UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The question of the failure of the parties of revolutionary Marxism becomes important in relation to the opportunist decline of the Labour Party after the death of its founder leader Keir Hardie in 1914. This meant that it became very difficult to develop an organisation based on the principles of socialism and the struggle for the realisation of peace in relation to the development of world war one. Instead the Labour party became based on the ideological ascendency of the reformism of the Webb’s and was led by various opportunists like Arthur Henderson. This meant that the issue of the development of revolutionary politics would have to be based on the assertion of an alternative to the role of the Labour party. But this development did not occur because the most feasible alternative of the Communist party became based on the problematical politics of Stalinism. This meant that it was necessary to create the political and ideological conditions for the creation of an alternative to both the Labour party and the Communist party. But this never occurred. Instead the major allegiance of the various Communist parties was based on their support for the leadership of the Soviet Union and this meant opposing any possible development of a genuine expression of the possibility of proletarian revolution. It would seem that in these circumstances that the workers would become supporters of alternative to the reformism of the Labour party and the opportunism of the Communist organisations. But this development never occurred in a successful manner. Sean Matgamna in his book: ‘The Left in Disarray’ (Workers Liberty, London 2017) outlines the manner in which the process of ideological degeneration was expressed by the reactionary role of Stalinism: “Before the spread of the Stalinist plague, Marxist socialists were guided by adherence to the working class, to the working class side in the class struggle – always and everywhere and in all circumstances; and to the education of the labour movement in consistent democracy, in working class political independence, and in unrelenting anti-capitalist militancy.”(p22) In other words the reactionary role of Stalinism was that it both posed as the expression of revolutionary Marxism and yet acted to undermine this role in terms of the promotion of the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The problem became that it was difficult to develop a credible alternative to this situation. In this context the very conception of what was meant by the aim of socialism became distorted and transformed. “ “Socialism” after the victory and reconsolidation of the bourgeoisie in the west and of Stalinism in the USSR and in the Communist International, was no longer conceived as the rule of working people in a world created by advanced capitalism, as in Marx and Lenin’s conception of socialism it had to be, but as the de facto rule of an oligarchy over the producers in underdeveloped or even pre-capitalist societies with the historic mission of developing those societies to what advanced capitalism had achieved. Values were turned inside out and upside down.”(p27) But the problem was that despite these theoretical and political limitations the parties of Stalinism acquired mass support and any attempt to develop the alternative of the form of a genuine revolutionary Marxism remained marginal. The problem was that the enduring character of what was defined as the character of socialist politics seemed to have been defined by the role of Social Democracy and Stalinism. In relation to the USSR: “The new ruling class continued to call itself communist and Marxist; it defined and camouflaged its own brutal rule over the working people as the rule of the working class over itself; it represented anti-socialist and anti-working class counterrevolution as the living continuity and embodiment of the October revolution.”(p28) But the point is that for various ideological reasons the actual situation was not understood by the adherents of the Communist International. They continued to consider that the USSR was a genuine expression of the aims and principles of socialism. Matgamna explains this development in terms of the transformation of the various Communist parties into the expression of the interests of the Stalinist ruling class, but this issue is not explained in any systematic manner by Matgamna. Instead he assumes that a situation developed in which Stalinism was able to transform and undermine the principled character of Marxism into becoming an expression of the interests of a new ruling class: “Totalitarian-utopian Stalinism unravelled all of the old assumptions and concerns of the old Marxist movement. It redefined the role of the parties – in Russia the agent of development, outside Russia as a significant network for the “defence of the Soviet Union”. It displaced the working class as the protagonist in the socialist movement and offered as its substitute. The party, which might be tied to the working class, but then again, might not, but in either case was the decisive, the irrepressible agency. It implied redefining the agency of the party to the working class; not to educate in order to develop consciousness and political independence but to manipulate and to use.”(p30-31) But this elitist role led to serious repression within the USSR and the promotion of defeats of the working class in Europe. Hence the question that arises is why was it not possible to develop a genuine Marxist expression of opposition to the opportunist limitations of Stalinism and Social Democracy? It has to be assumed that this principled alternative had the chance to be developed but that was not possible to realise this potential because of importance limitations of the forces of a possible expression of genuine Marxism. However, it is also necessary to consider that this development was difficult because of the very domination of reformism and Stalinism over the labour movement in the UK. This issue was made more complex by the fact that it was essentially only possible to develop a revolutionary opposition to the role of Stalinism from within the communist party. It was not possible to establish a type of credible Marxism within the Labour party because of the importance of the domination of reformism within this organisation. This situation meant that revolutionary Marxism could only be the expression of a small current of opinion that developed out of the process of disagreement with Stalinism that developed in response to the political limitations of the Stalinist led Communist International. The result of this situation was that the forces of revolutionary Marxism could only express peripheral importance within the labour movement of the UK. In this context it was necessary for these marginal forces to relate to the only other expression of genuine socialism which was the Independent Labour party. But the ILP was a declining force because of its mistaken decision to leave the Labour party because of its increasingly right-wing policies. Thus, the ILP had become a sect that was of declining political importance and was based on the advocacy of what could be considered to be an antiquated conception of the aim of socialism. It was unable to develop its relevance because of this lack of a relationship to the Labour party and so had become a propagandist organisation that seemed to lack any relevance in relation to the British political situation. However, it retained an important sense of political principle in regard to the important solidarity work it carried out in relation to opposing fascism in Spain. In this context it remained credible and so it would seem to be a logical policy for the British Trotskyists to join the ILP. But it has to be questionable whether they had an aim of the restoration of the importance of the ILP or instead considered that joining this organisation was merely a cynical exercise in order to increase their significance. In other words, the motives of the Trotskyists could be questioned in relation to their role within the ILP. Therefore, this development could be considered to be merely of empirical significance and so was not to the merit of the Trotskyists who lacked any consistent perspectives about how to develop the influence of revolutionary Marxism in what was an unfavourable situation. However, this problematical aspect was to be repeated in relation to the involvement of the Trotskyists within the Labour party. In other words, the outcome of these political developments could be said to have a problematical legacy that did not result in the development of a principled relationship of revolutionary Marxism with popular reformist organisations. However, the ultimate response of the Trotskyists to this expression of sectarianism was to adopt the contrasting approach of opportunism which meant adapting to the left wing forces within the ILP and the Labour party. Hence the problem was that the Trotskyists lacked a coherent perspective that could have combined the aspects of flexibility with a consistent approach of principled politics. This aspect was complicated by the fact that the Trotskyists developed authoritarian organisations that did not encourage the role of democratic participation and so the aspect of the influence of opportunism was combined with the importance of elitism. The ultimate result of this situation was the failure to create a genuinely consistent and principled Marxist organisation. Some aspects of this history will be discussed in the analysis outlined below.

The most important problem was the question of how to develop a viable alternative to the communist party which had degenerated because of the influence of Stalinism. The small group of Trotskyists ultimately took the decision to join the Independent Labour Party. But the problem was that this organisation was declining because of the fact that it no longer had a political and organisational relationship to the Labour party. Hence the most important question concerned how to create a more important and effective ILP that could establish a genuine and principled relationship with the Labour party. But this issue was obscured by the fact that the ILP was influenced by Stalinism in the mid 1930’s and often considered that its major task was to establish political and organisational relations with the Communist party of the UK. In this context the influence of the small group of Trotskyists was unimportant. However, this issue seemed to have become resolved when the supporters of Stalinism increasingly left the ILP to join the Communists in the mid 1930’s. But then the ILP entered a political crisis over its attitude towards the invasion of Ethiopia by the Italian fascist army. The majority of the ILP adapted a position of neutrality and refused to support Ethiopia against the Italian forces. The Trotskyists argued in support of the defence of Ethiopia, but they were in a minority on this issue. Hence the ILP had entered into a situation of political crisis caused by the influence of dogmatic pacifism, and this position had little support within the working class. However, the situation could have become transformed if the ILP had become won over to a more principled and revolutionary position. This should have been the perspective of the Trotskyists within the ILP because the influence of a principled political party would have been important in relation to the oncoming development of the second world war when a principled position on this conflict could have become the basis to revive the influence of the politics of revolutionary Marxism within the working class. But in a sense the Trotskyists had a crisis of political perspectives and were essentially undecided about how to proceed in this complex situation. Increasingly they considered that the ILP was an irrelevant organisation and so they favoured work within the Labour party, but this ignored the importance of the challenges of the oncoming situation of the development of the second world war. In this context the influence of an organisation like the ILP advocating the position of a critical stance on this international conflict could have become the basis of the creation of a principled standpoint leading to the revival of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. But instead of this possibility the forces of Trotskyism had become a minor part of the Labour party and so lacked influence and importance. In other words, there was essentially a crisis of political perspectives that resulted in the acceptance of the irrelevance of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. This situation was only mitigated by the role of the Trotskyists in the organisation of some industrial disputes during the second world war period. But the increasing importance of the Labour party because of its role within the coalition government led to the situation that all hopes for an improvement of the social situation were with this organisation. This development was reinforced by the publication of the Beveridge report that led to support for the aim of the formation of a welfare state after the second world war. In other words, it seemed that the approach of revolutionary Marxism had become irrelevant and so the decline of the ILP was accompanied by that of the forces of Trotskyism. Hence the aspirations of the working class could only be upheld by the role of the Labour party. In this context revolutionary Marxism lacked a coherent approach that could generate its increasing influence in a situation in which it seemed to be basically irrelevant apart from its involvement in various industrial disputes. Furthermore, the prestige of the USSR during world war two seemed to contribute to the apparent limitations of Trotskyism which seemed to have become an irrelevant political force. In this situation the credibility of the Labour party and Stalinism seemed to have become an unchallenged aspect of social reality. Hence it would not be long for the forces of British Trotskyism to accept this situation and to become critical supporters of the role of the left wing of the Labour party. Indeed, this development was anticipated by the forces of Trotskyism joining the Labour party in the late 1930’s. Hence the important question that arose was what would be the basis of a principled relationship between the forces of revolutionary Marxism and the Labour party? This question was not immediately answered because of the problems involved in developing a standpoint that could answer the problem of how to establish a credible perspective for the generation of a perspective that could orientate the Labour party towards the issue of the socialist transformation of society. It was understood that the Labour party was reformist and so was opposed to the possibility of revolutionary change but this issue did not result in the formation of an approach that could create the political conditions for the Labour party to support the aim of revolutionary change. Indeed, the immediate problem in 1940 was the support of the Labour party for the coalition government in the second world war. The Trotskyists advocated the perspective of revolutionary defeatism, but this did not directly tackle the issue of the relationship of the Labour party to the coalition government. Instead the effective policy of the Trotskyists was limited to supporting various industrial disputes of the workers. Hence the obvious aim to call for the Labour party to break with the coalition and to form a revolutionary government was never made. In this context the call for a popular war against fascism was never made and instead the Trotskyists remained essentially without a credible perspective for the international and national situation. This limitation was intensified by the process of the Stalinist expansion during world war two which required a principled response. Ted Grant outlined the basis of this policy in terms of the formulation that the Soviet bureaucracy was creating the conditions for the formation of deformed workers states in Eastern Europe. But this position was not universally supported and instead the ambiguity of the leadership of the Fourth International was upheld by the majority of the leadership of the British organisation which had become the Revolutionary Communist party in 1944. But the primary problem was that the British Trotskyists were unable to establish a credible perspective in relation to the role of the Labour government. They did not recognise the necessity to support the measures of reform and to argue for their extension such as calling for the connection of the nationalised industries with the development of worker’s control. Nor did they seem to understand that the creation of the National Health Service could become the precedent for the creation of an economy based on the aims of need and not profit. Instead the RCP became preoccupied with various internal disputes and the increasing development of a power struggle involving Ted Grant and Gerry Healy. In this context the objectives of Trotskyism seemed to have little relationship to the aspirations of the working class and instead the emphasis of the RCP was on apparently obscure political issues that had little relationship to the interests of the workers. In this context it would seem to be reasonable for workers to continue to support the Labour government which seemed to be addressing their needs, even if this process was carried out in a limited and inadequate manner. Indeed, it also seemed that the aspirations for a radical development of politics was being advanced by the left wing of the Labour party led by Nye Bevin. In this context the forces of British Trotskyism became essentially a support group for the left wing of the Labour party, and so their actual importance seemed to have become very obscure. Furthermore, the Trotskyists increasingly became preoccupied with internal theoretical questions such as the character of Stalinism and the issue of explaining the boom of post-war capitalism. The formation of a Conservative government in 1951 did not change this situation and instead the major issue seem to be about how to re-elect a new Labour parliamentary majority. Furthermore, the forces of international Trotskyism went into crisis with the international split of 1953. The major organisation led by Gerry Healy declared in support of the minority led by Cannon of the American Socialist Workers party. But the problem was that the organisation led by Healy was increasingly authoritarian despite having formally principled positions and the other groups led by Ted Grant and Tony Cliff were small organisations that also seemed to be organised in a similar elitist manner. Hence by the mid 1950’s it could be argued that there was an organisational and political crisis of the groups of revolutionary Marxism, and arguably this problem has never been resolved in an effective and principled manner. Instead additional and new organisations also emerged that were organised without the genuine expression of the role of democracy and so also had elitist leaderships. In other words, by the mid 1950’s it could be argued that a crisis of British revolutionary Marxism had been created and this problem has never been tackled in an effective and principled manner. Therefore, it is an important task to try to address this problem and to outline a perspective which at least in theoretical terms can provide the basis of an approach that can regenerate the effectiveness of revolutionary Marxism.

Sean Matgamna in the work already mentioned considers that this task has to begin with developing a principled contrast between the perspectives of Stalinism and revolutionary Marxism. This is because it is Stalinism which has upheld the domination of a new ruling elite in the name of socialism, and this approach has become the justification of the role of an authoritarian society in terms of the supposed interests of the workers. Instead of this distortion of the principles of socialism it is necessary to outline the character of a genuine society of emancipation: “Disparaging bourgeois democracy, Stalinism counterposed to it not working-class democracy but lawless perpetual bureaucratic dictatorship. Where the communist programme stipulated, and socialism as a social system required, a collectivised economy run and owned democratically, the Stalinists put in its place a collectivised economy run by a totalitarian autocracy.”(Matgamna p45) In other words the major problem was this equation of the rule of a party elite with the role of socialism. In this manner the emancipatory character of socialism could be undermined and replaced with an understanding that was based on the justification of the equation of the domination of the leadership of a party with the character of socialism. In this manner the role of an elite was defined as being the expression of what was meant as socialism and so the importance of democracy and the role of the working class could be rejected as being unimportant in terms of the realisation of this perspective. But the problem was that the forces of Trotskyism did not elaborate what they meant by socialism and instead emphasised a programme of demands concern how to develop the mobilisation of the workers in favour of revolutionary change. The result of this theoretical limitation was that the activist emphasis of the perspectives of the Trotskyists meant that they only promoted the perspective of a participatory form of socialism in a vague and ultimately unsatisfactory manner. This meant that the Stalinists could reject the approach of Trotskyism as being an essentially activist doctrine that had little connection to the ultimate objectives of class struggle. Instead the Stalinists could claim that the USSR was socialist because of the role of the Communist party and the importance of a nationalised economy. Hence the problem was that Trotskyism was an activist doctrine that had little relationship to the theoretical establishment of the conception of a genuine socialist type of society. The Trotskyists were essentially critics of capitalism and Stalinism and yet lacked the justification of an elaboration of an alternative type of society. In other words, the approach of Trotskyism was to be critics of capitalism and Stalinism and yet to lack the justification of the elaboration of an emancipatory alternative. This meant that they became activists who lacked the perspectives of a genuine aim and instead they became militants of the working-class struggle, and yet were also dogmatists who were reluctant to elaborate the views of Marx, Lenin or Trotsky. In other words, they knew that they were against capitalism and Stalinism and yet it was not established what they considered to be an alternative to these types of social formation. The ultimate result of these limitations was the process of adaptation to the role of nationalism and Stalinism as in relation to the increasing acceptance of the role of the Cuban revolution of 1959. This situation became the ultimate expression of what was meant by a legitimate form of socialism to the majority of people defining themselves as Trotskyist. The actual process of structural assimilation of Cuba into the social character of the Soviet Union was conveniently ignored. Therefore, by the early 1960’s the majority of the forces claiming to be Trotskyist were based on an acceptance of a form of Stalinism and the related characterisation of Cuba as a type of genuine workers state. The result of this situation was the definite degeneration of the majority of the Trotskyists into becoming the adherents of a type of centrist and opportunist politics.

In other words, it could be argued that by 1960 there was no longer a genuine expression of revolutionary Marxism because of the political crisis of the Trotskyist organisations. Instead there were a collection of organisations essentially led in elitist and autocratic terms, and which failed to address important issues such as the role of the working class and the character of Stalinism. But this did not mean that the theory of Marxism was not developed in this period, but this aspect was generally carried out by intellectuals dedicated to the aims of Marxism They evaluated issues such as the character of capitalism and the aim of socialism and established important questions concerning the possibility to transform the present system into a revolutionary alternative. But one result of this process of inquiry was to reject the importance of the revolutionary role of the working class because of the development of the affluent society. One of the most eminent of these views was that of Herbert Marcuse. But the adherents of the various Marxist groups tended to ignore these issues and only Mandel carried out an extensive study of the character of contemporary capitalism. But this was an exercise in political economy and so it tended to ignore other important theoretical questions raised by the various intellectuals of the ‘new left’. In other words, the tendency was for the creation of insular Marxist groups, and these were generally based on various authoritarian regimes. In this context the development of a democratic Marxist culture could not be facilitated. The ultimate irrelevance of revolutionary Marxism was indicated by its failure to intervene in the French general strike of 1968. Instead there was a continual process of splits and the formation of new groups. Some of these new groups had potential, but they were constantly undermined by their small size and the generation of continual splits. Essentially the fourth international had ceased to function by 1960. Since that time the major objective for the renewal of revolutionary Marxism has been the promotion of a programme of political unity. However, the problem has been that this perspective has not been supported by the various groups that have emerged as a result of the crisis of the forces of Trotskyism. Instead they have attempted to establish the basis of an exclusive and new form of international socialism, as with the call of Workers Power to replace the opportunism of the Fourth International with a new Fifth International. But the problem was the lack of credibility of these various attempts to develop and revive the prospects of revolutionary Marxism. Ultimately the lack of popular support for these objectives means that the result was the justification of forms of sectarianism and the necessity of the unity of the revolutionary forces was rejected. The result of this situation was a situation of irrelevance. In this context is Matgamna able to outline a convincing conception of the possibility for the revival of revolutionary Marxism?

His starting point is the view that Trotskyism was the continuation of the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism given the opportunist limitations of Stalinism: “Trotskyism was no arbitrary, episodic, or merely personal creation. The Trotskyists took over, developed and fought for the ideas of the early Communist International – the International which itself inherited the progressive work and root ideas of the previously existing socialist movement. The ideas of what came to be called Trotskyism were the continuation and summation of the whole history of the socialist working class movement.”(p84) But this would imply that this expression of the continuation of the principles of Marxism in the context of the opportunist degeneration of Social Democracy and Stalinism would mean that Trotskyism would be able to develop with increasing success and be able to become a valid revolutionary opposition to these opportunist forces. But instead of this development there was a process of the expansion of Stalinism in the post-war period which led to a crisis within the Trotskyist movement concerning the character of this development and the ultimate result was a process of fragmentation. Thus, when Stalinism was ultimately replaced by capitalism the Trotskyists were not in a cohesive position to be able to take advantage of the situation and so were unable to promote the aim of proletarian revolution. Instead: “Today we live in conditions were the tradition of revolutionary Marxism passed on by Trotsky and the Trotskyism of his time is highly fragmented. Its elements are dissembled and sometimes needlessly counterposed to each other, that is dogmatically overemphasised aspects of what should be one integrated whole, or even made into substitutes for larger concepts (“the party for socialism)”(p89) This conclusion obviously implies that this present situation is detrimental to the aims of the creation of an effective revolutionary party and the aim of the promotion of the realisation of socialism. Hence it would seem that it is logical to try and provide a perspective to overcome these limitations and so advance the creation of a united and principled revolutionary party.

But Matgamna does not outline the possible reasons for the development of an effective and mass Marxist party in terms of the overcoming of the divisions of the organisations of the left-wing forces. Instead he indicates in vague terms the major principles of a possible united Marxist party in terms of: “We need to remind ourselves of the fundamental ideas of Marxist socialism. For Marxists, socialism has become possible has become possible because capitalism has created a mass proletariat and created means of production which, liberated from the drives and unreason of capitalism, can create abundance for all in the basics of life. We base our socialist programme on this Marxist idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irreplaceable ground preparer for socialism; on the social, intellectual and political preparation of the proletariat through both capitalist evolution and communist education and organisational work, to make it able to seize power in capitalist society.”(p93) This comment seems to be valid in general terms, but what is ignored is that the very differences between rival and small Marxist groups undermines the possibility to develop the popularity and influence of this perspective. The very limitations of Marxism in political and organisational terms means that its objective of socialism seems to be discredited and ineffective in relation to the issue of realisation. Hence the initial task should concern how to achieve the genuine political unity of the competing Marxist groups. But Matgamna only refers to this issue in vague and unsatisfactory terms. Hence his approach is problematical because whilst he can outline what are the problems and limitations of contemporary revolutionary Marxism, he does not seem able to indicate what is the possible approach that would generate the overcoming of these limitations. In other words, he does not outline a comprehensive understanding of how this possible development could be realised. Instead the emphasis is on the opportunist limitations of the majority currents that claimed Trotskyist because of their conception of the character of the states created by the USSR as deformed workers states. Hence the assumption is that the issue of unity with these strands is questionable because of this accommodation to Stalinism. The other and more principled current of non-orthodox Trotskyists led by Max Shachtman was considered to have principled positions concerning Stalinism but there was ultimately a process of opportunist accommodation to the interests of American capitalism and so this current was unable to sustain a consistent revolutionary perspective. Hence the whole history of post-war Trotskyism is defined by either an accommodation to Stalinism or capitalism. Thus, the only conclusion to be made is that the only consistent and principled Marxists is the organisation led by Matgamna! In other words, the majority of organisations have considered that the tasks of the class struggle are secondary to the importance of the development of the role of the party which instructs the workers in how to proceed in order to realise social change. This means: “Often by demagogy and the dominance of agitation-led activity to “build the party”, this travesty works against the education of the working class. Only the conscious struggle of the living Marxists, reacting specifically and concretely, focusing and redefining Marxism, can make of Marxism a consistently revolutionary instrument for the working class., for separating out and maintaining scientific consciousness in the working class.”(p104) But the question that immediately arises concerns whether this development has been both possible and feasible in the period since the decline of Stalinism into becoming a bureaucratic organisation of the working class. In other words, does not Matgamna seriously discuss the complex difficulties involved in the creation of a revolutionary party given the apparent domination of the role of bourgeois ideology within the working class. Instead he outlines in vague terms the importance of the development of a political organisation based on the application of the role of democracy and opposition to elitism and the justification of bureaucracy. He indicates the importance of the expression of a genuine ideology of the emancipation of the workers and concludes that: “The proletarian party without a mass working class membership organised at the point of production and deploying the power which the working class can have at the point of production, is impotent; proletarian militancy at the point of production devoid of the historical programme of working class socialism and perspectives for achieving it, is sterile and ultimately impotent.”(p107) But this is the very situation that has characterised the post-war period and has expressed the problems involved in trying to develop mass support and activity in favour of the socialist transformation of society. The point is that the various revolutionary organisations are small and unpopular and have little opportunity to become popular and so capable of establishing the leadership of mass struggles that can facilitate the possibility of socialist transformation. Hence instead of engaging in vague comments about the character of the process of revolutionary change it would be more sensible and useful to try and outline how a mass revolutionary party with popular support can be created. Instead he asserts that the Alliance for Workers Liberty has a democratic culture that is required in order to facilitate the advance of the class struggle and the possibility of revolutionary change but he does not discuss the uncomfortable fact that the AWL is small and not yet able to provide genuine revolutionary leadership of possible mass struggles. The AWL may be democratic and opposed to the intolerance and authoritarianism of most of the other left wing organisations but it is still small and not yet capable of providing effective leadership of the working class in relation to the promotion of struggles for socialism. Instead the AWL is a tiny organisation and so is part of the overall political crisis of revolutionary Marxism. The point is that the groups claiming to be revolutionary Marxist are tiny and so lack any actual relevance for the working class. The task of building the socialist party has to be developed, and in this context Matgamna can only provide various principles rather than outline in a coherent manner how this task can be achieved. However, it could be argued that the basis of a revolutionary programme is being outlined in a consistent manner and this could facilitate some aspects of an understanding of the approach of a genuine Marxist party. But what has to be understood is that this task is connected to the complexity of the present situation which has posed important questions about the very revolutionary capacity of the working class. The point is that the contemporary offensive of capital to undermine the social gains of the workers has posed serious questions about the capacity of the proletariat to be able to defend its interests and so ultimately strive for the socialist transformation of society. But this issue is not seriously tackled by Matgamna because his emphasis is about the various political limitations of the post-war Trotskyist movement, such as its accommodation to the apparent progressive aspects of Stalinism and its capacity to create so-called workers states. In other words, the major political problem is defined as the opportunist limitations of the post-war Trotskyist movement and the complex issue of the character of the working class is not tackled in any satisfactory manner. Thus the very political problem of the accommodation of the forces of orthodox Trotskyism to Stalinism with justifying the view that this reactionary force could create deformed workers states was because of the political attempt to consider that in some sense the advance of world proletarian revolution was occurring. This meant that despite the apparent weakness of the genuine revolutionary forces in some manner the process of the progress of the realisation of socialism was occurring, even in deformed terms. Thus the problem of the weakness of the forces of revolutionary Marxism was being compensated by the fact that in a bureaucratic manner capitalism was being overthrow and replaced by the apparent progress of the process of the formation of deformed workers states. Hence in a bureaucratic manner Stalinism was carrying out the tasks of the proletarian revolution.

Matgamna concludes that this approach was both false and opportunist because: “In real history, of course the bureaucratic USSR was not a progressive alternative to capitalism. It was not socialist in any sense, to any degree, or on any level. It was not in transition to socialism. It was indeed a rival to capitalism but a regressive and reactionary one. It was not “post-capitalist”, but in important respects pre-capitalist, a system in all respects parallel capitalism as a class-exploitative society and one in its methods worse than typical modern capitalism. All the events hailed as revolutionary working class triumphs by so many socialists were in fact reactionary and regressive.”(p140) But the point is that the failure to indicate the character of the USSR as a bureaucratic and exploitative regime was because of the influence of the conception that historical progress was being realised even if this was in a reactionary manner. The forces of orthodox Trotskyism adapted to this standpoint because they could not envisage the realisation of a situation of total domination of the working class by the bureaucracy. Instead it was suggested that in an elite manner the interests of socialism were still being upheld by the ultimate contradictory role of the Stalinist bureaucracy. In this manner the aspect of historical progress was still being expressed despite the lack of the realisation of the role of a genuine revolutionary process. This approach was consolidated by the conception that anti-imperialist revolution was also an expression of the process of permanent revolution and the advance of the possibility of the formation of a socialist regime, even if this occurred in a bureaucratic form.

But the only conclusion that can be made from this analysis is that the forces of Trotskyism had become influenced by the conception of a perspective of bureaucratic socialism that had little relationship to genuine Marxist politics. Only the organisation of Max Shachtman in the USA and then the AWL in some sense continued to advocate a principled revolutionary standpoint. So, the issue that is raised how is it possible to obtain the support of the Marxist groups for the only principled approach of the AWL? But this is the very issue that does not seem to be tackled by Matgamna. Instead he is content to outline the various limitations of the Marxist organisations and so fails to connect this to the possibility of the realisation of an alternative revolutionary approach. But this means that a critical analysis is ultimately an exercise in futility because the problem of the differences between the AWL and the other Marxist organisations is not tackled in terms of how progress of the influence of a genuine Marxism can be realised. Instead the various Marxist groups are considered to be expressions of unprincipled politics and so the possibility that a process of transformation can occur is considered to be very problematical. Hence the only conclusion that can be reached is that the only hope is to consider that the objective is to achieve the political hegemony of the AWL and so in this manner the possibility of the realisation of an effective revolutionary perspective can be realised. But there is no outline of how this prospect will occur. Instead what is being suggested is the politics of hope or what is logically necessary in terms of the realisation of revolutionary principles. But this perspective is not outlined in terms of the apparent superiority of the AWL in political terms but instead in relation to the elaboration of the opportunist limitations of the post-war Trotskyist organisations. Hence there is no outline of what is meant by the superiority of genuine Marxist politics. Instead the apparent understanding of the failures of post-war Marxist groups will establish the only possible conclusion that the only principled course is for supporting the AWL. But why is the task of transforming the politics of the various groups a futile task? This issue is not addressed and instead we have the vague but dogmatic conclusion that only the AWL can provide the basis for the regeneration of revolutionary Marxism.

In other words, there is no strategy outlined for how the AWL can relate to the other Marxist groups and so attempt to establish the basis of a principled process of political unification. But this surely is the primary task unless we assume that in some manner the AWL is essentially the exclusive expression of genuine Marxist politics. But this assumption is dogmatic because the point is that an elaboration of a programme for the principled political unity of the Marxist organisations has not been made or attempted to be realised. Instead what is implicitly being argued is that the AWL is the exclusive revolutionary party because none of the other groups support its perspective and programme. But because of this assumption the very issue of how to establish popular support for the approach of revolutionary Marxism is not being established in a convincing manner. Instead we have to assume that in some unprecedented manner the politics of the AWL become hegemonic and so become the basis for the development of a revolutionary type of Marxism. But surely it would be more constructive to try and outline the conditions of principled political unity of the forces of socialism?

Instead of attempting to establish the political basis of principled revolutionary unity of the forces of Trotskyism, Matgamna instead develops the reasons why the AWL is distinct from the other rival organisations. This perspective is based on a discussion of various political issues that indicate the apparent accommodation to Stalinism and Social Democracy by various Trotskyist groups. The first issue discussed is the war in Korea that occurred in the early 1950’s concerning the attempt to unify the country by the forces of the Stalinist dominated North Korea. The position of the American Socialist Workers Party in support of North Korea is criticised but there is no outline of what should have been a more principled political standpoint. The role of the forces led by the American government in support of the government of South Korea are not discussed. Hence there is no mention of the necessity to support the united action of the people of Korea to try and strive for the realisation of a democratic Korea based on the formation of a worker’s government. Instead the emphasis is on criticism without the elaboration of what should be a principled revolutionary approach in relation to this situation. Hence the approach that is adopted is that of criticism and the related failure to outline the possible alternative of a perspective that could have united the Fourth International in terms of opposition to both Stalinism and the forces of Imperialism. The aim of a workers government of Korea is not elaborated and instead the approach that is being adopted is that of a critic who fails to outline a constructive alternative to the opportunist accommodation of the interests of Stalinism which was advocated by the forces of the Fourth International. In this context it is being suggested that the events in Korea provided a precedent for opportunist support of various anti-imperialist struggles in the third world. But this criticism is not connected to the elaboration of what would be a principled revolutionary perspective. The development of a revolutionary strategy is not established and instead the criticism is made of the positions of the Fourth International without the justification of what would constitute a principled alternative. In other words, the difficulties of developing a popular mass movement in the context of a conflict between forces supported by either the USA or China on the one side or the USA on the other are not indicated.

However, in relation to the question of the American intervention in Vietnam Matgamna does outline what he considers to be a principled alternative to the uncritical support of the forces of North Vietnam by the majority of the forces of Trotskyism. He comments: “The Orthodox Trotskyists, like the Stalinists, believed that victory over imperialism was identical to defending and expanding the Vietnamese “socialist” or “deformed workers” state. Most of the orthodox Trotskyists did not advocate a working class revolution against the North Vietnamese regime.”(p157) But this alternative perspective is not developed and the difficulties of promoting its possibility in the context of the American invasion of South Vietnam is not discussed. Instead what is being suggested is an alternative perspective in vague terms, and the issues connected with this approach are not outlined. The relevant point is that only the defeat of the forces of American imperialism could create the possibility of a progressive political development and so the objective should have been for a democratically organised popular war against imperialist invasion as the prelude to the possible creation of a genuine workers state. But this type of perspective is not being elaborated by Matgamna because he is instead content to discuss the various limitations of the position of the orthodox Trotskyists but without outlining an alternative perspective in systematic terms.

Matgamna outlines criticism of the position of the Fourth International concerning Israel but he does not outline what should be an alternative approach. He makes no mention of the importance of the am of socialism in order to transform the situation and to facilitate the creation of a democratic Israel that could facilitate the possibility of an equitable agreement with the Palestinian people. Hence his approach is based on what is wrong with the approach of the Fourth International, but he does not outline the aspects of a principled standpoint. Hence, he is content to consider that his role is that of a critic and so considers that it is not important to outline an alternative. This approach is also utilised for other situations, as in relation to the war between Cambodia and Vietnam and the Iranian revolution. Furthermore in relation to the military conflict between Britain and Argentina concerning control of the Falkland Islands there is criticism of the support by the Fourth International for Argentina’s claims but there is no outline of how opposition to the war could have been developed within the working class of the UK and Argentina. The fact was that support for this war led to the continual re-election of the Thatcher administration in the UK and showed that nationalism had become more influential than the alternatives of socialism. The point being made is that the primary issue is not that of the limitations of the policies of the Fourth International but instead what is the basis of a principled politics of internationalism and socialism in relation to this situation. Hence there is no demand for an end to the war and the realisation of peace. Instead it seems to be sufficient to criticise the limitations of the Fourth International and so ignore the influence of this situation in relation to the attitudes of the workers in Argentina and the UK. In other words, the demand for peace and not war should have been the major perspective of socialists and this approach would be connected to demands for negotiations and not support for military conflict. In this manner the influence of nationalism in the UK and Argentina could have been opposed by the role of internationalism and its connection to the demand for peace. In other words, the major issues was how to develop the possibility of political unity between the workers of Argentina and the UK, but Matgamna seems to be indifferent to this issue because of his emphasis on the political limitations of the various Marxist organisations. In other words, he is content to be a critic of the various left-wing organisations and so the issue of what should be a principled and internationalist political position is of secondary consideration. The immediate demand that should have been made would have been for an end to the situation of military conflict and for negotiations in order to realise a just peace. However, this approach is not mentioned because the major concern of Matgamna is not about how to connect the role of a Marxist party with the consciousness of the workers. Instead he is content to be a critic of the limitations of the various revolutionary organisations.

In other words, the issue of what should be a principled perspective is not of primary importance for Matgamna. This is indicated by his criticism of the organisations of the Marxist left, especially the SWP, concerning various international issues, and it could be agreed that this criticism of accommodation to the role of reactionary forces is justified. But only on the question of the European Union is an alternative approach outlined in a detailed and systematic approach. The nationalist position of many of the organisations of the Marxist left in the UK in terms of their opposition to the EU is opposed and instead a definite alternative is outlined in the following terms: “The way forward is a working class campaign to democratise the EU, and a Europe-wide working class campaign for a Socialist United States of Europe. We seize the chance to unite the European working class; we propose that the working class should set as its goal the creation of a fully democratic Europe, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the creation of a socialist united states of Europe.”(p178) This position has been completely vindicated given the reactionary successful campaign for the UK to leave the EU. The majority of the forces of the revolutionary left have accommodated to this aspiration to reject the role of the EU and to instead assert the national distinctiveness of the UK. The majority of the forces of the revolutionary left has not recognised the reactionary character of this aspiration and has instead accommodated to it in terms of support for BREXIT. In other words, the reactionary implications of support for BREXIT was completely underestimated by the majority of the Marxist organisations and instead they accommodated to a reactionary form of popular nationalism. This situation indicated that there was a serious crisis of the Marxist organisations within the UK. They were no longer able to promote principled and consistent politics for the people of the UK. Instead they had accommodated to the populist ideology of reactionary conservatism. In other words, there was a serious political crisis of the majority of the organisations of Marxism within the UK. Only the AWL and Workers Power seemed to uphold a principled and internationalist standpoint. Hence the issue of Europe indicated the ultimate process of regression of many of the organisations claiming to be Marxist. Hence the issue that arises: does this mean that it is necessary to reject the aim of the revolutionary unity of the various Marxist groups? This would be a sectarian mistake because the most principled approach is to try and promote the influence of a genuine revolutionary and internationalist approach in regard to relations with the various Marxist groups. Primarily this requires rejection of the position that the standpoint of BREXIT has to be supported. Obviously, it is not possible to reject BREXIT because this is based on the democratic decision of the British people, but revolutionaries should regard it as a mistake. Hence, we should advocate close economic and political relations between the UK and EU. Furthermore, we should advocate the aim of socialist internationalism as the only principled alternative to the influence of reactionary nationalism. The problem in this context is that various organisations like the SWP and the Socialist Party accommodate to this approach or try to ignore it because of its reactionary influence. In other words, the issue of genuine revolutionary unity means that the opportunist aspects of various groups have to be opposed and a principled alternative outlined and promoted.

Matgamna considers that an important aspect in the promotion of a genuine revolutionary approach is to criticise the limitations of a problematical anti-imperialist standpoint. In other words: “In this world, the residual elements of “anti-colonialism” will be auxiliary ad subordinate to working class socialist anti-imperialism. Otherwise “anti-imperialism” becomes a siding with anything else against the dominant capitalist powers, and comes to include siding with lesser weaker imperialisms and regional imperialisms like Iran or Iraq.”(p229) But this understanding seems to be dogmatic given the domination of the advanced capitalist countries within the world economy. Hence it is still possible to connect a genuine conception of national liberation with the aim of the realisation of socialism within the countries of the Third World. This perspective should not be opposed to the aim of internationalism because the basis to develop a political mass struggle against the domination of imperialism within any third world country has to be connected to the development of genuine revolutionary leadership and the promotion of the objectives of socialism. Hence the struggle for national liberation need not be based on an undermining of the aims of internationalism but is instead connected to this approach because the realisation of national objectives is connected to the development of the advance of world proletarian revolution. Hence this approach does not mean an acceptance of nationalist ideology but instead the aim of national liberation is still connected to the attempt to promote the advance of world socialist revolution. This means that the important political problem in this context is not the acceptance of nationalism by the various forces of Trotskyism but instead their accommodation to various forms of nationalist and bourgeois leadership in terms of the promotion of the aim of national liberation. It is the denial of the importance of the objective of socialism that has led to opportunism in this context. In other words, the issue of national liberation has not necessarily become irrelevant because of the modernisation expressed by the development of capitalism. Instead the primary issue is that the various Trotskyist organisations have tended to accommodate to various forms of radical politics that have not expressed the genuine interests of the workers and the aims of socialism. Hence it is not necessary to reject the politics of national liberation in order to uphold the aims of international socialism but that instead the issue is about how to reject the prospect of accommodation to forms of opportunist politics in relation to the advocacy of the relationship of the national and anti-imperialist struggles to the objective of the realisation of socialism. In other words the problem is that the issue of how to effectively oppose the role of capitalism in the third world is not outlined in systematic terms and instead the important issue is defined in terms of opposing the continued importance of the understanding of the role of imperialism in understanding the character of the nations of the third world. Hence the issue is posed of the importance of socialism in the third world and the connection of this aim to the overcoming of the domination of the forces of capitalist imperialism is not outlined or even acknowledged as being of importance. This dogmatic view is based on the refusal to outline an understanding of the character of the capitalist world economy because this could only indicate the continued importance of the domination of the major capitalist countries in terms of the role of monopoly capital. In other words, the issue of national liberation has not become irrelevant in the modern world economy because this is based on the domination of the capitalist system of the most powerful nations. Thus, the struggle for national emancipation is not necessarily antiquated or reactionary but instead can still be an aspect of the aspiration to realise socialism. Only empirical analysis can indicate the validity of this understanding. But the major task is to reject any accommodation to the national bourgeoise of third world countries in the name of the aim of anti-imperialism. Instead the only principled perspective is to promote the leadership of the workers in the attempt to realise national liberation. This development can only be truly successful as part of the perspective of attempting to advance the progress of world socialist revolution. But the negative rejection by Matgamna of this perspective means that he ultimately fails to outline a credible perspective of class struggle in relation to the third world countries. The tasks in these countries cannot be identical to those in the advanced capitalist countries because of the social differences between the dominant and subordinate countries within the world economy. However, Matgamna is right to also suggest that the primary emphasis of Marxists should be about the interests of the working class in any given situation. This is more important than an abstract and dogmatic form of anti-imperialism: “Marxists tell the truth of situations, in the first place to ourselves. We face the practical implications of our slogans candidly and squarely. We are concerned at all times with the labour movement and the working class. We would have to have very special and very good reasons indeed to even seriously consider accepting something else as higher in the scale of things and more important than the fate of the working class. “Anti-imperialism” or vicarious “National liberation”, is not from our point of view, a self-sufficient world outlook. The problem with much of the “left” is that for them it is.”(p305) But the problem with this criticism is that it does not establish the basis to provide an alternative criteria by which to persuade the left to support the views of the AWL. Instead their perspective has tended to represent an exclusive party doctrine that has not had widespread influence. Hence the task is to try and develop a perspective that would attempt to challenge in an effective manner the limited anti-imperialism of many of the other left groups such as the SWP. This task has to be created in elaborating how the aim of the promotion of the possibility of socialist revolution in the third world depends on the development of an internationalist stance and the advance of the progress of the class struggle in both national and international terms. But the problem with the approach of the AWL is that they are content to criticise the perspectives of groups like the SWP and do not provide the type of reasoning that could establish increased support for the principled alternative of socialist revolution. Thus, the AWL is content to denounce the SWP but this approach will not convince them of the limitations of their position. The point is that the AWL is not concerned about the necessity to try and develop increasing support for their approach. Instead they are content to remain a small group that is satisfied with making criticisms of other organisations. This sectarian approach will not result in the revival of revolutionary Marxism.

But possibly the most problematical approach of Matgamna is to define many Marxists as being anti- semitic because of the equation of Zionism with the views of Jewish people. This point has validity when connected to the views of the Socialist Workers party, but it also raises questions about the issue of the unity of Marxists. The obvious question arises how is it possible to establish the prospect of principled alliances between Marxists who have these important differences on the issue of the role of Jewish people and as a result support totally opposing conceptions concerning the role of Israel. In other words, Matgamna has outlined the perspective that there is a reactionary trend of thought that is justifying problematical views concerning the character and role of Israel in relation to the supposed justification of anti-Zionism. However, he does not outline how it would be possible to develop support for an alternative approach that would establish the political basis for the generation of more progressive views. In other words, he does not call for support of a perspective of the creation of a revolutionary state of Israel and Palestine. The point is that it is the political logic of capitalism which results in the justification of national privileges and the rejection of the realisation of the principles of equality. In other words, the cause of the problem of social and cultural inequality is not the views of the Marxist left in the UK but is instead the result of the unequal relations between Israel and the Palestinian people. Hence the task is to develop democratic principles that would facilitate the creation of political relations based on the importance of economic and political equality. This development would mean the advance of the realisation of the aim of socialism. The point being made is that the moralism of Matgamna provides no basis to effectively oppose the crude anti-Zionism of the SWP supporters. Instead it is necessary to show that the interests of socialism require the development of the unity of the Palestinian and Jewish people, and so it is necessary to develop a democratic programme that would facilitate this possibility. In contrast the moralism of Matgamna concerning the views of the SWP does not provide an alternative to their problematical anti-Zionism.

The point is that it is not sufficient to outline what is reactionary about the views of the SWP it is also necessary to try to elaborate a superior alternative approach that could express the possibility of a different perspective when compared to the justification of a reactionary approach. But instead Matgamna is content to outline the various instances of the defence of repressive and authoritarian forces by the SWP in the name of anti-imperialism. This point is valid but what does it mean about the possibility to develop political relations between the AWL and the other Marxist groups. Instead they are considered to be essentially reactionary and elitist, or adherents of the interests of the party and in that sense indifferent to tackling the tasks of the class struggle in a principled and flexible manner. Hence: “Apparatus Marxism is self-righteous: it serves “the Party”, which for now is “the revolution”, or so to speak, its “Vicar on Earth”, has few scruples, and recognises only those aspects of reality that serve its needs. Its progenitor is neither Marx not Engels nor Lenin, but ultimately Stalin.”(p333) But this conclusion means that most of the organisations of the supposed Marxist Left are irrationalist and reactionary groups that apparently the possibility of working with the AWL or genuine Marxists is not possible. The fact that such organisations are apparently in the majority would imply that the very forces of so-called Marxism are opposed to the actual principles necessary for the development of the class struggle and the promotion of the realisation of the aim of socialism. Ultimately this analysis implies that only the small organisation of the AWL is an expression of the authentic principles of revolutionary socialism. But the problem with this view is that the apparent ideological domination of forms of irrationalism and opportunism means that the prospect of the emergence of a genuine form of revolutionary Marxism seems to be impossible. This is because the elaboration of these various criticisms of the limitations of the forces of supposed revolutionary Marxism only apparently indicates the importance of the influence of irrationalism and opportunism. In this context the forces of Marxism are small and reduced to the role of being critics. There is apparently no basis for the possibility of the realisation of socialism given the apparent limitations expressed by the influential and reactionary role of the various Marxist groups.

In other words, the problem is that the influence of various forms of irrationalism have become the basis of the ideology of the major Marxist groups. In this context the role of the small and minority organisations that could be said to have a principled revolutionary approach is reduced to being critics of these dominant organisations. It could be argued that the era of the Marxist group is over and that it has been replaced by the role of activists and the importance of single-issue campaigns. But the problem with this view is that this type of activity does not result in increasing support for the aims of revolutionary socialism. Instead the illusion is developed that it is possible to bring about progressive change within the capitalist system. It would seem that the only basis to transform this adverse situation is to develop support for the socialist transformation of society. This aim seems to have developed credibility with the radical leadership of the Labour party by Jeremy Corbyn. In the period of his leadership the objective of socialism seemed to have become plausible and the outline of a programme of change was outlined in recent Labour party manifestoes. But the recent defeat of the Labour party in the general election seemed to have discredited the validity of this perspective and the result has been the re-emergence of right-wing leadership of this organisation. Hence the perspective of socialism has been effectively marginalised, and the Labour party has asserted its usual reformist credentials. In this situation the left-wing groups are without popular appeal and the aim of socialism seems to be an irrelevance in terms of the isolation of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. Furthermore, most of these groups makes little reference to the aim of socialism and instead they emphasise various types of activism and essentially act to try and realise limited demands within the capitalist system. Hence the regeneration of the appeal of socialism seems to require the elaboration of this aim. Indeed, the outline of a credible version of socialism would seem to be the basis of the possibility to establish some form of political unity between the presently competing Marxist groups. However, if this prospect is to be realised would require that the various organisations agree to reject the sectarianism that has present undermined the attempt to establish a viable form of Marxism within the UK. This would seem to be a difficult task given the complex history of the Marxist left and the rivalry that has characterised their relations. In other words, it is necessary that the sectarianism of the past be rejected and that instead agreement about long term objectives be agreed even if differences about tactics remain. It will be suggested that this perspective is problematical given the significance of political differences and so the objectives that can be outlined to elaborate the aim of socialism may not realise support. Hence it seems to be naïve that the development of a perspective of revolutionary change and the conception of socialism will be sufficient in order to end the importance of past political differences. But the point is that without carrying out this task it will not be possible to determine whether the aim of revolutionary unity is possible or is essentially impossible to realise. However if such an approach is to be at all successful there must be some form of prior agreement that the continuation of political differences will not undermine the attempt to establish the possibility of some type of agreed programme by the various Marxist organisations. In other words, it is issues in the present and past which represent differences such as in relation to understanding the character of Stalinism and the various Stalinist societies. Indeed, differences on this issue primarily explain the various splits that arose between the Marxist groups. But in a sense the very restoration of capitalism has actually established the possibility to go beyond these differences and instead develop the theoretical and political basis of unity. Indeed, there is an overriding reason to facilitate the possibility of reconciliation of the various groups which is a shared commitment to the liberation of the working class and the related establishment of socialism. Hence it could be possible to establish a perspective for revolutionary change and to develop a more systematic understanding of the aim of socialism which should express the character of this process of the transformation of capitalist society. This task should begin with the elaboration of the reasons as to why a revolutionary form of Marxism can still develop a convincing understanding of these theoretical and political objectives.

But in order to develop a convince understanding of the aim of socialism it is also necessary to indicate the reasons for the failure to realise this system in a situation of the limitations of capitalism. This situation is connected to the problems involved in the development of an effective form of revolutionary Marxism given the influence of Social Democracy and Stalinism and the importance of the sectarian differences of the various left-wing organisations. The point is that as a result of this situation what is apparent is that there is little popular support for the aim of socialism. The various forms of public protest are based on the ideology of a type of activism that is based on an indifference in relation to the aim of socialism. Whilst the Labour party is generally a reformist organisation that does not support the aspiration of socialism in any consistent and convincing manner. In this context there is a welcome attempt by Sean Matgamna to outline the reasons in favour of socialism in his book: “Socialism Makes Sense”(Workers Liberty, London 2018) He defines socialism in the following terms: “Socialism is human solidarity, beginning with working class bonding in resistance to capitalist exploiters, and raised up, projected to being the guiding principle of all society. It is the elimination of class exploitation by making the means of production, exchange and communication collective social property rather than as now private property run for private gain. It is the enthronement of unfettered reason armed with love, enlightenment, entrenched respect for individuals, and democracy in all the social, economic and political affairs of society.”(p17) But the question that immediately arises is how will it become possible to develop the economic and political conditions within capitalism that makes this process of transition to socialism a feasible possibility? The point is that the forces for socialism are small, disunited and generally demoralised and there is generally no questioning concerning the continuation of the present capitalist system. Hence even if we consider that there is some level of dissatisfaction with capitalism this has not led to support for the possible alternative of socialism. Instead most people accept that there is no alternative to the present system. Therefore, the issue of the credibility of socialism has to be connected to the possibilities within capitalism for it to be transformed into this alternative. Hence it is necessary to establish that working people will become motivated to strive to realise this objective of the socialist alternative. Matgamna: “Socialist ideas are built up from the history of capitalism, working class battles and other experiences, and from Marx’s analysis of capital. Socialism will build on the science, the technology, the cooperation, the working- class solidarity, developed within capitalism but free from being poisoned by exploitation and all that goes with it. Stop them from being thwarted by the profit-drive. The economy will be run in a cooperative way, for the benefit of society, and not for profit. Operated in the interests not of profit for a few but of everyone.”(p18) This is a reasonable description of the character of socialism but it is based on the assumption that the moral superiority of this system will somehow generate a process for its realisation. But this has not happened because of the ideological domination of the defenders of capitalism and the related political weakness of the forces advocating the aim of socialism. The apparent answer of Matgamna to these objections is to assume that working class solidarity will facilitate the development of a dynamic that will result in socialism. But this has not occurred, instead the role of collective class action has generally been about defending the situation of the workers within capitalism and so has not been concerned with the objective of the transformation of society. Furthermore, the forces of revolutionary Marxism have not been effective and so have not been able to develop support for the aim of the necessity of transition to socialism. However, Matgamna tries to evade this apparent ineffectiveness of the revolutionary forces in the following manner: “Socialists are people who by political instinct and conviction side with the oppressed and exploited, victims of malign and of cruel indifference……The left in history has been a tremendous force for progress, enlightenment, liberty, tolerance and freedom…..It has organised and shaped labour movements that have established and broadened working class rights against employers and their states. We have fought fascism, Stalinism, plutocracy, capitalism. The real left in any situation are the consistent democrats.” (p20) But this description of the progressive role of Marxism is unable to indicate any credible conception of its influence and potential to facilitate the revolutionary transformation of society. In other words, the capitalist system is not challenged by any potential opposition led by Marxism. In this context there is no connection between revolutionary Marxism and the workers in favour of the objective of socialism. Instead the forces of Marxism are generally isolated and the aim of replacing capitalism with socialism is considered to be an irrelevant perspective that has little popular support. Indeed, this is the very reason that Matgamna is motivated to try and establish the credibility of the aim of socialism in a historical period in which this objective seems to have become discredited or irrelevant. However, the attempt to establish the credibility of the aims of revolutionary Marxism have to be connected to the revival of the organisations with socialist objectives. But this is the very issue that is not discussed by him in convincing terms. Instead he assumes that working class struggle will somehow promote the possibility of socialism. But this issue is also questioned by the contrasting view that: “Yes, the unreadiness of the working class to do in history what it alone can do is one of the basic contradictions in advanced – not to say senile – capitalist society. We have to overcome it if society is to go forward.”(p47) Thus it is admitted that the working class is not necessarily a revolutionary force for various political and social reasons, which implies the importance of the role of Marxist leadership. But how can this issue be resolved in a progressive manner if it has proved to be constantly difficult to create an effective and popular revolutionary party? Instead the influence of reformism and bourgeois ideology has proved to be important reasons why the struggle for socialism has not developed in a consistent and effective manner. Hence this issue has to be addressed in relation to the question of the importance of the role of a genuine Marxist organisation. But this is the very issue that seems to be ignored by Matgamna who instead emphasises the revolutionary potential of the working class. But this apparently one-sided perspective seems to ignore the importance of the role of bourgeois ideology and the very acceptance of the present system that is generated by its continual reproduction and apparent durability. In this context the influence of ideology develops the influence of the viewpoint that there is not a possible alternative to the present system. The importance of this standpoint has also been consolidated by the apparent inability of Stalinism to create a genuine socialist system. Matgamna admits that the very continuation of capitalism leads to acceptance of the system by the working class. But he also suggests that the increasing influence of the role of the interests of the workers will result in support for the aim of socialism: “There is a strong incentive for working class people to want socialism…..The barriers to the working class achieving this are many. It must first come to understand the need for it and think it possible to win – that is, it must break through the domination in its minds of the ideas of the ruling class and the habit of seeing the capitalist society as normal and the only possible system. It must organise and educate itself, and defeat the ruling class…”(p48) But how is this process of transformation to occur given the general reproduction of the domination of capital over labour and the related influence of the view that the present system is superior and so cannot be replaced? Matgamna can only refer vaguely to the transforming role of struggles as the basis of social transformation. But this view seems to be more of a hope than the expression of a definite and credible strategy of change. He refers to the importance of the Russian revolution of 1917 but the point is that capitalism has been an increasingly stable system and the possibility of revolutionary change has apparently become increasingly problematical. But this point does not seem to have been understood by Matgamna, instead he outlines in dogmatic terms his understanding of the intensification of the class struggle and the related possibility of socialism.

In other words his perspective of change is based on the assertion that capitalism is an exploitative system that can only be transformed by the role of class struggle: “Capitalist exploitation also, by its very nature, integrates workers into large collective workforces, generates constant conflicts between workers and capitalists over working hours, pay and conditions; and pushes workers towards organising for these conflicts. We educate ourselves about politics and society in the process.”(p49) But in an important sense it is quite possible that class struggle can occur but without this establishing a dynamic of change that results in the realisation of socialism. Indeed, this would seem to be the expression of the historical experience of Western Europe since 1914. The point is that genuine revolutionary parties have not been developed which could have provided leadership of mass struggles and so made socialism a feasible possibility. Instead the domination of forms of reformism and Stalinism has meant that any unrest of the workers has not resulted in the prospect of transition to socialism. But Matgamna attempts to address this issue in terms of the perspective of the possibilities of class struggle: “In all societies and in all history the basic exploited class revolts. Revolts again and again. In our history the working class has arisen from defeat again and again. This is the other side of the defeats. Every victory of the bourgeoisie is incomplete. It can’t win outright because it needs to preserve the working class to do the work. Even while British capitalism was defeating the British working class in the 1980’s, capitalism was vastly increasing the number of workers in other areas of the world.”(p51) But this perspective of triumphalism does not actually outline the conception of a feasible strategy of revolutionary change by the role of the working class. Instead it is only possible to make the assumption that at some point of time it will be possible to realise the victory of the working class and so achieve socialism because of the enduring importance of the class struggle: “The one thing that is certain is that the working class struggle on lower or higher levels will go on, as it is going on now – and that serious socialists will work to help those fighting in that struggle to find the way through the political and ideological mazes of capitalism.”(p52) In other words the solidarity of the various mass struggles will express the possibilities of the realisation of an alternative type of society: “But in the trade unions you will find tremendous stores of benevolence, altruism, fellow-feeling, selfless devotion to the common good. Workers sacrifice wages in their spirit of solidarity with other workers. The drive to change things for the better triggered by the elemental “trade union” struggle over the effects of capitalism tends to nourish the manifold values of solidarity.”(p53) But the fact is that such developments express a generally defensive character concerned with the defence of gains within capitalism. In this context such developments do not necessarily express the dynamic of the possibility of transition to a different socialist system. Therefore the following approach does not necessarily have much credibility: “Labour movements can be…..converted to socialism, which is the natural expression of what the working class is, and the necessary negation of the capitalist class and its system.”(p54) This perspective is essentially a hopeful prediction, and lacks any genuine validity or expectation of its likely realisation. In other words, the argument in favour of the feasibility of the revolutionary transformation of society has not been elaborated in any convincing terms. Instead the essential standpoint of hopeful expectation is being justified in terms of the assumption of dogmatic certainty. But the point is that class struggle has occurred without it being transformed into the expression of support for revolutionary change in favour of socialism. The major emphasis of workers has been about how to obtain improvements within the capitalist system. Hence this situation will only be changed with the development of the effective influence of a principled revolutionary party. But this is the very issue that Matgamna seems reluctant to discuss. Instead he is making the assumption that the intensification of the class struggle will inherently generate the possibility of revolutionary change. But this approach has only been occasionally justified by the events of history. In general, the role of the class struggle has not meant the creation of the potential for socialism. Instead it is necessary to discuss this issue in more detail and so provide a perspective that Matgamna seems to be reluctant to develop as part of his justification of the possibility of socialism. The major point is that the various struggles that occur within capitalism such as those that are the result of trade union actions are not intended to challenge the continuation of the present economic system. Instead these activities are based upon an acceptance of the legitimacy and validity of capitalism, and so are about the progressive modification of the relations between capital and labour rather than representing the attempt to overcome and replace this situation. Hence the character of the trade unions is defined by their acceptance of the importance of a process of negotiation with the employers in order to try and improve the conditions of the workers. Hence it would require the development of the influence of a revolutionary and socialist consciousness for the role of the trade unions to become transformed into becoming an expression of opposition to capitalism. But how is this development to occur given the present irrelevance of the various Marxist organisations? This is the very issue that is not addressed by Matgamna. Instead he assumes that the various actions of the workers to improve their situation will somehow become the expression of the rejection of the continued domination of capitalism. But such a prospect is not discussed or elaborated. Instead he suggests that the development of trade union action will represent the development of a collective impulse for the realisation of the principles of solidarity within society: “People have motivations for action other than crude direct self-interest, certainly motivations other than monetary self-interest. Motives of class, social and human solidarity, of doing good to other people, of benign sharing and being shared with, of being part of a benign collective, and simply of being a decent human being.”(p55) But even if we accept this characterisation of trade union actions it does not establish the possibility of social change and the realisation of a different and emancipatory society. Instead all that is established is that collective forms of action occur within capitalism in order to improve the social conditions of the workers via the role of the trade unions. There is no convincing perspective of how this development will result in the promotion of the possibility of emancipatory social change and the establishment of an alternative type of society based on the principles of cooperation. It is argued by Matgamna that the working class of the world is continually increasing in size and influence but that does not mean that the promotion of the objective of socialism will be the automatic result. Instead the decline of the influence of revolutionary Marxism would seem to create an important problem in relation to the successful promotion of the aim of socialism. The point is that the issue of the development of the credibility of Marxism and socialism would seem to be an important aspect of the renewal of the aim of socialism. Matgamna indicates a definition of socialism in terms of economic and political democracy, but he does not seem to be concerned to discuss the apparent problems involved in its realisation. Instead he seems content to outline why the workers are the expression of the aims and the possibilities for socialism: “We say that the proletariat, the wage-labour class of people who, to live, must sell their labour-power, is historically the bearer of socialism. Why? Because it alone can resolve the contradiction within capitalism between private ownership and socialised production. And how? By establishing collective social control, democratic control over the production processes that knit together vast social networks. The working class will do that because it needs to free itself from exploitation and social mistreatment and the general mismanagement of society by the buyers of labour-power, the bourgeoisie.”(p72) But this comment is unable to connect the situation of the exploitation of labour by capital with the possibility and feasibility of the revolutionary transformation of society. Instead all that has been indicated is the situation of domination, but this aspect does not therefore convincingly indicate the feasibility and possibility of the overcoming of the economic and social power of capital by the forces of labour. Nor is the aim of socialism shown to be a feasible expression of the aspirations of the workers in relation to their domination by capital. It is quite possible that people will support the reform of the system and so reject any support for the objective of its revolutionary transformation and the related realisation of socialism. Indeed, the trade unions have historically acted to improve the situation of the workers within capitalism and have generally rejected the aim of socialism as being irrelevant in relation to their interests. Hence the problem has been the inability of the forces of revolutionary Marxism to change the priorities of the trade unions in favour of the struggle for workers control within capitalism as a prelude to the realisation of socialism. In this context the inability of the forces of revolutionary Marxism to influence the objectives of the trade unions is an important relevant issue, but this problem arises because of the lack of the unity of the organisations of left-wing socialism and there connected failure to be able to relate to the workers in an effective and systematic manner. Matgamna blames Stalinism for the failure to realise the general demise of capitalism and so realise socialism, this aspect is indeed relevant but it does not fully explain the failure of to develop genuine Marxist organisations which is connected to the influence of sectarianism and the related justification of the creation of bureaucratic parties. In other words, the failure to create important and influential Marxist parties is the responsibility of all those that have attempted to develop a revolutionary alternative to Stalinism. In this context the creation of genuinely democratic organisations with socialist aims has not been realised and instead there is a political crisis that has not yet been resolved. Instead we have a situation of competing small groups with their distinct programmes and the result is a situation of disunity which can only discredit and undermine the realisation of the creation of credible working-class parties. Hence there has not been the development of effective revolutionary parties in any country. The result of this situation is that the capitalist system is not seriously called into question and so this seems to be an economic and political system that is invincible. This means that the domination of various types of reformism and opportunism is expressed in most countries and the result is that any expression of the class struggle does not acquire revolutionary possibilities. Consequently, the major question that arises from this situation is how to create a popular and united revolutionary party. This point is connected to what would be a popular and principled programme that would be able to generate the unity of the party and also be capable of developing support for the objectives that will be promoted. But the problem has been that the disunity and related fragmentation of the parties of revolutionary Marxism has meant that this possibility of a united and mass revolutionary party has not been realised. Instead there are a collection of competing groups with little popular support. The only result in this context is that the approach of revolutionary Marxism becomes discredited. Hence the problem with the approach of Matgamna is that he is not interested in how to promote the possibility of revolutionary unity. Instead he upholds the implicit assumption that this issue will be resolved in terms of the possible imperatives of the class struggle creating the conditions for this development. But such a standpoint is questionable because previous developments of mass political activity has not resulted in the promotion of the possibility of the realisation of revolutionary unity. Instead the differences between rival groups has remained and indeed they have often upheld different views concerning the issues of the class struggle. In other words, no organisation has tried to promote the approach of unity in these circumstances and so the differences between rival groups has not been overcome. This situation means that the attempt to create the political conditions for revolutionary unity of the rival Marxist groups has not even been tried. There is advocacy of the vague perspective that somehow the development of mass struggles will resolve these types of issues. But such an eventuality has not occurred. Instead we have the rivalry of a collection of small groups that lack any credibility. However it is possible to challenge this situation in terms of the develop of a programme that would outline demands for the generation of the class struggle and so this approach would imply that a united front of the groups could be established in terms of support for this perspective. Such a policy would suggest that the initial group outlining this standpoint would approach the other organisations in order to try and establish agreement around a collection of demands to promote the development of the class struggle. If this type of unity was realised, then the issue of the unification of the various groups would become a relevant issue. But without the creation of this initial approach the issue of unity of the various Marxist organisations would not become a possibility. The point is it requires one organisation to promote the aims of principled unity for this issue to become a feasible potentiality. But instead of discussing these types of issues Matgamna can only indicate the potential for the working class to achieve socialism via the role of revolutionary leadership. But it is this very issue that is problematical given the small size and the disunity of the forces of the various revolutionary parties. Instead the discontent that develops within capitalist society means that the result is a situation in which the capitalist system still remains dominant and is not challenged in an effective manner. The various expressions of unrest take the form of single-issue campaigns that do not aspire to end the continuation of capitalism. Hence the problem is the inability to create a single and united revolutionary party that is able to establish leadership of mass struggles and so influence them in a socialist direction. Instead of such a development the various expressions of unrest are accommodated within the limitations of the capitalist system.

But Matgamna refuses to discuss these issues and instead asserts in a dogmatic manner that “For working class struggles to move towards revolutionary conclusions, what is needed is that those activists educate themselves; keep their theory bright and sharp; and integrate themselves into the existing labour movement and win respect there, so that at crucial moments of class battle they can direct challenge the old-time serving leaders and prevent the diversion of the “spontaneous socialist” impulse of the workers in struggle.”(p170) As a result of this development: “That way the activists can win wider influence, recruit new activists, refresh their own ideas by learning from the battles, and ultimately enlarge, improve and sharpen their organisation so that at one of the inevitable points where large working class struggle coincides with drastic internal crisis for capitalism they can lead the working class to revolutionary victory.”(p171) But this perspective has rarely been realised and generally the very ineffectiveness of the various Marxist organisations means that mass struggles do not acquire a revolutionary potential. The problem is the apparent irrelevance of the Marxist groups which means that their objectives seem to irrelevant in relation to the concerns of the workers. The result of this situation is that the capitalist system continues to be dominant despite the occasional expressions of mass discontent. It could be argued that this situation could be changed if a popular and genuine revolutionary organisation is created, But Matgamna has not outlined the basis for this development to be realised. Instead his perspective is basically a vague hope that class struggle can establish a dynamic of revolutionary change. But this possibility is discredited by the very irrelevance of the Marxist groups. The result of this situation is that the ideology of socialism is not very influential. Instead it seems to be more realistic and credible for people to try and obtain improvements to their situation within the capitalist system. But Matgamna does not seem to recognise the difficulties and complexities of the situation and instead asserts the merits of his organisation the Alliance for Workers Liberty as the basis of the revival of the connection of the class struggle with the objective of socialism: “We are the pioneers of the future mass revolutionary workers parties which will be free of Stalinist seepage and sharp edged in their drive for independent working class struggle.”(p175) But this vague prediction lacks any effective justification and instead is an expression of the claim made by all of the competing Marxist groups. What would be more constructive and principled would be the outline of an approach that could facilitate the possibility of the realisation of the genuine Marxist unity of the various organisations. In this manner it would be possible to develop a credible programme for the promotion of mass struggle against capitalism. But such a perspective is presently not possible given the sectarianism of the various Marxist groups, and as a result they promote rival claims to be the genuine expression of the interests of the working class. In other words, the very importance of the differences between the Marxist parties contributes to undermining the apparent credibility of the objectives of revolutionary socialism. Hence it would seem to be an important task to create the conditions for the development of principled unity between the Marxist groups that would be able to advocate a principled programme of struggle for socialism. Instead Matgamna seems to imply that only the AWL is able to facilitate the advance of a perspective of revolutionary change: “The fight for Marxism and for a Marxist labour movement is the fight to prepare the only force capable of taking humanity out of our age of neo-barbarism, the working class, for that task. It is for that task that the Alliance of Workers Liberty exists and fights.”(p179) But this perspective is dogmatic and seems to lack credibility given the inability of the AWL to become more than a small group with not much support. Hence it would seem that the realisation of socialism is a problematical objective given the present situation of the crisis of the Marxist groups.

The problem is that the serious character of the situation is not apparently recognised by the various socialist groups because they consider that at some point the revival of the class struggle will result in their increased influence and ability to become a new leadership of the mass movement. This means that the assumption being made is that at some point the supposed exclusive character of the principled nature of their politics will be recognised by the workers and so as a result the particular organisation will become the leadership of a mass struggle for socialism. However, the increasing lack of credibility for this type of view would seem to indicate that such a conception of revolutionary politics has become problematical. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a different conception of Marxism and its relationship to the people. The point is that the expression of the most dynamic forms of mass struggle has been that of the various single-issue campaigns in the recent period and these have lacked the influence of the role of the various Marxist organisations. But the problem is that various activities do not pose the importance of the revolutionary transformation of society in order to establish the realise of the objectives of the given campaign. Instead a modified form of capitalism is accepted as being an aspect of the possibility to achieve the aims of the various types of mass movement.

The problems of this situation are discussed in a book edited by Cliff Slaughter and entitled: ‘Against Capital’(zero books: Hants 2015) He comments: “First capital’s structural crisis is throwing all manner of protests, struggles, movements, and at the same time it intensifies the agonising need for a structural change in the social order, beyond the need for reforms or changes of political regime; Second, the working class as the agent of the necessary social revolution has gone through a century of repression, betrayals, mistaken or inadequate theory and practice of leadership, new and radical internal differentiation (national and international): it is left with its organisations decimated or bureaucratised, and is completely politically disenfranchised…..And last the key question: what will be necessary – reconstitution of the working class movement? International coordination? to overcome this situation, and are there signs of that overcoming?”(p25-26) In other words Slaughter accepts that there are serious questions to be raised about the possibility to revive the militancy and determination of the working class movement because of the legacy of a period of defeats and the related generation of the increasing domination of capital over labour. Hence the issues can be posed in the following manner: “Today’s great problems of agency, i.e. of how the working class can overcome and surpass the rule of capital must be posed in terms of how popular forms of organisation and cooperation can be more and more inspired by a consciousness of the necessity of becoming consistent with and anticipating the future, truly human society.”(p316) But the problem with this perspective is that it is based on the possibility of the revival of the importance and influence of revolutionary Marxist organisations but this development does not seem likely to occur. Instead the various groups have become more marginalised and so the issue of the possibility seems to have been undermined by this aspect, and this situation is combined with the apparent increasing right wing trajectory of the working class towards support for various right wing populist politics. In other words, the possibility of socialism seems to be increasingly remote given the importance of this regression of class consciousness which is combined with the crisis of the various Marxist organisations. The point is that it can be established that the social conditions are present for the realisation of socialism to become a credible possibility but that the consciousness of this possibility is lacking in popular terms. The apparent inability to build an effective revolutionary party is the most obvious expression of the problems involved in the attempt to advance the realisation of the aims of socialism. But this aspect is connected to the question of the increasing importance of the issue as to whether the working class is still an expression of the possibility to realise the alternative society. It could be argued that the changes to the character of the capitalist economy has created a fragmented working class that is increasingly divided into different sections with their own distinct interests. The most obvious expression of this situation is the apparent distinct character of the working class and the middle class. This is a division that can only be of benefit to the ruling class in that the result of this situation is the generation of the political conditions that means that the capitalist system remains hegemonic. But this is the very issue that the various Marxist left groups do not tackle and provide a strategy for the unity of the workers and middle class in relation to the generation of the conditions of support for the struggle of socialism. The importance of this issue will be discussed in relation to an evaluation of Slaughter’s other recent book on the prospects for socialism entitled: ‘Not Without a Storm’(Index books, Surrey 2006) The major issue that this book has to address if it is to be serious about the possibility to tackle the questions involved in the attempt to realise socialism is the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology in the subordination of the working class within capitalism. In other words the starting point for the study of a perspective for socialism has to be connected to the problems involved in the creation of an influential revolutionary party because of the influence of reformism and the general acceptance by most people of the continuation of the capitalist system. These aspects have been involved in the failure to develop a successful Marxist organisation.

Slaughter introduces his work with the interesting comment that it is only in the present that the favourable conditions for the realisation of socialism have become established: “What must be understood is that it is only now, with the globalisation of capital, that the objective conditions for socialist revolution are maturing. The struggles of the past – even including the many defeats and betrayals – are the source of inspiration and the spur to a new understanding. But that new understanding cannot come from history alone. There has to be a refoundation of the working class movement which includes a refoundation of Marxism.”(p4) But such a conclusion is rigidly determinist and denies the importance of the role of the class struggle and instead emphasises the primacy of economic aspects to the expense of the significance of consciousness and activity. The point is that the class struggles of the past often created the conditions for the realisation of socialism but that these possibilities were undermined by the influence of the opportunist politics of various socialist parties. However, the major problem has been the inability to develop a genuinely effective revolutionary party since the opportunist degeneration of Social Democracy and Stalinism. This problem has been connected to the dogmatism and elitism of the various organisations and their inability to be able to express a genuine form of inner-party democracy. Hence the result is the failure to address the complexities of the issues of the class struggle in a truly creative manner, and instead to justify the politics of illusion concerning the promotion of the view that socialism is a potential possibility in the short-term despite the lack of the influence of the various Marxist groups. In other words the influence of bourgeois ideology has not addressed in relation to the question of the prospects for socialism, and instead the assumption is that the realisation of the objectives of the demise of capitalism is more favourable than that which is actually being expressed within society given the apparent fact that the domination of the present system is not called into question. Instead of the acceptance of the importance of these aspects of the continuation of capitalism, Slaughter assumes that it is a system of problems which means: “The phrase ‘intensification of contradictions’ is frighteningly appropriate. It indicates that we must anticipate – and as far as possible prepare for new forms of the class struggle endemic to the capital system (endemic by reason of the structurally antagonistic relation between labour and capital), given the new and globally interconnected nature of capital’s functioning.”(p36) The major problem with this perspective is that it underestimates the low level of support for revolutionary Marxism and the importance of the influence of right wing populism within the working class. Instead it is assumed that an inevitable revival of the class struggle will automatically result in increased support for the organisations of revolutionary Marxism. But increasingly this perspective seems to be problematical and expresses a dogmatic view that is unable to explain the actual complexities involved in the possibility of the revival of the class struggle. The point is that the very complex changes within the capitalist system such as the increased importance of what could be defined as white collar occupations and related decline of factory production are not explained or considered within the development of a genuinely convincing perspective for the possibility of socialism within the conditions of contemporary capitalism. In this context the failure to recognise the importance of the weakness of revolutionary Marxism is not explained, and as a result the challenges of the attempt to establish socialism are not indicated in perceptive terms.

In other words, instead of the dogmatic prediction of the revival of the class struggle it would be more thoughtful to outline the difficulties involved in the promotion of a convincing revolutionary politics in the present period. This task has to be connected to the elaboration of a programme of change that was based on the understanding of the present situation instead of trying to justify an imaginary conception of the class struggle. The point is that in most countries the domination of capital over labour is accepted as a conventional truth that cannot be challenged. Instead of this understanding the approach of Slaughter is based on the assumption that the capitalist system continually generates the possibility of the intensification of the class struggle. But this observation lacks empirical validity and is instead the expression of a hopeful perspective that seems to lack any relationship to actual developments within social reality. Slaughter outlines various problems connected with the character of world capitalism, but this does not provide convincing criteria as to why the result should be the generation of opposition to the domination of the present system. The point is not that the majority of people support capitalism but rather that they cannot presently envisage the credibility of an alternative. Therefore, the primary issue is the development of a consciousness in favour of social change that is able to reject the influence of the ideology that defends the continuation of capitalism. This aspect requires the creation of an effective relationship between revolutionary Marxism and the working class. But instead of the recognition of the importance of this process of genuine interaction between the forces of socialism and the class, Slaughter seems to suggest that the possibility of change is determined by the limitations of a capitalist system that is related to the development of economic crisis: “Certainly we now face ‘destructive self-reproduction’ as capital’s mode of existence, but for the conditions of capital’s overthrow to come about, there must occur an economic-social- political crisis resulting from capital’s no longer being able to ensure – economically or politically – the displacement of its contradictions. It is in such a general crisis, under today’s ‘globalised’ conditions, that the working class will make the experiences necessary for success. Preparation for those experiences, in practice and in theory, is the historic responsibility facing the working class movement and all socialists.”(p128) But the point is that it is quite possible for crisis to occur without the connected aspect of change because of the lack of influence of revolutionary Marxism and the fact that class consciousness does not automatically express possible problems created by the economic situation. In these adverse circumstances it is quite possible that people still accept the continuation of the capitalist system. Therefore, the influence of Marxism does not necessarily develop because of the development of the economic contradictions of capitalism. Instead the system remains dominant because of the very important problems involved in the attempt to facilitate the development of the influence of a revolutionary party.

However these issues can be avoided because of the assumption that the approach of Marx indicated the essential opposition of capital and labour and the connected possibility of the overcoming of this situation: “It is on the basis of this understanding that Marx provided the theoretical basis for seeing the working class as the structural antagonist of capital as a whole. The point is that the antagonism is indeed inherent in and structurally constitutive of the capital system. Capital depends absolutely on wage labour. It is itself ‘dead’ labour. The working class depends absolutely on capital. They define each other. Thus in contrast to all other opposition, resistance or protest against this or that aspect of the system, or even against the system itself, the proletariat is an opposing force of a fundamental kind, carrying with it the necessity of a revolutionised social order.”(p129) But this relationship of capital and labour can only be changed in terms of the generation of a consciousness that can facilitate support for this objective. How is this to be realised given that the very continual expression of the capitalist system results in acceptance of this situation by the forces of labour. The answer of Slaughter is to support a perspective of inevitable change: “I take what some no doubt dismiss as the old fashioned view that the rule of capital must and will be overcome by communism.”(p129) But the problem with this view is that it is dogmatic and does not explain the complexity and difficulty involved in trying to replace capitalism with an emancipatory alternative. It could be argued that there are aspects of the present system which could facilitate the realisation of socialism, but this does not mean that this possibility will inevitably be realised. Instead we have to accept that the character of history is complex and does not express the dynamics of a process of inherent transformation of the present system into an emancipatory alternative. Instead the majority of the people have to become convinced of the possibility of the replacement of capitalism and this development is not inevitable and instead depends on the outcome of political and ideological struggle. In this context the lack of influence of genuine Marxist parties is a problem that undermines the realisation of an alternative to capitalism. Hence the most we can suggest is that the character of history is open-ended and that different possibilities are inherent in relation to the character of social reality. Only the successful conclusion of the class struggle can create the genuine possibility of the realisation of socialism, and this outcome is not inevitable and instead depends on the development of class consciousness and the influence of an effective revolutionary perspective. But the present problem is the lack of the credibility of the various revolutionary Marxist organisations and their inability to be able to relate to the workers in an effective manner. The result of this situation is that it seems that the most that can be achieved is the reform and improvement of the present system. This situation means that people still vote for reformist parties when they are critical of capitalism and the forces of revolutionary Marxism are marginalised. But Slaughter tries to ignore these issues by his emphatic and dogmatic assertion that the inevitable demise of the domination of capital will occur. But such predictions lack genuine validity given the apparent ability of the defenders of the present system to be able to maintain its continuation. This situation is connected to the apparently marginalised situation of revolutionary Marxism. The very complexities of the present situation mean’s that the justification of a dogmatic assertion of inevitable victory of communism can only be a simplification that is unwilling to tackle the actual complexities involved in the continuation of the present system. Therefore, it is necessary not to ignore the actual problems of the class struggle but instead to explain them in relation to developing a credible conception of the possibility of revolutionary change. Slaughter emphasises the importance of the collective character of labour and its ability to oppose the domination of capital. This has been an aspect of the system of capitalism but what is more apparent is that the defenders of the present system have been successful in relation to their determination to oppose the possibility of the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. Instead it can be argued that the attempt to realise an alternative to the present system has been unsuccessful. Slaughter seems to ignore this point in relation to his determinist justification of the realisation of an alternative to capitalism.

This perspective is based on a determinist approach that suggests that the antagonistic character of capitalism will generate inevitable struggles between capital and labour that will therefore generate the possibility for the revolutionary transformation of society: “The great question to be addressed in practice and theory, is this. Through our experiences in these struggles, and the forms of organisation we evolve, will we – the working class – learn to do more than resist attack, and to go beyond each particular issue to strengthen ourselves as a class? Will we be able to discover and carry through the practical means not only to oppose, but also to overcome the rule of capital and its ‘destructive self-reproduction’ by the necessary control of self-production by the producers themselves? Will we be able to make the necessary movement towards communism?”(p137) This is an important question but it is based on the assumption that such struggles will be an inevitable expression of the limitations and the situation of increasing crisis of capitalism. But such assumptions cannot be made because Slaughter underestimates the influence of the view that considers that the present system cannot be challenged and effectively opposed. Hence, he does not recognise the fact that people increasingly accept the present system as being invincible and so cannot be challenged and overcome by the role of mass activity. This situation is also expressed by the lack of influence of revolutionary Marxism and the fact that the aims of class struggle to create socialism seem to have become increasingly discredited given the apparent invincibility of the present economic and political system. But these issues do not seem to be addressed by Slaughter given that the assumption he is making is that struggle will inevitably occur that results in opposition to capitalism. This approach is also based on the connected view that the role of revolutionary Marxism will inevitably occur. Slaughter does accept that the ideological role of imperialism has been to justify the continuation of capitalism in the advanced countries, but he also considers that the limitations of the present economic system because of the priorities of capital accumulation pose the necessity for its overthrow: “They are the immediate manifestation of the need, in the name of humanity, for the overthrow of the rule capital; and for the development of the practical and theoretical instruments through which the working class – our class – can defend the conditions which make possible a new ‘truly human’ social-metabolic order.”(p148) But this perspective is not connected to the present character of the balance of class forces which is effectively an expression of unfavourable possibilities for the realisation of revolutionary objectives. Indeed this is the very issue that Slaughter does not seem to address and instead he seems to suggest that the historical limitations of capitalism will somehow automatically create the conditions for the development of the attempt to realise the aspiration to replace the present system with socialism. But this is the very perspective that is not being facilitated because of the very importance of the present unfavourable balance of the class forces. At present the forces of capital is in the ascendency and this means that labour is on the defensive and is unable to develop an opposition to the present system. The result of this situation means that the domination of the present system is not being challenged in any effective manner. This aspect is connected to the lack of influence of the organisations of revolutionary Marxism, and so the very aim of socialism seems to be antiquated and not feasible. But instead of attempting to address this issue in a serious manner, Slaughter instead assumes that the limitations of capitalism will generate discontent that will result in the development of the importance of the Marxist party. But such a perspective has continually been made in recent times and has seemed to have lacked justification given the apparent popular acceptance of the continuation of the capitalist system. Indeed, the very importance of mass struggle seems to have become discredited because of the apparent inability to be able to challenge capitalism in an effective manner. However, Slaughter tries to deny the importance of this point because he continually insists on the role of the collective character of the international working class which is generating the objective and subjective conditions for the possibility of the realisation of the alternative of socialism. However, this perspective is based on the effective denial of the lack of popular support for the objectives of revolutionary change by the actions of the workers. Instead there is an acceptance of the continuation of the capitalist system. But Slaughter insists that capitalism is a system of increasing crisis, the counterrevolutionary importance of Stalinism has ended, and the increasing importance of the role of labour has created an increasingly powerful international working class. The problem with this analysis is that it does not represent the criteria by which to indicate that increasingly favourable conditions are being created for the realisation of international socialism. Instead we can only suggest that some of the problems that have undermined the prospect of revolutionary change have been ended. However, it is also necessary to suggest that the overall issue that people generally accept the role of capitalism has not been undermined by these developments. This aspect is connected to the continued effective irrelevance of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. The challenge is how to generate the possibility to change this situation and so create the genuine conditions for the development of revolutionary class consciousness and connected practice.

Slaughter suggests that the very dynamic of struggle will somehow resolve these issues: “The workers in these countries inevitably seem their struggles initially in purely defensive terms, and fight within the old forms. But major struggles have already forced them to begin to test out new ways of fighting; and to develop a consciousness that they are now involved in a quite new period which forces them to find ways to change their organisational forms and methods. Then will come into focus the unity of their own interests and struggles with those on a worldwide scale…..It is the work to protect and defend the natural and human foundations of the society of free men and women that must replace the rule of capital.”(p182-183) But this perspective is presently an expression of wishful thinking and does not seem to be based on any actual developments. Instead it is assumed that the global character of capitalism will result in the possibility of the realisation of international forms of class struggle. But this perspective seems to underestimate the success of the offensive of capital against labour since the 1980’s which has meant that the working class has been on the defensive and so as a result the very conception of the necessity of class struggle has become discredited. In this situation it has been possible for capital to try and impose the policy of austerity in order to attempt to solve the present crisis at the expense of the interests of the working class. Therefore, given the present unfavourable balance of class forces it has not been possible to develop the struggle of labour against the domination of capital. But none of this understanding seems to influence Slaughter who instead outlines an imaginary scenario of the increased progress of a militant working class that is able to challenge capital in an effective manner. However instead of the promotion of this imaginary perspective it would be more beneficial to outline a perspective that was based on an accurate understanding of the present unfavourable balance of class forces in relation to the interests of labour. In other words, the actual task is how to develop opposition to the offensive of capital against labour. Only the success of this approach could then create the conditions for the advocacy of a more ambitious perspective of social change. But instead of this understanding Slaughter is content to outline an understanding of the situation that has little relationship to the present adverse balance of class forces. He outlines that defensive struggles will acquire a more ambitious character, but the actual issue is how to develop defensive struggles that are not presently occurring. The point is that the situation is characterised by the apparent success of capital in being able to resolve aspects of the economic crisis at the expense of the interests of labour. This is because austerity economics are not being challenged by popular struggles. Hence there is the necessity to develop a credible defensive approach that is able to generate the confidence of the workers to be able to uphold their interests and so as a result promote the possibility of increasingly militant actions against the aims of capital. Instead the present balance of class forces is to the advantage of the interests of capital and so the result is that the situation of economic crisis is being resolved in terms of the undermining of the aspirations of the role of labour. In this context Slaughter does not outline even a defensive strategy to try and maintain the interests of the working class and on that basis try to develop more offensive actions that express the possibility of opposing the capitalist system. Instead what seems to be assumed is the conception of the actuality of the role of mass action against the domination of capital, but this perspective is illusory because that is not happening in any effective and actual manner. Instead the forces of labour are on the defensive because the interests of capital are utilising the situation of austerity in order to develop an offensive against the interests of the working class and so in that manner what is occurring is a situation in which the ability of the workers to be able to defend their position seems to be called into question. Hence what is required is the development of a perspective that would uphold the ability of the workers to be able to uphold and consolidate their interests and so in that manner be then able to develop the possibility to facilitate the transformation of society in terms of the ending of the domination of capital over labour. In this context it would be possible to establish a connection between the role of a revolutionary party and the aims of labour in terms of the development of this prospect of challenging the domination of capital and so as a result bringing about the creation of a new socialist society. Hence the relevance of the revolutionary party based on the development of a credible perspective of change that would result in the possibility for the forces of labour to overcome the supremacy of capital within society.

These issues are discussed in a book by Ronaldo Munck: “Globalisation and Labour’ (Zed books: London 2002) He comments in the introduction: “A global labour force is emerging and, at least potentially, workers are emerging as a new (yet ‘old’) global social movement. What potential does the post-Seattle movement for globalisation ‘from below’ have and what role might workers and their organisations have in this process?”(px1) This question is important because there is not necessarily a connection between the development of an inter-related working class based on the economic role of the world economy and the issue of the creation of an international consciousness that is based on the support of an objective of the overcoming of the domination of global capital. Instead it could be argued that the workers of the world are still divided by national allegiances and that the result of this situation is that there are important problems involved in developing forms of effective activity that could facilitate the possibility of the revolutionary transformation of global capital. The point is that the influence of nationalism could still be an important aspect in the undermining of the development of a class consciousness that is required in order to generate the possibility of the realisation of the success of labour over the forces of capital. This aspect is connected to the apparent important problems that undermine the development of the role of an effective Marxist party. However, Munck is apparently not primarily concerned with these issues because he emphasises the continued importance of the role of labour in relation to the development of a situation of globalisation. Hence the significance that is being suggested is that labour is of increasing significance to the prospects of capital and so this suggests that it has the possibilities to be able to aspire to realise a situation in which it will be able to overcome the limitations of the present economic system and so establish its domination. But this assumption does not seem to recognise the problems involved in facilitating the prospect of the transformation of the situation in favour of labour. Instead Munck comments: “Much of the literature on globalisation, critical as much as adulatory, seems to assume that capital has all its own way and that labour can only negotiate the terms of its surrender. Capitalist triumphalism may, however, be misplaced…Once we begin to think of globalisation as a specific epoch of capitalism, perhaps but still sharing all the problems of capitalism…..there is always an alternative.”(p13) But the problem with this view is that the situation of economic crisis or the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism does not mean that there will be the automatic development of the possibility for the transformation of the system and the realisation of an alternative. Instead it is still necessary to develop support for an alternative on the basis of the articulation of a programme of radical change in terms of the increased influence of the role of a Marxist approach. But Munck would argue that there is an alternative to what he could a dogmatic approach and instead suggest that globalisation is creating the possibility of the trade unions to act in a international manner and so facilitate the prospect of the realisation of emancipatory change. Obviously, any perspective of progressive change would have to involve the role of the trade unions, but this does not deny the necessity to still promote the important role of the revolutionary party. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the crisis of the Marxist organisation that is contributing to the inability of the trade unions to develop radical conclusions in relation to the limitations of globalisation. The point is that trade unions will attempt to defend the interests of their members within the capitalist system and so this means that there is no inherent dynamic that will connect this aspect to the development of opposition to the character of the present economic relations. Instead it is the influence of the role of a revolutionary party that will facilitate the possibility of the trade unions to develop more radical aims such as workers control of production. Instead of recognising this issue Munck seems to suggest that the possibility of social change is an inherent possibility of the character of globalisation: “The growing economic/political/social integration of the world caused by the process of globalisation also creates transnational processes of empowerment and democratisation.”(p22) But the point is that what is a potential possibility is not an actuality. Instead it requires the development of the influence of a revolutionary perspective based on the objectives of the realisation of the possibility of workers control of the means of production. This prospect is itself related to the increased influence of the approach of Marxism and socialism. Hence what is potentially possible may never be realised if the revolutionary standpoint is not developed in an important and influential manner. Instead it is quite possible that the development of global capital can only facilitate the increased power of the present economic system and the related undermining of the interests of the global working class. Indeed, it could be argued that this is what has happened in terms of the promotion of the possibility for capital to intensify its exploitation of labour. Hence the actual crisis of the forces of revolutionary Marxism contributes to the situation of the adverse balance of class forces and related possibility for capital to undermine the realisation of the interests of the working class. But this very situation only contributes to the discrediting of revolutionary Marxism and the rejection of this approach in the name of realism and the acceptance of this situation because the realisation of the possibility of a progressive alternative does not seem to be feasible. Indeed, it would seem that the very development of globalisation has only contributed to the strengthening of the forces of capital at the expense of labour, and so the possibility of progressive change seems to have been undermined. But Munck suggests that this very development of an increasingly inter-connected world economy can only facilitate the possibility of increased unity between the workers of different countries. However, it would seem that this prospect of the overcoming of the influence of nationalism is not just an expression of an economic process but also requires ideological and political developments. This aspect can only be consistently related to the creation of the influence of a Marxist party, and this is the very aspect that has become increasingly problematical in the recent period. Furthermore, Munck is aware that the very development of a globalised world economy has not overcome the influence of nationalism and so the conclusion that he makes seems to contradict the apparent logic that he outlines of the increasing ability of capital to dominate labour and so undermine the possible development of the realisation of an emancipatory alternative. Hence he seems to suggest in dogmatic terms that: “The unions and the broader labour movement are made up of, and indeed themselves create a dense network of social relations…..The ‘moral economy’ of the labour movement, and in particular the principle of ‘solidarity’, will conceivably play a significant role in designing a social system ‘beyond’ competition. An alternative social system of production…..will necessarily be based around the political economy of labour.”(p184) But this perspective is only a hopeful assumption and is not based on any coherent conception of the realisation of a credible programme for the transformation of capitalist society. Instead the conclusion that there has been the generation of the role of a transnational and increasingly unified trade union movement is an assumption that lacks credibility. Instead it can be argued that the very dynamics of global capitalism have only undermined the possibility of the realisation of the aims of socialism and the liberation of the working class. Therefore, the issue becomes how to develop a genuine and principled revolutionary and Marxist party that can promote the importance of a feasible and coherent perspective of change. This is the basis to establish a conclusion to this article.

But initially it is necessary to outline the reasons why the possibility to develop effective and popular revolutionary parties was not realised. This failure means that the prospect of the creation of a political relationship between the working class and genuine Marxist organisations has not been established. Mike Macnair outlines in his book: ‘Revolutionary Strategy’ (November publications, London 2008) that: “A ‘Marxist party, then, consists, in principle of nothing more than a party which is committed to the ideas that the working class can only emancipate itself – and humanity – through struggling for communism can only be victorious through the actions of the working class.”(p27) However the problems of this formulation is that the various Marxist parties assume a position of an elitist relationship to the workers and so as a result consider that they have a privileged standpoint that means that they can justify acting on behalf of the proletariat in the name of the objective of socialism. Indeed, it could be argued that this was the basis of the approach of Lenin. Hence the perspective of the self-emancipation of the workers becomes a problematical perspective that has tensions and is undermined by the generally dominant role of the party. In other words, there is an issue about how the workers are able to express their interests in an effective manner in relation to the role of the socialist party. Therefore, the definition of the Marxist party provided by Macnair represents problems about the character of the actual relationship of this organisation to the role of the class. Arguably only Luxemburg resolved this issue in a progressive manner by outlining how the party should be concerned to promote the realisation of the potential of the mass struggles of the workers in a revolutionary manner But this understanding became obscured by either the increasing reformist character of the socialist party which acted to influence the workers to achieve their objectives within the capitalist system, or the development of a Bolshevik organisation which became the major instrument of the tasks involved in realising a revolutionary process. In other words, the increasing importance of the role of parties has led to a situation in which the relationship of party and class has become problematical and so means that the party acts on behalf of the class. But the fact that this situation has led to either the formation of bureaucratised states that claim to be socialist, or alternatively justified a process of accommodation to capitalism, has indicated the necessity to reject these approaches is necessary in the name of socialism. But the dilemma is that this task cannot be achieved by the working class acting in terms of an understanding of its genuine self-interest and instead the role of an authentic Marxist party is necessary to facilitate the realisation of these revolutionary objectives. However, it has been difficult to develop this type of principled organisation in popular terms. Therefore, on the one hand the interaction of party and workers organisations like the trade unions is necessary in order to generate the possibility of success in the class struggle, but it has been difficult to develop this type of interaction because of the problems involved in the development of revolutionary organisations. Hence the question that arises is whether this issue can be resolved in a progressive manner in terms of the creation of an effective Marxist party. In other words, in the recent period the various struggles of the workers were undermined in terms of the possibility to be successful because of the general lack of the influence of a principled Marxist party. However, it has been difficult to create this type of party because of the situation of competition of various rival organisations and the overall dominant influence of the approach of reformism. This situation has meant that the possibility of the successful advance of the interests of the workers has been undermined and instead the capitalist class has gained from the problems involved in the attempt to create an effective revolutionary party.

Macnair considers that the situation of the parties claiming to be socialist has been generally characterised by the divisions between an openly reformist trend, the centrism of a process of vacillation between reformist and revolutionary politics and the advocacy of a consistently revolutionary trend. But in actuality it is questionable whether consistently revolutionary organisations have been created and instead the situation has been defined by the importance of reformism and centrism. This situation is not necessarily serious because it is quite possible for centrist organisations to evolve in a revolutionary manner. This is because centrism has a progressive aspect because it is still concerned to try and uphold the principles of socialism despite some expression of limitations in relation to the strategy of change being advocated. Therefore, it is not unprincipled for revolutionary Marxists to critically support centrism against reformism. For example, the centrism of the Independent Labour Party should have been critically supported between 1914-40 because the role of this organisation was important in terms of providing a genuine and progressive alternative to the opportunist reformism of the Labour party in this period. Hence it was not unprincipled for the Trotskyists to relate to the ILP in the 1930’s. The point being made was that it was not a futile task to try and gain the support of the ILP for a revolutionary approach in this period, and it did actually express aspects of sympathy for Trotskyism in this period. Therefor the actual decline of the ILP meant that the possibility to obtain increased support for genuine revolutionary Marxism was undermined and instead the influence of either reformism or Stalinism was increased in this period. But despite this problem it was also possible for the Trotskyists to develop their support by an increased involvement in the Labour party. However, the forces of Trotskyism were undermined by their failure to develop an effective perspective for the second world war and instead this confusion led to their insignificance. This situation only improved after the war when they could develop support in terms of involvement in the struggles of the workers. However, this development occurred in terms of the role of what was a united Trotskyist organisation, the Revolutionary Communist party. But the development of splits in this organisation meant that a collection of rival small groups became formed. It could be argued that the result has been detrimental to the prospects of the creation of a genuinely effective and popular Marxist organisation. This situation was not improved by the fact that the various groups were increasingly bureaucratic and anti-democratic and based on the role of authoritarian leaderships. In this context the formal democracy of the Labour party seemed to be preferable and the basis for the promotion of left-wing politics. This is why various left-wing trends within the Labour party seemed to have become more important than the rival collection of small Marxist groups. In other words, the situation was characterised by a crisis of perspectives that meant the objectives of reformism seemed to have been more credible. It seemed to be more realistic to try and elect a Labour government rather than attempt to develop the influence of the small revolutionary groups. Furthermore the politics of socialism seemed to have been undermined by the success of authoritarian Thatcherism which was able to utilise a nationalist agenda based on the role of the Falklands war in order to promote the implementation of reactionary economic policies. In this context the only credible approach for left wing politics seemed to be to support the left wing of the Labour party led by Tony Benn. But this struggle seemed to be genuinely irrelevant. Only the miners strike of 1984-85 seemed to result in the revival of the credibility of a revolutionary Marxist approach. In this context the role of politics based on the importance of the class struggle seemed to have become relevant and credible, and the issue of the necessity to realise a general strike seemed to be relevant and important. Thus, the situation of recession and austerity revived the politics of revolutionary Marxism. However, the various political and organisational problems of the Marxist groups meant that these apparent new opportunities did not result in the generation of the increased influence of Marxist politics. Nevertheless, these problems seemed to have become overcome with the role of the anti-poll tax campaign which led to the popular influence of Militant. But this potential was never realised because of the authoritarian character of Militant and as a result the influence of Marxism seemed to be on a general decline.

In other words, the political and organisational limitations of the various groups have meant that it has not been possible to create effective and popular organisations that have been able to develop an influence within the working class. It could be argued this situation was predictable given the influence of reformism within society, but this situation can also be explained in terms of the various limitations of the Marxist groups. Primarily the failure to create a genuinely democratic organisation with revolutionary politics has meant that the situation is characterised by the role of a collection of elitist groups that lack the basis for the development of policy in a cooperative manner. Instead the organisations are generally dominated by the role of the authoritarian leader. Hence it would seem that the only feasible alternative to this situation of the apparent limitations of the perspective of the hegemonic role of the Marxist party in the promotion of the possibility of change is to support the alternative approach of the role of the mass strike, or the expression of the dynamic role of the workers in economic struggles against the interests of capital. But Macnair contends that this approach is problematical because: “A strike wave or revolutionary crisis can last longer than a truly all-out indefinite general strike, but it cannot last longer than a period of months – at most a couple of years. In this situation if the workers movement does not offer an alternative form of authority - alternative means of decision making which are capable of running the economy – the existing social structures of authority are necessarily reaffirmed.”(p48) But the point is that this strategic limitation is not necessarily an inherent aspect of a situation of the development of the mass strike. What is required is the development of the influence of the role of the revolutionary party. In this context the militant possibilities of the strike could acquire increasingly more ambitious and radical aims such as ultimately the realisation of forms of authority which challenge the continued domination of capitalism. Hence the problem is not the role of the mass strike but instead the fact that generally the domination of the opportunist and reformist leadership of these struggles is not challenged and replaced. In other words, the situation could be transformed if there was a revolutionary influence within the development of the mass strikes. The result of this possibility could be the generation of a genuine and effective opposition to the continuation of the domination of capitalism. Hence contrary to what Macnair implies, the problem is not with the role of the mass strike, but instead that its potential is not realised because of the failure to replace the opportunist leadership of the struggle with more principled adherents of the view that the mass strike should become the basis to facilitate the development of a genuine struggle to realise socialism.

However, Macnair extends his criticism of the strategic role of the mass strike in order to question the related importance of the role of the realisation of soviet democracy. He indicates that to Lenin the realisation of the power of the institutions of the soviets was the logical realisation of the activity of the workers: “Lenin in 1917 believed that the Russian working class had found in the Soviets – workers councils – the solution to the strategic problem of authority posed by the mass strike movement. Growing out of the strike movement itself, the soviets created the form of authority which shared the characteristics of democracy and accountability from below which Marx described in the Paris Commune. Communism would therefore take the political form of the struggle for soviets and for soviet power.”(p48-49) But this perspective proved to be illusory and instead the only credible form of revolutionary government that was established was the domination of the Soviets by the role of the Bolshevik party, and it was this organisation that become the effective expression of political authority in the revolutionary social formation. Therefore, Macnair concludes: “Workers councils and similar forms have appeared in many strike waves and revolutionary crisis since 1917. In none have these forms been able to offer an alternative centre of authority, an alternative decision-making authority for the whole society. This role is unavoidably played by a government – either based on the surviving military-bureaucratic state core, or the existing organisations of the workers movement.”(p49) Hence it would seem that there is no alternative to the role of a limited type of popular democracy based on the importance of the hegemonic role of the revolutionary party. But this outcome would seem to suggest that the very character of the objective of socialism is connected to the justification of authoritarianism and the rejection of the role of genuine democracy. However, there is actually nothing to suggest that the role of a hegemonic revolutionary party within a genuinely socialist type of society cannot be based on the feasibility of the role of soviet democracy or even a type of parliamentary democracy. Hence the banning of parties by the Bolshevik government after the October 1917 revolution was related to exceptional circumstances and so did not express any generalisation of the character of the role of a worker’s administration. Nor can it be suggested that the effective formation of a one-party regime expressed some type of example to be copied in different circumstances. Indeed, it can be suggested that it was the very development of hegemonic Bolshevik domination that created problems that undermined the possibility to realise a credible democratic and socialist type of society.

The point is that the role of Soviet democracy can be based on a situation of competition between different parties and based on a genuine system of election and the role of consent in terms of the development of a hegemonic party. Hence the Soviet system is a valid substitute for the role of parliamentary democracy, and so the problem with the situation in the period 1918-24 in Russia was not the result of this political structure but was instead the realisation of the monopoly domination of one party. In this context the Bolsheviks utilised their dominant position within the Soviets in order to effectively ban the other parties. It could be argued that this was an exceptional measure, but it established a situation in which the principles of democracy were seriously compromised. Furthermore, the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly meant that the possibility to develop a united and popular revolutionary government was undermined and instead the result was the creation of a process of development towards the authoritarian rule of a dominant party. In other words, the Bolsheviks justified measures that meant the realisation of a situation that undermined the possibility to realise genuine democracy. But there was an alternative based on the attempt to establish an agreement between the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly and the recognition of the importance that the role of one-party rule could only become the justification of authoritarianism. Macnair does not outline what his alternative would be under these circumstances. Indeed, it seems that he is essentially in opposition to all of the various policies being advocated, except to imply that it was necessary to develop the most principled form of rule by the revolutionary party. But in a sense, this was the very approach of the Bolsheviks and it failed because the effective domination of the single revolutionary party could only result in the realisation of a bureaucratic regime. This was because the tendency towards authoritarianism was connected to the very character of the role of the domination of an exclusive party. The aspects of the integrity of this party could not provide the basis to oppose the realisation of the potential for the problematical potential for the development of the domination of what had become an authoritarian organisation. Macnair considers that the political problems of the system of political structures is not resolved by the role of the Soviets: “The point is simply that the problem of decision making authority is not solved by the creation of workers councils arising out of a mass strike movement. Hence the problem of institutional forms which will make authority answerable to the masses needs to be addressed in some way other than the fetishism of the mass strike and the workers councils.”(p50) But this perspective is problematical because what is also being suggested is that the role of parliaments are also being questioned. Hence it would seem that there is no valid basis to establish the possibility of democratic political authority in a revolutionary society. The result would of this situation would seem to suggest that there is no credible alternative to the possibility of the realisation of a form of elitist rule by a party on behalf of the working class. But this logical conclusion is not the position of Macnair, and so his standpoint seems to be ambiguous and inconclusive.

It is interesting that Macnair does not support the alternative of the Kautskyist centrists in favour of the revolutionary party obtaining a majority in parliament in order to facilitate the realisation of a process of transition to socialism. Hence, we know what he is in opposed to, but what he is in favour of seems to be an obscure perspective based on the rejection of other approaches. Therefore, on the one hand he outlines the problems involved in the political character of the Bolshevik regime, but also does not seem to establish a credible alternative. Hence: “On the other hand, it is also a theorisation of what the Bolsheviks had done to their party in 1918-21, both in militarising it and in setting it up as a minority dictatorship, a state authority against the working class. In this aspect the ‘new party concept’…..was a theory of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, and one which was to animate endless bureaucratic sects.”(p93) But despite the identification of the role of the dominant revolutionary party with the problem of bureaucratism and elitism, Macnair does not consider that there is an alternative to the importance of this role: “That a party is only a part of society is logically necessary. That the organised membership of a political party, however large, is a minority is a simple fact about political parties in capitalist society – even very large ones like the Labour party, etc. That in the case of a worker’s party this minority is in some sense a ‘vanguard’ is an idea which cannot be abandoned without abandoning the idea that the party should promote its distinct political programme. If we are not ‘more advanced’ in the sense of having a better understanding of the strategic line than non-members then out organising is a waste of time….and this is true of the Labour party, etc, as it is of left groups.”(p93) But this necessary role of the party means that whilst it should provide leadership in the struggle for socialism this should not justify the approach of elitism. However, Macnair is aware of this problem but he does not seem to provide a perspective that would ensure the development of a genuinely democratic and accountable revolutionary party. Instead there would seem to be a dilemma. On the one hand the workers are not sufficiently class consciousness to be able to act politically without the role of a party, but on the other hand the party organisation can become bureaucratised because of the reactionary influence of the importance of the power of its leadership. Hence there seems to be problems with the very character of the role of the party, and these are not resolved by the general involvement of the membership of the organisations in the class struggle. Instead bureaucratic degeneration of the party is an expression of the very problematical aspects of the character of the elitist character of leadership. Macnair does not seem to provide an approach that would resolve this problem of bureaucratism, authoritarianism and elitism in relation to the role of Marxist party organisation. But surely it is important to reject the influence of the reactionary view that the leadership is infallible and so beyond question. Instead the policies of the party should be continually questioned by the membership and so as a result the aim should be the realisation of a situation of the genuinely democratic character of the revolutionary party. Not only should the leadership be accountable to the membership, but there should also be procedures that allow for the possibility to establish a new leadership if necessary. But the most important thing is to promote policies that are genuinely related to the possibility to develop the advance of the class struggle. Macnair makes the valid point that what is required is the advocacy of an approach by the revolutionary party that attempts to overcome the limitations of both sectarianism and opportunism: “Rather we have to fight for forms of partial unity with the right, so as to achieve the maximum class unity round particular goals that can be achieved and to bring our politics into confrontation with the right’s politics.”(p99) But this approach should be based on the primary importance of the promotion of the aim of the necessity to realise socialism. In this context the primary criticism of the right wing should be about how they compromise and undermine the realisation of the aim of socialism. In other words, the reformist character of the right wing is about the undermining of the possibility to achieve the objective of socialism. In this context they are prepared to make compromises with the forces of capital in order to undermine the possibility of the progress of the realisation of the interests of the workers. Hence the ultimate aim of the workers is connected with the issue of making progress towards the attainment of socialism. But this perspective has become compromised by an emphasis on activism by the various left-wing groups and so the ultimate aim of socialism become relegated to being of secondary importance. Such an approach is problematical because the leadership of the reformist parties can always claim that their concentration on the immediate interests of the people is more relevant to the workers than the obscure emphasis on the aim of socialism. In other words, the forces of revolutionary Marxism have to theoretically develop a credible perspective of how the struggle to realise socialism is both credible and feasible. It could be suggested that this is the very task that has been either neglected by the Marxists, or else is reduced to a dogma that does not seem to be credible or of relevant importance.

But primarily the problem with the approach of Macnair is that he does not seem to address the problem of the generally marginal influence of the role of revolutionary Marxism when compared to the political importance of reformism. He tries to develop a perspective to overcome the limitations of this situation in terms of the advocacy of the united front between the forces of revolutionary politics and reformism. Macnair outlines how this approach is generally promoted by various Trotskyist groups in order to facilitate mass struggle against capitalism: “The theory justifies diplomatic unity with the reformists “in action not in ideas”: with the implication that they do so in relation to their particular struggles. Unity with the reformists is essential to set the masses in motion; and on the particular struggles it is unnecessary for the Trotskyists to offer sharp criticism of the reformists, which might prevent unity; the mass struggle will find the reformists out.”(p113) Macnair suggests that this approach can only result in the promotion of the political domination of the reformists and the rejected undermining of the importance of the revolutionary forces. But he does not outline what is an alternative perspective that would be more fruitful for the development of the influence of genuine Marxism. The point is that what is actually of importance is the advance of the class struggle. If united action between reformist and revolutionary forces results in the possibility of success in relation to opposition to capitalism, then this development can only be of benefit for the interests of Marxism. In this context the success of struggles will generate the increased confidence of the workers to become more confident in regard to developing opposition to capitalism. Such an outcome can only be beneficial in relation to the generation of the increased influence of revolutionary Marxism. Therefore, in this manner the alliance of Marxists and reformists will have been justified in relation to the interests of the promotion of the role of the class struggle. In other words, the realisation of the aim of socialism will have been advanced in these terms. Macnair maintains that the united front is an important aspect of the struggle for socialism, but he does not explain how this would facilitate the increasing possibility of the creation of the leadership of the revolutionary party. However, what we would suggests is that a united front concerning the demands of the workers becomes the basis to indicate the political limitations of the reformists. In this context it is possible to develop the influence of the revolutionary party because of its more principled approach concerning the demands of the class struggle. But Macnair fails to outline these possible progressive aspects of the united front and instead only assumes that the role of a principled united front should result in the increased influence of the revolutionary party. But such an outcome is not inevitable because the workers may conclude that the very success of the united front is because of the role of the social democratic organisation. But such a possible outcome should not mean that we conclude that the united front has an opportunist and unprincipled character. Instead the fact that the success of the role of the united front in the class struggle can only be to the ultimate benefit to the possible to generate increased support for revolutionary Marxism. This is because the major conclusion to be made in relation to this success of the united front is that the class struggle has a relevant importance in terms of the enhancement of the possibility to realise the interests of the workers. Hence the success of the united front can only be to contribute to the successful achievement of revolutionary objectives. In other words, it is in the interests of the reformists to oppose the role of the united front and in contrast the revolutionary party has a reason to advocate this approach. However, whether the united front contributes to the ultimate success of the revolutionary process depends on the given political circumstances of the class struggle. But generally, the role of the united front cannot be to the detriment of the interests of the class struggle and so can only enhance the importance of the revolutionary party.

But the problem has been that increasingly the forces of revolutionary Marxism have been insignificant and so are not able to promote the united front in a successful manner. Instead they have remained propaganda organisations that have had an ineffective relationship to the possibilities of the class struggle. Hence the primary problem becomes how to generate a process of transition from what are presently insignificant propaganda groups into becoming effective and popular revolutionary parties. Such a process of development has become increasingly difficult and instead we have a situation in which the forces of revolutionary Marxism are increasingly small and ineffective. The result of this situation is that reformism still seems to be credible and able to obtain the support of the majority of the workers. In other words, there is a crisis of Marxism which does not seem to be overcome in terms of the increased influence and popularity of the revolutionary parties. This situation means that there is apparently no credible alternative to the role of the mass reformist organisations despite their apparent limitations in terms of a generalised failure to generate popular support on the basis of an inspiring programme. The result of this situation is that the influence of the forces of conservatism is not challenged and this has meant the development of increased support for various forms of populism within the working class. However, the various revolutionary organisations are not able to provide a credible alternative and instead they seem to continue to decline into insignificance. In this context the problem with the approach of Macnair is that he makes the assumption that with the promotion of a principled perspective the principled Marxist party could re-establish its relationship to the working class. But this problem cannot be resolved in terms of the advocacy of a principled Marxist programme. Instead the issue is a long-term one of re-establishing the influence of the role of the Marxist party within the working class. This means that the objective of the unification of the various Marxist organisations on the basis of a credible programme is an urgent task. Hence it will be necessary to overcome the limitations of sectarianism that presently undermine the possibility to create a credible Marxist party. Hence the ultimate problem is the issue of the justification of the role of the leadership of the given organisations instead of the recognition of the necessity of the promotion of the aim of the creation of a united Marxist organisation on the basis of a credible programme of aims and a strategy to advance the possibility to realise socialism. But the lack of this development means that people will continue to support the reformist Labour party because it at least seems to promote the possibility of the realisation of political power which would enable it to introduce radical measures for the change of society. Hence it is the sectarianism of what seems to be increasingly irrelevant groups that is the primary basis of their apparent irrelevancy and inability to be able to promote what could be a credible perspective for the transformation of society. Macnair seems to consider that these issues can be resolved if a principled group is able to emerge with influence on the basis of the advocacy of a credible perspective for the transformation of society. This understanding is part of the answer in connection to the development of the role of a Marxist organisation with a credible programme for changing society. However, this aspect has to be connected to the rejection of the traditional support for sectarianism by the various Marxist groups. In other words there has to be a process of organisational and political compromise on the basis that the objectives of the struggle to realise socialism should be considered to be of primary importance in relation to the role of the various Marxist groups. But instead what has occurred is that the different organisations promote their specific perspectives as if they had an exclusively principled character. In this context the assumption being made is that the rival groups have an unprincipled perspective for the class struggle. This means that there is no recognition of the necessity for discussion between the different groups concerning the development of a unified and credible programme which could provide principled perspectives for the advance of the class struggle. Instead the fact that the various organisations have rival leaderships seems to be sufficient to result in the rejection of the possibility of discussion about the development of a united front based on the role of an action programme to facilitate progress in the class struggle and the related generation of the development of the possibility to realise socialism. Hence the various splits that have occurred in the past seem to be sufficient to undermine any prospect of the creation of a situation of unity between the various Marxist organisations. In other words the interests of the development of the class struggle are not primary and instead the insular aspects of narrow organisational considerations means that the differences between rival groups are not overcome in terms of support for a common action programme in order to advance the possibility to realise socialism. Hence the initial position of the Communist International that it was able to recognise the necessity for unified political action between the various working class organisations in order to advance the realisation of the interests of the working class has been rejected in terms of the contrasting approach which assumes that only a particular political organisation is able to express the essence of the revolutionary interests of the workers. But the point is that the credibility of a given political approach can only be tested by the situation of the interaction of Marxist parties and the workers in relation to the demands of the class struggle. However the very possibility to establish this situation of interaction will be facilitated if the various groups are able to combine in terms of the promotion of an agreed and common strategy for the advance of the realisation of the objectives of socialism. Therefore, the very disunity of the various groups means that it is not possible to establish a situation of organisational and political credibility that would facilitate the realisation of influence of these organisations within the working class. Instead there is a collection of rival parties that are increasingly insignificant and as a result this situation of marginalisation means that they cannot become an expression of a process of the realisation of political interaction with the workers. In this context the very aim of the development of a coherent opposition to the interests of capitalism seems to be improbable given this situation of disunity and rivalry. Macnair comments: “The present task of communists/socialists is therefore not to fight for an alternative government. It is to fight to build an alternative opposition: one which commits itself to unambiguously to self-emancipation of the working class through extreme democracy, as opposed to all the loyalist parties.”(p130) But how can this credible type of opposition be created given the continual problem of sectarianism and its role in the undermining of the possibility to develop a effective opposition to the aims of bourgeois governments? The problem is that the united front does not seem to be a feasible possibility given this regressive role of sectarianism and the problem of the promotion of the interests of the particular type of organisation instead of an emphasis on the importance of unity in relation to providing an alternative to the domination of the bourgeois parties. In other words, Macnair’s aim of the creation of a situation of effective opposition to the capitalist system is constantly undermined by the importance of the problematical aspect of the lack of unity of the various socialist type organisations. This situation means that the perspective of the election of reformist organisations seems to be the only credible option and the constructive alternative to the constant problem of the ineffectiveness and sectarianism of the Marxist groups.

Macnair seems to suggest that such a situation can only be overcome by the realisation of the political supremacy of a principled communist party: “As I argued…..it is illusory to suppose that the policy of the united front can be applied as a substitute for overcoming the division of the Marxist left into competing sects. Without a united Communist party, the various ‘workers government’ and ‘workers party’ formulations of the Trotskyists are at best empty rhetoric, at worst excuses for a diplomatic policy towards the official left.”(p129-130) But what constitutes the authentic and principled Communist party? The problem is that various organisations claim to express this character. In this context the outstanding issue is the failure to acknowledge the importance of the rival group and instead it is being suggested that only the exclusive and unique organisation has the credentials to become the expression of the genuine revolutionary party. But the actual result of this disunity is the failure to develop a popular organisation that could establish a genuine possibility to realise mass support. Instead there is a situation of the rivalry of many different groups. Occasionally a particular group is able to achieve significant support as Militant did in relation to its role in the Anti-Poll tax campaign, but this situation is not frequent and generally the Marxist groups are characterised by their isolation from the mass movements. The result of this situation is the development of authoritarian organisations that are not characterised by the importance of the role of inner-party democracy and instead are based on the domination of various individual leaders. This means that the various mass struggles that develop tend to lack any relationship to the influence of the role of a revolutionary party. The result is that the demands of these mass activities is based on what can be achieved within the limits of capitalism. There is no connection of the spontaneous struggles with the intervening role of Marxism and so the aim of socialism is never raised. Instead it becomes accepted that the aspirations of mass movements have to be connected to what can be achieved within the present system. A militant reformist consciousness becomes more influential than the apparently unrealistic alternative of a revolutionary socialist approach. Indeed, the various left groups adapt to this situation and so the Socialist Workers party for example has promoted a vague perspective of radical change being realised by the role of the activist. The relationship of this approach to the aim of socialism becomes ambiguous and uncertain. Hence in a majority of instances the forces of revolutionary Marxism have become transformed into a collection of activist groups, and the result of this situation is that the very objective of socialism becomes merely a formality that has little relationship to the actual ideology and activity of the various left-wing parties. In other words, there is a serious crisis of Marxist politics which no group seems to be capable of being able to solve. Instead the result is the justification of a collection of illusions such as the view that at a certain moment the political conditions will be created for the realisation of the revolutionary consciousness of the workers. But such an understanding is based on hope rather than a realistic conception of the possibilities of the political situation. What is not understood is that only the expression of progress towards political unity will enable the forces of revolutionary Marxism to become credible. However, this development does not occur because of the differences and rivalries of the various groups and so it seems that the crisis of revolutionary Marxism cannot be resolved in a genuine manner. But such a situation means that the working class is without the influence of the perspectives of credible Marxism. This situation can only be advantageous to the supporters of capitalism.

Macnair suggests that what is necessary is the development of an international Communist party: “The need for an international is posed because the working class has concrete, immediate, practical international tasks. These are tasks of class solidarity – because the bourgeoisie uses national divisions in the working class to defeat strikes, etc. They are also tasks of formulating an independent class perspective on world affairs.”(p154) Therefore: “The need for an international is posed because the working class can only really understand its own strength and become conscious of itself as a ‘class for itself’ by becoming conscious of itself as an international class.”(p155) Thus: “In the third place the need for a international is posed because the working class cannot take power in a single country and wait for the proletariat of other countries to come to its aid. This is the fundamental lesson of degeneration and collapse of Comintern and the eventual fall of the ‘socialist countries’.(p155) But how is this importance of socialist internationalism to be created given what seems to be the inherently national character of politics? Macnair does not seem to answer this objection and instead only makes the apparently dogmatic conclusion that: “The struggle for an international is a present, concrete task of communists. It is clear, however, that this struggle cannot be carried on by creating yet another micro-international. It has to be carried on by fighting, on every occasion that allows, against bureaucratic centralism and the nationalism that goes hand in hand with it, and for the concrete tasks of the international: the global struggle for solidarity in the immediate class struggle, for the symbolic unity of the working class; and the continental struggle for working class political unification and political power.”(p156) But given the enduring influence of nationalism within the working class, and also influencing the actions of Marxist organisations, this perspective of Macnair seems to be an illusion. How can it become credible? In other words, the present situation is characterised by the complex situation of the rivalry of a collection of what are essentially rival national organisations. In this context the principles of internationalism can be nothing more than a formal principle which is not being realised at the level of political practice. So, the question arises: how can an effective international Marxist organisation be created? What is initially required is the commitment to the aim of the development of a revolutionary international by the various Marxist organisations. But this would require agreement about the details of a political perspective concerning the struggle for socialism. Hence it would be the task of various organisations to try and outline the aspects of this programme for the realisation of international unity. The content of this programme would try and outline the possibilities to develop the class struggle and so advance the possibility to realise the aim of socialism. It would be important not to let the political differences of the past undermine the prospect of making progress in this task of achieving general support and agreement for a programme to facilitate the development of international class struggle. Hence it would not be constructive to emphasise the differences of the past concerning the history of Trotskyism and this acceptance of tolerance would become the basis to promote the realisation of international political unity. It could be suggested that the basis of this programme would involve policies to develop mass opposition to the austerity perspective of the ruling class, and to facilitate militant action that could advance the realisation of the aim of socialism. It would also be necessary to make demands on the various reformist parties to carry out measures in the interests of the working class when in government. In this context the question as to whether the Soviet Union was state capitalist or a bureaucratic worker’s state becomes a complete irrelevance and a matter of theoretical discussion. Instead what is of importance is the development of an agreed programme for the generation of international class struggle against the domination of the interests of capital. This task would be connected to the acceptance of the necessity of discussion about the possibility to form a united revolutionary party on the basis of support for the action programme for the international class struggle. However, this process can only be based on the acceptance of the importance of the creation of a genuinely democratic socialist organisation in which it would be possible to discuss differences of opinion. The new organisations would be based on the holding of regular policy conferences and would be connected to the creation of leaderships that were truly accountable to the aspirations of the general membership of the parties. Furthermore, the new parties would also attempt to obtain the support of the various reformist parties for this programme of revolutionary change and so a close and cooperative relationship to the organisations of the workers would be considered to be a necessity. In contrast to this approach Macnair’s call for the formation of mass communist parties is an anachronism that seems to have little relevance in relation to the political tasks of the present. Instead we would suggest that what is important is the formation of a genuinely unified socialist party. The actual title of this organisation is of secondary importance.

In other words, the major problem is the issue of the development of genuine relations between the working class and the role of the revolutionary party. Without this development the Marxist organisation is isolated and lacking in political influence. But this has been the constant problem of the post-war period in which there has been the role of small groups that claim to express the interests of the workers. These organisations lack credibility because of the very fact that they have no genuine relationship to the people and instead seem to assume that at some moment they will become important and able to express the interests of the workers. But such a development never occurs because people cannot understand why the various Marxist groups are not united on the basis of the promotion of a common programme for the development of struggle in order to realise socialism. However, Macnair seems to evade discussion of these problems and instead asserts in a dogmatic manner the necessity of an international communist party in order to realise socialism. He comments: “Capitalism is an international system and both the capitalist class and the working class are international classes. The nation state is merely a firm within the international capitalist system; it is just as much vulnerable to the flight of capital and disinvestment as are individual firms. The working class can therefore lay collective hands on the means of production and decide democratically on their use on a world scale. The first and foremost lesson of the ‘short 20th century is the impossibility of socialism in one country. But exactly the same reasons mean it is impossible to have political power of the working class or the democratic republic – for more than a few months in a single country. The struggle for workers power is therefore a struggle for a global democratic republic and immediately for continental democratic republics.”(p166) Therefore he concludes that the objective of principled and feasible working class politics is to realise the development of an international socialist society. This means: “Further, it is impossible to have full class political consciousness – i.e., mass consciousness by the working class as itself a class and its independent interests in a single country. The independent class party of the working class, in the broadest sense, is necessarily an international party. Indeed, it is increasingly the case that cooperation of the working class in international class organisations is essential to defending the immediate interests of the workers in the direct class struggle.”(p166) But the problem with this supposed strategic approach is that it is based on the vague perspective of the realisation of an international democratic republic, and this aim is not outlined in more explanatory terms. What is the relationship of this objective to the ultimate objective of the realisation of international socialism? This connection is not indicated in more than a vague perspective. Instead we have the dogmatic assumption that in some inherent sense the struggle for the international democratic republic can be an inherent aspect of the class struggle. But this understanding is not outlined in convincing terms. Instead it is a dogmatic assumption without being connected to a valid standpoint. Instead we have to establish how it could be possible to develop political unity in national and international terms by the forces of revolutionary Marxism. What would be the programme that could generate this type of unity? This issue is not addressed by Macnair in any convincing manner. Instead his approach is based on the dogmatic assumption that an international Marxist party is necessary to promote the possibility of a conscious struggle for socialism. But the basis of this development is not outlined in any convincing manner. This means that his approach is based on a dogmatic perspective that is not credible and instead it is based on assumptions about what should happen rather than how this perspective of the formation of a genuine international party can be realised.

However it could be suggested that the primary issue that Macnair and the other commentators do not consider is how to achieve the realisation of the unity of the various Marxist groups which could if achieved make an important contribution to resolving the problem of the lack of a credible socialist organisation. Hence it is necessary to complete this article by trying to outline a perspective that could promote the possibility of the development of an international revolutionary party.

Firstly there has to be the awareness that capitalism is an international system and so the ultimate objective of the forces of revolutionary Marxism should be the understanding that the primary aim is the realisation of the success of the global working class in the achievement of a genuine form of the world system of socialism. This means that secondly the aim should be the creation of an effective international party with the aim of the achievement of an international system of socialism. This party should be based on the principles of democracy and the right to argue for various viewpoints in a tolerant manner. However, the aim of these discussions should be about the creation of a programme for the realisation of the aim of international socialism. But it also has to be recognised that the success of the struggle for socialism on a national basis can contribute to the progress of the overall victory of the global demise of capitalism. Thus, victories in national terms can make an important contribution to the progress of international socialism. But any national victory will be subject to the pressures of the forces of global capital and so this development will be inadequate until the victory of international socialism has been realised. In other words, the only aspect of the revolutionary programme that is rigid is the aim of the realisation of international socialism. Hence all aspects of the class struggle should be understood in terms of the role of democratic discussion and agreement about the strategy and tactics of the attempt to realise international socialism. It is possible to development agreement about these objectives if the various organisations agree to accept the importance of the objectives of the struggle to replace capitalism with socialism. However, at present this possibility is undermined by the fact that most organisations promote their own narrow organisational objectives to the detriment of the interests of creating a united and important party of Marxism. Hence the ultimate problem in relation to the development of the struggle for socialism is the influence of the bureaucracy, organisational conservatism of the various groups. It has not been possible to create a united revolutionary organisation that would be able to promote a common perspective that could become the basis to promote conscious opposition to capitalism by the working class. Indeed, the problem with the contributions of people like Matgamna and Macnair is that they ignore the importance of this issue of how to form a genuine and united revolutionary party. Instead they assume that only their approach can express the basis of the development of authentic Marxism. Hence the issue of political unity is ignored. But this narrow view ignores the fact that the groups they represent are very small and not influential. Instead the character of what is considered to be revolutionary Marxism is essentially defined by other organisations. This means that the situation is defined by the role of these bigger groups and so the views of Matgamna and Macnair are merely propaganda on behalf of small groups, and these approaches do not generate significant support. Instead we have to try and relate what we consider to be a principled approach to the task of developing support for these objectives in more popular and effective terms. We have to suggest to the bigger but also sectarian organisations that they have an interest in supporting a credible programme for the realisation of socialism. Hence it would be necessary to try and engage with the views of many different groups in order to try and promote the creation of a principled perspective of change from global capitalism to the realisation of international socialism. But in order to facilitate the development of a credible programme of revolutionary change we need to connect this understanding to a conception as to why Marxism is still relevant in relation to the contemporary situation of global capitalism. In other words, the regeneration of theory is connected to the possibility to promote principled forms of the class struggle. However, the problem has been that the various groups have been primarily concerned with the promotion of policies in order to try and increase their influence and so the importance of the more general questions about the development of the class struggle has not occurred in a convincing manner. Obviously, programmes connected with struggle have been developed but they have not attempted to address the issue of the credibility of socialism in the contemporary situation of global capitalism. Ultimately the validity of Marxism itself is connected to the possibility to address these issues in a convincing manner.

It could be argued that the failure to develop effective Marxist parties is an indication that the period of their importance is over. But this would be a premature conclusion to make because the alternative of spontaneous struggle is unable to effectively generate the possibility of the transformation of society in the direction of the realisation of socialism. Hence there is no alternative to the continued importance of the role of the revolutionary party despite the obvious difficulties involved in trying to realise the aim of socialism. Instead in order to indicate the importance and relevance of the revolutionary party it is initially necessary to develop the aspects of a programme to establish the possibility of the unity between the different organisations. In this manner it will become increasingly apparent to the workers that a serious and important political party has been formed in order to uphold their class interests. This development will not automatically result in mass support for the new organisation. But it will have established the vital aspects of what is required in order to make the objectives of Marxism seem relevant and important for the workers. In this context it could become possible to establish the basis of the genuinely popular revolutionary party. Hence the problems with the various approaches outlined in this article is that the various views outlined fail to support and promote a policy of revolutionary unity. Instead it is assumed that the supposedly principled character of the organisation of the various authors will at some point become the expression of the aspirations of the working class. This is the very perspective that has to be rejected because of its justification of sectarianism. Instead only the attempt to realise revolutionary unity will create a truly popular party that can develop mass support. Only in these circumstances can Marxism become the basis of the creation of an organisation that can develop mass support. Only in this situation can Marxism express the ability to represent and promote the attempt to realise the aspirations of the people in a serious manner. We would suggest that the following points should become part of the revolutionary programme of a united Marxist party. Firstly, the perspective that the realisation of socialism is an international process that involves the unity of the workers of many different countries. Secondly, the Marxist party should provide the leadership to defend the gains achieved for the workers within capitalism and to then extend this struggle into the more ambitious attempt to facilitate the transformation of society. Thirdly, this process would involve the realisation of workers control of production within capitalism, and to then utilise this development in order to end the domination of capital over labour and so facilitate the realisation of a more egalitarian society. Fourthly, the aim of socialism should be based on the application of the principles of democracy, and this aspect should be crucial to the character of the society that is the expression of the various mass struggles. Fifthly, the objective of socialism should be connected to the emancipation of all oppressed sections of capitalist society. Sixthly, it is vital to create an international organisation to represent the aspiration to realise these progressive objectives. Seventh the aim of socialism is connected to the ecological requirements of the world. Eighth, the workers should aim to create the necessary popular and democratic organisations required to realise the most progressive form of socialism. Ninth, the revolutionary party should make a commitment to the principles of democracy and as a result should reject any attempt to justify one party rule as the expression of the character of the socialist society being proposed. Tenth, the Marxists should try to provide adequate answers to the criticism of the supporters of capitalism concerning the character of socialism. In particular they should try and outline how socialism is not connected with the creation of an authoritarian society. In other words, it is important for the forces of revolutionary Marxism to provide adequate evaluation of the views of the defenders of capitalism. They have to show that socialism is not an expression of the authoritarian objectives of a party elite.

Obviously if the forces of Marxism provide this type of perspective it is not necessarily a guarantee of the success of socialism. However, what will have been established is the development of the political approach that is necessary in order to facilitate the realisation of socialism. Obviously, the creation of this type of revolutionary Marxist party with a systematic conception of its theory and understanding of political obligations is no guarantee of success in the class struggle. Indeed, there is no inevitable basis for the realisation of the aims of socialism. Instead the most that can be achieved is to promote the most principled and plausible understanding of the aims of revolutionary Marxism. However if there is success in this context then it will be possible to at least suggest that the forces of revolutionary Marxism have acted in the most principled and effective manner to advance the realisation of the possibility of the attainment of the aim of socialism. Some commentators would suggest that the era of the role of the revolutionary party is over. Instead the activists of the various mass struggles express the potential for the realisation of a more emancipatory society. But we would suggest that this is not the objective of these struggles and instead they aim to achieve their demands within the limits of capitalism. Hence the revolutionary party still retains its relevance in terms of the promotion of the aim of socialism as the effective manner in which the interests of humanity can be realised. There have been many problems associated with the role of the revolutionary party, but it is still required in order to facilitate the possibility to realise socialism. Hence the primary problem with this type of organisation does not concern its political character but is instead because of the distortions that have occurred which has meant that the Marxist party can become an expression of reactionary rather than revolutionary objectives. However, despite these limitations there is not a credible alternative to the continued importance of the organisation of the forces of socialism into a principled party. Thus, the greatest problem is actually the rejection of the principles of socialism in the name of various forms of expediency. But despite these problems the task remains to develop and construct a revolutionary party that can provide a leadership role in the struggle for socialism. In this context the realisation of principled unity is the major initial aspect of this possible development.