UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURE OF REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM

The character of contemporary revolutionary Marxism was created by the development of Trotskyism as a response to the limitations of Stalinism in the 1930’s. It was considered that the opportunist character of Stalinism would create the basis of the development of what would become a popular Fourth International. But this expectation never occurred because of the tendency of the forces of revolutionary Marxism to split and to become competing rival organisations. This situation resulted in the development of a situation in which various parties claimed to be the exclusive and principled expression of what was meant by revolutionary Marxism. But generally, this development did not result in the creation of organisations with popular support, and so they lacked the possibility to become genuine leaderships of a struggle for the realisation of socialism. But this serious situation has never been acknowledged by the various groups which have promoted the illusion that at some point in the future they would become the leadership of a mass struggle for the realisation of socialism. Some of these groups have suggested that on the basis of the advocacy of a modified version of Trotsky’s transitional programme they would be able to promote the realisation of a political relationship between party and class. Other organisations have contended that they need to relate to the contemporary role of various activists. But none of these organisations have attempted to tackle the importance of the issue of the actual apparent insignificance of the various Marxist parties in relation to the political situation of the various countries of the post-war period. These illusions have not been overcome by the problems created by the constant process of the fragmentation of the various groups which has been generated by a situation of splits. Instead the illusion has been upheld which suggests that at some certain moment in time the particular revolutionary group will acquire genuine mass support. In this context the various programmes of the given organisations will become the basis for the promotion of a popular struggle to replace capitalism with socialism. In this context the apparent durability of capitalism and the connected lack of support for revolutionary Marxism is constantly underestimated and not explained. The point being made is that the profound character of the problem being described is because of the failure to address the issue of the apparent marginalisation of the forces of the Marxist organisations. Instead it is suggested that the promotion of the role of a re-elaborated transitional programme or the advocacy of some activist approach that relates to the various struggles will somehow transform this situation. One book that attempts to address these issues is that of Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy in ‘Beyond Capitalism’ (Zero books Hants 2012) They consider the problems in the most serious terms: “The gap between where we are and where we want to be is the basic problematic of left politics today. Once you get passed the optimistic rhetoric of the left, the fear that lingers behind the scenes is whether we can overcome the radical disjuncture between our political aspirations and the degree of support in the working class that genuine revolutionary change requires.”(p4) They suggest that the attempt to establish different subjects of social transformation has also not facilitated success in relation to the aim of the establishment of an alternative socialist society. This is because the emphasis on activism has not resulted in the development of the capacity to undermine the domination of the reformist led mass labour movements. Instead what has occurred is that the forces of the Marxist left have become content with the expression of support for various forms of activism and so in this manner have ignored the problem of the marginalisation of the groups in relation to the role of the working class and the various oppressed sections of society. But in an important sense this problem was located within the very formation of the Trotskyist alternative to Stalinism. It is necessary to criticise the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International if the development of a credible understanding of how to create a mass socialist organisation is to be addressed. The point being made is that the character of the revolutionary alternative to Stalinism was based on an underestimation of the difficulties involved in the creation of a new type of popular organisation which could led to the struggle for socialism in an effective manner. Cooper and Hardy outline the necessity to promote a type of radical politics that would overcome the limitations of activism. But the problem is that this activism was justified in terms of the very programme outlined in relation to the formation of the Fourth International. We need to indicate the problems of this standpoint and to provide alternatives if the issue of the limitations of contemporary revolutionary Marxism is to be sufficiently understood.

Trotsky outlined the programme of the Fourth International in 1938 or the ‘Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International’, or the transitional programme: (Pathfinder Press, 1973 New York) The programme outlines the reasons why proletarian revolution is a short-term possibility: “The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind’s productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth. Conjunctural crises under the conditions of the social crisis of the whole capitalist system inflict ever heavier deprivations and sufferings upon the masses. Growing unemployment, in its turn deepens the financial crisis of the state and undermines the unstable monetary system. Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another.” (p111) But the problem with this analysis is that it projects a conjunctural and specific crisis of capitalism onto the character of the system in general. The point is that what is ignored is the possibility for this situation to be transformed by the onset of new periods of economic growth and expansion. What has to be understood is that capitalism is not inherently a system of stagnation and instead has periods of both crisis and expansion. Hence it is problematical to try and provide an argument for socialism in terms of a rigid and dogmatic understanding of the fluctuations of the capitalist economy. Instead of providing the major reasons for socialism because of the apparent economic limitations of capitalism it would be more effective to outline the primary basis for socialism in terms of the fact that the present economic system cannot transcend the necessity for the forces of capital to exploit and dominate labour. This aspect explains the development of class struggle and the possibility for change. In other words, capitalism is a problematical system because it has to be based on the necessity for the capitalists to extract a surplus from labour in an exploitative manner. In this context the character of the importance of class struggle can be understood. However, what had already become apparent by the 1930’s was that this aspect does not suggest the possibility of inevitable change. Instead the issue as to whether capitalism can be overthrown depends on the level of the class consciousness of the workers and the quality of its political organisations. Trotsky is aware that there is a contradiction between the objective maturing of the possibility for the realisation of socialism and the limitations of the development of the role of the subjective factor: “All talk to the effect that the historical conditions have not yet “ripened” for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only “ripened”; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. It is now the turn of the proletariat, i.e., chiefly its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”(p112) This point would seem to be valid given the opportunist limitations of the role of the Social Democratic and Communist parties which reject the necessity to advocate and promote the importance of a revolutionary strategy of change. But it has also to be indicated that the role of bourgeois ideology is important for the possibility for the capitalist system to continue in a situation of increasing economic and political crisis. The effect of bourgeois ideology is to marginalise the possible importance of revolutionary Marxism and so provide the possibility for the development of a principled opposition to capitalism to become difficult to realise. In this context it has to be suggested that both Stalinism and Social Democracy represented forms of bourgeois ideology because both political trends were opposed to the promotion of the realisation of the aim of proletarian revolution. In a situation of increasing economic crisis these forces acted to uphold the system of capitalism and to discredit the possible promotion of the aim of the overthrow of the present relations of production. In contrast the forces of revolutionary Marxism were marginalised and insignificant. Therefore, in this situation of ideological crisis of the role of principled socialism the defenders of capitalism were able to maintain the system and ensure its political stability despite the situation of economic crisis.

But the implications of this situation were serious in that what was suggested was the possible failure to develop the role of revolutionary parties that could enable the possibilities for socialism to be realised. Trotsky tries to reject this possible conclusion in his comment that: “The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers organisations. Of these factors, the first of course is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus. No matter how the methods of the social betrayers differ……… they will never succeed in breaking the revolutionary will of the proletariat. As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.”(p113) But the problem with this perspective is that this prediction does not have the basis of it being realised in a certain and determinist manner. There may be many complicated political and ideological reasons why it may not be possible to achieve the development of genuine and principled revolutionary parties that have popular support and the related ability to lead struggles for the overthrow of capitalism and Stalinism. But this alternative outcome is not essentially accepted by Trotsky who can only envisage of the development of a situation in which the struggle for socialism will be led by an authentic Marxist party. Hence, he does not allow for the open-ended character of history which means that the influence of reactionary organisations of the working class might not be effectively challenged and replaced with the role of the revolutionary party. What is not adequately explained is how the small organisations of the Fourth International can become the dominant political force within the working class and so overcome the present hegemony of Stalinism and Social Democracy. Instead there is an assumption that the dynamics of the economic and political crisis of capitalism will somehow result in the increased influence of the role of the revolutionary party. But this approach is determinist and does not allow for the conservative importance of ideology and the connected relation of this aspect to the apparent durable domination of Stalinism and Social Democracy within the working class. The fact is that this aspect acquired the character of political stability and it would be difficult for the Fourth International to be able to challenge this situation. But Trotsky tries to tackle this issue by suggesting that these subjective issues of consciousness and the influence of opportunist parties are secondary to the dynamics expressed by the situation of economic and political crisis: “All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not “ripened” for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only “ripened”; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. It is now the turn of the proletariat, i.e., chiefly of its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.” (p112) This point could be said to have been generally valid but this did not mean that it could be resolved in a progressive manner. Instead it was the situation that despite the limitations of Social Democracy and Stalinism they were not generally opposed by the development of an alternative revolutionary approach, apart from the situation in Spain. Hence the influence of opportunist organisations was utilised in order to reject the realisation of any possible realisation of the aim of proletarian revolution, and the forces of Trotskyism were not able to transform their situation of marginality in this context. Hence the contradictions of the economic and political system did not result in the increased influence of the role of revolutionary Marxism, which was unable to influence developments within the class struggle. Trotsky does not seem to fully appreciate the difficulties of this situation because he assumes that advocacy of a revolutionary programme will somehow resolve the difficulties of the isolation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. In other words the problems associated with the marginalisation of the parties of the Fourth International is underestimated because it is assumed that the situation of economic and political crisis will somehow resolve the situation and so result in the development of the increased influence of genuine Marxism. But this view underestimates the problems associated with the marginalisation of these organisations and their related failure to become mass parties. In this situation the aspect of the increased economic problems of capitalism actually results in increased support for the opportunist parties of Social Democracy and Stalinism rather than developing adherence to the Fourth International. Only a protracted period of the constant growth of the Fourth International could resolve these problems in a manner that led to a connection between the working class and revolutionary Marxism. Hence the apparent superiority of the programme and perspectives of the parties of the Fourth International could not resolve these issues in an automatic manner. Instead the opportunism of the organisations of Social Democracy and Stalinism was more likely to lead to the disorientation of the workers and the related inability to realise situations of political crisis in a revolutionary manner. Indeed, this is what happened during the 1930’s and led to defeats in Spain, France and Austria. The problem of the defeat of the workers in Germany had not been overcome by the development of victories in the class struggle in international terms. Therefore, the workers had been placed in a defensive situation and their receptiveness to a programme of action had become problematical. Instead the issue was the defence of bourgeois democracy against the possibility of the successful realisation of fascism. However, Trotsky seemed to ignore this task in relation to the ambitious perspectives of the Transitional Programme which located the major issues of the class struggle as being either the continuation of capitalism or the successful realisation of the overthrow of the system. Hence Trotsky outlined a perspective based on the possibility of an offensive struggle against capitalism when the actual issue was the necessity of defensive action to oppose the possibility of fascist counterrevolution.

Thus Trotsky outlined the perspectives of the Transitional Programme in terms of the prospect of the intensification of the class struggle in order to pose the possibility of the overthrow of capitalism: “The economy, the state, the bourgeoisie’s politics and its international relations are completely blighted by a social crisis characteristic of a pre-revolutionary state of society. The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary condition into a revolutionary one is the opportunist character of proletarian leadership: its petty-bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it, even in its death agony.”(p112) And: “In all countries the proletariat is wracked by a deep disquiet. The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines.” (p112) Generally this view was an optimistic and essentially inaccurate understanding of developments within the class struggle. It was true that the militant actions of workers in Spain and France had achieved revolutionary possibilities but it was the very actions of the various parties of the workers that had been able to undermine the prospect of achieving the potential of these actions. Hence the situation of the effective marginalisation of genuine revolutionary organisations was an indication that the potential of these mass actions could not be realised. But the very betrayal of the workers by their reformist parties did not result in support for the alternative of the Fourth International. Indeed, most workers were not even aware of the formation of this organisation. Instead they stayed loyal to their political parties despite their opportunist actions. Hence it would require a long-term development of the parties of the Fourth International if it was to become a credible basis of the promotion of revolutionary politics. But the Fourth International was characterised by a situation of political crisis from the period of its formation. Therefore, the predictions of Trotsky that this organisation could develop because of the radicalisation of the workers became a prediction that lacked credibility.

Trotsky’s perspective was based on the following approach: “The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers organisations. Of these factors, the first is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus…..the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.”(p113) But this prediction was inaccurate because there was no deterministic relationship between the opportunist limitations of the traditional parties of the working class and the generation of support for a revolutionary alternative. Instead the increasing problems associated with the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties did not result in support for the rival Fourth International. Instead this latter organisation continued to be a small group based on the allegiance of a few activists. In this context the advocacy of a more principled revolutionary perspective did not result in increased support for the Fourth International. Therefore, a connection between the opportunism of the major parties of the workers and the development of the viability of revolutionary alternatives did not occur. Hence it was necessary to promote the role of a less ambitious programme that would be of relevance to the small groups of workers that came to be influenced by the Fourth International. This approach would emphasise the importance of Marxist theory in order to create genuine cadre organisations that could be able to relate to the aspirations of the workers in a meaningful and principled manner. In other words the task was the creation of the importance of an organisation based on Marxist culture that would be able to prepare in the long term to become effective revolutionary parties in situations that had become more favourable to the possibility of an interaction of these organisations with the working class.

But instead of recognition of this long-term perspective, Trotsky outlined the possibility to create mass revolutionary parties in a short-term perspective: “The strategic task of the next period – a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). 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.”(p113-114) But the major assumption was that the working class would be receptive to supporting aims that connected their immediate interests to the aim of the overthrow of capitalism. But such a connection was not even apparent in the militant struggles of the French workers in the mid-1930s to occupy the factories. Instead the ideological domination was of a reformist type consciousness that conceived of gains for the workers within the continuation of capitalism. Therefore, the result of this situation was popular support for what Trotsky defined as the minimum programme of Social Democracy and Stalinism. Hence this political situation could not be changed merely by the advocacy of transitional demands which established a connection between the immediate objectives of the workers with the aim of the overthrow of capitalism. Instead the influence of the role of Marxist theory would have to become important if support for transitional demands was to acquire a popular basis. This process would mean the building of rival Marxist parties with increasing levels of popular support. But instead of this awareness Trotsky seems to suggest that the very process of the promotion of the role of transitional demands would become the major basis of the creation of new revolutionary parties. Obviously the credibility of transitional demands would be connected to the development of mass mobilisation to realise them, but this possibility would be linked to the creation of new revolutionary parties. This prospect would be based on the generation of popular support for new and more principled Marxist organisations. But such a development could only be connected to the increasing ability of the forces of revolutionary Marxism to be able to ideologically undermine the influence of Social Democracy and Stalinism. But on this issue Trotsky seems to express no convincing opinion, and instead he dogmatically relies on the view that the increased influence of transitional demands will be able to undermine the domination of Stalinism and Social Democracy. Hence the connection of the dynamics of the class struggle with the growing importance of transitional demands automatically results in the increased importance of the genuine Marxist party. This view is an expression of a type of determinism which underestimates the complexities involved in the creation of a popular revolutionary organisation.

In other words it is assumed that the issue of developing support for a programme of demands based on the generation of mass activity of the workers will be relatively un-problematical and so express the inherent militancy of the dynamics of the class struggle and the related potential for the realisation of social change. But in actuality various forms of militancy occur without the expression of this type of revolutionary dynamic because of the very political problems caused by the lack of the influence of the Marxist party. Hence it is necessary to generate the development of the importance and influence of a principled revolutionary party if the programme of transitional demands is to acquire importance and so become a feasible basis for the generation of a process of the development of the class struggle. But this aspect is what is problematical because the various Trotskyist parties lack any popular appeal and instead remain insignificant and so the programme they advocate is not known by the workers and as a result they are still under the political influence of either Social Democracy or Stalinism. What is necessary is that the Trotskyist organisations attempt to develop the influence of a principled Marxist culture that is able to become the basis of the very character of the class consciousness of the workers. But instead of this understanding it is assumed that the very dynamics of the class struggle will solve the issue of the development of the influence of a principled Marxist party. This perspective is illusory because it underestimates the importance of the ideological aspects that are involved in the possibility to create a credible revolutionary party. Instead it is assumed that the dynamics of the class struggle will somehow automatically resolve these issues in a progressive manner. Hence the forces of principled Marxism merely have to advocate a programme for the development of class struggle and the marginalisation of the forces of the revolutionary party will be overcome. But this is an illusory perspective because despite their opportunist limitations the influence of Social Democracy and Stalinism is not overcome by the possible increased influence of the transitional programme. Instead the approach of reformism has to be shown to be inferior when contrasted with the alternative of the perspective of a struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. But such a development is undermined by the ability of the forces of reformism to suggest that the overcoming of the influence of capitalism can occur without the necessity of revolutionary change. The election of Social Democratic and Stalinist parties will result in progressive change that enables the possibility of socialism to become feasible. Such a standpoint seemed to be credible because of the very interaction of the militancy of the French workers with the role of an elected popular front government in the mid 1930’s. In contrast the small and marginalised forces of Trotskyism lacked any credibility when compared to the progress that could apparently be made by the role of Social Democracy and Stalinism. Trotsky assumes that the dynamics of a programme of change will result in the increased influence of revolutionary Marxism, but this understanding is based on a determinist view that the intensification of the class struggle will automatically created a connected importance of the revolutionary Marxist organisation. But instead of this development the development of mass actions of the workers only consolidates the domination of the opportunist parties. This situation is an indication that the process of increasing the influence of a genuine Marxist party will be of a long-term character. In other words there is no substitute for the perspective of the increasing importance of the political role of a revolutionary party which has to prove its validity to the workers in relation to its principled character in relation to the requirements of the class struggle. Trotsky makes this point but also suggests that this aspect will be of a short-term character because the limitations of capitalism means that it has matured to the point where revolutionary change has become feasible and possible in the short-term. This means the very immediate demands of the workers increasingly pose the necessity of the realisation of an alternative to capitalism: “If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish. “Realizability” of “unrealizability” is in the given instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by struggle. By means of this struggle, no matter what its immediate practical successes may be, the workers will best come to understand the necessity of liquidating capitalist slavery.”(p116) This perspective implies that the dynamics of the class struggle will generate the possibility of revolutionary change in some automatic manner. But the major problem with this understanding is that it does not recognise the complexities and difficulties of the very process of struggle. It is entirely possible that most struggles will be unsuccessful because of the complexities involved in trying to facilitate the realisation of victory even in immediate and specific terms. There is no dynamic of change that connects struggles to the generation of a revolutionary process of the transformation of society. Instead such developments will be very occasional and based on the radicalisation of the consciousness of the workers. In the general situation it is necessary for the principled Marxist forces to make propaganda about why capitalism should be replaced with socialism. Hence it is necessary to develop a convincing conception of the superiority of socialism when compared to the limitations of capitalism. Thus, the process of the development of class consciousness is based on the promotion of an ideological culture based on the increased influence of the principles of Marxism. But Trotsky seems to ignore these aspects and instead implies that the importance of programme of action for the class struggle is sufficient in order to realise the increased influence of a revolutionary approach. But how can workers become adherents of the Marxist standpoint without the connected development of support for the objectives of this approach. Thus, a process of counter-hegemony, as Gramsci would define the central issue, is vital if a culture of Marxism is to be created within the working class. Only on this basis can mass support for a programme of action be developed in a credible manner. Hence it is not sufficient to merely advocate a programme for the development of the class struggle. Instead developing support for the aim of socialism is a vital aspect of the promotion of the role of principled class consciousness. For example, Trotsky outlines reasons for the development of the militant character of the trade unions if the intensification of the class struggle is to occur. This point is valid but how is it to be realised without the related increased influence of the aim of socialism? In other words people will come to understand the importance of the trade unions because they also appreciate their important role in the generation of collective action by the workers in order to facilitate the possibility of the replacement of capitalism with socialism. Hence to develop this connection means that the aim of socialism has to become credible because of the potential to realise this objective is related on the increasingly ability of the workers to be able to modify the present economic system in terms of these class objectives. But such a dynamic will only occur if the very conception of socialism is considered to be both feasible and an expression of the interests of the workers. Hence this dynamic of class struggle cannot be differentiated from the development of an understanding of the character of the socialist system that will replace capitalism. But Trotsky seems to underestimate the importance of this perspective because to him what is of greater significance is the role of a strategy to develop the process of class struggle. But the point that is not mentioned in relation to this perspective is that mass action is merely the means to the end. Such a development is essentially futile if it is not connected to the objective of the replacement of capitalism with socialism. Hence it is necessary to know what represents the ultimate outcome of the class struggle in terms of the objective of socialism. But such a process of development is not logical unless the conception of socialism is elaborated in sufficient detail. Only in this context is there the creation of a relationship of means to ends.

The point being made is that the defensive and limited character of the class struggle will not be overcome unless there is the development of popular support for the aim of socialism. But this very development means that a conception of what is meant by socialism has to be outlined in popular and convincing terms. With the influence of this understanding the character of the class struggle becomes transformed. The very aspects of the actions of the mass movement acquire a purpose and strategic logic. In this context the emphasis that Trotsky places on the role of the formation of factory committees by the workers acquires a strategic logic, they become the organised expression of the process of transition from capitalism to socialism. Trotsky outlines the importance of the factory committee in the following terms: “From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a de facto dual power is established in the factory. By its very essence it represents a transitional state because it includes in itself two irreconcilable regimes: the capitalist and proletarian. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely contained in the fact that they open the doors if not to a direct revolutionary, then to a pre-revolutionary period – between the bourgeois and proletarian regimes.”(p119) But the generation of an awareness of the strategic possibilities of the factory committees as the expression of the development of workers control within the enterprise will only become durable and the basis of strategic purpose if it is understood that they are the basis for the transformation of the character of economic power within the enterprise and the related generation of the development of a process of transition to socialism. Hence in order to motivate the creation of the factory committee it is necessary that the workers have a conception of what is the end result of this development, or an understanding of the aim of socialism that can be generated by the role of these enterprise organisations. Hence the basis for the establishment of factory committees will be most definitely advanced in terms of the increased popular influence of an awareness of what is meant by socialism. In this manner a theoretical and practical connection is established between means and end. Without this influence the factory committee becomes merely an expression of protest by the workers against the economic power of capital. Trotsky effectively outlines the relationship of means to end in that he indicates the importance of the role of the factory committees is to promote the realisation of the aim of workers control of industry: “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 the eventuality strikes.”(p121) However the issue of the development of the consciousness of this process is obscure and not sufficiently explained. The point is that the antagonism of capital and labour will not inherently create the development of a process of class struggle that results in the possibility to establish workers control. Instead it will be the increased influence of the aim of socialism that provides an aim to realise and to which all the other aspects of the class struggle are subordinated. Trotsky outlines how the logic of the intensification of the process of mass action should result in the formation of a worker’s government. But what is the aim of this type of administration? There is a credible strategy for change that has been elaborated in terms of the approach that: “Each of the transitional demands should, therefore, lead to one and the same political conclusion: the workers need to break with all traditional parties of the bourgeoisie in order, jointly with the farmers, to establish their own power.”(p135) In other words a credible programme has been outlined concerning the possible process of the development of the class struggle from its spontaneous beginnings to the development of increasingly conscious awareness of the necessity to realise the economic and political power of the working class within capitalism in order to facilitate transition to the domination of a workers government. Hence the problem is not with the lack of credibility of this strategy. But instead there is an assumption that what begins as a process of spontaneous class struggle can acquire revolutionary dimensions. This approach seems to underestimate the complexities of the process of developing a mass movement in order to oppose the domination of capital over labour, and also apparently ignores the ideological task of the necessity to outline in comprehensive detail what is meant by socialism and why workers should attempt to strive to realise this objective.

It is necessary to establish that the approach of the Transitional Programme has not been popularly supported in any major capitalist country. Instead various reformist parties have generally had influence over the working class, and the various revolutionary organisations have been marginalised. The result is that the approach of the transitional programme has not become the basis of the struggles of workers, even if the aims of workers control and management have sometimes acquired popularity and become the basis of the aspirations of sections of workers and trade unions. In the context of the apparently protracted character of the class struggle and the related apparently uncontested ideological hegemony of the standpoint of capitalism it would seem that it was necessary to develop a new programme and strategy for the promotion of revolutionary change that would attempt to relate to the challenges of the present period. One attempt to carry out this task was the League for the Fifth International which outlined its ‘European Action Programme’ in 2012. But the problem is that this standpoint is based on assumptions that generally fail to come to terms with the complexities of the present situation in terms of the primary importance of the ideological hegemony of the present capitalist system. In other words, this action programme is not concerned with outlining the superiority of socialism and why it should replace capitalism. Instead it is assumed that the mobilisation of the international working class on the basis of support for a revolutionary perspective of change will resolve this question. Hence the approach is similar to that of Trotsky, the primary question concerns how to mobilise the workers in order to realise revolutionary change and so ideological issues, such as the outlining the aim of socialism, become of secondary importance. The action programme contends that: “Only the working class, today a larger social force than ever before…by a revolutionary seizure of power and a socialist plan of production….save humanity and the natural environment.”(p1) But how is this development to become credible given the apparent ideological domination of the interests of capital and the opportunist limitations of the various parties claiming to represent the working class? The point is that the issue of bourgeois ideological domination has to be tackled in a serious and through manner if the outline of an argument in favour of revolutionary change is to be credible and not the justification of dogmatic reasoning. Furthermore, tackling this aspect means indicating that the alternative of socialism has not been promoted in an effective manner by the forces of Marxism and as a result it is an urgent task to elaborate what is meant by the aim of socialism in a satisfactorily detailed manner. But it is questionable whether the action programme is able to develop this type of standpoint in an effective manner. Instead it repeats the view of Trotsky that what is of central importance is how to mobilise the workers in order to oppose the domination of capital. Therefore, the connection between mass struggle and the ultimate aim of this development is not outlined in a satisfactory manner. The point is that what is not recognised is that it is the very domination of bourgeois ideology which means that the workers are reluctant to engage in actions against capitalism. Therefore, the promotion of the influence of the objective of socialism is itself an aspect of the development of the class struggle. This is a point that is arguably not understood by both Trotsky and the League for the Fifth International. But this very neglect is an expression of a rigid emphasis on the view that what is of primary and almost exclusive importance is the development of the mobilisation of the working class against capitalism. Hence what is not sufficiently recognised is the relationship of the dynamics of the class struggle to the influence of the aim of socialism. The failure to outline this type of credible perspective means that the issue of the role of struggle becomes something defined as important in itself and the issue of the relationship of this aspect to the objective of socialism is not outlined in definite terms. This failure is a logical expression of the failure to go beyond the limitations of the original elaboration of the Transitional Programme by Trotsky.

However in relation to the development of an empirical analysis of the present situation the programme of the Fifth International is quite impressive in terms of the elaboration of the challenges for the working class posed by the attempt of the EU to impose a policy of austerity and to undermine the social conditions of the people in the interests of capital. It is indicated that the various parties of the a progressive character have been unable to provide a strategy for the development of opposition to the reactionary approach of the governments of the EU and the related attempt to realise a policy based on the interests of capital. But primarily there is a crisis of the role of the trade unions: “It is not only the reformist parties, old and new, and the left populists who have failed to give a fighting answer to the crisis. The trade unions have also failed to provide leadership to defensive struggles or to unite them on a European level. The trade unions …. remain weak and are closely tied to a system of class collaboration, modelled more or less on the German system of co-determination. In most countries the trade unions have shrunk and been reduced to certain sectors of industry or the public sector.”(p9) Hence the apparent decline of the influence of the working class is connected to either the political regression of the various parties or the development of the class collaborationist approach of the trade unions. It is indicated that the central problem of the organisations of the workers is the lack of internationalism and revolutionary perspectives. This is because the influence of a type of opportunism is connected to the ideology of nationalism and the rejection of a European wide struggle of the workers in order to defend their interests and so facilitate the transformation of the change of the balance of the class forces in favour of the objectives of labour. It is suggested that what is needed is the development of a fifth international which can promote the influence of an action programme that is able to facilitate the mobilisation of the workers against the offensive of capital against labour. But the point is that whilst this approach seems to be both principled and related to the requirements of the class struggle it does not address the actual crisis of the political organisations claiming to be revolutionary Marxist. These groups are disunited and unable to organise together in terms of the promotion of the role of an action programme. The result of this situation is that the possibility of unity in support of an action programme of struggle is not likely to occur because of this fragmentation. But the supporters of the fifth international seems to deny the importance of the difficulties of the present situation and instead contend: “The right is further on the offensive and the Left and the working class must take the lead in mounting resistance. Therefore we call on all revolutionaries to unite in this task and present this programme as a contribution to the necessary discussion, forge a resistance that can not only defeat the rights offensive but go on to the socialist transformation of Europe.”(p11) But the problem with this approach is that it seems to underestimate the durability of the organisational divisions between the various groups. Unity around an action programme for the class struggle will not be achieved without some expression of a willingness for the various groups to support this objective. But this prospect does not seem realistic given that the requirements of the class struggle do not seem to be sufficient to facilitate the realisation of this aim of unity. What seems to be initially necessary is the elaboration of a policy that could facilitate the development of a united organisation based on the acceptance of an end to the independence of the various parties. This would mean the importance of the creation of a structure that was able to facilitate the realisation of genuine inner party democracy and on that basis the possibility to discuss the development of a programme of struggle would become a credible objective. But for such a prospect to occur would mean that the leadership of the various political organisations would have to support the objectives of unity – the advance of the class struggle – at a higher level than the narrow interests of the given political organisation. However, there is no expression of this type of willingness to reject the imperatives of sectarianism. So, whilst the objectives of the League for the Fifth International seem to be principled and worthwhile they do not seem to be realistic because of the continued importance of the differences between the various groups which undermines the realisation of the creation of a united revolutionary organisation.

In terms of the action programme it has a simple and principled objective to achieve facilitate the development of mass strikes in order to realise the objectives of a programme of public works in order to realise full employment and these should be based on the role of workers control and the development of plans by the trade unions as the basis of the organisation of these industries. The establishment of a 35hour week, and a minimum wage is also advocated. These demands seem to be a principled and credible basis to develop struggle in order to facilitate the realisation of the increased influence of the workers within the economy and the character of its activity. This approach is connected to the objective of: “An immediate end to austerity across the continent and a fight to take the power into the hands of the working people. The next oncoming capitalist crisis must be met not with austerity but with the socialisation of all firms declaring redundancies or attempting to go into bankruptcy.”(p13) But the problem that is not tackled is whether the working class still has the sufficient possibility to develop the influence, strength and level of consciousness to be able to develop forms of collective struggle that would make this perspective credible and realistic. Instead the assumption is merely asserted that workers governments can be realised on the basis of: “A united class struggle in Europe, or in major countries will rapidly pose the question of political power, the question which class rules in a specific country or the continent as a whole. The current crisis of Europe cannot be solved on a national level. Every major question will raise the need for a transformation of the continent as a whole.”(p14) This perspective may be principled but is it realistic because of the ideological effect of the period of protracted austerity which has undermined levels of organisation and the consciousness of workers? The point is that it is necessary to outline a credible approach that can indicate how it is possible to go from the present situation of defensiveness and instead increase the confidence of the workers so that they become willing to engage in more militant actions. But this is the very issue that seems to be neglected by the analysis being presented. Instead of tackling these complex questions a dogmatic assumption is being made that the development of opposition to austerity will become an inevitable development. Instead the only difficult option being outlined is the issue as to whether genuine workers governments can be formed that are able to reject the policies of reformism and instead advocate the realisation of a revolutionary programme. The justification of this approach is also connected to the related assumption that credible revolutionary parties can be created that are able to advocate the role of a revolutionary programme in a popular and revolutionary manner. However, such an approach ignores the actual difficulties of the situation of rivalry between many competing and small revolutionary groups. Furthermore, the continuation of this aspect seems to undermine the possible creation of a united and effective revolutionary party that would be able to advocate a programme of change in a popular manner. Hence the approach of the League for the Fifth International underestimates the difficulties of the class struggle, and so does not outline a convincing perspective of how to develop mass opposition to capitalism given the present defensiveness of the working class in a situation of austerity and the offensive of capital against labour. This aspect is formally mentioned but it is also assumed that this situation can be transformed by militant activity under the influence of the programme of the revolutionary party. But the actual difficult process of transformation of consciousness is not explained, except to assume that the workers will generally become receptive to supporting the demands of a revolutionary programme. What is also problematical is that the programme of the Fifth International seems to ignore the possible importance of the role of the various activist groups. Therefore, it could be argued that what is being outlined is a programme that is antiquated and not related to the developments of forms of struggle in the present period. But primarily the programme being defended is not able to explain how the ideological domination of the ruling class can be challenged by a counter-hegemonic strategy and related opposition to the domination of the ideas of capitalism. What is also ignored is the necessity to outline a understanding of socialism which could develop popular appeal and become the basis for the development of opposition to capitalism.

An alternative form of strategy is outlined by Alex Callinicos in his ‘Anti-Capitalist Manifesto’ (Polity Press, Cambridge 2003) He outlines the importance of the role of various activist struggles for challenging the domination of the capitalist system: “And so the great debate over capitalism has been resumed, two hundred years after it began in the aftermath of the Great French revolution….the worldwide rebellion against capitalist globalization as has changed the intellectual agenda.”(p13) But it could be argued that such a conclusion is an exaggeration because the various mass actions have not acquired sufficient influence and importance to the extent that they undermine the continuation of the capitalist system. Instead the various actions are generally based on the role of a few dedicated participants and in general the stability of the system has not been called into question. Callinicos describes the movement of protest and discontent as being an expression of anti-capitalism even if he accepts that the aim of the overcoming of the domination of capital is not a primary objective of the various movements of discontent. However it is necessary for the role of Marxists to convince the participants of the various struggles that the problem to be overcome is the domination of the capitalist system: “The major problems facing humankind – poverty, social injustice, economic instability, environmental destruction, and war – have the same source, in the capitalist system: the solution to these problems must accordingly be a radical one.”(p66) But the very conclusion that the participants of the struggles will conclude that it is necessary to realise gains within the system. There aim is not the overthrow of the present system which is essentially considered to be an impossible objective. Indeed Callinicos admits that the influence of a localist anti-capitalism that aspires to achieve limited gains within the present system is very important, and this is expressed by the popularity of aims of fair trade and other concessions to be obtained from the capitalist system. This standpoint is connected to the influence of reformist anti-capitalism that attempts to realise the modification of the present system so that it can become more progressive. The radical section of anti-capitalist sentiment is expressed by autonomism which attempts to modify the character of capitalism by increasing the influence of forms of participatory and popular democracy. In relation to this diverse mass movement the minority trend is expressed by forms of revolutionary socialist anti-capitalism. The role of this group is to relate its aspirations to the generation of the increased importance of anti-capitalism and to facilitate its ability to transform reality: “It is up to socialists to show….. that their conception of the world is relevant to this new movement – that socialism is a credible and feasible alternative to capitalism, and that the organized working class still is the decisive agent of social transformation.”(p85) But the problem with this perspective is its apparent lack of credibility. The forces of revolutionary socialism are small and generally divided into rival groups. In contrast the various forms of activism are often flexible, dynamic and able to obtain concessions from the representatives of the capitalist system. Why is there a need for Marxist groups given their apparent lack of ineffectiveness and the contrasting dynamism of various forms of activism? Callinicos contends that the relevance of revolutionary Marxism is because of its relation to the working class which remains the most important possible agency of social change. But what this view does not address is the apparent long-term marginalisation of Marxist groups which has meant that there attempt to relate to the working class has been generally unsuccessful. This aspect means that the various strategies that the Marxist organisations have put forward as perspectives for the realisation of revolutionary change have also been unconvincing. Callinicos outlines how it is quite possible to establish the continued importance of the workers to the development of the economy, and so they have a primary strategic role in the process of the possibility of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. But this aspect is not the major issue of contention. Instead what is problematical is the issue of the apparent failure to establish genuine political connections between the workers and the various revolutionary organisations. The result of this problem is that it is not possible to facilitate the genuine influence of a strategy for revolutionary change. Hence the forces of Marxism have to address this issue, and it is to the merit of Callinicos that he seriously attempts to address this problem. Providing perspectives will not resolve the issue of the relation of party to class but at least it will provide important criteria by which these questions can be understood and possible answers provided that can facilitate the development of effective revolutionary parties that are able to promote a feasible programme of social change.

Callinicos considers that the four major principles of the anti-capitalist movement should be justice, efficiency, democracy and sustainability. He contends that justice is connected to an emphasis on the realisation of the aim of an egalitarian society but the point is that it could be suggested that this objective can only be realised in terms of the establishment of a type of socialism. Hence Callinicos should not evade the issue of outlining the importance of socialism and so should not utilise the emphasis on anti-capitalism to evade this question. The second aspect of efficiency means that the other objectives should not be undermined by an emphasis on the importance of economic growth that is opposed to the realisation of an egalitarian society. Instead economic growth should be made compatible with the understanding that what is vital is to develop a type of society based on the genuine participation of the people in its development. But the problem that is not considered in this context is that economic growth has usually been the context for the expression of inequality in the relations of production. How is this prospect to be overcome? It is necessary to elaborate an understanding of an economy in which the participation of the producers is the basis of its character and objectives. Callinicos makes the important point that the greater the potential of the economic system to be efficient the more it is possible to meet the needs of the people. But this objective in a limited manner is already realised under some capitalist societies. The point is that only when the producers are able to define the character and objectives of the economic system will it become genuinely possible to establish a situation in which their needs are being realised. This is because the needs of the people have become the major objective of the new economic system instead of the interests of a small dominant capitalist class. But this development requires the realisation of the domination of the process of production by the producers. But Callinicos surprisingly does not make this point in any explicit manner. Instead he contends in vague terms that: “The right conclusion is that we should prefer an economic system that supports the widest extension of human productive capacities …..that is consistent with the requirements of justice, democracy and sustainability.”(p110) But the realisation of these principles means the development of the undermining of the domination of capital over labour and instead the expression of the democracy of the producers in order to facilitate the organisation of the relations of production. But Callinicos does not make this point in an explicit manner, and it could be suggested that what is more feasible and possible is the regulation of the role of capital by the supervision of labour. In order to overcome any ambiguity in this context it is necessary to outline in emphatic terms a conception of workers control of the process of production. Only in that manner can it be suggested that the objectives of the situation of the domination of capital have been ended. Callinicos is also vague about the type of democratic system he is advocating. He seems to evade discussion of the issue of the importance of the present system of universal elections and the role of the multi-party system. Instead in a vague manner he suggests that a different type of society could be more democratic. But how is this to be possible given the present domination of the political system by various reactionary parties. How could radical organisations win elections given their present marginalisation and insignificance? He does not tackle these issues and instead asserts the importance of the principle of democracy in vague terms. The presumed assumption is that the dynamic of the struggle of activists will apparently create a more democratic society. But how is this objective to be realised, and what would be the institutions of democracy of an alternative to capitalism. Would the system of universal elections still be an expression of the political system? These important issues do not seem to be addressed, and instead the vague aim is for the realisation of a more democratic political system. But how is the issue of the present domination of the parties that support capitalism to be addressed and tackled. How are the presently small and ineffective revolutionary organisations to become more popular so that they can develop greater support for policies of radical change? These issues are not addressed and instead it is assumed that mass struggles will somehow, although this process of change is not outlined, so that governments can be formed that are able to introduce an anti-capitalist programme. However, the importance of the marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary socialism is not addressed, and furthermore the apparent limitations of the various mass struggles which have no aspiration to acquire state power is not tackled. Instead the issue of the relationship of struggle to a process of change is not outlined in a satisfactory manner. The result of this limitation is that the policies of a left-wing government are outlined, but the process by which this administration has been formed is not tackled in any satisfactory manner. Instead it is suggested that a radical administration would introduce progressive taxation measures, a universal basic income, and reduction of the working week, plus the revitalisation of the public services. This would be combined with a progressive income tax and an end to immigration controls. The approach that is being outlined in order to justify the possibility to realise this approach is the dynamic of Trotsky’s transitional demands: “At the same time, the tendency of these demands is to undermine the logic of capital. For example, to introduce universal direct income at a relatively generous level would severely compromise the present workings of the labour market, and therefore remove one of the essential conditions of capitalist exploitation. In other words, while not necessarily formulated for explicitly anti-capitalist reasons, these demands have an explicitly anti-capitalist dynamic. They are what Trotsky called transitional demands, reforms that emerge from the realities of existing struggles, but whose implementation in the current context would challenge capitalist economic relations.”(p140) Callinicos outlines the political criteria by which the attempt to realise this perspective would become feasible: “A movement that followed this path could only succeed by winning the active support of the majority of the population, particularly with the reserves of collective strength that only the organized working class possesses, and by appealing to like-minded movements around the world.”(p141) But this perspective seems to be an exercise in the justification of illusions given the apparent stability of the domination of the capitalist class. There has not been the development of the role of a revolutionary party which has been able to generate popular support for this type of perspective of radical change. However Callinicos tries to answer this issue in an unsatisfactory manner by implying that the anti-capitalist movement is acquiring a radical character that is based on this type of revolutionary dynamic: “To undertake a revolutionary project today, at the beginning of the twentieth first century is an awesome task…It is however the path on which the anti-capitalist movement has embarked not as a result of a conscious strategy but through the logic of the struggles in which it is engaged.”(p142) But this perspective implies that the dynamism of what are actually small groups of activists can somehow generate the development of popular struggles that will create the political possibility to transform the system. But how is this activist movement able to facilitate the motivation of the mass of the people to become involved in a process of changing society? This important question does not seem to be addressed by Callinicos. In actuality the various activist struggles are only able to achieve limited changes and the prospect of the transformation of society does not become a realistic possibility. This is because the connection of the activist movements to the mass of the people has not been established and realised. Instead these struggles remain generally isolated and of limited importance. In contrast to these developments people generally still vote to support the continuation of the various parties that defend the continuation of capitalism. Hence the emphasis on the role of the activist does not seem to provide an effective basis for the realisation of a strategy for changing society. The various forms of the transitional programme and the emphasis on the role of the activists do not seem to express credible strategic basis for a process of the promotion of the transformation of society in a socialist manner. Does this problem imply that capitalism is omnipotent?

The point being made is that the major limitation in the development of an alternative to capitalism is the failure to develop the influence of an alternative which we can define as socialism. This point has been outlined by Michael Lebowitz in his book: “The Socialist Alternative” (Monthly Review Press, New York 2010) He contends that: “In the struggle against capitalism, a system that destroys human beings and nature, we need a vision of the alternative.”(p166) The point is that it has been the lack of the influence of a genuine and plausible conception of an alternative to capitalism has continued to provide the major basis that has undermined the possibility to develop a consciousness that supports the aim of the realisation of socialism. In this manner the lack of the popular influence of the socialist objective has meant that various struggles have been limited to objectives that can be realised within capitalism. But the onset of the situation of austerity has undermined the possibility to achieve these objectives. It would seem that the capitalist system is no longer able to realise these reforms. The result has been an ideological crisis of the mass movement of the workers and the various reformist parties. However, the activism of the left groups has not been able to express a valid alternative because the emphasis on the importance of struggle is no longer sufficient in order to make gains within the system. Instead: “The purpose of this book is to point to an alternative path. A path focused not upon quantitative growth but on the full development of human potential, not a path of barbarism but one of socialism. And the premise is that we desperately need a vision of that alternative. Because if we don’t know where we want to go, no path will take us there.”(p7) Hence the objective of progressive aspirations, the aim of socialism is also the basis of the character of the strategy by which it is realised. In this context all attempts to limit aspirations to what is possible under capitalism are problematical because this means that the realisation of the aim of socialism becomes more difficult. Instead what is possible within capitalism is a problematical approach because it is based on the rejection of the only valid objective of the aspirations of the working class for genuine social improvement which is based on the attainment of socialism. If capitalism remans the dominant system, then the subordination of the workers to the forces of capital will not be overcome. Therefore, any gains made within capitalism should be part of a process of change that results in the formation of a socialist society. What can be achieved in the present system is essentially a prelude to the possible realisation of the alternative to the present economic system because only in that manner can the workers be liberated and the possibility to end domination within the relations of production be advanced and eventually resolved. Therefore, the major limitation of the class struggle has been the lack of influence of a credible conception of socialism and the result of this situation is the ideological domination of the objectives of capitalism. This problem has not been resolved by the various activist strategies of the left wing groups which have outlined an understanding of the dynamics of the class struggle but have neglected to relate this approach to a satisfactory elaboration of the objective of socialism. The result of these limitations is that the very credibility of strategy is questioned because it becomes a justification for struggle but the aims that it is connected to are vague and not outlined in satisfactory detail. Thus, the emphasis on struggle seems to replace a recognition of the actual purpose of strategy which is to realise a socialist society. This problem can begin to be tackled if we attempt to elaborate a conception of socialism that is connected to the possible dynamics of struggle. In other words, socialism is not a distant objective but is instead an expression of the very logic and character of mass movements against capitalism. Thus, in some sense we are trying to establish socialism within capitalism. The success of this perspective is an essential aspect of the process of change and the generation of the conditions by which the successful realisation of socialism is achieved.

The point being made is that generally the discontent of workers does not result in the overthrow of the domination of capitalism because of the very lack of the influence of a credible conception of a socialist alternative to the present system. This problem has been connected with the failure of the Soviet Union to create a genuine socialist society that could be a progressive expression of what people should aspire to develop. But the various critics of Stalinism have been limited by their failure to develop an understanding of a possible alternative to capitalism which could resolve the problems created by the installation of one-party dictatorships. The result of this failure meant that workers considered that they had no alternative than to strive to realise improvements within the capitalist system. But this means that people are unable to realise their potential as implied by the importance of productive activity because this aspect is dominated by the interests of capital. Hence it is necessary to overcome this situation and instead establish the conditions in which labour is able to utilise the process of production so that it is able to realise its capacities. But this possibility means that it is necessary to develop a strategy by which people are able to express this potential in terms of enhancement of their potential to express the character of productive activity: “Marx was most consistent on this point when talking about the struggles of workers against capital and how this revolutionary practice transforms “circumstances and men”, expanding their capabilities and making them fit to create a new world.”(p51) But we can also suggest that this level of consciousness is not necessarily generated in a spontaneous manner as the outcome of the various struggles of the workers. Instead it is important that a revolutionary party has an approach that can promote the view that the various militant actions of the workers express a level of collective content that represent the possibility to establish a type of society in which the domination of capital can be overcome. Thus, the problem with the approach of Lebowitz is that he implies that the spontaneous actions of the workers are sufficient in order to develop this awareness of the possibilities for the organisation of the process of production by the producers. However, it would be more precise to suggest that what has developed is the possible recognition of the awareness by the workers of the limitations of the exploitative character of the capital-labour relation, but this potential discontent has to be transformed into a conscious support for a socialist alternative. In this context the revolutionary party has an important role, but it means that it has to develop a credible conception of what would be meant by a socialist economy. The aim is to aspire to achieve a situation of self-government and organisation of the process of production by the workers, but this understanding is not spontaneously generated by the character of capitalism itself. Instead the system generally generates the view that the workers are not capable of the organisation of production and instead this aspect should be the task of the role of capital and its various mediating agencies. Therefore, the very task of Marxism is to outline credible reasons why the workers can organise production and realise their needs without the exploitative role of capital. In this manner the promotion of a conception of a validity of socialism is the expression of the reasons why the domination of capital can be overcome and replaced with different and emancipatory relations of production: “To repeat, the working class can no more use the ready made despotic capitalist workplace….for its own purposes than it can use the “ready-made” capitalist state machinery for its own purposes. The socialist combination of workers that increases social productivity must be a combination that flows from the relations of the associated producers rather than from the plan and authority of a being outside them.”(p59) But this development requires that the aim of workers within capitalism should be to advance the realisation of this objective in terms of establishment of forms of workers control within capitalism, or the progress of the logic of socialism within capitalism. The possible realisation of this aspect facilitates the possibility of the transformation of the capital-labour relation into becoming the possible generation of new relations of production. In this manner the objective of the realisation of socialism acquires progress and the related ending of the domination of capital over labour.

However, there is a political problem. Would the people in general vote to support this process of change in general elections? There is no certain answer to this question. All that can be suggested is that it is necessary to develop the role of a principled socialist party that would contest elections on the basis of the principles of the importance of workers control of production and the related objective of the aim of the realisation of genuine socialism. Obviously, the defeat of a party that had this programme would undermine the credibility of the struggle for the realisation of revolutionary change. But there is the possibility of electoral success because the socialist organisation would have a policy that was based on the actual development of the actions of the workers. In this context it would seem logical that workers would possibly support a political party that supported their actions in a principled manner. Obviously, the influence of bourgeois ideology could mean that a socialist party would still be defeated in a general election despite the influence of a process of radicalisation of the workers. But in this situation, it would still be the principled obligation of the socialist party to continue to support the realisation of forms of workers control of the economy. In this context there would be a contradiction between the possibilities of the economic situation when compared to the reactionary limitations of the political system. But this contradiction should mean that in an important sense the workers reject the result of the general election and still continue to strive to advance the realisation of their influence within the economy. The very ability to undermine the domination of capital over labour would prepare the possibility for the success of the revolutionary party in the next general election. This is because the continued functioning of the capitalist system would be shown to be untenable. Furthermore, the possible effectiveness of the workers in realising forms of control over the economy would be an indication that new relations of production were being established. The important point would be that a new type of economic logic is proving to be superior to the imperatives of capital accumulation in the development of production in order to meet human needs. This situation was indicating that the continuation of capitalism was being challenged by a more progressive economic system. What was becoming established is a situation in which the principles of solidarity and community are becoming more important than capital accumulation. However, it is questionable whether such a possibility will occur without the related influence of the role of a revolutionary party that is able to promote this programme of workers control and socialism. But how is such a party to be developed given the influence of bourgeois ideology and reformism? In relation to this issue the problem seems to be the very marginalisation of the parties of revolutionary Marxism. The influence of reformism is still vey important and indeed support for bourgeois parties is often expressed in the results of general elections. Hence the marginalisation of the forces of Marxism would seem to suggest that the possibility to develop genuine radicalisation of the working class is problematical. In this context bourgeois ideology is dominant and so the perspective of transition to socialism is not considered to be credible. The system seems to be omnipotent. But the point is that the crisis of capitalism is prolonged and has not been resolved. Therefore, the objective conditions are favourable for the perspective of socialism to make political progress. But the problem is the lack of a revolutionary party that can advocate a credible programme of change. This means that on the one hand capitalism is unable to resolve its economic problems, but on the other hand the development of an effective revolutionary party with a credible programme of change has not been created. This means that there is discontent, but it does not acquire an organised and effective political character. But the situation is maturing in which a party with a programme for socialism could acquire mass support. However, the problem is that the various organisations of Marxism neglect this task and instead emphasise the importance of activism. This actually means that they deny the importance of the challenges of the present situation. But discontent with capitalism has not been resolved in the present situation and so potential popular support for a socialist organisation with a strategy of change could be possible.

Lebowitz suggests that the three major aspects of the conception of socialism are social ownership, workers management and production for the needs of the community: “Without production for social needs, no real social property; without social property, no worker decision making orientated towards society’s needs; without workers decision making, no transformation of people and their needs.”(p88) This is a good description of the character of socialism, but the point is how will it be possible to overcome the dominating influence of bourgeois ideology and create the political conditions to make this perspective a possibility? The point is that under the present conditions the various parties that support the continuation of capitalism are dominant and this is expressed by the results of elections and the forces of socialism are small and often divided into rival groupings. But Lebowitz suggests that the very struggles of the workers have dynamics to go beyond the limits of capital: “We see…..that in their struggle…the workers transform both circumstances and themselves. This is a process of substituting for the logic of capital the logic of human development. And in this process the dynamics of capitalism, its laws of motion, are superseded by laws of motion of the society of associated producers.”(p111) But how is this development to become a feasible possibility given the ideological domination of the approach of bourgeois ideology which suggests that capitalism is a system that cannot be challenged and that its imperatives are omnipotent and unlikely to be transformed by the role of mass struggle? Hence there is the necessity for a revolutionary party to develop what Gramsci defined as a counter-hegemonic ideology in order to oppose the influence of bourgeois ideology and in that manner attempt to develop popular support for the standpoint of socialism. This ideological task has to be combined with the development of mass struggle in order to facilitate the process of the transformation of capitalist society. The very success of this ideological task would generate increasing support for a strategy of change via the mass action of the workers. But failure in this task would mean that the system of capitalism would be consolidated and so not subject to a process of challenge to its domination. Hence the counter-hegemonic strategy would be connected to developing popular support for the aim of socialism. This standpoint is based on an understanding that capitalism is a problematical system that is not able to realise the possibilities of human activity: “To go from struggles within the bounds of capitalist relations…to those that break with the common sense of capitalist relations requires an understanding that capital is inconsistent with the need for full development of our potential.”(p131) But how can the influence of this approach be generated given the important influence of bourgeois ideology and the related view that an alternative to capitalism is not feasible. The traditional Trotskyist view is the dynamics of struggle will somehow generate increasing popular support for the socialist alternative, but if this relationship is to be established it will be necessary to outline a conception of socialism in convincing detail. It can be suggested that Lebowitz carries out this task generally effectively in terms of outlining an understanding of socialism in terms of the participation of the people in its character and development. But what he has not connected to this understanding is a conception of how this perspective can be realised given the present marginalisation of the forces of Marxism and the apparent inability to develop the influence of this standpoint within the working class. In another book: ‘The Socialist Imperative’ (Monthly Review Press, New York 2015) he contends that: “The working class makes itself a revolutionary subject through its struggles – it transforms itself. This was always the position of Marx – his concept of “revolutionary practice”, which is simultaneous changing of circumstances and self-change. The working class changes itself through its struggles. It makes itself fit to create the new world.” (p143) But we know that this perspective has generally not been realised because the dynamics of class struggle are not sufficient to generate the possibility of revolutionary change. Instead there has to be the important influence of the role of a revolutionary strategy of the transformation of society. Lebowitz has contributed to this task in his elaboration of some of the important principles of what would constitute a participatory socialist society. But the problem is that this understanding has not had influence in relation to the generation of the domination of bourgeois ideology in the recent period. It would seem that the most logical position is for people to accommodate to the domination of capital. In this context the very aim of socialism seems to be discredited or an expression of a lack of realism concerning the character of practical policies. Hence it would seem that Lebowitz’s understanding that the very relationship of capital and labour creates a dynamic for this opposition to be resolved by the transcendence of the domination of the present economic system is a simplification that underestimates the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology. Thus, Marx’s understanding that the economic opposition of capital and labour would result in political struggle to overthrow the system would seem to be a perspective that has generally been falsified by actual events. When an effective revolutionary party has not been created then this development has not occurred. Therefore, the task is to develop a revolutionary party that can promote the role of a credible strategy for the transformation of society. In this context there seems to be no substitute for the development of the importance of workers control of production. Only in that manner will it be possible to facilitate the significance of the conception of what socialism will be like under capitalism and so facilitate the increasing influence of this objective. But this perspective should not be differentiated from the promotion of a conception of socialism which has been outlined by a number of Marxist intellectuals. Their views should be discussed and utilised in order to develop a popular conception of what is meant by socialism. In this development the connection of the role of class struggle with the ultimate aims of this aspect will be outlined and established. However, there is a problem in relation to the marginalisation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. This means that there is a situation of the crisis of the organisations that favour the realisation of the aim of socialism. Without the development of a credible and effective revolutionary party it is questionable whether a strategy for change will acquire support and the related determination to try and realise its objectives. The problem is that the issue of the importance of strategy requires that there is an effective political force that is able to promote it in a popular and convincing manner. Thus, the creation of a credible revolutionary party is itself a strategic issue, because this development is an expression of the most effective manner in which the influence of Marxism can be promoted. In this context the role of strategy becomes an expression of the importance of the party and its increased ability to relate to the aspirations of the working class. But the concept of the ultimate aim of socialism has to be an integral aspect of the strategy that is being promoted. The problem with many programmes of the various Marxist organisations is that they actually deny the importance of the actual ultimate aim of the programme, which is socialism. Hence these programmes generally fail to outline a credible conception of socialism and of how it can be realised. Instead what is emphasised is the role of struggle as an end in itself, and the result is the promotion of the role of activism rather than revolutionary Marxism. Furthermore, it is necessary to be realistic about the difficulties of the present situation. The various Marxist groups are small and divided. There is little popular support for the approach of Marxism. Therefore, what is required is a patient ideological struggle in order to increase the influence of the approach of Marxism. Only the success of this objective can establish a relationship of party to class that could facilitate the possibility of the realisation of the potential for revolutionary change. But the elitist and dogmatic character of the various revolutionary organisations seems to undermine the possibility to realise this development. This means that the influence of a political strategy for change does not acquire influence in these unfavourable circumstances. Hence the most important aspect of the prospect to develop support for a revolutionary strategy is the striving to develop the successful realisation of an effective political organisation of Marxism. This process will not be realised without the development of unity between the many contending groups. But the formation of a united group with a common programme would seriously facilitate the creation of a Marxist organisation that would appeal for support from the workers in terms of its promotion of a convincing strategy for change.