist International. The Fourth International adopted a programme that elaborated the transitional method as the expression of the strategy of class struggle.(7) This approach connected the immediate aspirations of the working class with the ultimate aim of socialism. We believe that this transitional approach has not been outdated and is part of the enduring legacy of revolutionary Marxism.

(5)The contribution of revolutionary Marxism is not limited to the organisational role of various parties and their leaderships. Instead we would also indicate the importance of outstanding intellectuals. In this context we would recognise the role of Istvan Mezaros who has produced a work that is the worthy successor of Marx’s ‘Capital’ and is a brilliant study of modern capitalist political economy.(8) Despite the flaw of historical determinism he has also outlined the strategy of the socialist offensive in the period of the structural crisis of capitalism.(9) We would also suggest that Alex Callinicos, the present leader of the SWP, has made an important contribution to our understanding of historical materialism.(10) Hence the work of contemporary intellectuals has been crucial for establishing valuable arguments for socialism and against bourgeois ideology. It would be dogmatic to limit the apparent development of revolutionary Marxism to the role of programme and the various contributions of Trotskyist organisations.

(6) The DSA would argue that dogmatic adherence to the standpoint that the Soviet Union was a workers state was already causing theoretical and political confusion within the post-war Fourth International. Max Shachtman explained how the failure to comprehend the USSR as a new bureaucratic system based on nationalised property led to uncertainty about understanding post-war Eastern Europe. He outlines how the various countries of Eastern Europe had been structurally assimilated into the regime of the USSR because of the extension of nationalisation and the formation of repressive police states. In contrast the Fourth International still considered that Eastern Europe was capitalist in 1948.(11) However Shachtman only proves that confusion is prevalent within the Fourth International and not opportunism or accommodation to Stalinism.

(7)The LFTFI suggest that it is Yugoslavia’s break with the USSR that led to centrist opportunism within the Fourth International in the form of adaptation to the political role of the Yugoslav bureaucracy. The LFTFI suggest that the Tito-Stalin split did not overcome the bureaucratic workers state character of Yugoslavia. This point is explained in more detail in their book on Stalinism.(12) What is not explained by the LFTFI is the political upheaval that occurred in Yugoslavia. A popular revolution effectively led to the formation of organs of workers economic self-management and the erosion of the power of the party state. The Fourth International responded in a principled manner and issued an Open Letter to the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party that called for the adoption of the standpoint of world revolution and the rejection of the Stalinist approach of socialism in one country.(13) In other words the Fourth International tried to adapt in a flexible manner to the process of change that was occurring in Yugoslavia. It was only the consolidation of the party state in the mid 1950’s that indicated why the continuation of this standpoint had become opportunist. It could be argued that Yugoslavia between 1948-1951 was a transitional state that was becoming a deformed workers state. However the repression of the radical intelligentsia and the limitations of economic democracy meant the bureaucratic system of the Yugoslavia was never transcended.(14)

(8)What definitively established an opportunist trajectory within the Fourth International was the adoption of the perspectives of war-revolution at the 1951 Third World Congress. This standpoint represented the determinist and objectivist view that world revolution was occurring in a distorted form and without principled political leadership. It was occurring in the context of the threat of a new world war. This possibility of war would realise a revolutionary process based on the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy.(15) The acceptance of this perspective by the whole of the Fourth International appeared to suggest degeneration into centrism, as explained by Workers Power.(16) However this analysis is one-sided because James Cannon, the leader of the American SWP, issued an Open Letter in 1953 that called for struggle for principled Trotskyism against the leadership of the Fourth International led by Pablo.(17) It is true that this document is a dogmatic assertion of orthodoxy that does not adequately comprehend the importance of understanding the post-war period of the cold war and the durability of world capitalism. But Cannon does recognise the connection between the perspective of the inevitability of socialism, via the role of bureaucratic distortions, with Pablo’s opportunism. He concludes that: “This reveals the utmost pessimism about the capacities of the working class, which is wholly in keeping with the ridicule he has lately voiced of the struggle to build independent revolutionary socialist parties. In place of holding to the main course of building revolutionary socialist parties by all tactical means, he looks to the Stalinist bureaucracy, or a decisive section of it, to so change itself under mass pressure as to accept the “ideas” and “program” of Trotskyism.”(18)

(9)Hence despite significant political limitations, and the justification of an abrupt organisational break with the majority of the Fourth International, Cannon had outlined a principled basis for struggle against Pabloite opportunism. For several years the Cannon led International Committee represented the continuation of revolutionary politics. It was the Cuban revolution that generated the political impulse for the American SWP to reconcile itself with the majority of the Fourth International led by Ernest Mandel. The approach adopted by the SWP was now similar to the Pabolite conception of distorted revolution in terms of support for revolution via the role of a blunted instrument.(19) This meant the defence of a revolutionary process that was based on social forces that were not genuinely proletarian and socialist.

(10)The revolution in Cuba caused the most serious crisis of the forces still claiming to represent the principled heritage of Trotsky’s Fourth International. On the one hand the Socialist Labour League categorically denied the possibility that a workers state could be formed by guerrilla based social forces: “If workers states could be established through the action of petty-bourgeois guerrilla leaders – based principally on the peasantry, who possessed no significant historical, organizational and political connections to the working class, and under conditions in which there existed no identifiable organs of class rule through which the proletariat exercised its dictatorship – there then followed a whole new conception of the historical path to socialism, entirely different from that foreseen by Marxists.”(20)This view was a denial of the empirical fact that the situation had dramatically changed in economic and political terms with the success of the revolution in 1959. However, this does not mean that the conception of a non-bureaucratic workers state was more explanatory and principled.

(11)The Spartacist tendency that originated within the American SWP argued that between 1959 to late 1960 the Cuban state was transitional and not definitively committed to the defence of capitalism or the promotion of a workers state.(21) Workers Power argue that this view does not explain the class character of this so-called transitional period. They argue in favour of the conception of a bureaucratic workers government that has not been able to overthrow capitalism.(22) This formulation does not explain sufficiently the initial period in which Castro was committed to capitalism and was opposed to nationalisation and socialism. It was the increasing hostile attitude of American Imperialism, and the alliance of Cuba with the Soviet Union, that definitively explained its class character. In this context the Spartacists were accurate in outlining the importance of a transitional state that was still open-ended in its class standpoint. But what proved decisive in explaining developments was the process of structural assimilation of Cuba into becoming a replica of the Soviet Union via the role of Soviet type nationalisation and the fusion of the July 26th movement with the Cuban Communist Party. This meant a replica of the bureaucratic character of the USSR was formed.(23)

(12)The conception of the workers state was not explanatory because that suggested what had occurred was a progressive process, whilst in contrast the SLL ignored the importance of empirical events and instead utilised the dogmatic view that suggested the petty-bourgeois cannot change historical development. The result was confusion. The failure to explain what happened in Cuba seemed to suggest a total process of degeneration of the forces of the Fourth International into either opportunism or dogmatism. However despite this apparent debacle the forces of the International Committee continued to generate important and principled contributions to Marxist theory. But the Socialist Labour League became increasingly nationalist and indifferent to the struggle to promote revolutionary politics within the working class. The result was a rebellion by the Oxford working class members of the SLL/Workers Revolutionary Party. This resulted in the formation of the Workers Socialist League and the publication of the ‘Battle for Trotskyism’ that argued in favour of the continued significance of the Transitional Programme as the basis for intervention within the working class.(24) However the defence of programme proved not to be a sufficient basis for the progress of Marxist theory. The result was that programme became interpreted as the justification of an increasing right-wing practice. This situation led to the fusion of the WSL with the opportunist Socialist Organiser. Consequently the forces of principled Trotskyism were represented by small fragments that lacked a definite organisational expression. There was not a single expression of the possibility for the realisation of creative Marxism apart from the promise by Workers Power to re-elaborate their programme. In this period principled Marxism was upheld by the contribution of various intellectuals like Meszaros, and in a more limited sense by the defence of the ideas of Luxemburg by the Council Communist groups.

(13)The apparent re-elaboration of the Trotskyist programme by Workers Power was a disappointment. Its Trotskyist Manifesto was mainly a rehash of the original transitional programme and the resolutions of the first four congresses of the Comintern.(25) The attempt to understand the post-war period was not carried out and the re-elaborated programme was not located in the context of the challenges of the contemporary class struggle such as the offensive of capital since 1980 and importance of defeats in the class struggle like the British miner’s strike. However the split within the Workers Revolutionary Party had created the prospect for the re-groupment of the forces of principled Trotskyism. With some goodwill and compromise it may have been possible to unify Workers Press, Workers Power, the Workers Internationalist League, and the variant of the International Committee led by Dave North. Workers Press made the call for an international conference to discuss the tasks for revolutionary Marxism in 1987, but this apparently open invitation was soon reduced to an effectively closed event.(26) Very quickly the WIL underwent a right-wing trajectory, Workers Press eventually liquidated itself, and the Dave North group was hostile to everyone on principle, and Workers Power made little efforts to try and ensure that re-groupment could occur. A promising opportunity had been squandered because of sectarianism. The result is that we have many fragments that claim to be Trotskyist and yet little effort is made to bring about unity in terms of programmatic agreement and common understanding of the tasks involved in the class struggle. The Fourth International has effectively ceased to exist.

(14)In these circumstances we would argue that the claim of the LFTFI to represent a new fifth international is both arrogant and false. Instead the LFTFI is part of the crisis and not the exclusive basis of the resolution of chronic political problems. The task is not to proclaim the banner of the fifth international but is instead about how to re-create the Fourth International. It is true that the most important currents of so-called Trotskyism are centrist, but within these currents and in other fragments the potential still exists for the promotion of the re-generation of the Fourth International. We believe that a common programme for the era of globalisation is possible and which could act as a beacon for the renewal of Trotskyism. (We dedicate the rest of this document to tackling this task.) It is also necessary to reject the pessimistic view of the LFTFI who contend that regeneration of the organisations of the various Fourth International fragments cannot occur. This issue can only be tested in terms of the holding of a international conference that would enable the various groups to discuss their respective programmes and strategies. In contrast the standpoint of the LFTFI effectively upholds the rigid and elitist view that the question of the development of a principled international is their exclusive task. We would contend that the forces for the development of an international revolutionary Marxist organisation exist, especially in Latin America, and so regroupment is possible. This process of regroupment would not necessarily be limited to Trotskyist groups and could include anyone that is committed to the principles of revolutionary Marxism.

(15)We also believe that the contentious issue of the social character of the USSR and the various Stalinist states has been resolved by history. The effective demise of Stalinism as a social system has meant that the crucial questions of the present concern the development of the struggle of the international working class in the epoch of imperialism and globalisation. It could also be argued that the question as to which grouping of the Fourth International has the most principled history is secondary when contrasted with the importance of the tasks of the class struggle in the present. Hence what is the crucial test of the forces claiming to be revolutionary Marxist is the character of their programmes and strategies for tackling the tasks of the contemporary class struggle. Thus we would argue that the question of developing a strategy to oppose the austerity policy of the ruling class in Europe is the most important issue for the Marxists that are within the EU. In this context the history of the Fourth International is only of relevance in terms of how it influences the prospect of the creation of a mass movement of struggle against austerity. This does not mean that we should not have distinctive views about the history of the Fourth International, but this question and the issue of the nature of Stalinism, should be viewed as secondary when considered in relation to present tasks. The point is that we can develop political unity in terms of support for a socialist offensive against the attacks of the ruling class on the living standards of the working class.

(16)In the last analysis the question of what number should be given to an aspiring international organisation of revolutionary Marxists is secondary. The actual number is irrelevant when contrasted with the significance of the tasks that have to be realised in relation to the attempt to develop the struggle for socialism. Compromise and the acceptance of democratic decisions will be necessary if this issue of the number of a new international does not result in a trivial split. Consequently it may be better that the proposed international organisation is neutral in relation to the question of number. The point is that we cannot outline a process of unbroken international and organisational expression of principled struggle for the principles of Marxism. Instead centrism has undermined the prospect to build a viable international party of Marxism. Hence it would be better to let the proposed international conference decide the question of number if that issue is deemed appropriate.

(17)The LFTFI document maintains: “A Leninist vanguard party is indispensable not only for the insurrection and seizure of power but in all phases of the class struggle. Such a party must be based on an international transitional programme which links historic goals and principles to fundamental tactics in an overall strategy for working class power. Only the proletariat can create a healthy workers state. The revolutionary party has to be rooted in this class and express its historical aims.” (27) This standpoint assumes that the most important strategy for the realisation of the political power of the proletariat is the role of the insurrection based on the primary role of the party. This standpoint is inflexible to the extent that it insists that only the insurrection is the principled strategic expression of the possibility to achieve revolutionary change. We would argue that the question of the most appropriate strategy depends on the actual circumstances of the class struggle. It could be that the most appropriate method of class struggle differs from that of insurrection and that instead what is more important is the role of the general strike, or the struggle for peace against the prospect of war, or the escalation of mass strikes that begin to pose the issue of power.

(18)However the most controversial aspect of the revolutionary process concerns the relationship between the working class and the party in the struggle for socialism. The Bolsheviks interpreted the October revolution as expressing the primacy of the party in this relationship. Trotsky explains: “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of the party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer.”(28) Thus: “But events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising.”(29) These comments may be true to the extent that the leadership of a party is important in the process of revolutionary transformation but it does not explain the precise relationship between the party and class in the development of the possibility of change. What Trotsky seems to underestimate is the importance of developing mass struggle. If the role of the party is indispensable then it is also necessary to indicate that without the radicalisation of the working class the possibility of change will not occur.

(19)This neglected aspect is recognised in the Transitional Programme when it is outlined that the role of the party is to promote the possibility of the working class taking power via the role of mass struggle. Hence: “The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie.”(30) Consequently the programme advocated by the party is one which influences the development of the class struggle to become a conscious attempt to overthrow capitalism. The role of the party does not substitute itself for the revolutionary possibilities of the activity of the working class, and instead it advocates a programme that attempts to promote these developments: “It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”(31) What is justified is the understanding that the relationship between the party and class is about interaction and dialogue and not the rationalisation of domination and instruction. The party is trying to persuade the class that transitional demands relate to their interests. If success in this context does not occur then the prospect of revolutionary transformation is unlikely. Without the development of conscious mass struggle the possibility of the overthrow of capitalism will not occur. Hence the task is to bring about a relationship between party and class in order to promote the aims of socialism, but without the radicalisation of the class the prospect of the demise of capitalism will not be realised. This perspective is a rejection of the previous strategy of party revolution that culminates in insurrection directed by the party. The modified approach suggests that the culmination of mass struggle generates the tactical possibilities for comprehending the precise moment and features of revolutionary change. The approach of Trotsky becomes similar to that of Luxemburg.

(20)The perspectives of the LFTFI oppose any organisational relationship between reformist and centrist parties with the revolutionary group. This is a dogmatic view that cannot explain the complexity of circumstances that may explain the possibility for revolutionary forces to join these hybrid parties. The standpoint of the document is also contradicted when it also argues that: “Similarly, where broad political parties or alliances encompassing a wide spectrum of political currents from reformism to left centrism are formed, revolutionaries may need to enter them in order to try to win them to the revolutionary programme.”(32) This latter comment is more principled than the justification of empty intransigence. The point is that if new forces emerge of a reformist and centrist character like the recent Left Unity group it is principled to join in order to gain a new audience for revolutionary ideas, and because the new organisation may allow for the expression of ideas and dissent. The aim will be to develop a pole of revolutionary opposition and so aim to transform this centrist/reformist organisation in a revolutionary manner. This does not necessarily mean a project for splits and is instead about trying to convince the centrist/reformist organisation of the importance of mass struggle against austerity and support for the aims of socialism. In this context it is important that intransigent ideological struggle is waged within Left Unity in favour of socialism and against the project of the alternative of a mixed economy. The level of success in this aim will establish the capacity of whether Left Unity can become a force for the development of a revolutionary party or else is consolidated as the durable justification of a reformist/centrist grouping.

(21)The document of the LFTFI also outlines the process of development of the party from a small ideological current into a fighting propaganda group and ultimately the development of a revolutionary party. It argues that at each stage the tendency should be to strive for class politics against reactionary ideological influences. However what is problematic about this conception is that it is conceived as an insular process that seems to be exclusive to the group that has the elusive revolutionary status. In contrast we would suggest that this process of party political development involves the possibility of regroupment, and involvement in mass struggles implies the possibility for immense progress of the revolutionary organisation. This is why it is crucially significant to outline a strategy for the class struggle such as opposition to austerity, and the various small groups of revolutionaries should be constantly attempting to relate to other forces in order to advance the socialist offensive against capitalism. We do not agree with the LFTFI document’s apparent suggestion that the formation of the mass revolutionary party will be the outcome of the growth and transformation of one organisation. Instead, as Mezaros argues, what is crucial is to realise the unity of many different projects in terms of the aims of socialism. This suggests that the age of the exclusively dominant single party is over: “For the meaning of socialist pluralism – the active engagement in common action, without compromising but constantly renewing the socialist principles which inspire the overall concerns – arises precisely from the ability of the participating forces to combine into a coherent whole, with ultimately inescapably socialist implications, a great variety of demands and partial strategies which in and by themselves need not have anything specifically socialist about them at all.”(33)

(22In other words we should aspire to reject monolithic domination of the particular party political organisation within the development of the class struggle. Instead the issue of achieving dominant political influence should be considered secondary to the aim of bringing about the unity of the diverse struggles in terms of the objective of socialism. In the age of democracy the reduction of socialist political opinion to being the expression of an exclusive understanding of Marxism is a reactionary fantasy. There will always be a plurality of parties and organisations. The task is to unite these apparently competing groups into a united front that supports the aim of a socialist offensive against austerity. In this context it should be understood that the aim of the role of the various political organisations should not be the attempt to establish a fictitious domination over the other organisations and instead should be about the promotion of struggles in order to generate a sense of solidarity and to promote the advance of the prospects of alternatives to capitalism: “Struggles are rarely mere struggles-against. The experience of shared struggle already involves the development of relations between people that are different in quality from the social relations of capitalism. There is much evidence that the for people involved in strikes or similar struggles, the most important outcome of the struggles is not the realisation of immediate demands, but the development of a community of struggle, a collective doing characterised by opposition to capitalist forms of social relations.”(34)

(23)The view being argued is not that Marxist revolutionary politics has become redundant, but rather that it has an indispensable task in providing strategic reasons for the socialist offensive in the period of austerity and crisis. But this task does not imply that ideological struggle should be directed to the aim of party monolithic domination. Instead the very pluralism produced by democratic culture implies that the role of the most principled Marxist groups is not to aspire to an illusory domination and instead is about providing the most convincing reasons why working people should struggle for socialism. However this does not mean diluting socialism into the anti-capitalist activism described by Cooper and Hardy.(35) On the contrary instead of conflating the aim of socialism with a vague and ambiguous anti-capitalism we have to provide more effective arguments for socialism and recognise that this task is necessary because defeats in the class struggle have discredited the conception of socialism. We need to provide accessible arguments for Marxism of the type provided fairly recently outlined by Terry Eagleton.(36) Hence the aims of the principled Marxist groups should be altruistic; our objectives should not include self-glorification and egotistical aspiration for political supremacy. Instead we should be intellectuals for socialism and the proponents of an offensive against capitalism.

(24)The document of the LFTFI also justifies a certain conception of democratic centralism. What is problematical about their viewpoint is that it glosses over the central importance of conscience. In other words the right of the individual to oppose the policy of the party because they consider that it has become unprincipled or even unethical. The LFTFI do not deny the right to form factions but what is apparently denied is the capacity of the individual to be able to oppose the majority policy of the organisation in public. Instead all differences are to be internal. In other words the conscience of the individual has to be sacrificed in the name of the organisation. This view has become unacceptable and only results in the defiance of the policies of the organisation by the use of social media. Hence if collective discipline and the morale of an organisation is to be upheld it should be possible for individuals to publish their views and differences with party leaderships. However it should also be permissible for the leadership to try and influence individuals not to engage in this type of dissent. Checks and balances will ensure that an organisation is both democratic and disciplined. Whether this organisational condition can still be described as democratic centralism is also controversial. However they type of discipline that generally prevailed in the Bolshevik organisation and the Comintern has become antiquated. Thus the attempt to maintain this type of strictness and conformity will eventually result in people leaving the organisation. Instead of trying to uphold the futile task of defending antiquated forms of party discipline it would be better to accept that the pluralist conditions of the present suggest new forms of organisation. It is the ability of all individuals within an organisation to participate in the formation and modification of policy that will enhance party morale and ensure that discontent does not become generalised. But what will enable a party to uphold its morale in the most effective manner will be its ability to popularise a strategy that gains mass support. The confidence of the party will be connected to its ability to overcome stagnation and isolation and to promote a strategy that gains adherents.

(25The LFTFI also outline a conception of the connection of the party to the organisation of the vanguard of the class, the role of the utilisation of demands, and the promotion of higher forms of class struggle and therefore the preparation of the party and class for the revolution.(37) The problem with this perspective, apart from the lack of precision about the relationship of party and class, is the neglect of the role of the concrete. This indicates the lack of a strategy in order to promote the class struggle in the contemporary period. We would suggest that what is imperative is the elaboration of a strategy that establishes the tasks of the class struggle in the present. In this context it is necessary to develop a strategy for opposition to the austerity policy of the ruling class. Only if mass discontent with austerity is translated into practice will it be possible to credibly begin to conceive of the creation of the actuality of the revolution within the development of the class struggle. Instead of this focus on strategy the document only vaguely mentions higher levels of class struggle in the abstract and does not outline how we can go from the present situation of disorganised discontent to the realisation of successful methods of class struggle. The assumption is that if the party has a principled relationship with the class then the tasks of the class struggle will be automatically resolved. Thus in a dogmatic manner the LFTFI document asserts: “In a word, we recognise the actuality of the revolution in every serious struggle and thus prepare the working class and ourselves for it.”(38) We cannot justify these types of pretentious claims. First of all we have to establish how struggle itself can develop from its present defensive and limited character. How can we go onto the offensive? How can we advance rank and file control of strikes and end the domination and limitations of the role of the trade union bureaucracy? The situation we are presenting in is one of propaganda for the strategy of opposing austerity. This means we should avoid conflating our intentions with reality. Instead we should recognise that the situation is one that is characterised by the very distinction between intentions and actuality. Only the generation of a mass movement can bring about progress in the relation between party and class. For this prospect to happen we need to elaborate a strategy that can inspire support. Until these tasks are confronted the claims of the party to promote class struggle remain abstract and lacking in credibility.

(26)The sections on imperialism and globalisation are the most unsatisfactory in the document of the LFTFI. It is assumed that the approach of Lenin can be basically confirmed despite major changes to the character of imperialism since World War Two. Thus the document does not explain the importance of the cold war period as well as failing to recognise any significance to the onset of globalisation. It is necessary to recognise that the aftermath of World War Two led to the realisation of the absolute economic and political hegemony of American imperialism. This enabled it to modify the role of inter-imperialist contradictions, the various rival imperialist powers were integrated into a world economy dominated by the USA: “In this regard, of course, the Cold War provided the US with a glorious opportunity. The United States, itself dedicated to the endless accumulation of capital was prepared to accumulate the political and military power to defend and promote that process across the globe against the communist threat. Private property owners of the world could unite, support and shelter behind that power, faced with the prospect of international socialism. Private property rights were held as a universal value and proclaimed as such in the UN declaration of Human rights. The US guaranteed the security of European democracies, and benevolently helped re-build the war-torn economies of Japan and West Germany.”(39) Despite the decline of the economic and political power of the USA in the recent period it can be argued that it still remains hegemonic and able to establish the character of the present system via the role of finance capital.(40) It can also be argued that the role of the transnational companies has reinforced an economy based on the fluid movement of capital and labour, or the era of globalisation.(41) The LFTFI document mentions globalisation as indicating an era of the supremacy of American finance capital but this is not connected to the changing structures of the world economy. The suggestion is that globalisation is temporary and merely a passing phase of imperialism. Thus it is argued that: “Lenin’s theory of imperialism and Leninist-Trotskyist tactics faced with imperialist war are still fully valid. The essential features of imperialism, as characterised by Lenin, the revolutionary Comintern and Trotsky’s Fourth International, still exist, despite the dissolution of the formal empires of Britain and France and changes in the pattern of investment and the relative development of certain non-imperialist countries.”(42) It is true that in this present situation the tensions between different regional blocs may not have been entirely overcome but what is most important is the unrivalled power of the US economy that structures the very character of the world economy in the interests of its finance capital. (This point is partially conceded by the LFTFI in the section on globalisation)

(27)However the document of the LFTFI concentrates not on economic issues but instead utilises the issue of the continuation of wars between oppressed nations and imperialist powers in order to suggest that the world economy is based on imperialism. Thus it asserts: “War is endemic to imperialism”(43) What is not explained is that the era of national liberation is generally over apart from exceptional situations like Afghanistan and Iraq. The primary tendency is for unrest and war to occur between democratic or Islamist movements with despotic regimes over questions of democracy or opposition to secularism. It is true that the war in Libya had a NATO involvement but in Egypt, Syria and Tunisia the imperialist powers have been reluctant to intervene. In these countries the Marxist stance should be to support the forces of democracy and the prospects of the emergence of trade unions and socialist forces. These developments do not mean that the era of national liberation is over but we should not utilise categories like imperialism in order to defend an antiquated view of world economics and politics. Instead it might be helpful to understand the new global revolution that has been documented by commentators like Paul Mason.(44)

(28)The dogmatic comments by the document of the LFTFI against bourgeois pacifism are also unhelpful. We should recognise from the political development of mass movements in the USA against the Vietnam War, and against the Iraq War in Europe, that peace is a sentiment that has immense radicalising aspects. What we should be trying to develop is the connection between the struggle for peace and the aim of socialism. In this context it is important to recognise that if the struggle for peace is successful this can unify working people and provide the levels of confidence and solidarity that can enhance the struggle for socialism. However the struggle for socialism in the atmosphere of the inauguration of imperialist wars is made difficult by national chauvinist sentiments and sympathy for the role of the armed forces. This is why revolutionary defeatism has not generally advanced the struggle for socialism since the First World War. In contrast opposition to war and the successful realisation of peace can become the beginning of the struggle to overthrow the militaristic government.

(29)The question of national self-determination is very complex and still generates controversy. Hence the DSA both acknowledges the right of self-determination but would not always advocate the realisation of this right. We would apply this approach to Scotland because separation could undermine the potential unity of the working class of Britain and so could undermine the prospect of developing a mass movement against austerity. The advanced character of the working class of Scotland has been undermined by the ideology of nationalism and so created a sense of us and them that is based on national identity rather than the importance of class. But if the majority of the people of Scotland support independence in a referendum we would support secession, indeed we would advocate the creation of a democratic republic and attempt to connect it to the question of the struggle for the Scottish workers republic in the long-term. The situation in the Ukraine is very complex. What is involved is the conflict between two competing and apparently irreconcilable claims for national self-determination. On the one hand we oppose the expansionism of Russia that undermines the national integrity of the Ukraine. On the other hand we are against the attempts of the Ukrainian government to resolve the situation using military force. Instead we are for the development of authentic forms of democratic consultation that enable the people of the Eastern Ukraine to decide their national aspirations – whether to stay with the Ukraine, become autonomous regions in a federation, or join Russia – without the utilisation of repressive intimidation.

(30)The document of the LFTFI outlines a dogmatic defence of the strategy of permanent revolution for the oppressed and poorer areas of the world economy: “In the imperialist epoch, the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois revolution, (liquidation of pre-capitalist forms of exploitation in the agrarian question, democratic rights, national independence, economic development) cannot be resolved in the historic interests of the toiling masses except under the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, the rule of workers and where appropriate, peasant council’s.”(45) The problem with this comment is that it does not grapple with the structural complexity of globalisation and the fact that the economic emphasis on promoting competitive and open export markets has led to the rapid industrialisation of many countries that were previously underdeveloped. Tony Smith mentions the role of the developmental or catalytic states that utilise interventionist policies in order to create competitive economies: “The developmental state is designed to attain economic growth through competing successfully in export markets. In this respect, the model incorporates the fundamental neoliberal thesis that national economies are moments of a higher level totality, the world market, rather than more or less independent entities externally related to each other. Proponents of this state form agree with neoliberals that autarchy is neither feasible nor normatively attractive. The developmental state, however, is thoroughly incompatible with the state form found in the neoliberal model of globalisation…..In the developmental-state framework, in contrast, the private sector on its own is not an adequate ‘engine of economic growth’; it can play this role only if it is effectively guided and supported by an extensive array of state agencies.”(46) This developmental state has been successful in a Bismarkian manner in facilitating economic growth and creating intermediate capitalist nations in the hierarchy of the world economy.

(31)In other words the conception of the world economy and political order outlined by the LFTFI is anachronistic. It has been possible for modernisation to occur in several areas such as South East Asia, and parts of Latin America. It is Africa that remains the tragic peripheral part of this process. In the countries of modernisation the task is to connect the struggle for democracy with that of socialism. The tasks of economic development and national independence have been largely resolved by the very dynamics of capitalist development. In these countries the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front has become antiquated and instead the major strategic emphasis must be on the development of the hegemonic role of the working class in the struggle to realise democracy and socialism. The tactic of the anti-imperialist united front would still seem to have relevance in countries that are still an oppressed part of the world economy such as Africa and parts of Latin America. But we should also recognise that the anti-imperialist united front cannot ignore the yearning of the workers and peasants for democracy, land reform and the right to form independent trade unions. The primary strategic task of revolutionary communists is to outline how the aspiration for democracy is connected to the aim of socialism. We should also have a perspective of the United States of Africa, and of Latin America, as the basis for the beginning of the end of the domination by imperialism of these areas within the world economy.

(32)The characterisation of the LFTFI document that suggests the workers and peasant’s government is a lower form of the workers government should be rejected. In many countries the peasantry are still an important part of the economy and the political system. Hence we should recognise that the formation of the workers and peasant’s alliance is integral to the prospect for the formation of a government that is based on their aspirations and organisations. Thus we should not consider the workers and peasants government as an inferior form of the revolutionary workers government and instead understand that the alliance of the workers and peasantry is the basis to unite the tasks of modernisation, democracy and socialism. Furthermore, the question of the durable success of the workers and peasants government is dependent on the international expansion of this revolutionary regime.

(33)The LFTFI document mentions how the credit crunch created economic crisis but it does not establish why this situation may undermine the continuation of capitalism. Instead the document concentrates on the limitations of the various centrist groups and emphasises the willingness of the working class to fight back against the crisis despite the bureaucratic limitations of the trade union leaderships and the various reformist parties. In optimistic terms the document argues: “Nonetheless, imperialism and big capital have not been able either to engineer a sustained recovery or to inflict historic defeats on the working class on a scale that would allow a real restoration of their rates of profit. Consequently, more and bigger battles lie ahead and these will stimulate the growth of new political currents, both within and beyond the “Trotskyist” milieu, committed not only to effective resistance but to the overthrow of the system that creates such crises.”(47) This comment could be a recipe for complacency. Protests have occurred within the EU but they have still been defensive and lacked any resolute perspective to bring about the overthrow of bourgeois governments. The trade union bureaucracy still limits the scope and ambition of protest, and defeatism has become a widespread manifestation of the popular mood. In this context the lack of effective resistance means that the ruling class could resolve the crisis at the expense of the working class without a sustained opposition to capitalism occurring. This is why it is a matter of urgency that organisations opposed to austerity develop an effective strategy that could undermine the policy of the ruling class within the EU. To this end it is necessary to unite the working class of the EU together in solidarity action that would culminate in an indefinite general strike. If this process does not occur the ruling class will have every opportunity to implement its deflationary plans and bring about the end of the welfare state.

(34)The LFTFI document reduces the character of bourgeois democracy to the role of Parliament and elections. This is a narrow and dogmatic approach that rejects the importance of the democratic aspects of many capitalist societies. Kautsky outlined the crucial importance of democracy for the struggle for socialism. He argued firstly: “These so-called peaceful methods of conducting the class struggle, which are confined to non-military measures (parliamentarism, strikes, demonstrations, the press and similar methods of bringing pressure to bear) stand a chance of being maintained in any country the more democratic the institutions, and the greater the political and economic insight and the self control of the people.”(48) The point being made is that the very influence of a democratic culture encourages the possibility that the class struggle will be conducted relatively peacefully. Furthermore, the right of press and association enables the working class to organise, express itself, and articulate its aspirations. This does not mean that the process of revolution can avoid violence but bourgeois democracy does enable the working class to become familiar with democratic institutions and so encourage the ability to administer the future socialist society. Secondly, democracy becomes part of the very strategic calculations of the attempt to realise socialism: “Democracy cannot do away with the class antagonisms of capitalist society. Neither can it avoid the final outcome of these antagonisms – the overthrow of present society. One thing it can do. It cannot abolish the revolution, but it can avert many premature, hopeless revolutionary attempts, and render superfluous many revolutionary uprisings. It creates clearness regarding the relative strength of the different parties and classes. It does not abolish their antagonisms, nor postpone their ultimate object, but it does operate to hinder the rising class from sometimes attempting the accomplishment of tasks of which it is not yet capable, and to keep the governing class from refusing concessions that it no longer possesses the strength to maintain. The direction of development is not thereby changed, but its course becomes steadier and more peaceful.”(49)

(35)The argument of Kautsky does not suggest that the role of democracy is a substitute for the class struggle. On the contrary democracy and democratic forms can promote the very progress of the class struggle and the objective of socialism. Democracy can express the ability of the working class to organise in order to achieve economic and political goals and it also is the most accurate indicator of the level of support for socialism within society. In this manner democracy can enable the supporters of socialism to avoid premature attempts to realise socialism that lack popular support. The approach of Kautsky is based on a perspective of parliamentary socialism but we can reject this strategy whilst still recognising the wisdom he elaborates about the role and character of democracy within capitalist society. We can recognise that the ability to freely exchange views can help to establish the level of support for socialism. Furthermore, the right of association and free speech enables socialists to comprehend the popularity of socialism and the prospect of success for the revolutionary transformation of society. In contrast the document of the LFTFI does not establish any of these advantages and instead reduces the role of bourgeois democracy to the importance of elections. These have been historically important in order to put reformist or centrist organisations to the test of office. The DSA is reticent about the continued validity of this approach. For example we already know that any future Labour government will be based on the politics of New Labour, and is already committed to the continuation of deflation and austerity economics and politics. Hence it would be more principled to develop an analysis that outlines these limitations of any possible future Labour government. Thus it would be more useful to utilise the advantages of democracy in order to develop organs of popular will such as the Peoples Assemblies. Dialectically speaking the role of democracy can advance the extra-Parliamentary struggle for socialism.

(36)The DSA rejects the view of the document of the LFTFI that Stalinism and Social Democracy represent bourgeois workers parties. This definition may have had some validity in the past but it no longer explains these organisations in the present. The reformist project was historically connected to the period of the post-war boom and the welfare state. The neo-liberal agenda of the supporters of capital in the 1980’s led to Social Democracy adapting to this perspective, and the commitment to the welfare state and cooperation with the trade unions was rejected. Hence the electoral support of the working class for Social Democracy was based on support for its traditional programme that had become rejected because of the adaptation of these organisations to the requirements of global capitalism.(50) Stalinism has a heterogeneous character depending on its geo-political location. In Western Europe during the period of the welfare state Stalinism could be defined organisationally in terms of the role of the bourgeois workers party. But with the demise of Stalinism between 1989-92 in Eastern Europe and the USSR the result was that the parties in Western Europe split into bourgeois formations or remaned bourgeois workers parties. For example, the Italian Communist party became the Democratic Left that adapted to the imperatives of neo-liberalism and a minority upheld the traditional stance of Euro-communism.

(37In the USSR and Eastern Europe Stalinism represented a new bureaucratic class as described by Shachtman who was critical of the orthodox view that the USSR was a degenerated workers state: “Furthermore, according to the SWP, Russia is a “counter-revolutionary workers state”. The state is proletarian because property is nationalized, it is counter-revolutionary by virtue of the Stalinist political regime, the bureaucracy. What makes it counter-revolutionary? Is it for capitalism? Is it for restoring private property? No; the fact is that it defends nationalized property “in its own way”. Is it for maintaining capitalism in the countries that it conquers? No; the fact is that it abolishes capitalist private property in these countries and reorganizes the economy to correspond exactly with Russia’s. Well then? Well, it is counterrevolutionary because it is a deadly enemy of the working class and a violent opponent of the proletarian revolution.”(51) Shachtman is describing a process of structural assimilation in which the character of Eastern Europe becomes a replica of the USSR because of nationalisation and the domination of a repressive party state. Historical events have indicated that it is possible to overthrow capitalism in a counterrevolutionary manner but to suggest that deformed workers states have resulted is to imply that this event had progressive features. Instead nationalisation is the property form that corresponds to the economic domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy. However it is dogmatic to project this characterisation onto the various mass Communist parties that have existed outside of the countries dominated by Stalinism. Instead in order to appeal for support within the working class the Communist parties of Europe and Latin America had to be in favour of reforms, trade union militancy, and the utilisation of bourgeois democracy in order to be able to have an electoral appeal. This is why Stalinism was a contradictory phenomenon and was not counterrevolutionary ‘through and through’. However the various Communist parties were connected to the USSR as the supposed expression of world socialism. Hence the demise of the USSR was bound to result in a profound ideological crisis. If Trotskyism had been more effective it could have won the most principled Communist Party militants to the revolutionary banner. This did not occur and instead the various Communist parties have often become small groups and without their former trade union connections.

(38)We essentially agree with the description in the document of the LFTFI about the process of capitalist restoration in China which was based on the pro-market policies increasingly adopted since the mid 1970’s.However, we disagree with the characterisation that North Korea and Cuba are still degenerated workers states. North Korea is a despotic regime that has features of a slave society and feudalism. Unification with South Korea would be progressive given the strong trade unions in South Korea and the dynamism of its capitalist development. North Korea is a system in crisis because of its isolation and economic failures. There is nothing to defend about this social formation and its fragile nationalised economy is for the benefit of the militaristic system. Therefore we should unconditionally support the justified revolt of the North Korean people against the dictatorship. Cuba is in crisis because of the end of its relation with the USSR. The process of structural assimilation into COMECON has been replaced by increasing tendencies for the creation of a market economy. We should defend Cuba from the threat of American military or political intervention and instead develop a perspective for the connection of revolution in Cuba to the formation of a Latin American socialist state. We should also argue that workers control should replace the market as the most important agency of economic activity.

(39)In historical terms the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was an important defeat for the working class because the result was generalised hardship and poverty. This development also enhanced the basis of globalisation. This does not mean that we should have defended nationalised property as progressive because it represented the basis of the extraction of a surplus by the bureaucracy. We reject the view that what occurred was a defeat for socialism because the USSR and its empire were not socialist. But an important ideological crisis of the international working class did occur because the demise of the USSR was ideologically perceived as the end of socialism. Consequently we reject the over-optimistic view that the demise of Stalinism is an automatic progressive and so will generate the renewal of class struggle. On the contrary the end of Stalinism has contributed to the ideological standpoint that the era of Marxism and socialism is over. We have to develop arguments that challenge this view.

(40)The document of the LFTFI outlines the importance of transitional demands and the transitional method for the advance of the class struggle. We would also emphasise that transitional demands are crucial for the development of mass struggle against capitalism. Without mass struggle the prospect of socialism is bleak but historical development has also indicated that radicalisation and militant activity of the mass movement has not been sufficient in order to bring about the overthrow of capitalism. Instead the mass movement has to be connected to a strategy that enhances the prospect of consciousness of the importance of the socialist objective. The DSA believes the strategy that is most likely to attain these revolutionary objectives is that of workers control. The document of the LFTFI has a slightly different emphasis in that it calls for the formation of workers councils. We do not oppose workers control to the prospect of workers councils, but the reason that we place an emphasis on workers control is that we believe that it has become the most likely expression of the radicalisation of the working class in many countries during periods of mass struggle. Most crucially workers control is an indication of what the socialist economy of the future could be like. As the Transitional programme comments: “Thus workers control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalized industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes.”(52) For example the occupation of the factories in France in 1938 raised the prospect of the development of socialist relations of production and established the possibility of the overthrow of capitalism. Hence workers control establishes the connection of the present to the future and therefore can inspire confidence that socialism is a realistic and credible objective. In contrast workers councils seem to have become an organisational expression that was most associated with the October revolution of 1917. These doubts about the contemporary validity of workers councils do not mean that we oppose their development. Indeed we would call for the Peoples Assemblies to become democratic and accountable organisations that potentially could become a workers council and the popular will of the working class.

(41)The major reason for our doubts about the strategic validity of the workers councils is because of its apparent connection to a problematical strategy of insurrection. The document of the LFTFI upholds this strategy in the following manner: “We defend the Leninist-Trotskyist strategy of achieving working class power through an armed insurrection led by armed forces loyal to the workers councils. Only this strategy can ensure that defeat of the armed forces of the bourgeois state is simultaneously the establishment of a new form of state power, the revolutionary workers state based on workers councils.”(53) An important problem with this strategic contention is the assumption that armed insurrection is the exclusive and only principled basis for the overthrow of capitalism. We would suggest that the question of the most applicable strategy for revolutionary transformation depends on the concrete circumstances. For example the DSA would argue that the present austerity policy within the EU implies the possibility of an international general strike in order to end this policy and prepare the basis for the end of capitalism. The importance of workers control becomes secondary in this context, but we also consider that the progress of workers control would prepare the possibility for this development of the general strike. The point being made is that whatever are the most relevant tactics for revolution, the demise of capitalism will not occur without the mass struggle of the working class. This perspective is supported by the transitional programme: “Only a general revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat can place the complete expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the order of the day. The task of transitional demands is to prepare the proletariat to solve this problem.”(54)

(42)It is interesting that Trotsky in the Transitional Programme makes no precise mention of the strategic necessity of insurrection. Instead his emphasis is on the development of the class struggle resulting in the progress of militant factory committees and workers control that prepares the prospect for the formation of Soviets. What is crucial is the role of mass struggle in generating the prospect of workers councils, or Soviets. This situation then creates a dynamic in which the seizure of power is on the immediate agenda: “Dual power in its turn is the culminating point of the transitional period. Two regimes, the bourgeoisie and the proletarian are irreconcilably opposed to each other. Conflict between them is inevitable. The fate of society depends on the outcome.”(55) Is it merely an accidental omission that results in mention of insurrection not being made? This omission does not mean that insurrection is being rejected but rather the standpoint that is being expressed suggests it will be the mass organs of the working class (presumably in consultation with the party) that decide the appropriate methods of struggle in order to realise the overthrow of capitalism. Hence it would be dogmatic to categorically decide on one particular approach before the actual conditions of struggle have indicated the most appropriate tactics to adopt. What is crucial is to realise the situation in which workers control has advanced, or factory committees are being formed, and the mass momentum for the formation of workers councils achieves progress. Once the militant organisations of the working class are challenging the hegemony of the ruling class the question of the tactic relevant for the overthrow of capitalism becomes decided by the concrete circumstances of the class struggle. This is why Trotsky seems to be reluctant to conceive of the revolutionary development of the class struggle culminating in insurrection; it could be that insurrection is only one possible result of the dynamic development of a mass movement of opposition to capitalism. It is the creation of this mass movement that is the most difficult aspect of the strategic tasks of the process of realising the overthrow of capitalism.

(43)However despite these criticisms of the strategy of the LFTFI the document makes a very perceptive point when it comments: “This likelihood of an increased tempo in the class struggle, however, does not mean that there is some “logic” within transitional demands that automatically drives forward the revolution.”(56) This point refers to the fact that the class struggle has periods of defeat and setbacks which mean that demands that have been won can be undermined by changes in the balance of class forces. Thus we would agree that transitional demands do not have a mysterious power to create an irreversible momentum of progress. It has been the Mandel leadership of the Fourth International that has sometimes justified this teleological approach. The implication is that the logic of history can enable progress to be made in the class struggle without the role of revolutionary leadership and the development of the consciousness of the working class.

(44)The LFTFI document makes mention of the importance of democratic demands. We would strengthen this section with reference to recent events. The Arab Spring has indicated that the vague demand for democracy and freedom can ultimately justify the role of reactionary powers. For example the military in Egypt rationalised their repressive actions in terms of the aims of the democratic revolution of the Arab Spring. We have to be explicit and argue that the struggles for democracy will not be successful unless they are connected to the advance of the economic and political power of the working class. Hence the establishment of democratic freedoms such as the right of association must include the right for the formation of independent trade unions and socialist parties. We also should reject the overthrow of radical Islamist governments, as in Egypt, by the military and instead contend that discontent should have resulted in new elections. In order to overcome the tensions between supporters of democracy and anti-secularists we advocate the development of socialist conceptions of democracy.(57)

(45)The section in the document of the LFTFI on the trade unions is very good but it could possibly have been improved by reference to the fact that because of the limitations of the Labour Party and Social Democracy the trade union bureaucracy has never been more influential. This has meant an emphasis on defensive and sectional struggles that are inadequate and ineffective in relation to the tasks posed by the necessity to oppose austerity. Despite mass discontent the Union leaderships have refused to develop action that could have undermined the policies of the government.(58) The author of an article on the situation comments: “So long as the bureaucracy retains its grip the unions will certainly not break Cameron. Overcoming the problem of the bureaucracy is the principled task facing all union activists in the years ahead.”(59) But the problem is that the shop stewards movement has been undermined and disorganised by the offensive of capital since the 1980’s. In other words the basis of the development of militant rank and file action is not yet present. Thus we should encourage the activity of community and voluntary groups in order to try to encourage action by the unions. To some extent this development has occurred with the militancy of benefit groups but the unions still act in a sectional manner. To put it bluntly: the question of pensions is secondary because of the threat to pay, employment and conditions posed by the austerity policy. All the various grievances of the unions should become the basis for opposing the actions of the government. Furthermore, the left groups should overcome their present passivity and put pressure on the unions to become militant opponents of the government.

(46)In relation to the promotion of mass struggle the potential important role of the united front is not limited to mobilising around defensive struggles against reaction. The present fact is that the left groups are hopelessly disunited. Therefore in relation to the prospect of developing a campaign against austerity we would hope that the various forces of the left would act together around the common objective of defeating the government. This united front would not imply any programmatic concessions to centrism. On the contrary we would suggest that the strategic superiority of the most principled forces of the Marxist left would create the conditions for the creation of a united Marxist party that would become the political basis for the development of a socialist offensive against capitalism. In addition the development of united front action against fascism and the prospect of state repression are also vitally important.

(47)The oppression of women, black people and homosexuals has been part of the history of humanity. This oppression cannot be related just to capitalism and instead has been part of the patriarchal justification of the domination of a ruling class within history. However the situation of oppression has also led to resistance of the oppressed who have developed many forms of opposition to patriarchy, slavery and sexual conformity. The very fact of this resistance is an indication that forms of sexual and racial oppression are not part of human nature and instead suggest that what is possible is the end of all forms of oppression. Since the development of socialism the struggle against oppression has been connected with this perspective. The early forms of utopian socialism were connected to the ideology of emerging feminism, and the various slave revolts of the 19th century were inspired by the example of the French revolution. However Marxism did not develop in a satisfactory manner the relationship between the struggle against oppression and socialism. The struggle for the equality of women was not connected to the cause of socialism in an emphatic manner. Marxism knew what it was against which was bourgeois feminism but it did not establish what constituted socialism feminism.(60) It could also be argued that similar limitations were prevalent in relation to failing to establish the connection between the struggle against racial oppression and socialism. This does not mean that important work has not been carried out on the question of understanding women’s oppression but the continued arguments about the relationship of women to the working class indicates that the construction of a Marxist variant of socialist feminism has been problematical.(61)

(48)An important development within feminist theory has been that of intersectionality. This has resulted in controversy about whether it can be compatible with Marxism. It has been argued that intersectionality can develop Marxism in the following terms: “Most intersectional analysis focuses at the level of social location, a “place” defined by these intersecting axes of domination, and asks how a social location shapes experience and identity. If feminism is to become a powerful movement again, working class women will have to organize across the divides of race/ethnicity and sexuality. It is therefore of political importance to understand how class locations, in intersection with race/ethnicity and sexuality, shape women’s survival projects, their strategies for claiming self-worth and exercising public authority, their uses of motherhood as an identity, and their responses to cultural constructions of their sexuality. Due account must be taken of class differences within racial/ethnic groups as well as class similarities across racial/ethnic divides as a route towards delineating the common ground for a working class women’s politics and for a feminist politics of class.”(62)

(49)The above quote indicates that the methodology of intersectionality can generate the prospect of a mass movement based on the principle of unity in difference. The very divisions of the working class in terms of gender and race can be overcome by the formation of a movement that is anti-capitalist and is committed to women’s emancipation and the liberation of oppressed racial groups. Hence the perspective of intersectionality could contribute to the resolution of the tensions between the conflicting claims of gender, race and class and instead promote the unity of diversity. In other words intersectionality could express the possibility to overcome the gender and race divisions within the working class that have undermined the development of a united struggle for socialism. The sectionalism and chauvinism of the trade unions could be overcome by the advocacy of a strategy that unites men and women, black and white, heterosexual and homosexual in the struggle for socialism. If the revolutionary possibilities of intersectionality are not recognised by Marxists it is possible that this approach could be utilised in a reactionary manner that rejects the strategy of the struggle for socialism.

(50)The traditional Marxist view that suggests the family is the basis of women’s oppression has a profound level of truth but it is also unsatisfactory. This is because the family is the natural unit for the raising of children and developing partnerships between adults. The suggestion that we can abolish the family is unrealistic and is an impractical aspect of the Marxist programme. Instead of attempting to abolish the family we should develop a programme that can address the issues involved in opposing women’s oppression in a manner that is not dogmatic. Furthermore, historical experience has indicated that when the family was legally abolished the result has not been to the benefit of women and instead new forms of women’s oppression have resulted. It is necessary that Marxists reject dogmatic views about the family and instead accept the diversity of the various forms of the family that have developed in recent years. Instead of upholding in theory (but not in practice) the aim of the abolition of the family means that Marxism is not only being unrealistic but is also potentially alienating people from support for its socialist aims. We should accept that the family is an integral and biological part of human development and so the aim should be to overcome oppression within the family rather than aspire to the actual abolition of the family.

(51)This point can be established in a different manner. If we as Marxists and socialists want to praise the contribution of motherhood for the development of humanity we cannot differentiate this praise from the role of mothers in the raising of families. This understanding does not mean support for the male dominated family. Instead we can acknowledge that the very role of women’s liberation has been to undermine the traditional family and so create more generalised egalitarian forms. This does not mean that patriarchy and oppression has been ended but it does suggest that progress has been made in the undermining of male domination. The role of Marxism is to indicate a strategy that outlines the progress that has been made and the tasks that still have to be carried out if oppression is to be definitively overcome.

(52)The Marxist view of religion is something that is in urgent need of revision. The Marxist view of religion is based on the legacy of the Feuerbachian view that religion is a form of alienated consciousness that is unable to comprehend the importance of human activity. This means that atheism is effectively justified as being part of the programme of Marxism. What has resulted from this standpoint is an effective separation between Marxism and the followers of religion. This means that Marxism is considered to be opposed to the aspirations of the majority of humanity who are various types of religious believers. Marxism will never become the standpoint of the adherents of religious believers because of its atheistic stance. It is also arrogant to contend that at some point people will reject their religious belief in favour of atheism and Marxism. Instead of this traditional but dogmatic standpoint, the supporters of Marxism should accept that the question of support for religion should be a matter of personal choice. This also means that Marxism has no preference for any particular religious creed and instead its attitude towards religion should be based on the democratic programme. This means support for the separation of church and state, and recognition of the possibility for people to voluntarily choose the religion, or none, of their choice. We also reject any justification of the oppression of women in the name of religion. Marxism is against any attempt at forcible conversion of people and opposes terrorist repression of democratic values in the name of religion. However, the standpoint of Marxism should be that the question of religious belief should not be dictated by the dogmatic views of the past. Instead we recognise that the adherents of the various religions often share our concern to promote a world based on equality, fairness and for an end to poverty. Therefore ending the traditional relationship between atheism and Marxism will generate the prospect for Marxism to establish a dialogue with the various adherents of religion.

(53)The issue of the relationship between green politics and socialism also requires more detailed study. It could be argued that the greens are inherently opposed to the development of an inter-connected world economy in the name of the environment.(63) This standpoint implies that localism is the answer to the problems of economic activity such as pollution and poverty. But to principled Marxists this view seems to justify modern forms of the national basis of socialism. We would contend that the international development of the productive forces can still provide the possibility for economic activity that is able to tackle the problems of ecology. In order to address these issues it is necessary for Marxists to tackle the question of what we would mean by sustainable and environment friendly economic activity. This work has been begun by people like Ted Benton and John Bellamy Foster but it is also necessary that Marxist groups develop a more detailed conception of socialist society and its relationship to importance of ecology. Indeed the DSA would argue that this task is part of the process of elaborating what we mean by socialism.

(54)Despite some reservations about the ecological conception of how future economic activity can be developed we would accept that the issue of sustainability is vital. It is not possible to envisage a viable economy without recognition of the importance of tackling pollution, the problem of climate change, and the necessity for careful protection of existing resources. In this context the traditional Marxist conception of abundance and unlimited growth has to be seriously critiqued in terms of these ecological concerns. But we would question the view that the socialist economy that is being envisaged is post-industrial. In order to meet the needs of society it is necessary that it be based on the priorities of industrial production, but this understanding would also address ecological concerns. Trade would also be carried out in accordance with the principles of conservation. In other words we believe that it is capitalism and not industrialisation which is primarily responsible for ecological problems. However we cannot be dogmatic about this point; we have to be prepared to accept the possibility of reconciling economic activity with simpler forms if the retention of industry proves to be ecological problematic. But these priorities would also aim to maintain and improve the existing material standards of living. (This is one of the major promises of socialism)

(55)In the 21st century we cannot expect people to struggle for socialism if they have little conception of what we mean by it. It is unsatisfactory to argue that the results of struggle will resolve what we mean by socialism. Instead we have to remember that Marx was inspired by the Paris Commune in order to outline what he meant by communism. We should utilise recent work on economics and politics in order to indicate how socialism can be both democratic and economically efficient.(64) Hence it is not adequate to continue to maintain that developing conceptions of the future represents utopianism, and instead of these objections this task of developing views about socialism is part of the very process of struggling to realise the future in the present.

(56)The aim of the DSA is still socialism. We do not believe that it has become anachronistic because of the apparent unpopularity of this standpoint. Hence we would argue that the approach of anti-capitalism is not sufficient, consistent, or principled. This is because this aim is based on dissatisfaction with the existing system but its adherents refuse to outline what they are in favour of as an alternative to capitalism. Anti-capitalism is a mood of rebellion and protest but it does not establish the principles of an actual new form of society that is not based on the primacy of profit making. In contrast the principles of socialism are that the private ownership of the economy by multi-national companies is not in the interests of the majority of the people within society. This is why we are for nationalisation of the major companies and industries under workers control. Without this establishment of what are socialist relations of production the process of nationalisation could occur according to the interests of a bureaucratic elite that dominates the economy and politics. Hence economic democracy is crucial to the conception of socialism.(65) But it also necessary that a democratic state is established which is accountable to the popular will.(66) In order for these principles to become more convincing we have to carry out systematic work about what we mean by socialism and how it can be economic efficient and genuinely democratic. But this task is more principled than the anti-capitalist failure to outline what they mean by an alternative. Instead of dogmatically rejecting ‘what is’ we should attempt to outline how ‘what can be’ is able to emerge from what is. The very struggles of the working class express the possibilities to realise a future society. Hence an important task of Marxists is to outline the connections between present and future in terms of the prospects for socialism in relation to the possibilities expressed by the development of mass movements.

(56)This point can be established in relation to a critique of a popular book entitled Chav’s.(67) The book contains a passionate defence of the working class from the snobbish ridicule of the media. It outlines how the class war since the 1980’s was carried out in order to undermine the power and coherence of the trade unions and working class communities. But the problem is that it considers the working class to be a victim class that is unable to transform society: “People born into poor, working class communities do not deserve their fate, nor have they contributed to it. As the industries that sustained their lives disappeared, the once tight bonds holding many working class communities together unravelled at a breathtaking pace. Those living there could once look forward to respected, relatively well-paid jobs. Their lives had structure. Today, large swathes of communities are haunted by despair, frustration and boredom. Without real economic recovery, the social diseases that accompany hopelessness have flourished.”(68) The problem with this description is not its lack of empirical truth. He is outlining what has happened to some working class areas such as former mining communities. However the result of his pessimistic relationship between empirical description and political conclusions is to undermine the validity of his perspective of a strategy for radical change. How can a victim class bring about effective opposition to capitalism and generate the prospect of socialism? Instead his call for a new type of class politics seems to be an expression of dogmatic and sentimental reasoning rather than the outcome of sound theoretical logic: “The new class politics would be a start, to at least build a counterweight to the hegemonic, unchallenged class politics of the wealthy. Perhaps then a new society based around people’s needs, rather than private profit, would be feasible once again. Working class people have, in the past, organized to defend their interests, they have demanded to be listened to, and forced concessions from the hands of the rich and powerful. Ridiculed or ignored though they may be, they will do so again.”(69) The problem with this remark is that it does not indicate how nostalgia for the socialist politics of the past can be regenerated in the present. Is the working class able to become a powerful collective class force despite the structural changes and process of de-industrialisation?

(57)Another recent book that addresses the issues raised by Jones is by Richard Seymour.(70) He suggests that the crisis of capitalism that has promoted austerity politics could have resulted in a mass movement of opposition. However: “This is the problem we have to solve. Somehow, the Right has successfully transformed a crisis of capitalism, triggered in this case by the activities of the richest, into a crisis of state overspending caused by the fiduciary incompetence and stupidity of the poorest. They did not convince everyone of every aspect of their narrative, which is too incoherent to achieve total acquiescence. But it has been sufficient to weaken and disorganise opposition. What is needed is a realistic model of how this has been accomplished, what the weak points in the consensus are, and what resources there are for a coherent left-wing alternative.”(71) Seymour outlines how a strategy of opposition should be based on collective action and the promotion of solidarity. He also argues that this struggle should not adapt to what is good for capitalism. But he indicates an important problem with this perspective. The various left groups are in a chronic condition. They cannot provide leadership and strategic vision for the potential mass struggles: “And this is where the Left’s deepest problem lies: in the deep rooted crisis of confidence in the possibility of alternatives not just to capitalism as such, but to neoliberalism. The Left remains incoherent and fragmented on this point, and has thus far been unable to mediate between its agitation for piecemeal reforms or specific defensive struggles on the one hand, and its most abstract maximalist agenda (‘overthrow capitalism and replace it with something nicer’) on the other.”(72)

(58)The problem is that the strategy advocated by Seymour to overcome the crisis of the Left and the ideological illusions of the majority of the people is an ambiguous mixture of reform and revolution: “Three types of action thus comprise…..strikes and other trade union responses to austerity; radical social movement responses; and parliamentary intervention to break open the traditional social democratic monopoly over the working class vote, change the debate in the media, and establish ‘resistances’ within the state. The key strategic question posed by this brief upsurge of radical democracy is how to effectively link these forms of action through the appropriate organisational forms and political idioms.”(73)The initial problem with this perspective is that it does not explain how the prospect of mass struggle can be created given the emphasis on the ideological problem of the domination of the values of the ruling class concerning austerity and the related significance of the crisis of the forces of the Left. Seymour is also aware of the problem of the stifling role of the trade union bureaucracy which has undermined the possibility of the development of a mass movement against austerity because of its defensive and moderate approach. In other words the crisis of the Left, and the related problem of the ideological domination of the ruling class, has to be overcome if there is to be any prospect of the formation of a mass movement against the austerity policy. This process will have to be connected to the undermining of the domination of the trade union leadership and the formation of rank and file influence that will be able to provide expression to the discontent of the activists. The longer the inability to challenge the austerity policy continues the greater will become the ideological hegemony of the ruling class and the demoralisation of the working class will intensify. This situation would create an unprecedented situation whereby the ambitious programme for decreasing the living standards of the working class will have a chance of successful implementation. In this context the crisis of the Left and the Union activists will become greater. What is required is a strategy that can bring about the mobilisation of the working class and generate confidence in the Left to act as the guide and influence of this mass movement.

(59) Seymour would argue that his combination of the defensive and offensive, and the interaction of the Parliamentary and revolutionary struggle, is just what is required. He is principled to suggest that the aim of the struggle should not be preoccupation with previous gains and nostalgia for the past. We should not be aiming to defend the welfare state and instead should adopt an anti-capitalist perspective that is about the revolutionary transformation of society. Is this perspective upheld by a combination of Parliamentary influence and mass struggle which occurs outside of the role of the state? If his aim is to establish a Parliamentary government the problem will be the pressure of the state in order to establish correspondence between the imperatives of capital and the socialists forces elected into government despite the development of a situation in which the expression of the popular vote is in favour of anti-capitalism. However, if his aim is to consider the elected members of Parliament as being merely support for the mass struggle against austerity this would be a more principled and credible strategy. Despite ambiguity we have to give Seymour the credit for suggesting that the aim of the strategy against austerity is to promote radical democracy via the role of a mass movement of opposition to neoliberalism. In this context the role of Parliament is to reinforce the promotion of what could become mass struggle against austerity and in favour of the militant rejection of austerity. This emphasis would resolve his vacillation between the alternatives of reform and revolution. The point is does Seymour consider the mass struggle outside of Parliament to be primary, or alternatively does he think the election of a socialist government to be the central aspect of the struggle against austerity? The former option can open up the possibility of revolutionary alternatives but the latter prospect has historically resulted in reformist adaptation to capitalism. In our opinion the success of the mass movement against austerity would depend on the ability to construct the forces of radical democracy that would represent an alternative to the bourgeois government. Hence the popular will would express a dual power that can only become successful by supporting a strategy for a general strike (Connected to a general strike within the EU) that could bring about the downfall of the government.

(60)Seymour raises important doubts about the prospect of the success of his strategy. He suggests that reliance on the role of the trade unions for the creation of a mass movement against austerity is problematical. He argues that the trade unions represent only a decreasing part of the workforce. His answer to this problem is to create community unionism that would develop community unions within working class areas that would be concerned not only with issues of the workplace but also tackle questions of concern for working class communities. In this context Unions would become more responsive to their members and also rediscover the traditional militancy that could promote struggle against austerity.(74) The DSA would support this approach and be sympathetic to any transformation of the Unions that could make them more responsive to the general interests of working class communities and overcome their present sectionalism. We would also be sympathetic to Seyomour’s support for intersectionality and the concept of ‘unity in difference’. This does not undermine an emphasis on class politics and instead indicates that issues of gender and race are an integral part of the class struggle. However we would have problems in endorsing his view that the so-called precariat is acquiring strategic primary importance.(75) This is a strata of the working class that engages in part-time or seasonal work. In other words they are the most super-exploited of capitalism. The aim of Marxists should not be to glorify the revolutionary possibilities of this stratum of the working class and instead should attempt to win them to the trade unions. They would carry out campaigns that have the aim of providing full-time and well-paid work for the precariat. Instead of glorification of the precariat we should advocate policies that transform their social situation.

(61)Seymour argues that the diverse interests of the working class can be most effectively realised by the development of radical social movements rather than through the vanguard role of the party or trade union: “We need a working class strategy that is not reductive – that neither reduces the working class to its organised layers nor ignores the ways in which it is structured by gender, race and so on. The 99% is not just an alliance of white male workers, but of every heterogeneous element that is oppressed and exploited and stands to lose from austerity and entrenched neoliberalism. We need trade union action, but we also need to activate many people beyond that; we need a militant social movement.”(76) But the problem is that his definition of the social movement is very vague and represents any action that is not expressed by traditional trade unions or left-wing parties. What is more definite is his emphasis on the role of the working class, such as public sector workers in opposing austerity, and the necessity to create a mass movement of the forces of labour against capital. What he has actually outlined is the importance of uniting the workers in their unions with the working class communities in new community unions. These new unions would not necessarily replace existing unions but would provide additional pressure for the creation of a militant mass movement of opposition to austerity. Ultimately his strategy is based on opposition to the existing state and so is principled despite concessions being made to the view that political work within the state is also practical and necessary: “Our strategy should involve building up ‘resistances’ within the state, both among public sector workers and in the parliamentary apparatuses. And at critical moments, it should seek to cause ruptures in the state, to disorganise the power bloc and empower democratic forces beyond the state.”(77)

(62)The recent work of intellectuals like Richard Seymour is a useful addition to the theoretical work being carried out on the austerity policy and how it should be opposed. Unlike some Marxist work it does not assume that a movement of opposition will be automatically formed because of the crisis and instead outlines how ideology represents a material practice that can uphold the domination of the ruling class. He calls on the Left to reject dogma and instead to attempt to engage in imaginative thinking about the present situation. Only in these terms will it be possible to build a mass movement of opposition to the austerity. However we reject his attempt to reconcile reformism and revolutionary politics as an example of imaginative thought. Instead we should still attempt to develop a revolutionary strategy that engages with contemporary economic and political conditions.

(63)The development of a convincing conception of socialism has two major components. Firstly, analysis of economic elements, and secondly, an outline of the role of politics and democracy. An important recent study of Marx’s understanding of the economic features of the alternative to capitalism has been carried out by Peter Hudis.(78) He argues that Marx’s approach was not based on the perspective of the replacement of private ownership of the means of production with a statist or nationalised economy and instead his aim was to overcome the value character of capitalist productive activity. This was because the formation of value is the basis of the exploitation of labour. Hence the transcendence of exploitation would express important criteria as to how successfully the construction of socialism was being realised, and the related demise of the influence of economic activity based on the influence of capital. In this context Marx came to the understanding that the abolition of private property does not necessarily result in the demise of the importance of capital: “However, Marx brings a distinctive perspective to demands to transform property relations by arguing that the abolition of private property does not necessarily lead to the abolition of capital. To liberate the worker, he argues it is necessary to go deeper than the property relation and deal with ‘the direct relation of the worker and production.’”(79)

(64)The assumption is that labour must act to bring about the end of its domination by capital. In contrast the state can act even after revolution to continue to reinforce the domination of capital within the relations of production. The answer to these problems is not to provide workers with equal wages because this does not tackle the loss of control over production in the act of economic activity. It is not possible to overcome abstract labour that represents value creating production by installing an egalitarian form of wage payment, instead it is necessary to overcome the role of value and its undermining of the ability of labour to control the act of production. Hudis outlines how only the proletariat can be the agency of change and so there is something about its character that is able to overcome value creating production and its aspects like the division of labour, alienated labour and the role of the market. But he interprets Marx to suggest that this process of change does not involve transition and is instead immediate: “There is therefore – at least for Marx- no room for a transition to socialism based on the governing principles of the old society.”(80) This comment indicates the aspect of idealism in the approach of Hudis. His emphasis on the goal of communism means that he denies the importance of the legacy of the past in relation to the attempt to develop the new. Furthermore, he implies that the political situation will not result in the necessity of compromise in relation to the attempt to overcome the alienated and value character of labour. This point could be made in relation to the introduction of the New Economic Policy by the Bolsheviks. The limited reintroduction of the market was because of peasant unrest. Economic retreat was necessary in order to establish political stability. In this context the attempt to overcome value creating production in immediate and dogmatic terms would only have resulted in the overthrow of the Bolshevik regime. This retreat did not represent a compromise of principles and instead indicated that realism and moderation has to be an important aspect of the process of trying to creating new relations of production without the domination of value.

(65)This criticism of Hudis does not mean that he is wrong to criticise the so-called socialist regimes of the 20th century for failing to transform the relations of production with the result that generated abstract labour which in a concrete form produced value.(81) We could also suggest that there is no alternative to economic democracy if value creating production is to be overcome. Hudis does not deny this aspect but he emphasises that the generation of social and communal production based on free individuality is the logical outcome of the very development of capitalist and commodity production. The alternative society is being created within capitalism, and the formation of a new society would be characterised by its ability to met new needs and aspirations without the domination of value and exchange relations.(82) We do not deny the importance of the emergence of the new within the old but the evolutionist logic of Hudis means that he ignores the importance of the strategic task of how this aspect of the new within the old is to be actually liberated. He does not outline how the relations of production are to be transformed and neglects the political importance of the act of revolutionary change. Instead of the elaboration of a strategy of transformation from the old into the new Hudis outlines a philosophical process of the realisation of the subject which is identical to the formation of the alternative to capitalism: “In contrast, once wealth is freed from its value-integument, a ‘multiplicity of needs’ is generated for the sake of augmenting a concrete, sensuous force – that of the individuals themselves, who step forth as the real human subject. The actual individual now firmly emerges as the absolute subject. Largely for this reason, Marx writes that an ‘absolute movement of becoming’ characterises post-capitalist society. Such an ‘absolute movement of human capability and creativity, which is thwarted by capitalist value production, is the basis of the new society.”(83)

(66)The major problem with this approach is that it defines historical development solely in terms of economic imperatives. Hence he outlines a conception of historical development in which capital is increasingly undermining its own domination by the decline of the importance of value creating production. Hudis denies that he defends this view dogmatically, and he still accepts the importance of class struggle if change to the new society is to occur. But his approach does not allow for the significance of politics and ideology in undermining the prospect of mass struggle against capitalism. Instead the primary aspect of what is defined as an evolutionary process of change is the economic transformation that is occurring within capitalism. Hence he can also suggest that given the extent of the change that is occurring within capitalism the process of transition to the new society is not required and instead immediate communism is possible. This means that he has created a perspective that underestimates the difficulties involved in the overcoming of value creating production. For example, Hudis argues that whilst Marx accepts that production according to labour time is still an important aspect of the new society, he also contends that Marx considers this aspect to be qualitatively different to time under capitalism.(84) Hence the intellectual capacity of labour will be more important and so on. This type of argumentation denies any importance to the scarcity of resources in what is a transition period and so labour time is still necessary and not free and voluntary. It can also be reasonably assumed that this situation will mean labour has an element of compulsion in order to try and produce vital goods in the minimum of time. In other words totally free labour is not possible in the transition period and the realisation of communism is not possible without this process of transition. This point is exactly what is denied by Hudis because of his rigid ontological elaboration of the smooth evolution of capitalism into communism.

(67)Despite these criticisms of Hudis he carries out an immensely important examination of how Marx considered that value creating production can be transcended in the new society. He outlines how the principle of socially necessary labour time that is connected to the importance of commodity exchange can be replaced with production according to actual labour time that is not mediated by alienating mechanisms that generate value. This process connects individual production to the generation of the social product: “But how exactly is value-production to be eliminated? The question centres on the issue of time. With the creation of a free association of individuals who consciously plan out the production and distribution of the social product, labour ceases to be subject to the dictatorship of time as an external, abstract, and impermeable force governing them irrespective of their will and needs. Once time becomes the space for the individuals’ deliberation and development, social relations become ‘transparent’, since they are no longer governed by an abstract average that operates behind their backs. ‘Society’ no longer appears as a person apart, but rather as the sum total of the free and conscious activity of individuals. Labour again becomes directly social, but on the basis of freedom. Once the dictatorship of abstract time over the social agents is abolished in the actual process of production it becomes possible to distribute the social product on the basis of the actual amount of time that they contribute to society, since production relations have been transformed in such a way as to make such a distribution possible.”(85) However this important principle of what constitutes the alternative to the value production of capitalism is qualified by the problem of the scarcity of resources which means that labour cannot be truly an expression of free time. The task will be to minimise the element of compulsion within the relations of production in order to undermine the prospect of the generation of abstract and value creating production. This task will be advanced by the extent to which the relations of production are transformed in accordance with the principle of economic democracy.

(69)Hudis also outlines how the possibility to transform labour into value creating production is based on the process of the sale of labour power to the capitalist via the role of wage labour. This process enables wage labour to be controlled and owned by capital. Hence the demise of wage labour is also vital for the success of the new society in terms of its ability to overcome value creating production. But the question of the implementation of this aim of the end of wage labour also relies on the ability to develop a means of distribution that is superior to the role of wages for obtaining goods. Hudis argues that Marx is adamant that value and exchange value are not characteristics of any transition period in relation to the realisation of communism, and wage labour is immediately replaced by remuneration in accordance of the principle of individual labour time. The role of wage labour would be to reintroduce the basis of value creating production, and the state as employer would be the personification of capital. The role of the market in all its forms, commodities and wage labour, and rewards in accordance with production and the exchangeability of goods, is immediately replaced by this new principle of remunerating labour: “In direct contrast, Marx’s concept of socialism or communism is premised upon the abolition of wage labour and of capital and value production, as seen from his discussion of remuneration by labour time in the Critique of the Gotha Programme. The worker receives an amount of the means of subsistence based on the unit of time worked, not on the amount of productive output within that unit. Labour time is a varying and contingent standard, based on a given hour of actual labour performed by the individual in specific circumstances. The workers are not ‘paid’ according to whether or not their labour conforms to some invariable standard over which they have no control. The latter, distribution according to labour, is entirely consistent with value production, whereas the former, distribution according to actual labour time represents a break from value production altogether.”(86) A possible problem with this approach is that it could be argued that production according to the principles of a generalised socially necessary labour time could be more efficient and productive than labour time defined by the activity of an individual. In other words this formulation may correspond to the views of Marx, but it does not indicate that socialism without value production is more efficient then capitalism. (More on this point below)

(69)The standpoint of Hudis is that the successful transition to socialism or communism is only possible with the abolition of all mediating and alienating mechanisms such as wage labour, markets, commodity exchange and the restrictions of value creating production. This possibility is brought about by the realisation of a different principle of labour time. The approach of socially necessary labour time is replaced by individual labour time as defined by the role of the social plan. In terms of the work of Marx, Hudis has outlined an impressive reconstruction of his conception of the economic alternative form of society. But the problem is that he has not outlined what could be the empirical difficulties with this approach. Instead he assumes that if we follow Marx’s guidelines in the most principled manner the result will be the construction of communism. We know from historical experience that the difficulties involved in the process of transition to socialism and communism do not necessarily correspond to the theoretical conceptions of how the future society can be realised. For example in practice it is far more difficult to end the influence of the market and the role of abstract labour when compared to the confidence of Marx. However, despite these empirical and practical difficulties that Marx could not necessarily have anticipated, he has outlined the most perceptive criteria of what constitutes the basis of the transcendence of the domination of capital over labour which is the demise of value creating production. Hence the aim of overcoming value generating production is not a misguided strategy if the perspective of realising communism is to be achieved. Hudis has also carried out a considerable achievement in making this aim precise in terms of the overcoming of abstract and socially necessary labour time and instead realising labour time that is not based on the imperatives of external and alienating constraints. The problem with the approach of Hudis is that he does not outline how this form of non-alienating labour time can be realised. In principle he has differentiated between two types of labour time, the type that results in the production of value and the type that overcomes the domination of value. But he does not specify who constitutes the agency of this process of transcendence? How is labour to bring about the realisation of non-value production? He does mention the role of social and communal production and the importance of planning, but how is labour to realise these liberating aspects? In order to try and address this answer satisfactorily it seems apparent that it is necessary to emphasise how the relations of production can be transformed. The only possibility for the creation of a non-value form of labour time is when the producers are able to control the process of economic activity. Consequently it is necessary to go beyond Marx’s writings and instead utilise the material that tackles the issue of workers control of production.(87) Despite this criticism Hudis has been able to extract all that is important from Marx in relation to the tasks involved in the development of communism. What is absent is recognition of the politics of the process of transition. How do the supporters of communism gain the confidence of those social forces that are reluctant to support the development of an economy without the market and wage labour? In this context the question of the politics of democracy is vital. Comprehensive understanding of the process of transition to communism cannot be reduced to an economic process. Instead the importance of consent and support for economic change requires the role of politics. This aspect is absent from the work of Hudis.

(70)Hudis is also being controversial when he suggests that the ultimate expression of the highest form of society will be able to operate without reference to the role of labour as a measure of time.(88) It would be more cautious to suggest that the formal aim of the construction of communism would be a type of abundance that no longer requires the importance of time. But in a situation that is empirically defined by ecological considerations this would be a dogmatic claim that cannot be realised and instead the allocation of resources in accordance with the principles of time would continue. But Hudis is right to suggest that the crucial aspect is to transform the relations of production in order to establish a form of distribution that is non-alienating. In this context what is crucial is to end the domination of value creating production. Hudis is principled to argue that the conception of a revolutionary regime that aims for communism based on value creating production is a misinterpretation of Marx’s views. This type of regime can only be based on the domination of a party over a class, and a nationalised economy is not based on the self-emancipation of the producers. Therefore the crude reading of Marx’s ‘Capital’ by the Bolsheviks did contribute to the difficulties involved in the attempt to realise communism successfully. However the major practical problem was the objective conditions that were unfavourable to the possibility of the realisation of communism. Hudis also considers that Marx’s conception of the transition to communism means that this process will not succeed in a situation that is not materially mature for the successful accomplishment of this aim: “For Marx, there was never a question of calling socialism or communism into being through the projection of a subjective wish. The new society will immanently emerge from the existing conditions prepared by capitalist production and reproduction and the social struggles against them. If those conditions and struggles are not present, he held, it would not emerge at all, regardless of how much such a state of being may be desired by particular individuals.”(89) But we know from historical experience that the class struggle does not crudely correspond to objective conditions and the prospect of proletarian revolution may occur in conditions that lack the pre-requisites for transition to socialism. Only international revolution can resolve this contradiction. Thus the perspective of Hudis has an aspect of economic determinism and dogmatism that does not explain complex political events and the importance of the perspective of permanent revolution.

(71)In other words we cannot argue in the emphatic manner of Hudis that the attempt to realise communism will not succeed unless it corresponds to what could be called the economic determinist interpretation of Marx. The prospect of proletarian revolution does not only occur in situations where advanced capitalism has developed. Instead it has been the merit of Trotsky and Lenin to anticipate and work for the possibility of proletarian revolution in peasant based economies. The failure of these attempts to construct communism was primarily because of a failure to develop international revolution rather than a disregard for the works of Marx. But we can agree with Hudis that the failure to overcome value creating production will result in the reproduction of an economy based on alienation, exploitation and the domination of some form of capital over labour. This expression of the influence of capital can be expressed by both a nationalised economy as well as one based on the private ownership of the means of production. The perceptive point being made by Hudis is that the domination of the monolithic party is connected to the failure to overcome the domination of value within the economy. Indeed it can be suggested that the elitist party regime is based on the durability of the role of value and the continued alienated and exploited character of labour. The works of Marx have brilliantly anticipated this possibility, and also outlined how this situation can be overcome by the establishment of a new form of labour time. Hence we should modify our traditional conception that Marx failed to outline the central features of a post-capitalist society. Instead we should intensify our study of Marx in order to elaborate his conception of what constitutes communism. But we should also be aware that Marx cannot answer all questions about communism. In this regard the works of Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin are also important and make a vital contribution to our understanding of what constitutes communism. The same point can be said of Kautsky despite his opposition to the Bolshevik revolution. But primarily we have to make our own independent studies about what we mean by socialism and communism. In this context it is necessary to emphasise the active role of labour in the process of the developing an alternative society. This task is as important as the elaboration of the continued strategic importance of labour for the demise of capitalism. Only if we can indicate the contemporary relevance of labour for the end of capitalism can we also make a reasonable argument for the continued validity of socialism and communism.

(72)There are two outstanding issues not tackled by Hudis in relation to the complexities involved in the construction of communism. The first question concerns the inherited contradictory relationship between artificial needs and genuine needs, which is part of the legacy of the consumerism of capitalist society. We know that the imperatives of profitability for the capitalist mode of production generate the creation of goods that do not promote the realisation of genuine needs like burgers, and instead contribute to the undermining of human fitness and the ability to live a healthy life style. Would these goods be banned despite the demand for them within the population? It could be argued that a ban would represent the revolutionary regime instructing the population as to what they should consume, with the result that the government becomes authoritarian and dictates to the people how they should live and imposes its wishes as to what people should consume. However the alternative is that the continued production of goods that promote obesity will still be consumed despite their ill effects. Hence the challenge for the government (state?) will be to try and promote the consumption of goods that genuinely realise needs, and so enhance the capacity of the people without becoming an expression of the imposition in relation to the patterns of consumption. In this context the realisation of democratic forms of planning will advance the prospect of the production of goods that advanced the well-being of the people. For example the production of cycles will be encouraged, and the incentive for the continued mass production of cars will be discouraged by the expansion of public transport and the use of car pooling. However, in the last analysis the issue of what is produced and consumed can only be resolved by demand, and this would imply that some goods that do not enhance the realisation of genuine need could still be produced. The point is that the legacy of the past cannot be overcome immediately as Hudis assumes and instead the contradiction between past and present will generate contradictions that may not be easy to resolve.

(73)The other major issue is the question of the efficency or level of productivity of the socialist society. Hudis resolves this question by assuming that a global revolution has occurred and so communism is the only system in existence. We cannot make this assumption and it is entirely possible that capitalist societies with high levels of the development of the productive forces (The USA) may be in competition with the socialist societies. The possible lower level of efficiency of the socialist countries could result in their domination by capitalism, and the opportunities for world trade are undermined by the higher levels of productivity and cheapness by the goods created within the capitalist economy. This situation would created the dynamics for the introduction of compulsion within the socialist economies in order to generate the development of greater levels of production, and so the situation would be created for the re-emergence of value types of production that conformed to external and abstract conceptions of time. It could be possible to artificially attempt to limit these regressive possibilities by the introduction of a state monopoly of foreign trade, but this would not encourage the productivity of the socialist society. Instead the dynamism of the forces of capital would only be encouraged to try to continue undermining the economic validity of socialism. There are two possible possibilities that could encourage the prospect of overcoming this contradiction caused by the relative isolation of the forces of socialism. Firstly the development of technology and the superiority of planning that could encourage productivity without resort to compulsion, and secondly, the development of international revolution. Trotsky did not recognise that improvements in planning and technology would not necessarily advance the prospect of socialism unless value production was replaced by non-value forms of production. But he was aware that only the advance of the international revolution could resolve these contradictions. In contrast, the adherents of socialism in one country could only promote the importance of morality as the alternative to the problem of the influence of capital on a world scale: “Tragically, the contradictions were much more fundamental than what could be amenable to such solutions. They have arisen from the reproduction of the adversarial and hierarchical character of the rule of capital in a new –postcapitalist – form. The controlling personnel superimposed on labour, and its ever more tyrannical methods, opposed by marginalized former revolutionary leaders (in the end liquidated by Stalin) were the concomitant of the Soviet type system remaining fatefully trapped – despite the original revolutionary intentions and the corresponding initial political steps taken for ‘expropriating the expropriators’ – within the structural confines of the capital system as an order of socially metabolic reproduction with its own, ruthlessly self-expansionary logic. If the politically enforced extraction of surplus labour retains its adversarial and hierarchical character – which it must if control over the labour process is not exercised by the associated producers themselves – then the objective conditions of labour (which under capitalism are personified in the private expropriation of surplus value) will have to find their new type of personification of capital.”(90) Only the development of workers control could undermine the influence of capital within the relations of production. But this perspective was rejected within the Soviet Union because of apparent inefficiency and reliance on the role of bourgeois experts. However, it could be argued in theory, if not yet confirmed in practice, that the realisation of new forms of labour time could have undermined the advantage of the dynamism of the productive forces of the capitalist mode of production. The successful realisation of non-value production could have represented an alternative to the high levels of productivity of capital because of the historical advances expressed by the generation of non-alienated labour. We should be cautious about this point because it has not yet been empirically confirmed and instead we still are confronted by the problem of the actuality of the proven dynamism of capitalism.

(74)It has been argued by some commentators that capitalism’s tendency for crisis will undermine its growth and expansion. Frederick Jameson has argued that this standpoint is a dubious reason to justify the downfall of capitalism. He argues that not only does crisis not undermine the expansion of capitalism, but also this view projects the basis for the demise of capitalism onto the faults of the system rather than expressing the actions of human agency: “Of Capital itself, we must say that it consists in the representation of a peculiar machine whose evolution is (dialectically) at one with its breakdown, its expansion at one with its malfunction, its growth with its collapse. The secret of this unique historic dynamic is to be found in the famous “falling rate of profit”, which can today, in full globalization, also be understood in terms of the world market and the ultimate limits it spells for that necessary expansion (by way of which capitalism has always “solved” its crises). But this demonstration is framed in terms of system rather than that of human agency; it is therefore not political, in the sense of human action, and would seem better calculated to encourage illusions of inevitability than to energize programs of action.”(91) This comment is not necessary a rejection of the validity of the theory of the falling rate of profit, but instead what has to be rejected is the utilisation of this theory in order to justify the perspective of the inevitable demise of capitalism. The crisis of capitalism will not bring about the automatic end of the system, instead what is still required is conscious human action in order to realise revolutionary transformation.

(75)The conclusion of the above is that there is a continual international class struggle between labour and capital in order to realise non-value production. This struggle presently takes the form of opposition to austerity and the necessity to develop a mass movement in order to bring about the demise of this policy of the ruling class. The continual discontent of labour with its situation is because of the value condition of its role within the relations of production, as Marx explains: “It is precisely as value creating that living labour is continually being absorbed into the valorization process of objectified labour. In terms of effort, of the expenditure of his life’s energy, work is the personal activity of the worker. But as something which creates value, as something involved in the process of objectifying labour, the worker’s labour becomes one of the modes of existence of capital, it is incorporated into capital as soon as it enters the productive process. This power which maintains old values and creates new ones is therefore the power of capital, and that process is accordingly the process of its self-valorization. Consequently it spells the impoverishment of the worker who creates value as value alien to himself.”(92) If this comment is read complacently it would seem to suggest that the worker is merely an instrument of capital. But the crucial point that he makes is that the worker is alienated by this domination by capital and so implies that he/she will reject this role. However this does not mean that the process of change is inevitable because for various reasons it could be argued that labour lacks the social power to bring about revolutionary transformation.

(76)Consequently the crucial question becomes whether labour has the collective power to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism: “Proletarianization by itself, however, would not be enough to generate the intensification of anti-capitalist class struggle……since the intensity of social conflict depends not only on the intensity of opposing interests but also crucially, on the capacity of people to engage in collective actions in pursuit of those interests.”(93) This point is a crucial question that needs to be addressed by Marxists. It is entirely plausible that a strategic impasse characterises society because it is possible to combine widespread discontent caused by value creating production and generalised unemployment with an inability to change society because of structural limitations and the increasing ineffectiveness of collective action. Possibly this strategic question is the most important challenge for Marxism. We would argue that the situation of austerity represents the situation that can promote collective mass action by the working class. In this context we would also suggest that periods of apparent lulls in the class struggle have to be resolved one way or the other. This would mean either the prospect of important defeats if mass action does not occur, or alternatively, the renewal of militancy, and the development of significant struggles. However what is not likely is that the increasingly seriousness of the crisis of capitalism will somehow bring about revolutionary changes in some objectivist or automatic fashion. Instead of supporting this type of complacency Marxists should be preoccupied with the importance of strategy. The result of a failure to address this issue in a serious manner has led to the crisis of confidence within the Left, or indulging in fantasy politics. Ironically one of the major effects of the limitations of the Left is to discourage the working class from engaging in militant politics. The result of this situation is for the Left to blame workers for a lack of desire for struggle. If we are to overcome this vicious circle of decline the Left has to become serious and start to address the issues tackled by Richard Seymour. In this context we are worried that the Left Unity organisation seems to be more preoccupied with organisational questions rather than issues of strategy. It seems to have failed to elaborate a strategy of opposition to the austerity policy, apart from a vague commitment to a mixed economy. This failure is part of a general crisis of confidence on the Left. In order to address this situation it is necessary to tackle theoretical questions seriously rather than attempt to avoid them by support for various forms of activism.

(77)The other aspect of the understanding of a socialist society is the role of the political and democracy. One of the classical conceptions of the revolutionary Marxist standpoint is provided by Lenin. He is replying to Kautsky’s criticisms of the apparent lack of democracy within the Soviet regime.(94) Lenin argues that Kautsky’s claim that the Soviet regime is a dictatorship of a minority party elite is false. Instead the revolutionary regime is superior to bourgeois democracy in that it is based on the role of a Soviet state that is administered by the working class, and which is accountable to the popular will of working people. The restricted democratic freedoms of bourgeois regimes have become real such as freedom of the press. The old bureaucratic state of Tsarism has been replaced by the democratic state of the Soviets. Lenin concludes: “Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy. Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.”(95) But he also argues that the ability of the Soviets to flourish is based on the importance of the continuation of the class struggle of the working class against the former bourgeoisie. This means: “The indispensable characteristic, the necessary condition of dictatorship is the forcible suppression of the exploiters as a class, and consequently the infringement of “pure democracy”, ie, of equality and freedom, in regard to that class.”(96)

(78)Lenin outlines a strong argument as to why the Soviets can express the popular will and in this sense be superior to the limitations of bourgeois democracy which has a bias in favour of the wealthy and powerful. But this character of the Soviets can only be maintained if they are based on the role of multi-party democracy. The reduction of the activity of the Soviets to the domination of a single party, however revolutionary, will create tendencies for it to become an expression of minority dictatorship. It could be argued that in the conditions of civil war it was necessary to ban all parties that supported the counterrevolutionary forces. But this should have been an emergency measure. Arguably the Mensheviks continued to defend the revolution and so should not have been banned. Most crucially the very credibility of the Soviets for the working class was their ability to articulate the views of a multi-party democracy. The Soviets became discredited when they became conceived as the instrument of one party rule.(97) In relation to the coercion used against the old ruling class this could be justified in terms of the emergency measures of the civil war when the bourgeoisie was in armed opposition to the revolution. But in more peaceful periods this meant the denial of the vote for the employers. This was a measure that undermined the principles of Soviet democracy that should be based on universal suffrage. Without this aspect the results of votes to the Soviets would be discredited and bourgeois democracy would be considered to be superior. It is not sympathy for the employers that motivate this criticism and instead what is important is the question of the very democratic legitimacy of the Soviets. Furthermore, force should not be the normal means of conducting class struggle in the transition period to socialism instead the basis of class conflict should be in terms of democratic methods which obtain consent for the aims of the revolutionary regime. The development of popular consent will marginalise the forces of reaction and the use of coercion will only result in sympathy for the cause of the former bourgeoisie.

(79)Lenin argues that the Constituent Assembly was a reactionary institution and so rightly was dissolved in the interests of the class struggle and the higher claims of Soviet democracy: “To say that the Constituent Assembly should not have been dispersed is tantamount to saying that the fight against the bourgeoisie should not have been fought to a finish, that the bourgeoisie should not have been overthrown, and that the proletariat should have made peace with them.”(98) But the actual party with the majority in the Constituent Assembly were the Socialist Revolutionaries who represented the peasantry. The formation of a coalition government would not have betrayed the revolution and instead could have broadened its popular appeal. Furthermore, the Constituent Assembly was a traditional aim of the Soviets since 1905, and this meant establishing a democratic republic on the basis of Soviet power. In this sense the most progressive aspects of bourgeois democracy could have been reconciled with proletarian democracy. Therefore it could be argued that the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly did not contribute to strengthening of the Soviet regime and only resulted in antagonising the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. Hence the social basis of the revolutionary regime was narrowed and this situation did not enhance the credibility of Soviet democracy.

(80)Lenin ultimately defends the policies of the Bolsheviks in terms of the superiority of Soviet democracy: “Incidentally, the Soviets represent an immensely higher form and type of democracy just because, by uniting and drawing the mass of workers and peasants into political life, they serve as a most sensitive barometer, the one closest to the “people”…….of the growth and development of the political class maturity of the people.”(99) This comment has validity in general terms. The Soviets were historically justified in terms of their capacity to express the participation of working people in the tasks of advancing the cause of socialism. Hence the Soviets were superior to the institutions of bourgeois democracy that expressed the class interests of the capitalist class. But some of the policies of the Soviet leadership led by Lenin were counterproductive and unintentionally undermined the popular validity of the role of the Soviets. The lessons for the future could include recognising that a Soviet regime can co-exist with the formation of a Constituent Assembly. It is possible to reconcile the progressive aspect of bourgeois democracy with proletarian democracy to the advantage of the latter. The result is to uphold the legitimacy and importance of the Soviet regime. It is also necessary to uphold multi-party democracy. This includes the rights of parties that support capitalism. The point is that if the forces of socialism do not obtain popular support within the Soviets and Constituent Assembly such a situation will be an indication that the attempt to construct a new society is not being successful. Consequently the aspirations of the working class are not being realised. In this context the logic for counterrevolution will be enhanced and it will be necessary to resolve this serious situation in a democratic manner. But the economic success of the regime and the expansion of international revolution will be the basis to generate political support for the forces of socialism and undermine the prospect of counterrevolution.

(81)In conclusion we would maintain that despite the criticisms of the LFTFI document on ‘Trotskyism in the 21st Century’ the DSA would argue that this work represents a serious contribution to our understanding of the principles and programme of revolutionary Marxism. However we would also suggest that the very assumption that only one Marxist group expresses what is meant as intransigent politics is false. We would maintain that several parties and international formations may contribute to our understanding of uncompromising Marxism. An important task is to bring these organisations together in order to promote the development of agreed programmatic documents. One of the central tasks of this process will be to defend the aim of socialism within an ideological atmosphere that considers capitalism to be the natural and eternally given form of society. The limitations of Stalinism do not mean that socialism has become discredited and part of a politics of failure. On the contrary socialism combined with democracy represents the higher form of society that can resolve the apparently enduring problems of poverty, inequality and famine. We would argue that the various recent revolts in favour of democracy also represent an unarticulated yearning for socialism. Indeed the very task of revolutionary forces is to outline how democracy can be most effectively realised when it is connected to the struggle for socialism. We would also contend that the aspiration for national self-determination is not an alternative to international socialism and instead the demands for national equality can be realised most effectively in terms of the formation of international socialist states.

(82)The national question concerning Scotland and the Ukraine has led to disputes within Marxist circles. Jack Conrad has advocated the view that the formation of a federal republic for Scotland would be an alternative to national independence whilst also opposing accommodation to the chauvinist acceptance of the status quo of the UK state.(100) He contends: “A federal republic which constitutionally embodies both voluntary unity and the right to self-determination is, admittedly, a significant concession to national feelings. But it is also a tried and tested antidote to nationalism. If workers in England champion the right to self-determination, this will reassure people in Scotland and Wales: it will help show them that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain from our programme.”(101)What is problematic with this perspective is that its actual relevance refers to the policies of a workers government after the successful realisation of proletarian revolution. Hence the role of federation is the basis to establish the voluntary unity of different peoples within the boundaries of a single state as was proposed for the early Soviet regime. Consequently this standpoint does not contribute to the question of what attitude should be taken about the forthcoming referendum on independence for Scotland. Thus it is not surprising that Conrad advocates a boycott approach towards the referendum. His standpoint is only of importance for the future and not the present. It would be more principled for Marxists to abstain themselves from taking a standpoint towards the referendum and instead upholding the stance that we do not advocate separation but that we do accept the result of the democratic vote as the expression of the wishes of the people of Scotland. In this manner we can avoid accommodation to nationalism whilst also rejecting unionist illusions about the integrity of the United Kingdom. Whatever the result of the referendum the development of the unity of the working class within the UK against the austerity policy is vital.

(83)It is interesting that some members of the CPGB have rejected the perspective of an active boycott in relation to the question of Scottish referendum.(102) They do not reject the standpoint of the federal republic but suggest that a yes vote would undermine what is a actually constituted unity of the working class within the UK: “Tina Becker continued to argue forcefully that the question was not one of “lesser evilism” but of responding to an attack on the working class; the victory of Scottish nationalism would be a worse outcome…..What mattered was the unity of the working class and retaining what remained of the fighting power of the “historically constituted” British working class.”(103)This viewpoint acknowledges the ideological divisions that can be caused by the victory of Scottish nationalism. But the question of the unity of the British working class is not identical to the unity of the UK state. Instead the importance of unity in action, which is real unity, has to be struggled for in terms of rank and file control of the unions and the related undermining of the domination of the trade union bureaucracy. This task is posed whether the state consists of the UK or a separate Scotland and England. Hence a ‘Yes’ vote will not necessarily result in reactionary consequences. The point is whatever situation results in late September 2014 we have to strive to develop dynamic unions that can express united action in mass struggles. However Becker is right to imply that an active boycott is an abstentionist position that resolves nothing. Instead we have to uphold socialist and internationalist politics regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

(83)Workers Power adopt an different approach.(104) Andy Yorke outlines what he considers to be the disadvantages of the standpoint of national independence. Primarily he contends that the unity of the working class will be undermined. There has been a history of trade union struggle within the UK, and he outlines examples of these struggles. He argues that this unity could be undermined by the political and ideological effects of independence: “Scottish workers and English workers in these examples did not respond to an appeal for “solidarity”, they did not need one, they acted out of existing unity. The fact that they are in a single state, with a single economy and national companies (or multinational subsidiaries) and national trade unions has created an organic unity with identical interests, unions and opponents, and a consciousness of both.”(105)Consequently, the realisation of independence would undermine this unity and instead promote the separatist tendencies of working class institutions: “Independence will see the workers and employers in different countries orient to their different states and economies, with different rhythms and issues tearing the fabric of unity apart. It’s already happening by degrees as devolution is rolled out, independence would see a qualitative leap in the speed and strength of those separatist dynamics, and cement them in place.”(106)This perspective is pessimistic about the prospects for unity between English and Scottish workers if there is a yes vote in the independence referendum. Yorke’s approach is formalistic. It will not be the vote in favour of independence which will undermine unity but instead the attitude of the trade union bureaucracies. Will they utilise a yes vote as a pretext to divide the unions in the national terms of England and Scotland? The point is that regardless of the result of the referendum it will be an urgent task of union activists to maintain the levels of unity that has been the expression of the history of trade union activity within the UK. It is not the result of a referendum that decides the issue of the effectiveness, or otherwise of the unions, instead it will be the attitude of the rank and file. Our slogan should be: “In or Out of the UK, we are for keeping the organisational unity of the Unions”. Instead of this militant approach, Yorke’s pessimism means that he can only conceive of a sound future for the Unions within the UK. This statist approach actually denies recognition of the fact that we need international action if the austerity policy of the EU is to be defeated. Yorke’s policy is also contradictory because his arguments in favour of the progressive character of the UK for working class struggle undermine his democratic commitment to respect the result of the Scottish referendum. If his approach was logical he would actually be prepared to develop an alternative strategy that would attempt to promote class struggle within Scotland. We would suggest that the possible failure of the SNP to maintain its policy of defending the welfare state could be the basis for the political undermining of the credibility of Scottish nationalism. The resulting intensification of the class struggle would also generate action within the UK and at an International level.

(84)Instead of the confusion of Jack Conrad and Andy Yorke about the national question and Scotland we would suggest that Lenin provide clarity.(107) He argues that firstly, whilst Marxists do not generally support the division of nations we should be in favour of the voluntary, democratic aspiration for secession. The Marxists of the nation aspiring to separation have the right to argue against this demand whilst the Marxists of the oppressor nation should support the demand for national self-determination. Secondly, the approach should be similar to defending the right to divorce, but this right should not be advocated on every occasion when marital disputes occur: “In this concrete case taken from life, the action of the Norwegian and Swedish workers was…..unified, internationalist only because and insofar as the Swedish workers unconditionally championed Norway’s freedom to secede, while the Norwegian workers raised the question of secession only unconditionally.” (108)The confusion caused by the Scottish referendum has resulted in Scottish socialist groups arguing unconditionally in favour of separation whilst the English based groups have opposed independence. This is opposite to Lenin’s approach and indicates the lack of unity within the Left. What is absent from the discussion is an understanding that we should develop a flexible policy that can relate to whatever the decision is taken in September 2014.

(85)The point is that if we are located in England – utilising Lenin’s approach – we should support the democratic aspiration for the independence of Scotland – if that is the majority view of the Scottish people. This does not restrict our ability to make propaganda in favour of the advantages of large centralised states and the implication for the united actions of the Scottish and English/Welsh workers, but it does mean that we should respect the democratic decision of the people of Scotland. In this context the CPGB are trying to have their ‘cake and eat it’ in relation to their view that referendums are historically undemocratic. This may be true but the question in the Scottish referendum is fair and explicit, and so should produce an accurate representation of the views of the people. However it is entirely principled that Marxist groups in Scotland should outline the reactionary consequences of Scottish independence. This approach is making the point that the demand for independence is not unconditional and is instead conditional. In this context it is possible that the unity of action of Scottish and English workers could be undermined if the trade unions bureaucracy justified the role of separate unions. If this situation was to occur it would be principled for rank and file workers to act across national boundaries in united unions. The point is the result of the referendum does not mean that the result is inevitably reactionary whether the outcome is separation or upholding the UK state. What is crucial is the attitude of workers in order to act in terms of intransigent class politics. Marxist groups have a crucial role in this context in terms of promoting the standpoint of unity in action. We should not allow the referendum result – whatever the outcome – to justify demoralisation. Instead we should be prepared to relate to the situation in a principled manner even if the result is not that which is desired.

(86)Workers Power have also argued effectively in support of the aspirations of the people in the Eastern parts of the Ukraine and their resistance to the repressive actions of the central government.(109)They recognise that Ukraine is an aspiring imperialist power supported by American and the EU, whilst Russia is also an expansionist imperialist power. But the reactionary character of the Ukraine government, which contains pro-Fascist elements, means the demands of the separatist forces should be critically supported: “We should support the popular resistance in the East and support efforts to build a real leadership based in the workers and peasants, who when they are organised, will be able to kick out the self-appointed fascist “leaders” and replace them with people who genuinely represent the wishes of the people there, and are accountable to them.”(110)However, the same article also opposes the division of the Ukraine in pro-Russian terms: “Any attempt to divide Ukraine between Russia and the West must be as strongly opposed as the attempt to seize it in its entirety for the West. It is, however, clear that a united, democratic and independent Ukraine is impossible without a struggle to dispossess the political and economic dictatorship of the ruling elites, and for that power to be taken up exclusively by the working class who will use it in their own interests.”(111) In other words on the one hand Tait recognises the divisions in the working class of the Ukraine and take sides. This is justified by opposition to the apparent pro-Fascist government of the Ukraine. On the other hand he outlines a programme for the unity of the working class of the Ukraine and so is against the territorial division of the country. He seems to gloss over the fact that the resistance to the Kiev regime is based on the aspiration for the autonomy of the Eastern parts of the country, and success of this struggle would undermine the aim of territorial integrity. In order to try and reconcile the apparently conflicting aspects of the policies being advocated it would be necessary to outline a democratic programme that would enable the Eastern parts of the country to realise their aspirations in terms of democratic votes in favour of autonomy. This situation would enable an additional vote to be taken about the future of Eastern Ukraine. This vote would be about preferences for autonomy, joining Russia, or preserving the status quo. Consequently the territorial integrity of the Ukraine can only be maintained if the people democratically support it. If the people of the Eastern Ukraine effectively aspire for separation via autonomy this demand should be upheld. Hence a centralised Ukraine based on divisions within the working class should be replaced by autonomy if necessary. Separation would then create the basis for the renewal of the unity of working people. But what is primary is that we do try and uphold the territorial integrity of the Ukraine. In this context agitation for the Constituent Assembly could be the democratic alternative to autonomy. Thus a vote against autonomy promotes the campaign for an independent Constituent Assembly to become the democratic expression of a united Ukraine.

(87) Another article by KD Tait makes a confusing call for support for the autonomy of the Eastern areas and the formation of a Constituent Assembly.(112) On the one hand: “Meanwhile, the Russophone population of the East and South have every right to resist imposition of the illegitimate decrees and imposed majors from Kyiv over their regions and to seek and install de facto autonomy.”(113) On the other hand the call is also made for the formation of an all Ukrainian Constituent Assembly: “Beyond this would be best of all to raise the call for elections to a pan Ukrainian Constituent Assembly.”(114)What is not recognised by this ambiguous comment is the contradictions and tensions between these two aspects of the policy being advocated. If the Eastern parts of the Ukraine support and realise autonomy then the demand for the Constituent Assembly becomes defunct. The separatist tendencies of the people of the Eastern Ukraine are unlikely to recognise the credentials of an all Ukrainian Constituent Assembly. It will require the development of unity between the workers of the Eastern and Western Ukraine if the most progressive policy is to be realised which is the formation of a Constituent Assembly as a prelude to the enactment of the unification of a democratic republic and the realisation of a genuinely socialist state. Workers Power has to overcome confusion and make clear what is their preference, either separation of the Eastern Ukraine, or the formation of the Constituent Assembly? In our opinion the development of a Constituent Assembly based on the mass movement of the increasingly united action of the working class of the Ukraine would be the most progressive development and would be an alternative to the effective fragmentation of the country. But if this possibility was not to occur then the prospect of autonomy would be the most effective alternative to the continuation of civil war. However, any elections conducted on the question of autonomy would have to be transparent and fair, and include the right to vote either yes or no in favour of autonomy. At present elections in both Western and Eastern Ukraine are conducted in terms of the influence of intimidation and undue pressure.

(88)With the development of extreme religious movements opposed to imperialist influence in Africa and the Middle East controversy has developed about whether it can be politically principled to support imperialist military intervention against these reactionary forces.(115) Lenin is quite categorical that reactionary forces should not be supported in conflicts with the forces of imperialism.(116) But this does not necessarily mean that we should support the armies of imperialism. This approach would become an expression of justification of ‘defence of the Fatherland’, or support for the view that some type of united national interest is involved in the wars of the imperialist powers. This standpoint would undermine the development of internationalism and instead would result in the advocacy of nationalism that upheld the interests of capitalism and imperialism. Consequently we reject the view that an apparently progressive USA should be supported when intervening in feudal countries. The point is that the imperialist intervention will not result in the erosion of the power of feudalism and instead the forces of imperialism are likely to uphold the feudal interests. This situation has been the result of imperialist intervention in Afghanistan, and Taliban opposition has obscured this reactionary relationship. It is also unreasonable to expect that supposed imperialist support for democracy will be useful to any emerging working class movement. Instead democracy is ‘imposed’ in a manner that upholds sectarian religious divisions and is still based on the repression of trade unions. However this view does not mean that repressive dictators should be supported against what are genuine movements for change. The recent increasing influence of extreme religious movements in Syria does not mean that Assad should be supported and instead we should call for working class action to overthrow the tyrannical regime. This is also the only manner in which religious divisions can be overcome. However despite the points made above it is also necessary to recognise that it is not sufficient to limit our politics to the call for ‘Imperialist troops out’ of a particular country. Instead we should be concerned to support the most progressive class forces such as socialist parties and trade unions. We understand that the alternative to imperialist intervention can be a ‘carnival of reaction’ based on power disputes between rival sectarian forces and this is why we call for the convening of a genuine Constituent Assembly in order to introduce authentic democracy and also advance the cause of land reform and socialism.

(89)One important issue that has not been mentioned is the question of the European Union. This has become a crucial issue in the UK and has resulted in the development of populist support for withdrawal from the European Union. The DSA would call upon all principled socialists to reject the nationalist call for withdrawal from the EU. Instead we should work within the EU in order to develop forms of international working class solidarity action in order to promote the perspective of an international general strike against the austerity policy and to advance the realisation of a united European socialist state. We would argue that an important reason for the rise of reactionary and populist parties like the United Kingdom Independence Party is the result of the erosion of socialist culture over the past thirty years because of the important defeats in the class struggle. We believe that an important task of Marxism is to promote socialist culture as part of the ideological struggle against these reactionary formations. We hope that this document has contributed to this task.

(90)An issue that is often neglected is the strategy of world revolution. Instead of the development of a strategy the perspective of world revolution is assumed but not articulated. In contrast to this dogmatic approach the work of Petras and Veltmeyer attempts to develop an ontological understanding of contemporary capitalism which then becomes the basis for the establishment of a principled strategy. In one of their recent works: ‘Empire with Imperialism’ they argue that the world is based on the importance of imperialism and the domination of oppressed countries by an hegemonic imperial state which is the USA.(117) They reject the view that economic development has superseded the importance of the role of the nation state and instead outline how nearly half of the top 500 multinational companies are based in America, Europe has the second largest number and Japan is third. In general terms Europe accepts the hegemony of the USA despite occasional differences. The system is based on the transfer of resources and money from the subordinated countries to the dominant powers and hegemonic imperial state.(118) The state apparatus carries out policies that favour the MNC’s, but this does not mean that the state is the tame instrument of the MNC. Instead: “While the imperial state represents the MNC’s, it does so in its own manner, and occasionally policies may be pursued may sacrifice one set of imperial interests for another.”(119) There is tension between the view that emphasises the importance of the national state for the economic, political and military expansion of imperialism and acknowledgement of the apparent significance of the international capitalist class. Hence the role of the neo-colonial state is to act in the interests of global capital.(120) But the general view is that states are important in order to influence economic policy. The significance of the MNC’s could not occur without having a relation to the imperial state. Whilst the recolonised and dominated state can have an important role in relation to the introduction of measures that favour the interests of the MNC’s. In Latin America the client state has been established that acts in the interests of the MNC’s of America.

(91)The strategists of the imperial state also emphasise the importance of military expansion for the hegemony of the imperial state. This can result in tensions between the military and economic empire builders: “The latter clearly see military action as a means to an end – a dominant and hegemonic American empire. For military imperialists, military world conquest has become the strategic goal which, they assume, will redound eventually to the benefit of the economic empire builders.”(121) Maintaining the military empire has huge costs and has resulted in the cutting of social services in the USA. Only the utilisation of ideological propaganda has ensured the popularity of this military expansion within the working class. However the process of military and economic expansion has led to popular resistance from subordinated countries and classes. The creation of open economies in Latin America for the benefit of the MNC’s has undermined the social stability of the industrial working class and created a semi-proletariat of the unemployed and street vendors. Furthermore the undermining of traditional rural economies has led to protests by peasants who have been radicalised by a process of being transformed into an agricultural proletariat. The vanguard of struggle has become the rural working class (former peasants) and the public sector workers whose jobs and conditions have been undermined by a process of privatisation. This situation of radicalisation resulted in the formation of the radical regime of Chavez in Venezuela and mass struggles in countries like Bolivia. Military expansion has resulted in popular resistance in Iraq, but the aims of the imperial state are still popular in America. The development of a mass anti-war movement has not materialised. Demonstrations in Europe against the Iraq war did not result in a genuinely anti-war movement. Thus Petras and Veltmeyer indicate the present strategic impasse between the development of forces of popular resistance to the aims of the imperial state in Latin America and the Middle East, together with the failure to develop a popular challenge to the aims of empire in the most advanced capitalist countries. The success of single issue mass movements in the West has been very mixed. Furthermore, the forces of anti-imperialism can be reactionary and based on right-wing motives as in Eastern Europe and clerical forces as in the Middle East. The major expression of popular and democratic anti-imperialism is in Latin America. However, the authors also reject the possibilities of role of the industrial unions in Latin America. They reject the view that these unions have been part of the mass movements developing in Latin America: “In fact, industrial workers and their trade unions have been the least active and militant components of the anti-imperialist movements. Many workers fear the loss of employment, faced by a mass of unemployed workers. Equally damaging, most of the trade union officials have consolidated control and become closely linked to tripartite pacts with the state and employers, and reject independent class action, let alone active anti-imperialist solidarity.”(122) But despite this pessimism they do outline how the public sector workers have become radicalised by the situation of privatisation. However despite the apparent decline in the militancy of the industrial workers, the commentators are able to indicate that the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America has become more left-wing. This is because the national bourgeoisie is totally incorporated into the aims of the imperial state and the MNC’s. They uphold the client state, and it’s imperative to act in terms of the interests of the MNC’s. The anti-imperialist movement is now led by a new coalition of the subordinated classes: “Second, the popular base of the modern AIM has shifted from the industrial trade unions to the peasant and rural movements, as many of the trade unions are involved in collective bargaining agreements with the MNC’s and prefer to negotiate contracts rather than raise issues such as nationalisation. In contrast, peasant and farmer livelihoods and households are directly and adversely affected by the large-scale entry of subsidized food products, imperially dictated eradication programs and the expansion of foreign-owned agro-export corporations.”(123)In this manner the argument is presented that Latin America represents the centre of world revolution against the hegemony of the imperial state and the MNC’s.

(92)A powerful argument has been outlined in terms of the perspective that Latin America is the centre of world revolution. However this standpoint is connected to the pessimistic conception that the working class of Europe and the USA are unlikely to oppose the imperial state in the long-term. This view is basically asserted and related to the role of militaristic ideology rather than being based on discussion of the apparent structural weakness of the working class in Europe and the USA. This book was also written before the recent crisis of 2008 which has led to discontent with capitalism. It is quite possible that mass action against austerity would have occurred were it not for the conservative role of the trade union bureaucracy. However the authors make a convincing argument in favour of the radicalisation of sections of the subordinated classes in Latin America. They outline how the structural adjustment programmes have undermined the social stability of the peasantry and so led to radicalisation and mass movements of opposition to imperialism. We would also argue that the acceptance by the industrial working class of the aims of the MNC’s is temporary. Indeed the authors outline how it is the role of the trade union bureaucracy which has led to accommodation between the unions and the MNC’s. It will be necessary for the workers to overcome the domination of the trade union leadership if they are to become an integral part of the anti-imperialist movement. Instead of pessimism we should be advocating a workers-peasants alliance as the bulwark of the anti-imperialist movement and the basis of the struggle for socialism. The development of this struggle would then become the impetus for mass struggles in Europe and the USA. Only when struggles occur in Europe and the USA will it be possible to overcome the hegemony of the imperial state. This is the point that is not recognised by Petras and Veltmeyer and as a result their perspective represents a strategic impasse. They can explain discontent in Latin America but still cannot explain how the Imperial Empire can be overthrown.

(93)The authors outline how the national bourgeoisie is no longer part of anti-imperialist movements, and indicate that the Soviet Union is not able to undermine the development of the dynamics of revolutionary processes. Hence the modern AIM’s consider that the struggle is based on class conflict and the opposition between capital and labour, as with the struggles of public sector workers and the rural peasantry opposition to export substitution policies. In other words the tension between the imperial and client state versus subordinated class forces is being increasingly conceived as an issue of class struggle. In this context mention is made of Bolivia and the mass struggle of workers and peasants to oppose the policies of neoliberalism, but the authors also seem to suggest that success has been achieved with the ascendency to political power of Eve Morales. The point is that they do not differentiate between the anti-imperialism of mass movements from its caricature upheld by left-wing regimes that are still based on capitalism. They do criticise Chavez in Venezuela for not creating as genuine mass movement that can bring about socialism and for the fact that the power of the American MNC’s is still unchallenged.(124) In contrast to the limitations of the political parties that claim to be left-wing they argue that the primary opposition to imperialism is with struggles that originate from below: “In Latin America the major focus of the AIM’s is on the day to day struggles against imperialism: mobilizations against recurring privatizations, the countless SAP and IMF austerity programs and demands on debt payments, and the deep penetration of the US military in counter-insurgency, crop eradication programs and orchestrated coup events. While these confrontations receive far less publicity than the “big events” of the northern countries, they involve more workers and peasants and have generated concrete results in blocking privatization, sustaining struggles and educating the local population.”(125) Petras and Veltmeyer consider that these struggles are more militant and principled than opposition to imperialism in the West. This is true but the question is how is it possible to connect the various struggles that occur against imperialism in Latin American and Europe? Instead of addressing this question in a serious manner they outline how the social situation in Latin America is bound to have a different effect on political activity when compared to Europe and the USA: “The point is that class relations and different locations in the class structure in Europe, the US and Latin America have a direct impact on the emergence of different levels of anti-imperialist consciousness. The uneven impact of imperialist politics – its direct impact on the lives of Latin Americans and its indirect effects in the US and Europe – has resulted in an uneven development of militant action, scope and sustainability.”(126)

(94)We can agree that the social situation is more acute in Latin America and results in greater expression of mass struggle. But it is paradoxical to suggest that this actually explains the limited character of mass movement’s in Europe and the USA. If this standpoint was carried to its logical conclusion it would suggest that it was not possible for class struggle to effectively occur in Europe and the USA. What is more thoughtful and reflective is to carry out an analysis of why militant actions have been limited in Europe since the 1990’s. In this context it is possible to explain the possibilities for united action against imperialism and capitalism. The situation of austerity would suggest this possibility. However the authors are perceptive to suggest that radical mass movements are possible in Latin America because of the absence of the involvement of the national bourgeoisie and the potential for the formation of worker-peasant coalitions. But it is also possible to advocate the formation of alliances between the manual workers and the white collar working class in Europe and the USA. What is required is the creation of an issue that would allow for the promotion of this type of alliance in a manner that would be similar to the mobilising qualities of anti-imperialism in Latin America. However, in contrast to the pessimism and third worldism of their general strategic approach the authors are also aware that the offensive of capital against the welfare state within the EU could promote the forces of opposition to capitalism. Furthermore the tremendous costs of maintaining the military empire of the imperial state of the USA with the result that social provision is constantly being cut could also generate opposition from an increasingly poor and unemployed working class. The acts of military conquest have also led to popular resistance. But the centre of world revolution is still in Latin America. They consider that the formation of centre left governments, as in Bolivia, which have to try and tackle the contradictions of neoliberalism, could be transitional and a prelude to the realisation of revolutionary regimes: “Under these conditions of widespread and mounting resistance, Washington will find it difficult to squeeze more economic resources from Latin America’s impoverished but combative people. In the middle range, the clash between the military cost of empire and the declining domestic economy, rising liberation movements and the collapsing neo-liberal Latin American economies will put enormous pressure on centre-left regimes attempting to navigate a “middle course” - combining international agreements with the empire and domestic social reform.”(127) In other words the formation of centre-left regimes that are not truly socialist is not the answer to the social problems of Latin America, or elsewhere. Nor is the answer to the crisis of Empire to be located in the automatic demise of the system caused by the growing inter-imperialist contradictions and the burdens of the increasing military cost of Empire. Instead the only answer to the limitations of Empire is to be related to the formation of genuine anti-imperialist movements. But the authors are unable to establish the basis for struggle in Europe and the USA. This results in a strategic impasse that suggests Empire has a durability that cannot be overcome by means of international socialist revolution.

(95)Does the recent book by Petras and Veltmeyer: Beyond NeoLiberalism overcome this important strategic impasse?(128) This book seems to repeat themes of the previous work. It outlines the importance of mass movements in Latin America, but also explains how the result of this situation is often the formation of centre left governments that are committed to increasing state regulation of the neo-liberal economic model. However whilst social welfare has increased, state involvement has not taken the form of nationalisation and instead joint ventures between governments and private companies have occurred. There has been an emphasis on ethnicity and community rather than social ownership. Strike movements, as in Bolivia have been criticised by centre left governments. The authors suggest that the working class and the peasants should develop autonomous mass movements that have objectives independent of these governments.(129) In other words: “The revival of popular revolutionary movements begins by rejecting complicity with the new middle class rulers presiding over the new phase of state-private capitalist expansion.”(130)What is important is not that these centre left governments cannot carry out nationalisations, which have occurred in countries like Bolivia. Instead it is necessary to ensure that the forces of the genuine left do not become supporters of various types of models of (humane and participatory) forms of capitalist development.(131) Instead they should uphold genuine and principled forms of socialism in order to oppose the ultimate limitations of the new post neo-liberal economic model.

(96)However the authors recognise that the period of austerity within Europe and the USA is the basis to revive the mass movements of the working class in these areas. But they are also aware of the difficulties: “In the stagnant ‘developed’ imperial countries, the state has proceeded to impose the entire cost of the ‘recovery’ on the backs of workers and public employees, reducing employment, wages and social services, whilst enriching bankers and the corporate elite. The United States, the UK, and France have witnessed a sharp class offensive from above which in the face of feeble opposition from a shrinking bureaucratized trade union apparatus has largely reversed many previous social gains by labor. Essentially the struggles of labor are defensive attempts to limit the rollback of gains, but lacking the class political organization to counter-attack reactionary budgetary measures that cut social programs and reduce taxes for the rich, widening class inequalities.” (132)This perspective outlines the possibility to overcome their strategic impasse of the previous work. The situation of austerity has provided an issue that can unite and mobilise the working class of Europe and the USA in collective mass action. However this prospect is undermined by the lack of principled socialist parties that can influence the transformation of defensive struggles into offensive struggles against capitalism, and also the trade union bureaucracy is the major instrument undermining the development of militant mass action. But these problems have to be connected with the tendency for accommodation between the working class and the new centre left governments in Latin America. The general strike in Bolivia 2011 was an exception to this situation. In contrast militant actions against austerity have taken place in European countries like Greece and Portugal. Petras and Veltmeyer conclude that what is crucial to the prospect of the formation of mass movements is the role of principled socialist organisations: “In other words, there is no iron rule that ties particular forms of class struggle to the dynamism or stagnation of the economy. What needs to be included is the degree of independent class organization capable of raising the level of struggle amidst volatile economic and political changes.”(133)Hence what explains the level of militancy of the situation in Bolivia is the role of the traditional militant trade union, COB. Furthermore, the period of the Neo-liberal offensive led to the working class internationally being on the defensive. The change of this situation in Latin America has enabled the rebuilding of the mass movement on the basis of the role of the working class. The situation in Europe and the USA could result in the renewal of mass struggle but this possibility is undermined by a lack of international consciousness of the possibilities for united struggle and the present inability to go beyond defensive perspectives.

(97)The authors have recognised that the situation could be transformed by the situation of austerity and the renewal of the class struggle from above in Europe and the USA. But they also outline how the limitations of nationalism, trade union ideology, and the inability to develop a socialist programme for the mass struggle, can undermine the ability to develop collective resistance. In contrast the economic growth of China is more favourable for the creation of a militant trade union movement and the traditions of struggle in Latin America could also result in struggle against the Centre left governments. But despite these reservations the authors have overcome their strategic impasse and diluted their Latin American bias. The approach they have outlined is to elaborate how the crisis of global capitalism is creating the conditions for the intensification of class struggle in international terms. But they warn that there will not be an automatic demise of global capitalism and instead it is necessary to develop valid strategies of change. This means the rejection of defensive strategies and instead the adoption of the socialist offensive. It is vital that the working class of Europe and America begin to outline what they are in favour of and so do not limit their criticisms to support for a mythical past. In Latin America the challenge is to avoid accommodation to Centre Left governments that have been relatively successful and therefore they comment: “The centre left regimes weakened the independent class based movements that were pushing for radical or more substantive change – beyond capitalism as well as neoliberalism. They moved the political-economic spectrum to the ‘center’.”(134) The situation of mini-boom under the centre left administrations has undermined the prospect of militant class struggle in Latin America. Emphasis on reforms has replaced the increasing radicalisation of anti-imperialist movements.

(98)The formation of the Centre-Left governments in Latin America has led to the development of 21st Century socialism. This is based on a rejection of traditional socialism and extensive nationalism. Instead it emphasises the importance of ethnicity and cultural traditions and the role of democracy. The most left-wing variant is in Venezuela which is based on nationalisation of strategic industries, welfare state reforms and community politics. This does not amount to socialism because of the continued domination of capitalist property forms, but it does have left-wing commitments. The Morales regime in Bolivia is based on joint ventures with MNC’s in the extractive industries and the rich elite still own the majority of land. The promise of land reform has not been realised. The measures carried out by the centre-left have been less ambitious than the actions of the left governments of the 1950’s to 1970s. 20th century socialism was superior in relation to nationalisation, land reform and supporting anti-imperialist struggles.

(99)The authors suggest that the alternatives for humanity are expressed by the alternatives of socialism or barbarism. Barbarism is indicated by the situation of intensified inequality, poverty, and the generalised inability to meet the needs of humanity. It is also represented by the tendencies of the rich to uphold the practices of corruption and crime in order to maintain power. But the primary problem is the historic failure of the international working class to oppose this situation: “It seems to us that the major reason that workers across the world, and other elements of the popular sector of society, have not revolted is the combined effect of the decline of mass organizations, trade unions and class consciousness resulting from a prolonged capitalist offensive and the power of the dominant ideology (which does not allow for, or let people imagine, an alternative system). The decline and weakness of the Left in its diverse permutations and divisions undermines its capacity to respond to the challenge – to understand what needs to be done and to act on this understanding.” (135)The authors attempt to address the crucial questions about how the working class weakened by the offensive of capital can go onto the offensive. They point to the potential for mass discontent to be translated into collective action, but ultimately they rely on the objectivist view that deepening recession and the prospect of new imperial wars will result in mass struggle. The authors themselves are aware that this perspective is not satisfactory because they also argue that the crucial aspect involved in the possibility of developing a mass movement is the creation of a credible socialist party: “The problem is what agencies of socialist development are able to respond to the challenge? Is there an effective socialist movement in existence or in the offing?”(136) There is an element of pessimism in their approach as they indicate a historical decline in class consciousness but they try to overcome this problem by suggesting that capitalist development in China has led to the formation of a powerful working class that could become the vanguard of the world revolution. They also indicate high levels of class struggle in countries like France and Bolivia. We should incorporate the perceptive elements in their understanding of the international class struggle without justifying the tendency towards pessimism. The point is that the contradictions of capitalism cannot be resolved without the socialist alternative. This historical aspect continues to generate the possibilities for class struggle. What is crucially important is that Marxists develop an understanding of the socialist alternative that is able to influence the activities of the working class. This means the Left should address the crisis of Marxist politics and instead attempt to make its politics credible and relevant. Furthermore, we should also overcome the temptation to construct schemas about the falling rate of profit that imply the demise of capitalism will be automatic. Instead we should develop programmes that propose action which really and truly can bring about the end of capitalism.

(100)It has been argued that the approach of popular democracy is a superior alternative to capitalism than socialism.(137) The limitations of both liberal democracy and state socialism can be overcome whilst also incorporating the strengths of both traditions in terms of the role of the individual and the importance of collective action.(138) Liberalism is characterised by its neglect of community, and property rights are emphasised at the expense of the significance of exploitation. But Marxism denies the role of the individual and instead defines everything in terms of class analysis and the role of exploitation. Liberty, choice and even democracy is underestimated in the Marxist approach.(139) The result of these dogmatic and one-sided approaches is that both Marxism and liberalism have not understood the impetus for change within capitalism: “Rather…..progressive social change in the liberal democratic capitalist countries has followed the logic of collective opposition to oppression suggested by Marxist theory, while adopting the liberal language of rights and the goal of democratic empowerment.”(140) The emphasis of the authors is on the ability of capital to impose hierarchical forms of domination that undermines the democratic logic of individual rights and the collective economic democracy that would be expressed by workers control of the workplace. But Marxism underestimates the complexity of oppressive power relations such as those based on gender, race, religion, language and region. The aspect of transformation of these various form of oppression does not necessarily imply the realisation of collective ownership of the economy and instead suggests democratic accountability between the state and the rights of individuals and social groups.(141) However the answer to the limitations of Marxism is not an uncritical acceptance of liberalism because the activity of the capitalist economy can uncritically reinforce oppression and deny the realisation of rights: “At the same time, the structure of capitalist production promotes a sense of political ineffectiveness, and assigns to racial, sexual, and other differences a set of hierarchical meanings that are as inconsistent with tolerance and respect as they are hostile to the forms of solidarity and cooperation necessary for effective political action.”(142)These problems cannot be resolved by a policy that favours either the market or the plan and instead requires the extension of democracy.

(101)The standpoint of Bowles and Gintis is superficially persuasive because it suggests an apparent alternative to the limitations of capitalism and socialism. The approach of liberal economics is criticised because it cannot sustain the aims of the individual and instead apologises for the domination of capital over labour. Hence the interests of property cannot be compatible with those of democracy. The development of democracy must have a character that is critical of the ideology of liberal economics. However this is not socialism because the collective ownership of the means of production does not necessarily extend the principles of democracy. Instead the implication is that a modified form of capitalism would be made compatible with the approach of democratic accountability. But whilst the argument has been made that the domination of capital is not compatible with democracy because of its perpetuation of elitism and hierarchies the same has not been outlined in relation to socialism. Instead the assumption is that the Marxist neglect of the individual will make it indifferent towards democratic rights. But why is it not possible to modify Marxism in terms of recognition of the importance of the individual? In this context the Marxist conception of socialism would still be compatible with the character of democracy and the arguments of Bowles and Gintis. Instead the apparent contradiction between democracy and socialism is outlined in terms of the limitations of the Soviet Union. The result of this assumption is to try and reconcile democracy with some form of capitalism. This conclusion actually undermines the argument that has been made which suggests that capitalism is not compatible with democracy.

(102)The type of democratic society advocated by the authors is as follows: “Today one might go further and insist that these democratic communities should not be the creature of the state: a democratic society must foster the proliferation of vital and autonomous self-governing communities standing between the individual and the state.”(143) Democratic self-government is sustained by its organisational form being separate from the state, and democratic communities like workplaces are the alternative to centralised state power. This conception is said to be different from that of liberal capitalism and Marxism. Marxism is said to justify direct democracy whilst rejecting the sphere of the private and so upholds totalitarianism. The result has been that: “Marxists typically failed to take account of the impressive ability of centralised state bureaucracies to thwart democratic accountability.”(144) In other words the Marxist denial of the importance of the individual has led to an emphasis on the importance of the state that undermined all the institutions that expressed democracy such as the Soviets. In contrast post-liberal democracy is based on the significance of the individual being able to learn and develop in the context of rights. The individual is in a constant state of transformation and becoming that acknowledges the importance of social being and the most effective form of this process is the workplace and community democracy: “By stressing that the extension of democracy is not synonymous with the extension of state power, post-liberal democracy affirms the sentiment that neither the centralized state nor the capitalist corporation will be the vehicle of human liberation.”(145) They argue that their perspective is not a utopian expression of the realisation of ideal norms, but instead suggest in a vague manner that an increasingly democratic culture will promote the democratic rules that can realisation a society based on empowerment.(146)

(103)However the major argument presented in favour of the new society is outlined in terms of the various limitations of a global society that neglects the importance of democracy.(147) What this viewpoint ignores is that the problems with a capitalist economic and political system have not led to its demise if the forces for change are still weak and feeble. Instead the authors justify a type of technological or economic determinism that implies that economic change can promote democratic transformation. In contrast the arguments in favour of democratisation of the economy are presented in terms of moral principles that represent the alternatives to the hierarchical domination of capital. There is a lack of a strategy of how democratisation would be realised. Most importantly the book seems to reject the importance of class struggle if the relations of production are to be transformed in terms of upholding democratic accountability and individual rights. The authors defend their standpoint in the following manner: “We have chosen to term our visionary historical alternative post-liberal democracy rather than socialism simply because we regard these time honoured commitments of socialists not as ends in themselves but as means toward securing an expanded conception of liberty and popular sovereignty. Our treatment of socialism – and the elimination of class exploitation – as means towards the achievement of democracy in no way diminishes our commitment to these objectives, though it does express our rejection of the not uncommon tendency of socialists to relegate democracy to the status of a means, however indispensable, for the achievement of classlessness.”(148) But the authors have realised more than a change in priority in means and ends. Instead of the establishment of a new type of society based on distinct relations of production their actual strategic aim is to establish democratic communities that do not challenge the existing state power of society. This would imply the creation of a type of dual power in which the logic of democracy competes with the logic of liberal capitalism. There is no suggestion that the aim of realising the democratic aspect of society would undermine the power of liberal capitalism. Instead the prospects for change would be based on the evolutionist logic of technological revolution and the extension of the information epoch. The working class that did control the workplaces would not be encouraged to extend their social power in terms of a revolutionary challenge against capitalism. Instead we are provided with a teleological argument that contends that the standpoint of defensive adherence to gains won will not be sufficient because of the expansionary logic of liberal capitalism. Hence: “Democracy can only survive by expanding to cover areas of social life now dominated by prerogatives of capitalist property.”(149)This perspective suggests that accommodation between liberal capitalism and workplace democracy will be unstable and has to be resolved in terms of the domination of one form or the other. What this actually means is that this recognition of the importance of hegemony cannot be understood without the acknowledgement that what is involved is a struggle between socialism and capitalism. In this context democracy is part of the attempt to replace the domination of capitalism with a different social system.

(104)Democracy is not this distinctively new economic system because it does not define the emerging relations of production. Instead democracy is an integral aspect of the historical character of socialism and workplace democracy will be vital aspect of this system. In other words democracy is not the new mode of production and relations of production that replaces capitalism. Instead the term democracy can be used in a reformist manner in order to justify co-existence with liberal capitalism. The authors do utilise the conception of democracy in this manner and also define it in a more radical manner in order to suggest basic incompatibility between genuine democracy and liberal capitalism. This confusion can be overcome if we argued that the actual issue of contention is between the principles of socialist democracy and liberal capitalism. In this context in order to develop the potential of workplace democracy we would advocate revolutionary struggle in favour of socialism. There is no alternative to this strategy despite the evasion of Bowles and Gintis. Ultimately the approach of the authors - despite their deserved critique of Marxism for its neglect of the individual - is to contribute to a sense of political confusion. This aspect is specifically expressed by the strategic impasse in their perspective which is not overcome by a hopeful utilisation of technological determinism. We would argue that the principled alternative is to connect the aspiration for democracy – which the authors have indicated is a very important aspect of society – with the standpoint of socialism. Therefore we would argue that the centralised state regimes of the past which claimed to be socialist were not socialist because of the very lack of genuine and popular forms of democracy. In summary despite these criticisms we would argue that the effective articulation of anti-capitalist arguments by Bowles and Gintis is an expression of an implicit sympathy for socialism. Their utilisation of the conception of democracy has become a substitute term that effectively upholds the principles of socialism. We would suggest that the various supporters of anti-capitalism have similar views, and the uniqueness of Bowles and Gintis is that they were among the first to utilise the principles of democracy as an implicit defence of the standpoint of socialism. The task of Marxism is not to reject the arguments advocated in favour of popular democracy and instead establish the connections between principled democracy and socialism. We can utilise the pioneering work of Bowles and Gintis in order to realise this task. In contrast it would be a sectarian and dogmatic error to reject the contemporary emphasis on democracy in the name of socialism. Instead it would be more fruitful and constructive to connect democracy and socialism, and so reject any suggestion that socialism is anti-democratic. This task would be connected – as it was with Bowles and Gintis – in indicating the anti-democratic limitations of liberal capitalism. In this manner the task of critique would be connected to the aim of indicating the integral connections between socialism and democracy.

(105)The question that arises from the discussion of important aspects of Marxism concerns how do we begin the task of promoting the renewal of Marxism and the establishment of its connection with a mass movement of opposition to capitalism? The apparent answer of Marxists like Alex Callinicos suggests that study of Marx’s Capital is an appropriate beginning for a situation of increasing economic crisis and the development of global mass discontent.(150) However the problem with this understanding is that increased attention to Capital – whilst very welcome – is unable to resolve the acute problems of the class struggle which are created by the contradictions of objective material reality. In other words the apparent justification of a theory of decline within Capital does not suggest vindication of an automatic collapse of capitalism and the related possibility of transition to socialism. Instead what is primary and crucial is whether the working class as labour is able to develop sufficient collective power in order to transform society. This enhanced understanding of reality can only be established with empirical truths about the structure of society combined with perceptive knowledge of the recent history of the class struggle. No book written in the past can substitute for this work. Instead Callinicos develops polemics against rival commentators of Capital in terms of suggesting that their mis-interpretation undermines our understanding of the revolutionary role of the working class. It is as if the process of textual reading imposes itself onto social reality: “In treating capital as an external force, Hardt and Negri transform it into a super-subject battening on the commons. The relentless plunder of resources is undoubtedly an important aspect of contemporary neoliberal globalisation, but repressing the relationality of capital blocks any understanding of the distinctive forms of capital accumulation today, and in particular the gigantic extension of the capital relation in the past generation represented by the expansion of industrial capitalisms in East Asia producing for the world market. It also fails to grasp the interdependence of capital and wage labour, which is expressed in the exploitation of workers, but also in their collective capacity to disrupt, paralyse, and take control of the production process.”(151)This comment is astonishing. The apparent mis-reading of Capital by Hardt and Negri has the mystical power to obscure the very real revolutionary possibilities of the capital-labour relation. Thus only the true, exclusive and principled reading of Capital can extract what is revolutionary. This idealist view suggests that the process of contested readings of Capital becomes the primary point of class struggle. Hence the relationship of text to reality is defined in an idealist manner that denies the actual capacity of the movement of social forces to transform the structures of society. Instead discourse is what brings about change. The ability to read Capital accurately expresses the impulse towards revolution, and a misinterpretation represents counterrevolution.

(106)Callinicos outlines the role of labour as a subject in relation to struggle.(152) This would imply the privileging of reality over the text, but this possibility is undermined by discussion of the character of economic crisis. Therefore there is a reductive and uncritical reading of Marx which equates the possibilities of revolution with crisis: “Crises are thus interpreted as both the expression in bourgeois society of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production that Marx in his writings of the mid 1840’s identifies as the motor of historical change and the precipitator of ‘real revolutions’ that ‘call into question the bourgeois conditions of life’. A preoccupation with this interplay between economic crisis and socio-political revolution is evident in Marx’s writings of the 19850’s.”(153) The problem is not whether this is an accurate reading of Marx but rather what is being defended is a form of dogmatic economic determinism that does not adequately explain important events in the 1840’s and 1850’s. For example the 1848 revolution was the result of the democratic aspiration to overcome absolute monarchy and feudalism. But Callinicos also contradicts his argument and suggests that Marx’s understanding of the prospect for revolution is not because of economic crisis, and its articulation as the falling rate of profit, but is instead because an increasingly powerful working class becoming progressively discontented with capitalism.(154) However this qualification does not undermine an intricate study of the character of crisis in the work of Marx and the conclusion that appears to contradict the previous viewpoint: “So, to the end of Marx’s career, he continued to attend both theoretically and empirically to the pattern of crisis that he was among the first to identify as inherent in capitalist development. Their significance lay in part in how they concentrated and summarised all the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, and in part because they announced that the ‘survival of the bourgeois world’ could not be taken for granted. Though they would not eventuate in the economic breakdown of the system, their occurrence would, Marx believed, contribute to its eventual overthrow. This understanding of crisis and revolution is an essential part of the intellectual legacy that Marx left in Capital.”(155)

(107)Despite the occasional rejection of the equation of crisis and revolution the study made by Callinicos of Marx’s theory of economic decline results in conclusions that make considerable concessions to catastrophism. The conscious intervention of the working class in the process of the demise of capitalism is obscure and the only definite aspect of transition is expressed by the role of economic crisis. It seems to be being suggested that economic crisis is the primary expression of the possibilities for capitalism to be replaced by socialism. What economic and political role the working class have in this process is not explained. In other words what is being justified is a reluctant and inconsistent defence of an automatic conception of transition from capitalism to socialism. The strategic limitations of this approach such as passivity and quietism are not questioned because a reading of Marx has outlined the importance of crisis for his historical materialist approach. What is not explained is the actual empirical relationship between crisis and the prospect of the revolutionary transformation of society. Instead a sense of hope and dogmatism replace the role of thoughtful strategy in terms of developing an understanding of the prospects for actual social change. The context of the balance of class forces is replaced by the rigid view that crisis is facilitating the potential for revolution. But in an inconsistent manner, Callinicos tries to obscure this reliance on catastrophism with affirmation of the traditional SWP view about the importance of the class struggle: “Nevertheless, Marx’s analysis consistently identifies workers as active subjects who, if they can organise themselves collectively, can improve, at least temporarily, their material situation and prepare for their ultimate self-emancipation. We can see this as the ultimate implication of the relationality of capital – that the internal dynamics of the capital involve workers actively shaping their destiny in opposition to their exploiters.”(156)This understanding is connected to the serious question as to whether the contemporary restructuring of capital has undermined the role of the working class as a collective subject. But his answer is unsatisfactory in that he emphasises the obvious point that the working class has changed since the 1980’s and it has grown in size because of globalisation. Consequently he has deliberately neglected to outline a strategy or programme of action for the era of austerity and instead asserts that in a critical manner we should recognise the importance of Marx’s Capital for the present.(157) He attempts to overcome the idealism of his views by also contending that: “Amid all the debates on Capital, it should never be forgotten that Marx wrote I from the perspective of this class and to help its struggle to avenge past sufferings and emancipate itself from the tyranny of the capital relation.”(158) But the point is that without strategic clarity this comment is just sentimentality, and reference to the importance of the class struggle concerns past dogmas and lacks a relationship with the present. Furthermore the impression that is left by Callinicos’s latest work is that praise for the achievement of Capital is a symbolic and idealist substitute for the theoretical development that has to occur in order to promote the class struggle. It is precisely the complexity of the class struggle that has made study of Capital so popular. This ideological standpoint is unsatisfactory and is utilised to justify catastrophism and the rejection of the importance of a strategy and programme of revolutionary activity.

(108)This article concludes with consideration of the claim that Marxism should reject its credentials to be a science and instead become a limited to a point of view that tries to rationally convince people of the merits of the socialist standpoint.(159) Gavin Kitching argues that Marxism has generally been demarcated into two strands. The first viewpoint upholds the optimistic view that the working class is potentially revolutionary and will act to overthrow capitalism, and the second standpoint justifies the pessimistic approach of critique that maintains the working class has been integrated into the capitalist system.(160) Instead of supporting dogmatic assertions about either the prospects for the overthrow of capitalism, or the alternative of considering that ideology has undermined the potential for the demise of capitalism, we should develop convincing arguments in favour of the possibilities for socialist change. This seems to be a reasonable argument because the perspective of either historical necessity, or certainty of the overthrow of capitalism, or the alternative of the end of history and the victory of liberal democracy, can be justified in a dogmatic manner that denies the importance of empirical truths and fails to present sound theoretical reasons for either the optimistic or pessimistic conceptions of the major versions of Marxism. Kitching seems to have strong reasons for suggesting that the various traditions of Marxist theory have not developed convincing reasons for why socialism is superior to capitalism and this is why people have had no sufficient interest or desire in trying to bring about a socialist society. People have had many reasons why they may think that capitalism is limited and is found wanting, such as in relation to the continuation of poverty and unemployment, but the deficiencies of the societies claiming to be socialist has not provided the basis for defending a superior historical alternative. Furthermore, Marxists in theory and practice have not been able to outline arguments that would convince people that socialism is necessary via the inevitable end of capitalism. However what is absent from Kitching’s analysis is a summary of the class struggle which has influenced this situation. The offensive of capital in the last thirty years has led to the illusion that capital is omnipotent and labour is weak. This viewpoint has discredited the Marxist viewpoint and instead the standpoint that ‘there is no alternative to capitalism’ has gained influence. In other words it is not just the theoretical weakness of the Marxist approach that has led to the inability to convince people of the importance of the socialist alternative to capitalism, what also has to be considered is the balance of class forces that have favoured capital in the recent period. Hence we could suggest that in a situation that is to the advantage of capital the ability to provide strong arguments for socialism has been undermined. This very unfavourable situation means that we have to strengthen our reasons for socialism. The question of trying to convince people about the socialist alternative is even more vital in an unfavourable period that has led to the popular rejection of the anti-capitalist perspective.

(109)Kitching contends that Marxism has tried to vindicate itself in terms that are compatible with that of natural science. This has resulted in a justification of a dogmatic conception of the relationship of Marxism to science whereupon Marxism is considered to be able to grasp the unobservable entities that define the actions of what is perceived by the senses. The result is the theory of value.(161) The author argues that the apparent scientific methodology of Marx cannot sustain itself because it cannot uphold accurate predictions such as the economic effects of the falling rate of profit. The problem is according to Kitching, that whilst the unobservables defined by natural science can generate sound scientific results, the same cannot be said about Marxism. Instead the result is subjectivism and endless controversy about the apparent conclusions of the application of the falling rate of profit. The view that Marxism was a science has not provided justification of historical teleology, or the view that socialism was inevitable, and it was not the vindication of the perspective that crisis would result in the demise of capitalism. But based on their studies of political economy, Marx and Engels upheld the elitist standpoint that their scientific approach provided them with a privileged access to reality: “In other words, scientific socialism allowed Marx and Engels to argue that socialism was nothing but the outcome of the self-activity of the working class, while at the same time the political economy which was at the heart of that science supposedly gave the founders of Marxism a scientifically privileged basis upon which they could agitate for a particular conception of what a “real”, “authentic” working class politics should be.(162) And: “In short, what scientific political economy supposedly provided for Marx and Engels was a privileged insight into the “true” political and material interests of the working class.”(163) Kitching extends this criticism to suggest that the Marxist conception of the exploitation of the labour power of the working class lacks any scientific merit. However whilst it may be justified to contend that Marxism is not similar to the approach of natural science this does not mean that its central political economic premises lack any credibility. The exploitation of labour in the production process is not merely a dogmatic assertion of Marxism and is instead empirically indicated by the unequal relationship between capital and labour in the relations of production. In this context the labour theory of value provides a theoretical view about what seems to be an empirically vindicated part of reality. Furthermore, Marx and Engels do not uphold the role of theory in terms of a privileged and elitist attempt to tell the working class what it ‘should do’ or ‘not do’. Marx considered that the formation of the Paris Commune was not advisable but once it had come into existence he became its greatest supporter. The great merit of the Commune was that its practice represented the promotion of the ideals of socialism via the role of the class struggle. This meant Marx and Engels supported the Commune despite their private reservations that it would fail. Hence Marx and Engels rather than instruct the working class in what was possible instead defined their politics in terms of what the mass movement had made realistic. The very possible formation of communism was the result of the activity of working people within social reality.

(110)Kitching contends that the very limitations of the Marxist science of political economy meant the role of Marxist science was dogmatic and limited this meant the role of science was regressive and undermined the development of the ethical reasons for socialism and primarily repressed the importance of utopian socialism or the development of a conception of socialism that would provide convincing reasons for the alternative to capitalism. It is true that Marx and Engels justified the denial of the importance of utopian socialism. This was because they believed that the very mass movement of the working class would resolve outstanding issues about the character of the future society. But the major reason for this rejection of the significance of utopian socialism was because the Marxists after Marx did not subject their views to critical scrutiny. The denial of the possible role of utopian socialism was not an indispensable part of Marxist theory. It could be argued that the working class itself yearned for the development of a credible generation of a social alternative to capitalism. (This yearning generated the later support for the view that the USSR was socialist) Furthermore, it would also be dogmatic to reject the perceptive role of Marxist political economy in providing a theoretical conception of capitalist society. Hence the concept of exploitation was not dogma and instead was part of Marx’s critique of bourgeois political economy. This work was also improved and refined with the later study of finance capital and imperialism. In this context the arguments for Marxism and socialism need not be reduced to those of ethical norms. The role of political economy was still indispensable, but the same point could also be made about historical materialism, international relations and programme. But Kitching is also perceptive to suggest that the justification of Marxist political economy is not a science but this does not mean that it is effectively worthless. Instead it can be argued that Marxist theory in all its forms does contribute to the development of the practice of the class struggle. Instead Kitching seems to suggest that the conception of Marxism as a science acts to repress the dynamism of the class struggle. This point could be said to be justified in terms of the reduction of strategy to the perspective of catastrophism by the Second International. But this approach was itself the result of the reduction of historical materialism and political economy to adherence to an evolutionary process. Hence it would actually require the correction of this standpoint in terms of an alternative conception of historical materialism, as was located in the works of Bukharin and Gramsci. In other words the answer to the reduction of Marxism to a scientific dogma was not the ethical socialism of Bernstein, which also expressed dogmatic views such as the denial of the contradictions of capitalism, but instead the principled aim was to improve and refine Marxist theory. Kitching is right to suggest that Marxism is not a natural science but it still has scientific credentials in terms of its ability to explain the observable aspects of capitalism in conceptual form. This ability also promoted the prospect of practice in terms of the development of the strategy of the class struggle.

(111)Kitching also argues that Marxism is flawed because it critiques capitalism either from the standpoint of the future communist society, which suggests concessions to utopian socialism, or else develops an approach that is limited to the horizons of capitalism and so cannot envisage what the future should be like.(164) He contends that Habermas attempted to resolve these tensions by developing transcendental arguments in favour of the alternative society such as the role of rational communication. However Kitching also argues that it is problematical to consider history from the generalised standpoint of reason and instead maintains that Marx had three specific judgements by which to evaluate capitalism. Firstly, the material inequality of capitalism, combined with juridical and political equality, can only be resolved by movement to a new society. Secondly, the limitations of the market can only be overcome by a planned economy. Thirdly, the diverse needs of people in the future society would be realised. This suggests that material scarcity can be replaced by a situation of abundance. Kitching suggests that these three rational arguments for socialism are more convincing than any reference to apparent scientific generalisations of political economy such as the level of monopoly or technical innovation. The argument for socialism is not the result of long-term trends of capitalist development and is instead the outcome of the perspective that people will act to bring about socialism in relation to the types of arguments that Marx provided in favour of socialism: “So when Marx observes that capitalism “provides the potentiality for”……..what he is saying is that it “has”, it “provides” these potentialities, these possibilities, these conditions, if we act to so as to realize them…..Thus in my view what makes a Marxist a Marxist, what is definitive of the Marxist point of view, is a rational willingness to act to realize these potentialities.”(165)This outcome depends on mass action in order to realise this potential, and the result will be a social situation superior to capitalism. If any of these propositions are falsified then the proposed action will not be rational. Therefore mass action is required and not the elite activity of small groups. But Kithcing also suggests that the actual experience of socialism has called into question whether the aim of this action is either feasible or desirable. Marx’s attempt to provide transcendental or immutable criteria of the superiority of socialism over capitalism has been called into question and instead the issue of what is progress is a matter of ideological dispute. Therefore it would seem entirely reasonable form the point of view of historical experience for people to conclude that socialism is not desirable or feasible. The result is that people do not act in order to struggle for socialism. Hence it is not sufficient to uncritically uphold Marx’s reasons for socialism and instead it is vital to provide new arguments that regenerate the arguments as to why socialism is both desirable and feasible: “Hence it follows that it can remain the objectively best point of view to occupy in order to “see” capitalism’s revolutionary possibilities if – and only if – Marxists can still specify a form of socialist society that can be created by realizing some blocked potentialities of actually existing capitalism and that can reasonably be judged to be a better form of society than capitalism. If Marxism cannot do this, or do not do it, then Marxism will perish as a living political tradition, and deservedly so. It will perish because without a realizable vision of a desirable and feasible socialist society, Marxists cannot convince any reasonable person to be a Marxist, to move to the Marxist point of view.”(166)

(112)This is the crucial point. We may disagree with Kitching’s scepticism about the credibility of Marxist political economy but the urgent issue concerns the capacity of Marxist’s to convince people of the superiority of the arguments for socialism in the context of the crisis of socialism because of the failures of the societies that claimed to have a socialist economy and society. In this context the attempt of Marxism to avoid this issue by becoming increasing academic and elitist is not an alternative because that only means that Marxism becomes the expression of a small group of people who are no longer concerned with the promotion of the mass struggle for socialism. Instead Marxism can become truly activist and concerned with the issues of working people through outlining a convincing argument for socialism. This issue cannot avoid tackling the historical experience of the Stalinist societies however they are described. It is also necessary to accept that Marx’s rational arguments in favour of socialism have become anachronistic in relation to the historical experience of Stalinism. These arguments were created before the experience of socialism and when capitalism was undermined by poverty and war. In contrast the post-war situation has created reasons why people could reasonably support capitalism and so new arguments are needed in order to sustain socialism. Hence it is not adequate to try and avoid this issue by suggesting that the various Stalinist societies were not socialist. This point may be historically accurate, and we would define the USSR as bureaucratic nationalised economy, but what is important is that the majority of people perceived the USSR as socialist. Consequently we have to defend Marxism as a ‘point of view’ by outlining the most sophisticated arguments for socialism. The objections of the defenders of capitalism have to be refuted if the rational argument for socialism is to be made in the most convincing terms. In other words the complacency that Marxism is a science that is able to understand capitalism is of small comfort when compared to the tasks involved in upholding the approach of Marxism in relation to the question of the superiority of socialism.

(113)Kitching asks how can we uphold the above standpoint without lapsing into relativism? He maintains that Habermas’s approach of communicative rationality provides standards of truth and falsity: “In conditions of communicative rationality what is true in the Marxist point of view will socially triumph (become socially and politically powerful) and what is false will become socially redundant or rejected.”(167) This means: “Moreover, insofar as I have defined the Marxist point of view as a “rationally motivated willingness to act to transform capitalism,” then, to be consistent, I must argue that in a capitalist society reformed to be communicatively rational that willingness would be very widespread and indeed would lead to such transformation occurring.”(168)The problem with this perspective is that it underestimates the complexity involved in the process of transition to socialism. There are more aspects involved than are allowed for by Kitching. Primarily the aspects involved in persuading people of the merits of socialism involve more than the role of rational argumentation. What is also important is the role of ideology that is utilised in order to undermine the apparent validity of the merits of the alternatives to capitalism. It is quite possible that people can be dissatisfied with capitalism and so receptive to the arguments for socialism and yet still accommodate to capitalism for complex ideological reasons such as the reluctance to leap into the unknown represented by socialism. Furthermore people can be militant fighters for their rights and yet also have conservative views that make them hostile to the aims of socialism. Consequently it is not sufficient to make good arguments in favour of socialism if the process of transformation is to be realised. The objective conditions have to be favourable which means that capitalism has entered a period in which it cannot sustain the material interests of working people in a satisfactory manner. This situation enables the arguments for socialism to be accepted more readily. However what Kitching ultimately underestimates is the discrepancy between support for socialism and the level of willingness to act to realise this aim. It is one thing to formally agree with socialism but it can be an entirely different thing to be prepared to act in order to successfully achieve this perspective. This is why strategy is required in order that the difference or contradiction between motivation and action can be overcome. The role of strategy is to unite the agreement with socialism together to the practical realisation of this aim. Strategy is effectively an action programme that unites conviction with the expression of practice. The most famous expression of strategy was Lenin’s call for “All Power to the Soviets”. In this context there is no substitute for the role of a party which advocates a strategy that can bring about the overthrow of capitalism and advance the prospect of socialism. In contrast Kitching does not outline the organisational form that would represent the transformation of growing support for socialism into the willingness to act in order to realise this aim. Instead in a vague manner he suggests that communicative rationality would express the context of the ability to act in order to bring about socialism. Certainly communicative rationality is important for promoting the best possible conditions for people to communicate about the merits of socialism. However this aspect cannot explain the conditions of revolutionary practice. In this context what is still important is the role of strategy, programme and the related capacity to transform the influence of Marxism into action. Interaction and communication may be the beginning of the process to persuade people of the merits of revolution and socialism, but the transformation of these aspects into practice is not inevitable. Instead what is also required are additional features such as the crisis of the ideology of the ruling class and success in building a mass movement of opposition to capitalism. Only with these features will it be possible for revolutionary action to occur.

(114)Kitching suggests that one of the most important aspects of the argument for socialism is being able to explain the economic and political limitations of what has been called actually existing socialism. The inability of the supporters and critics of the Soviet Union to comprehend the defects of “socialism” only promoted the working class of the West to support capitalism: “This is that the Western working class were loyal to capitalism, and rejecting of socialism, not so much because they were rendered ideologically incapable of generating a critical rational account of capitalism, as because they were unconvinced of either the feasibility or the desirability of socialism.”(169) He outlines how the bureaucratic expression of so-called socialism did not overcome social inequality and class differences, the economic system was inefficient with huge waste and low productivity and endless problems for the consumer. This situation would not be improved by the introduction of economic democracy instead the system would be increasingly inflexible and unable to take quick decisions such as being able to respond to consumer demand: “In short, there are very good reasons to believe that, even in the best possible case, a totally planned economy will be one that is much less flexible and responsive to the demands of consumers (and that just means to the changing material demands and needs of the people/citizens who depend upon it) than a market economy. Moveover (and this may be the most vital point of all), the more democratically planned it is the less flexible and responsive it is likely to be. For, of course, the more democratic any decision making process is, the longer the time it takes. It hardly needs to be stressed how destructive these conclusions are for Marx’s original vision of a socialist society as one in which production and consumption are planned by the associated producers and the market mechanism is totally abolished.”(170)

(115)The problem with Kitching’s critique is that it is one thing to indicate the empirical limitations of the bureaucratic economy of the USSR and another thing entirely to utilise these criticisms in order to be sceptical about the possibilities of a democratic system without the role of the market. It is necessary to be balanced and accept that at present we would not know the results of a democratic socialist economy. Furthermore, it is also possible to suggest that what is credible is a democratic economy that is combined with the role of the market. In this context the autocratic and hierarchical aspects of the capital labour relation would be overcome and the value character of labour would be ended. But in order to ensure that decisions are taken quickly and that flexibility is part of the system it is also vital to also allow for the role of market mechanisms. Market socialism would be based on high levels of economic democracy and participation. Indeed it could be argued that without democracy within the relations of production the influence of the market would mean that the domination of capital had not been ended. In this situation labour would still be alienated and subject to the external imperatives of capital that was based on the role of the market. But if the significance of the market was based on the development of workers control it would be possible to enforce the objectives of labour rather than allow for the re-emergence of the influence of capital. In contrast in an unproblematical manner Kitching suggests it is possible to relate the market to socialism without contradictions and tensions. This is an illusion. Only with the importance of economic democracy and the end of the capital-labour relation can the role of the market be made compatible with socialism. The influence of the market explains the quick decisions of the consumer and the rapid response of economic units to this activity. The market can be the mediation between production and consumption and yet economic democracy can still be hegemonic and the explanation of the character of the relations of production. In contrast, Kitching seems to be arguing that economic democracy should not be introduced in the name of the importance of the market and economic efficiency. This is a recipe for the emergence of the domination of capital over labour.

(116)Kitching envisages an economy that is based on the role of the market in relation to the allocation of resources, the rewards for labour and the realisation of consumer demand. This does not mean that the economy is privately owned and instead there would be various forms of social ownership including workers control. Important sectors of the economy would not be subject to market criteria such as health and education. However he cannot envisage the possibility that a state bureaucracy would not have an important role in the directing the economy: “Since the state would therefore have a major role in this form of economy and society, the state bureaucracy would obviously be considerable and it would dispose of formidable powers. It would therefore be necessary that the activities of this bureaucracy be closely scrutinized and publicized to guard against abuse of power, and it would also be necessary for it to be both formally and actually responsible to a democratically elected government and popular assembly.”(171)In other words Kitching concedes to the various critics of socialism who suggest that its economy cannot be administered without the role of a bureaucracy. Indeed it is significant that he cannot envisage the role of the market without the supervision of the planners of the state. He is also not aware of the apparent contradiction between the role of economic and political democracy and the domination of the bureaucracy which would act to undermine any attempt to make it accountable to society. Instead we have the worst of all possible worlds: the interaction of the market with the influence of the state bureaucracy. This situation would actually facilitate the prospect for the bureaucracy to become an economic ruling class based on the utilisation of their influence and the role of the market in order to become effective owners of the means of production. The major reason that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was not a capitalist ruling class was because of the limited role of the market. Thus the only manner in which the role of the market can be made compatible with socialism is via the importance of economic democracy and the rejection of the domination of a state bureaucracy. Kitching considers that this is a utopian or unrealistic prospect and is why he envisages the prospect of a bureaucratic socialism which he believes can be made to be compatible with the process of political democracy. But in actuality the bureaucracy would dictate economic priorities and determine the allocation of resources and so the very problems of the Soviet Union would be repeated. In order for this situation not to occur would require the transformation of the relations of production that would enable labour to establish economic priorities but Kitching considers this possibility to be unrealistic. Hence the only society that he can consider as an alternative to capitalism is one that is administered by a bureaucratic ruling class. He cannot contemplate the possibility that labour could organise an economy in an efficient manner. Therefore his arguments are not in favour of a feasible socialism and instead support a bureaucratic nationalised economy administered by a ruling class that is not capitalist. But the subordination and domination of labour and its alienated status would continue in this type of economy.

(117)Kitching outlines a powerful reason why the struggle for socialism is not exclusively about material interests and is also related to rational persuasion. This means that people may not listen to those of us who are Marxists if our arguments are not convincing and adequate: “It means that though “we” may, and must, endeavour to rationally persuade or convince people of the desirability and feasibility of socialism, in a democratic society one of their human rights is the right not to listen to us. Similarly, in the democratic market-socialist society of the future(?), though a leadership must try to convince of the desirability of a certain policy or course of action, it must be able to be deposed and replaced by another leadership if the citizens are not convinced or (again) just won’t listen, for whatever reason.”(172)This important point has great relevance for the present. Marxist groups are unable to provide convincing arguments as to why people should engage in opposition actions against the austerity measures of the government. As a result the trade union bureaucracy has the initiative and is able to effectively undermine the prospect of the development of a mass movement of opposition. Consequently the Marxist left has neglected the fact that it is unable to persuade people of the importance of actions against the austerity policy and is instead emphasising the objective tendencies of the decline of capitalism. The question of struggle is projected into the future when the objective trends of decline apparently reach fruition. Hence the result of this situation is that Marxists have essentially ‘given up’ trying to engage the working class in dialogue about the necessary strategy for making progress in the class struggle. Instead they exist in a fantasy world of illusion that is preoccupied with internal questions and issues of party controversy. In this context it would represent an immense advance if the various Marxist groups could once again become effective and rational advocates of the ideas of Marxism. This possibility does involve consideration of what is socialism and the question of the strategy required in order to generate class struggle against the austerity policy.

(118)Kitching has also outlined and vital aspect of the role of the revolutionary party in the socialist society. He has indicated that if a policy of the party becomes flawed and rejected by the people the situation is ready for the influence of this party to be replaced by another one. No single party has exclusive access to the truth and is instead fallible and likely to make mistakes. These possibilities means that any revolutionary party should be accountable to the people and its hegemony should be ended by means of popular vote and rejection of its influence. If this prospect of accountability was available at the time of the Bolsheviks it could be argued that forced collectivisation would never have been introduced. This policy ended the worker-peasant alliance and instead consolidated the most bureaucratic forms of socialism. However this situation was possible because of the lack of a multi-party system and the absence of the role of a Constituent Assembly. Instead the formal Soviet system justified the monolithic rule of one party. An effective and democratic socialist system can only be possible if it is based on the plural competition of parties. Instead the domination of one party enabled people to acquire power who were ambitious and not interested in adhering to the principles of democracy. The result was the completion of bureaucratic degeneration and the formation of a new ruling class. Thus the renewal of democracy was vital to the process of the regeneration of the system. However this possibility could only have occurred with a new authentic proletarian revolution. This never occurred despite rebellions in Hungary 1956 and elsewhere. The lessons of this historical experience is that the question of what constitutes principled socialism can only be related to the elaboration of a system of genuine popular democracy and also developing an economy that is both efficient and democratic. But this task can never be truly completed without successful class struggle that results in the possibilities of the development of socialism. In this context strategy is also vital if the development of class struggle is to realise its potential with the emergence of a better society. In this context Kitching is right to be concerned with the quality of arguments that can be made in favour of socialism. Inadequate or limited arguments will never advance the cause of socialism. We hope that this point is the major lesson of this document.

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