UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURE TO REALISE SOCIALISM PART 2

The recent general election rises the issue of the importance of the class consciousness of the working class because the apparent influence of the role of nationalism was obviously more important than that of ideology of socialism. It would seem that the appeal of Conservatism to the aspirations of the importance of nation was able to have a greater influence than the contrasting and opposed standpoint of the interests of the working class and its apparent connection to the aims of socialism. But this development is not a novel aspect of the character of the politics of the class struggle. It can be argued that the influence of the role of the nation has outweighed the apparently contrasting significance of class since the onset of the first world war. In this period the perspective of class interest was able to establish the support of the working class for the support of the various imperialist nations in the conflict that occurred from 1914. This situation was reinforced by the actions of the various socialist parties that generally supported the interests of the imperialist nation state in this conflict. Such a development was an indication that the politics of nation had a greater emotional appeal than the contrasting approach of the perspective of international working- class unity and the aim of socialism. But this development was encouraged by the fact that few people had little understanding of what was meant by socialism, which was an aspiration that had not been outlined in any convincing detail. Instead the discontent of the working class was primarily expressed in discontent of a trade union character, and this was connected to the struggle for various reforms in a political manner by various social democratic parties. But it was possible in relation to the exceptional circumstances of the onset of inter-imperialist war for the appeal of nation to be more influential than the competing claims of class. This situation was not challenged by the apparent failure of the various reformist parties to support an internationalism that was based on the unity of the working class of different countries. Instead the socialist organisations were uncritical supporters of their respective nations in the inter-imperialist war. In this context the working class of Europe considered that it had no alternative than to support the nation to which they belonged. But this development meant that a precedent was established of support for the given politics of nations by the workers in a situation of emergency. But this development became the basis of a generalised ideology of the conception of the national interest to which the social democratic parties and their working-class supporters adhered to. The result was that the very politics of the socialist organisations became defined in terms of the conception of the national interest and so as a result the objective of international socialism became obscured and rejected. Instead the character of the socialist type political parties was defined in terms of the importance of what was defined as the aims of the nation state, which was considered on the basis of the objectives of the given country in which any group of workers resided. This situation was apparently challenged by the realisation of the proletarian revolution in Russia, but the potential to uphold a new form of internationalism became obscured by the increasingly nationalist character of the Soviet state which meant that the aims of socialism became defined in terms of the interests of the USSR. In this manner the objectives of proletarian intentionalism became distorted in a new form. The result of this situation was that the objective of socialism became defined not in terms of the objectives of the international class struggle but was instead distorted and elaborated in terms of the narrow aims of the USSR. The result of this situation was that the working class either supported the traditional nationalism of Social Democracy or the primary interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. It was difficult to outline a principled alternative of the connection of genuine socialism to the role of internationalism in this context. This development meant that when actual revolutionary situations occurred as in relation to France, Germany and Spain in the 1930’s the possibility of the working class to change society was undermined by the influence of what had become the domination of the role of opportunist parties claiming to support socialism. In this context there was no genuine popular revolutionary party that was trying to establish the prospect of revolutionary change. It has to be suggested that what had become opportunist parties were opposing any aspirations within the working class to realise genuine socialism. In this context it seemed to have become obvious that the most effective expression of the interests of the working class seemed to be the role of traditional social democratic parties like the Labour party in the UK. The establishment of the welfare state in the UK was an attractive alternative to the domination of Eastern Europe by the Soviet bureaucracy in the name of socialism. In terms of the onset of the cold war it was a logical option to support the USA and its defence of liberal capitalism in contrast to the authoritarianism upheld by the Soviet Union. The very aim of socialism seemed to have become discredited by the repressive political practices of the Communist party of the USSR. In this context the most progressive objective seemed to be the reform of capitalism as opposed to what seemed to be the totalitarian character of the realisation of socialism. It was a logical expression of these developments for the majority of the working class of Western Europe to support moderate social democracy. This situation was ideologically upheld by the role of many books that supported the importance of the welfare state and so implied that socialism had become superfluous. Such developments were connected to the association of revolutionary Marxism with authoritarianism. The class interests of the workers became associated with reformism in a convincing manner, and this development was connected to the importance of the post-war boom which was able to provide the working class with various social benefits. It seemed that the very progressive developments within society had led to an end of the practical importance and necessity of the socialist transformation of capitalism. The objectives and interests of the working class could be realised within the present character of the economy and society. This situation was also reinforced by the views of supposed Marxists like Herbert Marcuse who considered that capitalist society had become too affluent to be able to facilitate the importance of the aim of socialism. The workers no longer had an interest in socialism and instead this objective was unconvincingly connected to the role of minority groups like students and oppressed sections of society. But this perspective was not convincing because it could be argued that the aspirations of these sections could be realised by militant struggles within society, as with the actions of racial minorities women and gays and lesbians. Hence the affluent society of the 1960’s seemed to imply that the era of revolutionary change was over, but the complacency of this standpoint was challenged by the revolutionary developments in France 1968 which indicated the importance of new forms of worker and student unrest. But after this situation was resolved the apparent challenges to capitalism were no longer important. Instead political stabilisation seemed to indicate that capitalism was still dominant and that no groups had a strategic aspiration for the establishment of a socialist alternative. In this context how was it possible for various Marxist intellectuals to outline a convincing argument for socialism based on the role of the working class as the major agency of social change? It seemed that the importance of economic affluence had resolved the issue of the necessity of socialism. Developments within capitalism had been able to overcome the problems of the period 1914-45 that had led to mass support for the aspiration for radical changes to society. Hence Marxists would have to outline a convincing argument in favour of socialism in relation to these new conditions.

In other words the period since the late 1960’s has seemed to express the apparent lack of support for the perspective of revolutionary socialism and this has been expressed by the small size of the Marxist organisations and the apparent ability of the parties of conservatism and support for capitalism to be continually re-elected despite the imposition of policies of austerity. It would seem that this situation could have led to the development of the increased influence of Marxism because of the apparent limitations of capitalism, but instead there has been a generalised demoralisation within the working class and the related acceptance of the continuation of capitalism. Furthermore, the various Marxist organisations have lacked credibility and have tended to defend dogmatic policies that have been unable to develop forms of popular support. Hence there has been a combined problem of the lack of effectiveness of the Marxist organisations combined with a low level of class consciousness of the workers. The result of this situation has been the tendency for the influence of the views of conservatism to become popular, and there has been considerable sections of the working class that have been inclined to support right wing politics, and this has resulted in the election of right wing governments. In contrast the role of Marxist parties has continued to decline, and their situation has been expressed by their continued irrelevance and inability to have an influence on the character of the political situation. However, the Marxist groups have not tried to analyse the reasons for their decline and ineffectiveness. Instead they have continued to argue in favour of socialism in terms that ignore the apparent problems of the present situation. For example, the serious defeat of the Labour party in the 2019 general election in the UK is considered to be because of the limitations of the role of Jeremy Corbyn and is not connected to the support of workers for the populist agenda of the Conservative party. The point that is not being addressed is that the appeal of nationalism seems to be more important than the alternative approach of the solidarity of class. Instead the very unity of the working class is being expressed in terms of the popular support for the approach of defence of the national interest. In this context the importance of nation is the manner in which the conception of the role of class is being expressed in these reactionary terms. It would seem that that the approach of socialism has little support and relevance for the vast majority of the working class. This aspect is expressed by the justification of the role of the nation in the approaches of most of the leadership contenders in relation to the contest in the Labour party. In this context it would seem that it is understood that the appeal to the role of class has become politically insignificant. This aspect is also being expressed by the continued marginalisation of the role of the Marxist organisations which express an incapacity to relate to the aspirations of working people. The crucial question that arises is how can this dire situation be changed and transformed into increased support for Marxism and the politics of socialism?

This adverse situation is not being transformed in a constructive manner in terms of the creation of a single Marxist organisation with a credible programme for the realisation of socialism, and in these terms the very conception of socialism would be outlined in a detailed and convincing manner. Instead the aspect of the differences between what are competing small groups means that the aims of Marxism do not seem to be credible and this aspect is expressed by the illusion that the particular small organisation will somehow become the popular organisation of the working class. This issue is reinforced by the failure of the Marxist groups to have a credible relationship with the Labour party. The result is that they do not seem to accept that the most effective strategy they could advocate under the given circumstances is the election of a left wing Labour government that could express the possibility of introducing radical measures that could improve the social conditions of working people. Instead the various Marxist organisations lack an effective and coherent strategy, and this means that they have been unable to develop a coherent attitude in relation to the possibilities that could be expressed by a left wing Labour government in relation to the realisation of the interests of working people. But this failure is part of the general inability to realise that the major reason why the working class does not support the aims of either reformism or socialism is because of the popularity of the nationalism of parties like the Conservatives. It is necessary to develop an approach that would be able to undermine the appeal of the type of nationalism that is being promoted by the Conservative government. The point is that the failure to tackle this issue is connected to the problem of the generation of support for a socialist alternative to capitalism. This is because the importance of nation seems to be the manner in which people are able to express their aspirations in a manner that seems to be emotionally satisfying and so is relevant compared to the apparently obscure and remote aim of socialism. Hence the very conception of the solidarity of class is being undermined and opposed by the contrasting appeal of nation and its seemingly convincing capacity to be able to unite people of all classes around common objectives. In this context the approach of socialism seems to be irrelevant when compared to the accessible and immediate aim of the unity of the nation in terms of the rejection of the relationship of the UK to the European Union.

The problems outlined above are intensified by the issue of the lack of a strategy for the realisation of socialism and the apparent inability to define what is meant by socialism. In a vague manner it is still being suggested that class struggle is the basis to achieve socialism, but what does class struggle mean in contemporary reality? It could be argued that the realisation of workers control of the process of economic activity is the primary objective of a strategy that would attempt to transform the character of the process of production of the present system. But how realistic is this objective given the successful undermining of the economic power of the workers since the onset of the era of austerity since the 1980’s. The point is that workers have been demoralised and disorganised by this offensive of capital and the very result has been the increased influence of reactionary nationalist views, and this development has been to the benefit of the populism of the Conservative party. Hence it would seem that what is most important is to try and generate the ideological conditions for the reassertion of the importance of class consciousness. But the problem is that such a possibility would seem to involve the prospect of successful struggles by workers in defence of their interests, but such a possibility does not seem likely under the given conditions. Therefore, the emphasis would seem to be able the importance of the election of a radical Labour government which could result in the development of the expectations and aspirations of working people. But this prospect does not seem likely given the convincing election of a reactionary Conservative government. Therefore, the prospects for the revival of the influence of the approach of socialism seems to be problematical because of the apparent importance of the role of nation when compared to that of class. Given the problematical significance of these aspects it would seem that there is no alternative to the realisation of the task of the successful development of a credible Marxist party that would be able to interact with the working class in terms of the promotion of the aim of socialism. This process would involve the development of a united organisation that would be able to outline the arguments for socialism in a credible and popular manner. Such a development would involve the determination of this party to influence the Labour party in terms of the advocacy of a programme that would aim to transform capitalism in a progressive manner. However, this approach would not be credible if the policy being supported was not based on the importance of the role of the workers in the process of the transformation of society. The major limitation of the Labour party 2019 election manifesto was that it was an expression of the standpoint of change by the government and the role of the people was to be merely supporting. Hence this manifesto did not seem to be a convincing advocacy of what could be realised by the actions of the people, and instead what was being outlined was the justification of a form of socialism from above. In contrast the standpoint of the Conservatives, of ‘getting BREXIT done’ seemed to be a more genuine and popular expression of the will of the people. As a result of the more credible standpoint of the Conservatives they won a majority in the 2019 general election. Hence it is necessary to outline the aim of socialism in a manner that indicates its correspondence to the aspirations and objectives of working people. The problem is that at present socialism seems to be an irrelevant objective that has little connection with the aspirations and potential of working people. In this context the standpoint of nationalism seems to be more relevant and so a more effective expression of the will and aims of the people. However, if socialism is to be made relevant the very arguments in its favour have to be elaborated in imaginative and new forms. It is not sufficient to suggest that socialism is about nationalisation and increased public services. Instead the principles of the possibility for the people to be able to develop their own capacity and abilities to organise the economy and society have to be outlined in new imaginative terms. In this context the possible dynamism of socialism has to be contrasted with the exploitation and alienation of capitalism. Hence it is not sufficient to outline the role of a socialist government that would act on behalf of the people. Instead it is necessary to establish the possibilities for working people to be able to act in order to generate control over their own productive and social activity.

However the success of this perspective means persuading working people of the viability and practicality of the perspective of socialism, which means generating a sense of confidence that it is possible to realise the objective of the transformation of society in a revolutionary manner This means that the influence of bourgeois ideology and support for the conservatives has to be undermined and replaced with the confidence that it is possible to establish the importance of an alternative to capitalism. In this context it is vital that a conception of how the realisation of socialism can be established has to be outlined in terms of an indication of the feasibility of mass struggle to be the basis of the success of this alternative to capitalism. But the possibility of the success of this approach means that the conception of the durability of the present system has to be effectively questioned. This is a difficult task because people have been accustomed to the apparent unchangeable fact that capitalism seems to be a type of society that it is not possible or feasible to replace with an alternative. Such an understanding has been encouraged by the view that the conservative party are the people who know how to administer and organise society in the most efficient manner. This aspect of deference is the most important factor undermining the possible development of militant class consciousness. In this context the various Marxist organisations seem to be both dogmatic and unrealistic because they refuse to accept the importance of these reactionary influences and instead appear to reside in a realm of illusion. The result of this situation is that their politics do not seem to be realistic and instead seem to be dependent on the importance of dogmatic reasoning. Hence this means that their politics is not convincing and instead people prefer the apparent realism of the approach of the Conservatives and other defenders of capitalism. In this context the only feasible alternative to the ideology of the Conservatives seems to be the views of the various leaders of the Labour party. Marxism is marginalised because of its apparent dogmatic understanding of reality and its refusal to accept the apparent superiority of the capitalist system. Such a situation is made worse by the fact that the Marxists do not outline in convincing detail concerning what the mean by socialism. Hence, they seem to be critics of the system in the most dogmatic and unconvincing manner. The result of this situation is that Marxism does not become a popular ideology. Such a development is only made worse by the inability of the various Marxist groups to unite in what could be the basis of the creation of an effective organisation. The result of the situation of the apparent complexity of the rival views of the many different and small Marxist groups is that people consider that they have no alternative than to support either the Conservative or Labour party. However, the election of Corbyn as the leader of the Labour party seemed to provide some credibility for the alternative of democratic socialism. But this option seems to have been seriously discredited by the results of the 2019 general election. There was little support for the radical Labour manifesto and instead the rival views of populist nationalism acquired what seems to have been genuine mass support. The result of these developments is that the standpoint of left wing politics has been discredited in a serious manner and so the standpoint of socialism has become marginalised and is considered to be nothing more than a discredited tradition of the past of the Labour party.

In these adverse circumstances it is necessary to elaborate the arguments in favour of socialism as the alternative to capitalism. This means outlining the view that the capitalist system because of the durability of economic crisis, which is expressed in the politics of austerity, is no longer able to provide the prospect for the realisation of social and economic advances. Instead it is a system that can only thrive in terms of the process of the undermining of the material and cultural interests of the people. This is why only a system based on the realisation of the dynamic initiative of the people can be a genuine improvement and alternative to the limitations of the present. This is why we have to develop the credibility of the reasons as to why socialism should replace the capitalist system. But this understanding is not merely an expression of the role of propaganda and the outline of what is meant by socialism. Instead we have to also outline the possibility of the importance of a strategy that will enable the potential for socialism to be realised. In this context it is necessary to elaborate the understanding that the very character of capitalism is based on the dynamism of the role of labour. This means that labour can express the possibility to end the superfluous importance of the domination of capital and instead establish an economic system without the importance of the aspect of exploitation. It is only the influence of bourgeois ideology that persuades people that this present situation cannot be challenged and transformed. The task of Marxism is to elaborate the reasons as to why the very productive activity of people within capitalism could become the basis of the realisation of an alternative economic system. If increasingly numbers of people became convinced by this understanding it could motivate the development of struggle to realise an alternative to capitalism. However, the insular concerns of the various Marxist groups mean’s that their central concern is not about how to develop the class consciousness of the workers. Instead they are motivated by the objective of being more important than their rivals. In this context they are not concerned with the tasks of the class struggle and instead are motivated by the insular concerns of maintaining the loyalty and support of the members of their particular grouping. The result of this situation means that the various groups have no effective relationship to the tasks of the development of class struggle and the realisation of socialism. Instead what has resulted is the role of organisations that have accepted the domination of capitalism in practice. In other words, the Marxist groups have no effective connection to the requirements of the class struggle. They do not as a result outline the reasons for socialism in a coherent and persuasive manner. Instead the task of providing reasons for socialism is the task of various intellectuals located mainly outside the Marist organisations. Hence it would seem to be logical to try and unite the Marxist intellectuals in terms of a coherent party type organisation. But the emphasis on the importance of intellectual freedom undermines the realisation of this development, and instead the intellectuals are based on the formation of diverse schools of Marxist theory. The result of this situation is that there is effectively no organisation that is able to promote a Marxist approach in an effective manner.

Some people would argue that this situation is not problematical because it is the task of the working class to liberate itself without having an organisational and political relationship to any type of revolutionary party. The importance of the party is considered to be the legacy of the influence of Leninism. But the point is that the very lessons of history seem to indicate that without the role of a Marxist party the working class will not be able to realise a process of self-emancipation. Therefore, resolving the issue of the role of the party would seem to be crucial to the prospect of achieving the revolutionary transformation of society and developing socialism. But the importance of the party cannot be differentiated from the issue of the aspect of programme. It is necessary to elaborate a credible programme for the realisation of socialism if the development of the party is to be a successful task. At present there is neither a credible party and nor is there any serious systematic elaboration of a perspective for the realisation of socialism. It could be argued that this task was resolved by Trotsky’s elaboration of the Transitional programme. But the point is that this programme was written in the 1930’s and so is likely to be antiquated in important aspects. The task is to develop a new programme that is able to relate to the challenges of the present. Obviously, the successful elaboration of a new programme will not resolve the issue of the creation of a credible revolutionary party, but at least this development will mean that progress has been made towards the possible creation of an effective Marxist organisation. However, such an advance has to be connected to the realisation of the development of a united revolutionary party. Only in this manner will it be able to relate to the aspirations of the working class in meaningful terms. Hence the sectarianism of the various Marxist groups is an important limitation that undermines the possibility to create a credible organisation with an agreed and serious programme.

But the important issue is still the problems involved in the development of a left-wing consciousness within the working class. This point is indicated by the significance of the emergence of a type of nationalist populism which is counterposed to the development of class consciousness. The forces of the Marxist left have been unable to explain this development and have actually tried to ignore its importance and instead have often accommodated to this situation by the attempt to develop a left- wing expression of the aspiration for BREXIT. But such an approach has not had any influence and instead the sections of the working class have supported the nationalist appeal of the Conservative party. The result of these developments is that the appeal of nationalism seems to have undermined the possibility to generate support for what would be a socialist form of internationalism. The result of this development is that most people adhere to the importance of nation instead of class. In this context the various Marxist organisations have been unable to explain this situation and instead have tried to continue to reconcile the divergent approach of nation and class in terms of the promotion of the standpoint of a left-wing form of BREXIT. But what is actually occurring is that class consciousness is at its lowest level and this explains the indifference of people concerning the policies of the Labour party manifesto at the 2019 general election which outlined a defence of the welfare state and an end to austerity economics. Whatever the limitations of this manifesto it was necessary for Marxists to defend its most progressive policies and to support the formation of a Labour government in these terms. Instead the popularity of the appeal of nationalism led to the successful re-election of a Conservative administration which is based on the eclectic aim of the promotion of economic growth in order to satisfy the economic aspirations of its increasing working-class voters. In this context the undermining of class consciousness means that the challenges for Marxist is immense. The initial task is to ensure that the left-wing character of the leadership of the Labour party is retained by the election of a new left-wing leader. But the primary task is to reflect on the issue as to why the Labour party general election manifesto was not popular and instead was considered to be dogmatic and irrelevant in relation to the aspirations of the people. The problem is that the demoralisation caused by the imposition of austerity politics has meant that the issue of social improvement has been replaced by the alienated consciousness of an emphasis on the greatness of the UK, a greatness which has been undermined by membership of the EU. The importance of the prestige of the nation has replaced social concerns, or there is the vague hope that the Conservative government of Boris Johnston will end the era of austerity and generate a situation of increased affluence. In this context it would seem that the programme of economic and social progress of the Labour party has become irrelevant, and this viewpoint is encouraged by the scepticism about the possibility of the election of a Labour government in the foreseeable future. Hence the aspirations of the people seem to be expressed by the role of the Conservatives who claim that the era of austerity is being replaced by economic prosperity. At present people have a tendency to believe these claims.

In other words, class consciousness and support for the Labour party is declining and this aspect is connected to the apparent irrelevance of Marxist organisations. Instead it would seem that the Conservatives are politically in the ascendency and the very prospect of the working changing society has been undermined by the apparent domination of reactionary ideology. It can be suggested that the influence of the ideas of the ruling elite has led to the acceptance of a situation of subordination within society by the majority of the working class. However, we have to suggest that this development is not universal. There is a section of the working class, often based in the public sector, which is still loyal to the Labour party and the role of the trade unions. Hence what is required is to encourage this advanced sector of the working class to try and develop popular support for the objectives of genuine defence of the role of the welfare state and the necessity of the increased democratisation of society. The point being made is that it is the task of the vanguard of the class to try and interact with the working class in general in order to create increased support for the aims of the defence of the interests of the people as opposed to the ultimate objective of the Conservatives to promote the objectives of the ruling class. But the major problem is that there is no consistent political interaction between the class consciousness workers with the more reactionary inclined workers. The result of this situation is that the less advanced workers act in a manner that is opposed to the genuine expression of their class interests. This situation does not seem to have the potential of being transformed in progressive terms. However, what could generate progress would be if the Labour party became convinced of the necessity to develop its effective ability to argue in favour of its politics. One of the problems of the general election was that people were unaware of what the Labour manifesto represented. This situation was because the Labour party leadership did not try to explain their policies in terms of popular slogans. Instead there was no attempt to develop support for the objectives of the manifesto. The result was that the issue of BREXIT was allowed to become of primary importance and the result was the development of popular adherence to a national chauvinist approach. The popular appeal of nationalism meant that all the various policies of the Labour manifesto became seem to be irrelevant in relation to the concerns of people. Nationalism has provided an emotional dynamic that has generated irrationalism and the apparent rejection of the role of politics based on the importance of class interests. The only alternative seems to be opportunist acceptance of the importance of nationality or the attempt to develop the arguments for socialism in a more serious and consistent manner. However, the disarray of the Marxist groups means that they do not seem to be able to effectively realise the objectives of this challenge. Indeed, they do not recognise the importance of providing an elaboration of an understanding of the importance of an internationalist conception of socialism. Instead most of the groups uphold the activist view that the role of the struggles of the people, such as ecological groups or workers on strike, will somehow resolve the important political issues of the importance of the development of class struggle. But what is not tackled in relation to this perspective are the problems associated with the limitations of the various mass actions and the inability of these developments to become the basis of serious opposition to the ruling class. Furthermore, struggles will not in and of themselves solve the issue of the continued ideological domination of the ruling class within society. The point being made is that there is no alternative to the development of the increased influence of a genuine socialist approach and in that manner the effective undermining of the hegemony of views that uphold the interests of capitalism. This possible development can only mean the elaboration of the approach that is able to indicate in more convincing terms why socialism is in the interests of working people. The failure to realise this task means that the apparent prospects of the effective advance of the working class becomes defined in terms of the policies of the Labour party. Hence the actual failure of the Labour party to generate support for its politics is also a failure of the Marxist groups to develop the credibility of their alternatives to capitalism. Indeed, these very conceptions of socialism are often vague and unsatisfactory. The result of this situation is that the defence of the system outlined by the Conservatives seems to be the most convincing explanation of the potential to realise the interests of the people. The Conservatives have the advantage that they can defend what is the actual present situation as opposed to the apparent uncertainties of a different type of society. The result of this situation means that the aims of the Labour party become to be considered to be unrealistic, and the objectives of the Marxists are not understood. The Conservatives have the advantage that they can reject any alternative policies as being unrealistic, and as a result they have the apparent advantages of seeming to have the most credible approach. What is required is that Marxists and the Labour party outline a conception of the alternatives to capitalism that seems to be both feasible and imaginative. But this means developing the confidence of the people that they can establish a situation in which they are able to change society. It is necessary that the understanding of the importance of the self-initiative of the people acquires popular support. But this means that the present domination of the influence of alienated consciousness has to be undermined and replaced by a confidence in the recognition that people can change society.

Such a development requires that the influence of the conception of the importance of the nation as the expression of the character of the community of society be replaced by the development of the significance of the solidarity of class. However, the very low level of class struggle undermines this possibility and instead the importance of the role of community and cooperation becomes defined in terms of the understanding of the character of the nation as the most important type of social organisation. This aspect is reinforced by the referendum on the issue of BREXIT which seems to justify the view that the character of the UK is defined in terms of a distinct and sperate relation to the EU. In this context the importance of the international solidarity of the working class seems to be an impractical approach that has little connection to the greater importance of the forms of community that are established by the role of the nation. The ideology of the Conservatives reinforces this sense of a distinct nation, and the alternative of the international unity of class is rejected in favour of the conception of a historic type of society that is expressed by a understanding of a shared history and sense of belongness. In this situation the approach of internationalism becomes the ideology of the small groups of Marxists, and most of them uphold important compromises with the influence of nationalism concerning the issue of BREXIT. Such a development also means that the aim of socialism is rejected as being an expression of an international ideology of Marxism, and instead support for capitalism becomes an aspect of what it means to be a proponent of British nationalism. This development occurs in a period when the very merits of militant class struggle have become discredited and the trade unions have a declining importance within society. The ideologues of the Conservative party take advantage of this situation and associate the merits of capitalism with the role of the nation state. The doctrine of imperialism is utilised in order to provide a history of the British nation, and the creation of the welfare state by the Labour government of 1945 becomes reinterpreted in order to emphasis the creation of national institutions like the NHS. In this context the role of the monarchy is glorified in order to justify this conception of a unique national history and traditions, and the significance of the role of the organisations of the working class is denied by this ideological and selective interpretation of history. Instead the mythology of a united nation is elaborated, and in this context the character of the working class becomes interpreted in terms of the conception of the connection of the people with the role of the nation. The emotional aspects of this standpoint become the expression of a powerful ideology in which the importance of social class and class struggle is replaced by the mythology of the united nation. The overall result of this ideological process is to deny the importance and relevance of the approach of socialism. Instead what has occurred is the elaboration of the defence of capitalism in the name of the justification of the traditions of the nation. In other words, socialism becomes rejected in popular terms because it is the doctrine of elite intellectuals like Marx, and the character of the nation becomes connected to the expression of traditions and institutions that defend the continuation of the capitalist system. In terms of the ideology of nationalism the working class convinces itself that the continuation of the domination of capital over labour is acceptable. There is no alternative to this system, and instead socialism is an abstract doctrine that has no genuine connection to the task of the realisation of the improvement of society. Instead this aim can only be expressed and realised in terms of the progress of the national form of capital within the context of the competitive character of the world economy.

Therefore, socialism has become an abstract doctrine that lacks popular support. Hence the expression of support for Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour party is not because of his ultimate adherence to the aim of socialism but is instead because of the progressive criticism he outlines in terms of the limitations of capitalism. Furthermore, the general population do not share this enthusiasm for Corbyn and instead have a sceptical attitude about his personality. The result of this situation was the serious defeat of the Labour party in the 2019 general election. This situation is an indication of the necessity to develop a credible argument in favour of socialism and to indicate the importance of the role of class instead of nation. Without the success of this approach it would seem to be unlikely that a left-wing project based on the aim of socialism can establish the necessary mass support required for its success. But how can this prospect occur given the profound emotional character of the support for nationalism within the working class? The answer of the Marxist left is to promote the importance of struggles which will as a result create the political conditions for the development of the influence of class consciousness instead of nationalism. But the problem is that economic type struggles cannot have an important effect unless they become transformed into a general strike type of social activity. However, this means that the importance of class struggle acquires precedence over the competing claims of the importance of the nation. But how is such a process of the transformation of consciousness to occur? Only the increased role and leadership of Marxist organisations would seem to imply an answer to this question. But the Marxist organisations are ineffective because of their refusal to unite in one larger and more effective group and so the result is that this sectarianism means that they remain irrelevant in relation to the interests of the workers. Hence the problems seem to be too difficult to be resolved in a constructive manner and the result of this situation is the continued domination of the capitalist system. In other words, the sectarianism of the Marxist left can only contribute to the view that the capitalist system is the only credible possibility and that there is no alternative to this situation. Furthermore, the various Marxist groups tend to uphold the importance of activism and so in this manner deny the significance of the influence of nationalism within the working class. The next struggle will result in the overcoming of the ideological limitations of the workers! Hence it seems that there is no alternative to the role of individual Marxists trying to provide credible analysis of the issues involved in the class struggle. This development is necessary in order to generate the intellectual climate that could both tackle the complex issues of the political situation and outline the arguments in favour of the creation of a united and non-dogmatic Marxist organisation. If this aim was to be realised it could not automatically resolve the issues and challenges of the class struggle. The working class would still have a nationalist orientation on this situation. Nevertheless, the organisation could have been created that would be seriously determined to meet the challenges of the ideological and political situation. This party would become a focus of attraction to serious people who would also be motivated to try and provide answers to the complexities of the political situation. In this context an analysis of nationalism within the working class could be developed and the arguments in favour of internationalism could be elaborated in new and non-dogmatic terms. Hence the beginning of the process of trying to address the challenges of a complex political situation begins with the creation of a united and democratic Marxist organisation that is willing to discuss important issues like the influence of nationalism within society. The democratic character of this organisation would mean that it becomes attractive to many people. As a result, this type of party would begin the process of the elaboration of a strategy that would facilitate the development of the class consciousness of the working class so that the influence of nationalism becomes replaced internationalism and the aim of socialism. However, it is necessary to recognise that this development is complex and requires the theoretical progress of Marxism. Therefor the ultimate problem and limitation is that of dogmatism. It is necessary to understand that Marx and Lenin are not complete theorists with all the answers and that instead we need to be creative Marxists who are willing to be flexible and provide new perspectives concerning the important issues of the class struggle. This means that a genuine Marxist party has to be democratic and without any tendency for the justification of orthodoxy and dogmatism. Only in this manner will it be possible to develop an organisation that is capable of becoming popular and in that sense also democratic. Therefore, the ultimate problem is actually the authoritarian and orthodox character of the various Marxist parties. Only the creation of democratic Marxist party can facilitate the possibility that it acquires an influence in relation to the development of the class struggle. The ultimate problem of the class struggle is possibly about the role of the Marxist party.

But this question of the importance of the party is connected to the advocacy of a strategy that will provide an alternative to the influence of nationalism within the working class and instead express the possibility to develop mass struggle that will create the conditions for socialism. This question of the character of a strategy for the realisation of socialism is discussed by Mike Macnair in ‘Revolutionary Strategy’ (November Publications, London 2008) The starting point of the approach of Macnair is the importance of the role of collective action of the working class in order to realise the aim of the creation of a communist society. But the problem is how can this perspective be successfully realised given the importance of the domination of bourgeois ideology which continually generates reasons why this approach should not be applied. In other words, the very character of the capitalist system is based on the importance of the view that the role of individual action should be more important than the collective action as the basis of the possibility to improve the conditions of people. This standpoint implies that the organisation of the workers in trade unions will not realise a situation of advance of the interests of working people when compared to the attempt to realise individual progress. The merit of this perspective from the point of view of the interests of capital is that it does not undermine the continuation of the domination of capital. On the other hand, the collective organisation of the workers in order to defend their interests always has the possibility that the result of this aspect could be the creation of a challenge to the continued domination of capital over labour. Hence the perspective of Marxism is to advocate the development of powerful trade union organisation. However, the period since the 1970’s has expressed the issue of the defeat of the collective struggles of the working class. Macnair analyses this development in the following manner: “On the side of positive judgement, it is true that the defeats the workers movement has suffered since the new ‘roll-back’ offensive of capital began in the late 1970’s give superficial reasons for doubt and despair. But even amid these defeats and in defeated struggles, the working class has shown the ability to draw in behind it all the oppressed and exploited in struggles like the 1984-85 miners’ strike in Britain, while new movements – often expected by the left – have arisen and shaken local states, as again the 1980’s, in Brazil, South Korea and South Africa. These too have run into the sand. But the whole history of the workers movement – before Marx and Engels as well as after is not one of continuous advance but of advance and retreat. The present retreats do not in themselves give grounds for supposing ‘good-bye to the working class.” (p30-31) But the problem with this perspective is that it underestimates the ideological results of various defeats of the collective struggles of the workers. The result has been a tendency to reject the importance of activity by the trade unions and to instead emphasise the importance of individual advancement. This situation has been intensified by the importance of the situation of recession and austerity which has contributed to the understanding that collective action is difficult and impractical. Instead the defence of the interests of the workers is about individual advancement within society. Such an understanding is also facilitated by the inability to develop credible revolutionary organisations which could promote an influential strategy for mass action to realise socialism. Instead the various organisations have tended to uphold a dogmatic conception of the possibility of collective struggle and so ignored the difficulties imposed by what has been an unfavourable balance of class forces. Primarily, the problem is that of the failure to create popular revolutionary parties that could develop the influence of a strategy for change. As Macnair observes the role of the trade unions is not sufficient to promote the realisation of socialism. Instead it is necessary to develop the important influence of the role of a party, but this is precisely what has not occurred in the period since the second world war. Instead the spontaneous activity of the workers has not been sufficient and has lacked the conscious purpose necessary to realise the possibility of socialism. Furthermore, in the situation of the development of globalisation it is necessary to generate the development of the interactional actions of the working class, as Macnair outlines. But this possibility is undermined by the influence of nationalism and the very lack of awareness of the international character of the global economy. The nationalist inclinations of the workers are combined with a general scepticism about the importance of collective action in order to defend class interests and so create the possibilities of social change. Macnair’s important theoretical limitation is that he underestimates the importance of nationalism as the major ideological reason why the possibility to develop collective class activity does not occur. This limitation is combined with a general scepticism about the feasibility of the international mass struggle of the workers. Instead it would seem that the prospect of improving the social conditions of the people is connected to the role of individual advancement. The influence of this perspective is combined with the lack of credibility of the Marxist organisations. Hence the aim of socialism has little credibility. Instead of seriously discussing these issues in a consistent manner, Macnair seems to imply that a revival of the class struggle will regenerate the importance of the issue of socialism. But this is an optimistic approach that lacks credibility given the significance of the defeats of the workers in collective struggle. Macnair also underestimates the importance of this aspect of social reality. However, he is aware of the serious character of the problem of the failure to develop viable revolutionary parties. He connects this issue to the limitation of sectarianism and the inability to establish forms of unity of the various revolutionary organisations that would create the conditions for the development of a single and viable Marxist party in each country. However, this issue is also connected to the situation of the class struggle and its challenges. The problems associated with the failure to transform the various militant struggles into a challenge to the domination of capitalism has contributed to the situation of crisis and sectarian issues in relation to the competing opposition between the various Marxist parties. The problem of the party is ultimately connected to the challenges posed by the class struggle.

MacNair is right to suggest that the situation of working-class politics is connected to what has become a crisis of the politics of reformism in the period of the offensive of capital against the social gains of the post war period. The consciousness of many sections of workers was connected to the aspiration that social progress could be made by the introduction of reforms that would in some sense introduce the aims of the modification of the capitalist system in the interests of the people. This approach was also utilised in order to marginalise revolutionary Marxism. However, the offensive of the forces of capital and conservatism since the 1980’s has led to a general crisis of the approach of reformism, or the modification of reformism in terms of the interests of capital as occurred with the Blair led Labour party. However, Marxism has not been able to uphold a credible strategy to try and undermine the consolidation of the domination of capital in this situation and instead has continued to decline in importance. The result of this development is that the very notion of the importance of collective struggle has become discredited and instead the aim of individual self-advancement has become increasingly influential. Macnair suggests that the alternative to this situation of the effective stabilisation of capitalism seems to be provided by the role of the mass strikes of the workers which results in a general strike to challenge the domination of the capitalist system. This perspective can be connected to the creation of Soviet type organisations which generate the development of popular democracy that is able to represent the possibilities of the formation of a new type of socialist society. However, he also considers that the integrity of the Soviets can be undermined by the development of the domination of the exclusive revolutionary party and so this issue has to be resolved if the possible of a credible form of popular democracy is to be genuinely established. But this issue is resolved if the major revolutionary party accepts the principles of the role of a multi-party democracy within the Soviets. In this manner the Soviets can express both the dynamics of revolutionary change and yet also not compromise the expression of a situation of competition between the parties. This development is expressed by the acceptance of all of the parties of the Soviets of the necessity of democratic elections in order to establish the political credibility of this organisation. The actual major issue is how to develop the class consciousness of the workers so that the formation of the Soviets as an alternative popular authority within society is realised. The point is that the workers generally accept the legitimacy of the Parliamentary system of bourgeois democracy because they support the capitalist system as being the basis to uphold their social interests. If there is not a popular Marxist party this situation will be expressed by the continued domination of parties that defend the interests of capitalism. Hence only the increasing influence of the role of collective mass struggle and the importance of the revolutionary party can challenge this situation. But ultimately capitalism will continue if mass struggle does not acquire revolutionary dimensions. This possibility is very difficult to realise and requires the increasing radicalisation of the workers combined with the leadership of a consistently revolutionary party. But the problem is that the spontaneous dynamic of the struggles of the workers does not acquire this political clarity and often the cautious trade union officials retain their influence in this situation. Hence the potential of mass struggles is generally not realised. However, the prospect of militant actions does not generate the important role of revolutionary leadership and so the potential of these developments is not realised on most occasions. Hence Macnair does not acknowledge the potential of Soviets because they would express the rare development in which the impetus of the class struggle results in the creation of democratic organisations of the workers which have the potential to express the possibility to establish the political basis of a new type of society. He disputes the democratic credibility of the Soviets because they were utilised to uphold one party domination in the Russia of 1917-18, but the point is that this was not the logical result of the political character of the Soviets and instead was an expression of the character of the approach of the Bolsheviks who did not consistently recognise the importance of the process of genuine political competition of rival left wing parties. Hence the problem was with the approach of the Bolsheviks and not the character of the Soviets. Instead it could be argued that the Soviets could be credible political organisations that have a potential revolutionary character and yet could be an expression of a genuine form of democracy.

Macnair argues that the Soviets became an expression of the domination of the Bolshevik party, and that this type of development is an expression of the general history of this type of organisation: “Workers councils and similar forms have appeared in many strike waves and revolutionary crises since 1917. In none of these forms have they been able to offer an alternative centre of authority, an alternative decision-making mechanism for the whole of society. This role is unavoidably played by a government - either based on the surviving military-bureaucratic state core, or on the existing organisations of the workers movement.”(p49) This is a dogmatic assessment that ignores the importance of the Soviets in 1917, or in other historical situations. The point is that the Soviets are not opposed to the role and principles of multi-party democracy and instead provide a genuinely popular and participatory expression of the role of competition between different parties. Hence the role of democracy can be made compatible with the objectives of socialism in these terms. Therefore, the formation of a one-party dictatorship by the Bolsheviks was not because of the character of the Soviets but was instead of the expression of the aspect of authoritarianism in the ideology of this form of Marxism. It could have been quite possible to allow the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries to have a role within the Soviets. It was the development of political polarisation that made this option unfeasible and the onset of civil war made the creation of a one-party regime inevitable. The reasons for these developments was because of the unfavourable character of the social conditions and not because of any inherent unsuitability of the soviets for the task of the realisation of popular democracy in a post-revolutionary regime. The only alternative to the importance of the Soviets in a revolutionary society is to suggest the development of a Parliamentary system. But in actuality the contrast between Soviets and Parliament may not have to be an option instead it is possible to combine both aspects within the political system of the post-revolutionary society. Indeed, this possibility was created with the formation of the Constituent Assembly in 1918 in Russia. The dissolution of this assembly was very controversial and did not contribute to the political strengthening of the Soviet regime. However, the logic of Macnair’s position is to advocate the role of a parliament instead of the Soviets. This is also a problematical approach and denies the popular and democratic character of Soviet type organisations.

But Macnair does not support the apparent logical conclusion of his criticism of the importance of the Soviets and the apparent necessity of the role of parliamentary democracy in the process of the realisation of socialism. He considers that the character of parliamentary democracy is that it is an aspect of the role of the bourgeois state and so acceptance of its limitations implies the process of integration into the political aspect of the capitalist system. Hence Kautsky’s aim of the formation of a parliamentary democratic majority for the socialist party is strategically problematical. However, he does accept the role of the parliamentary system for indicating the level of influence of the socialist party in terms of its mass electoral support. But this rigid view denies the possibility of the realisation of a parliamentary majority of the socialist party as a mandate for the introduction of radical measures that would undermine the domination of the capitalist system. Macnair rejects this potential because he can only envisage the tendency of the socialist party to support opportunism as a result of involvement in the parliamentary system. But surely this issue is connected to the character of the ideology of the socialist party. The German Social Democrats became opportunist with the onset of the first world war not because of their involvement in Parliament but instead because of their acceptance of the standpoint of nationalism and social chauvinism. This was the real basis of the opportunism that was justified in 1914. Indeed, in an inconsistent manner Macnair accepts this point, but still upholds a rigid opposition to the view that revolutionary change can have a parliamentary emphasis. But given his criticism of the revolutionary role of the Soviets it is difficult to envisage what can be the political basis of the strategy of Macnair. The point is that the only democratic alternative to the role of Parliament can be the emphasis on the importance of Soviet type organisations. If both of these options are ejected as being problematical, which seems to be the view of Macnair, it is difficult to understand what he could support as a credible alternative political system under socialism. The problem of Macnair’s standpoint is that he becomes a critic of the various strategies of the process of transition to socialism but cannot substantiate a viable alternative because there is not such an approach. It is either the role of parliament or Soviets, via the influence of the role of workers control, which has to be the basis of a development of effective revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism. Instead in a vague manner, Macnair must imply that the role of the party becomes primary and that it defines the character of the process of the realisation of socialism in a manner that establishes its own democratic norms of transition. This is an unrealistic and idealist approach that has not relationship to the dynamics of the potential of the class struggle. The problem is that Macnair is a critic of the major strategies of the process of transition to socialism, but this means that his alternative cannot be credible or coherent. In other words, he knows what he is against, but it is not apparent what is the superior approach that would realise revolutionary goals. Instead we have to establish the principled character of the revolutionary party, and so assume from this aspect that the logical result is the ability to lead the workers to the successful struggle for socialism. But the logical result of this standpoint is that the role of the workers in the attempt to realise socialism becomes obscure and so is not elaborated in a satisfactory manner.

However, this approach becomes inconsistent because it is also argued that there is something elitist and inconsistent in supporting the conception of an elite party that acts on behalf of the workers. But this apparent approach becomes complicated and problematical when it is also argued that there is an organisational tendency for the party to become dominated by an elite that tends to dominate the rank and file membership. The result is a party of activists who are based on the superior and elite leadership of a few privileged members. What is being suggested is that there is an aspect of eclecticism and inconsistency about the approach of Macnair about the role and importance of the revolutionary party. There is an understanding that the party is vital but that this approach is based on the recognition of various limitations and problems in this context. Hence it could be suggested that the standpoint of Macnair is confused and based on the emphasis on what is being rejected in terms of the aspect of strategy. The result of this repudiation of an approach that is either ultra-left as in regards to the perspective of a workers government based on the role of soviets, or the attempt to introduce reforms in relation to the role of a socialist party within a bourgeois democracy, means that Macnair is only able to offer the vague and ambiguous alternative of the formation of a democratic government that would become the basis of transition to socialism. It is suggested that on the one hand: “Communists can only take power when we have won majority support for working class rule through extreme democracy.”(p130) But on the other hand the immediate objective is: “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 too self-emancipation of the working class through extreme democracy, as opposed to all loyalist parties.”(p130) But what is the relation of this form of struggle to the realisation of the objective of socialism? This understanding does not seem to be outlined in an explicit and simple manner. Instead in a confused manner what is being suggested is that it is necessary for a period of opposition of the socialist organisations to the capitalist system, and that this development can therefore create the conditions for revolutionary change. Only in these terms is it implied in a vague manner that the form of a government of a popular and democratic character can introduce the measures that will enable a process of advance towards socialism to begin and become successful. But how can this type of government be formed, what actions are necessary in order to realise this development? Would it not be possible to connect this process of change to the development of the popular capacity to realise socialism without the necessity of a situation of transition, or a democratic stage of development that facilitates this type of prospect? In other words why is a democratic revolution required in order to create the conditions for socialism, would it not be more simple and effective to combine the aspects of democracy with a process of immediate transition to socialism via the realisation of the political power of the working class. Indeed, Macnair suggests that only after a period of opposition to a capitalist type government can the imperative for change to become more favourable. But the problem with this perspective is that a prolonged period of opposition could only demoralise the potential revolutionary forces. Instead it would be more principled and ambitious for the parties of opposition to generate support for a perspective of the realisation of political power. The period of opposition should be transitory to the prospect of the successful attainment of the hegemony of the revolutionary forces. Therefore, the aspect of opposition is not something to be aspired to, and instead opposition of genuinely popular revolutionary forces should be understood to be the basis of the consolidation of the ability of the realisation of the successful attainment of the successful overthrow of capitalism. Hence for Macnair to suggest that the immediate task of the revolutionary forces not to strive for political power could represent the acceptance of accommodation to the domination of capitalism. Indeed, this is what happened to the Social Democratic party of Kautsky before 1914. In contrast the Bolsheviks understood that the mass movement of the workers could not be satisfied with the situation of dual power with the bourgeoisie and instead it was necessary to obtain the support of the Soviet for the objective of the successful struggle for political power. Hence dual power, or opposition to the bourgeoisie, should only be considered to be a temporary situation that had to be resolved as quickly as possible in terms of the successful attempt to achieve the overthrow of the rule of the working class. Therefore, if the working class acquired popular influence the objective should not be acceptance of this situation and instead the aspiration for the realisation of the political power of the workers should be an immediate priority. Therefore, the perspective of extreme revolutionary opposition of the workers to the domination of the capitalists was actually an opportunist standpoint that had to be rejected. Indeed because of the opportunist ambiguity of the approach of Macnair he does not outline how the perspective of extreme revolutionary will result in the creation of a democratic republic that can facilitate the process of transition to socialism. He does not outline any proposals that will enable the workers to establish a strategy that will create favourable conditions for the formation of a democratic republic. Instead this aim is outlined as a type of moral imperative that the working class should support in its class interests. Nor is the class character of the democratic republic elaborated: to what extent does it represent the influence and importance of the working class when compared to the economic power of the capitalists? The ambiguous character of this approach means that Macnair does not discuss the role that democratic republics have had in the suppression of the possibility of proletarian revolution. Hence the only democratic republic that is genuinely progressive and transforming is that which is based on the mass organisations of the working class and has the immediate aim of the promotion of the possibility of socialism. But instead of this clarity Macnair seems to imply in an ambiguous manner that the democratic republic is a distinct stage before the realisation of socialism. The precise relationship between these stages is not outlined in strategic and explicit terms. Instead it is only established in a dogmatic manner that the democratic republic of the workers will have an inherent and direct relation to the realisation of socialism. This understanding is not established in terms of the elaboration of the ability of the democratic republic to advance the generation of the political and economic conditions to establish socialism. In particular there is no mention of the necessity of workers control of the enterprises if the process of advance towards socialism is to be established in an effective manner.

Consequently, the strategic limitations of Macnair means that he does not elaborate a satisfactory strategy for the realisation of socialism. Primarily he does not establish how the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class can be undermined and the generation of revolutionary class consciousness can be realised. Instead he assumes that it is an uncomplicated task that will ensure that the workers become supporters of the aim of the realisation of the democratic republic and advance towards socialism. Hence his strategy is based on assumptions and not the elaboration of effective reasons that could express the development of the aspiration of the workers to strive for socialism. Hence his strategy is based on dogmatic reason that assumes that workers have an inherent capacity to become supporters of a Marxist revolutionary approach. This view ignores the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class, and instead asserts the apparent correctness of the views he is advocating which will mean the creation of a revolutionary understanding by the workers. Therefore, Macnair’s perspective is based on the glossing over of important objections concerning the validity of his approach. IT is still necessary to develop a strategy that is able to tackle the important issues involved in the possibility to develop revolutionary class consciousness. Primarily this means tackling the issue of what Gramsci understood to be the importance of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class and its reactionary influence which undermines the development of revolutionary class consciousness. Primarily this approach results in the understanding that there is not an alternative to the present system. This means an important task is to develop support for a counter-hegemonic approach that is able to undermine and replace the domination of the ruling ideology. However, such a task is undermined by the apparent isolation of the various Marxist groups from the working class, and as a result they are marginalised and lack any effective political influence. Furthermore, these groups are split from each other and emphasise the importance of their insular political situation. In these circumstances it seems that capitalism is the eternal system and that the realisation of the socialist alternative is unrealistic. This situation means that the crisis of the party is also an expression of the limitations concerning the development of class consciousness. The attempt to resolve this crisis will facilitate the possibility to make progress in the development of class consciousness. But how can the crisis of the role of the Marxist party be solved?

This issue is connected to the question of the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class which means that there is not popular support for the standpoint of the Marxist alternative. The importance of the Marxist understanding of ideology is outlined by Joe McCarney in his work: ‘The Real World of Ideology’. (Harvester Press, Sussex 1980) He indicates that to Marx an important aspect of bourgeois ideology is the understanding that the praxis of the people cannot transform the prevailing character of the capitalist economic system that is based on the expression of what could be defined as the role of human nature. It could be argued that this understanding is influential in that the working class come to accept the domination of capital because this situation seems to be absolute and so cannot be altered by their collective action. The bourgeois approach is to deny the transforming importance of collective praxis and to instead defend the standpoint that the process of economic activity is based on the role of given economic laws that cannot be altered by the actions of the role of labour. Thus, the collective action of the working class challenges these assumptions, but the problem is overcoming the influence of bourgeois ideology which undermines the validity of the role of popular opposition to the capitalist system. The objective of Marxists has to be to facilitate the willingness of the workers to develop forms of rejection of capitalism in terms of the importance of their collective strength being translated into economic and political aims. But the problem is that the influence of bourgeois ideology is to continually discredit this type of development. In other words the importance of ideology is that it is the expression of the manner in which class interests are articulated and so the domination of bourgeois ideology within the working class limits the possibility of the workers to act and conceptualise reality in a more revolutionary manner. Therefore, there is a contradictory and contrasting aspect to the character of class consciousness in the approach of Marx: “On the one hand, class is conceived of in terms of an ‘objective’ criterion, the location of groups in the process of production. On the other, he sometimes introduces a ‘subjective factor by requiring a certain level of consciousness for any such group to constitute a class.”(p40) Hence it is quite possible that the objective character of the working class is not expressed in subjective terms because the ideological interpretation of the role of the class is in contradiction with its actual potential, or an acceptance of the situation of the domination of capital and the rejection of the possibility of liberation in order to express the character of labour. In these ideological terms the forces of labour accept its subordination to capital and the connected denial of the possibility to express its potential via the act of social liberation. In this context we could suggest that the ideology of nationalism is useful for the ruling class because the result of this situation is to voluntarily accept the domination of capital as an expression of the imperatives established by what is defined as the national interest. But how can labour overcome this situation of ideological domination? What is being suggested is that a process of ideological transformation has to occur so that the actual ideological consciousness that accepts the domination of capital has to become a type of consciousness that accepts the importance of what is the genuine class interests of the workers. But how is this process of transformation to occur?

Lenin contends in ‘What is to be Done’ that the spontaneous consciousness generated by trade union struggle does not overcome the limits of bourgeois consciousness, and so the influence of Marxism is required in order that genuine class consciousness can be realised. But the question that arises is that if even the general practice of the workers does not create the potential for genuine class consciousness, why should the workers support the approach of Marxist parties? Can the influence of bourgeois ideology be overcome by the role of Marxism? This question seems to be very important given that Lenin does not outline a credible strategy by which this process of transformation can be realised. Instead he assumes that the Marxist party is able to convince workers that socialism is in their class interests. Why should the workers respond to the approach of the Marxist party if they are effectively influenced by bourgeois ideology? This question has never been tackled satisfactorily by Lenin or by the many Marxists that have analysed this issue. Instead it is assumed in a dogmatic manner that the inherent superiority of Marxism as the expression of the interests of the workers will result in mass support for this standpoint. Trotsky outlines the Transitional Programme as the basis of a programme of action that can develop the support of workers because it corresponds to their interests to oppose the domination of capital over labour. But the issue remains that the very development of mass struggle could be limited by the influence of bourgeois ideology. This aspect is reinforced by the generally insignificant role of the Marxist party which is unable to develop the popular support of the workers. Hence it would seem that the capitalist system has the ideological capacity to undermine the development of the class consciousness of what is a subordinate class that has difficulty overcoming its situation of inferiority within society. Indeed, the working class often is not able to express a connection with the role of the trade unions in an effective manner. Therefore: “Its empirically given consciousness will not always be identical with trade unionism, a form characteristic of a relatively advanced, though still pre-revolutionary, stage of development. Moreover, since the imputation of authentic consciousness is not simply that of the consciousness which a class ought ideally to have, but is limited by the objective possibilities of the historical situation, what is imputed to the proletariat will not always amount to socialist consciousness.”(p44) Therefore it is quite possible that important reasons could explain why the consciousness of the workers is not identical to what could be defined in revolutionary terms. In this context the possible ineffectiveness and lack of popularity of Marxism is a factor that enables us to understand an aspect of the difficulties involved in the creation of a revolutionary class consciousness of the workers. Hence the general situation is defined by the difference between the actual and possible consciousness of the workers. But this difference is actually problematical because such an explanation is based on the reasoning of Marxism, but what if there are important limitations in the theory of Marx? Hence it could be suggested that Marx did not sufficiently outline the criteria by which the class interest of the workers can be defined. Ultimately the issue is about whether capitalism is able to express the aspirations of the workers in a more effective manner than a possible alternative of socialism. But if we assume the credibility of this standpoint, the problem actually becomes that Marxism has underestimated the challenges involved in the attempt to develop mass and popular support for a socialist alternative. Indeed, this is the very question that we are trying to analyse and provide a satisfactory bass for the justification of socialism as being in the interests of the workers. In a certain sense the workers do not support capitalism in an enthusiastic manner, the issue is rather that they doubt their own ability to transform the present system into socialism. How is this influence of scepticism to be overcome? Marx does not tackle this issue because he assumes that the workers will express their class interests and become adherents of socialism. However, the apparent durability of the capitalist system means that this issue has become very relevant. To Marx the workers will ultimately express their true interests, which is defined in revolutionary terms. But the problem is that the workers generally adhere to an understanding of their interests as being an expression of what social gains can be obtained within the present system. Hence socialism becomes defined as an objective of intellectuals that are considered to be the supporters of doctrines that have little popular support. Lenin considers that this contradiction can be overcome by the development of the influence of a revolutionary party. But the problem is that such parties seem to be very ineffective in developing support for a Marxist perspective. Instead the workers prefer to support reformist parties or even organisations like the Conservative party. Therefore, how is this apparently dire situation to be transformed? This issue is not tackled by Marx or Lenin because they assume that this issue can be resolved in terms of the increasing credibility of the Marxist approach. But the problem is that Marxism seems to lack credibility and instead the capitalist system seems to be durable and not likely to be challenged by mass discontent.

The problem is that Marx and Lenin made what seemed to be a reasonable assumption that the working class would develop a revolutionary consciousness and so act in an appropriate manner to transform the character of society. But actual economic and political developments created problems in relation to this perspective and instead the issue of the realisation of a revolutionary role for the workers became very complicated. Primarily the ruling class was determined to prevent any possibility of the success of revolutionary change and the parties of the workers were increasing opposed to the radical approach of Marxism. In this context it was not unexpected that the workers increasingly accepted the apparent durability of capitalism and developed aspirations that corresponded to this situation. Furthermore, Marxism was apparently discredited by the role of Stalinism and the alternative Marxist parties were not popular or effective. Therefore, we have a situation in which whilst the present system is not necessarily popular it is not possible to envisage an alternative. The result is that the mass movements, as with ecology uphold the perspective of the improvement of the present system in accordance with their aims. Hence the contention of Marx that historical materialism, or Marxism, is the genuine ideology of the working class, seems to have been discredited by actual developments and instead the very conception of collective class interests is called into question. However, this situation does not mean that people are genuinely satisfied with capitalism. There is discontent with the continuation of exploitation, alienation and the increasing problem of the ecological situation. Primarily the capitalist system is not able to realise the potential of people because of the limitations imposed by the requirements of accumulation. Hence the issue of socialism is not overcome by a supposed invincible ascendency of capitalism. The issue that has not been resolved by the continuation of capitalism is as Lukacs maintained, the working class is not able to realise genuine class consciousness of its interests until its acts in a revolutionary manner to overcome the domination of capital. Until this development the workers are in some manner still unable to realise and express their aspirations in an emancipatory manner. The point being made is that the workers are not made content by the continuation of capitalism and instead their interests can only be genuinely expressed by the transformation of the present system into a socialist alternative. Hence the present continuation of capitalism does not mean that people are really satisfied by this situation and instead will still ultimately aspire to the realisation of an alternative social system. This means it is still the task of Marxists to outline the superiority of socialism when compared to capitalism. Therefore, the very activist character of the various present forms of Marxism actually undermines the credibility of this standpoint because it does not establish the articulation of the superior character of socialism when compared to capitalism. Only the elaboration of a convincing conception of socialism can motivate people to strive to realise this aim. Hence the actual activist character of many of the Marxist groups is counterproductive because this means that they are not motivated to develop an understanding of what is meant by socialism, and so do not realise the necessary theoretical task that can facilitate the development of revolutionary class consciousness within the working class.

The emphasis of Lenin was on the difference between spontaneous and revolutionary consciousness within the workers. But what does this mean? We can suggest that spontaneous consciousness means an acceptance of the continuation of capitalism, whilst revolutionary consciousness is an approach that is based on the aim of the realisation of socialism. But this latter form of consciousness is not likely to be developed if there is not a popular and convincing explanation of what is meant by socialism. However, this is the very task that is neglected by the various Marxist groups because they emphasis the activist view that various forms of mass struggle will inherently bring about the realisation of socialism. This is a dogmatic view that ignores the fact that people will actually only strive for improvements within capitalism if they lack an adherence to a convincing understanding of what is meant by socialism. In this context Lenin was right to contend that: “The true class consciousness of proletariat is socialist consciousness, and its ideology is the theory of socialism.”(p59) However it required the actual experiences of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions for Lenin to outline what was meant by the character of socialism in terms of the role of popular democracy in economic and political terms. But since these events the issue of the character of socialism has to be developed in a new manner, or in the sense of developing contemporary convincing reasons as to why this system can replace capitalism. The point is that the demise of Stalinism and the apparent ability of the capitalist form of production to survive a situation of prolonged austerity has raised questions about the credibility and feasibility of the alternative of socialism. This issue is connected to the apparent unwillingness of the working class to support radical measures to end the domination of capitalism. Furthermore, in this situation the influence of the various groups claiming to be Marxist continues to decline and is considered to be an expression of the apparent demise of the influence of a revolutionary alternative to the present system. But, in contrast the various single-issue activists seem to have acquired a measure of credibility and the question of criticism of the present system has become the basis of the approach of various single-issue campaigns. Furthermore, it could be argued that the importance and influence of the working class continues to decline and is replaced by the apparent importance of what could be defined as the white-collar strata, who could be considered to be too affluent to become an expression of the standpoint of opposition to capitalism. Hence sociological changes seem to have primarily undermined the credibility of the alternative of a revolutionary type of socialism. Nevertheless the contradictions of capitalism have not been resolved in this situation and the system is still characterised by aspects of crisis which result in the imposition of austerity policies that lead to the continued undermining of the social situation of the working class and white collar strata. Hence the objective basis for the credibility of the socialist alternative has not been undermined by the adverse economic situation. Hence the process of capital accumulation is still based on the intensification of economic contradictions such as the falling rate of profit. These developments actually mean that the socialist objective is still relevant despite its lack of popular support. The development of an effective voice for socialism is required in this situation, and this point was indicated by the period of success of the Corbyn led Labour party. The discontent that facilitates the possibility of socialism has not been overcome because of the enduring limitations of capitalism. However, the subjective aspect of consciousness lags behind the possibilities of the objective situation. In this context the ability to outline a convincing argument in favour of the socialist alternative could be of immense importance. However, this development has to be connected to the advocacy of a convincing strategy of change. This approach is connected to the elaboration of the arguments that would indicate the ability of the working class to still be a credible agency of change. But if this perspective is to be convincing it is necessary that the difficulties involved in the realisation of the success of class struggle are outlined and tackled in an effective manner. The problem has been that the advocates of Marxism have tended to gloss over these difficulties and instead to argue that socialism can be realised in relatively uncomplicated terms, or without the importance of various ideological and political limitations that have hindered the development of the collective activity of the working class. This situation has meant that the various Marxist groups have tended to promote a form of politics based on illusions rather than a serious expression of the difficulties and complications that hinder the possibility to realise socialism. The result of this tendency for complacency is the generation of a policy of complacency which actually expresses reluctance to tackle the various reasons within reality that hinder the possibility to realise socialism. This empty confidence about the prospects of the class struggle is actually opposed to Marx’s recognition of the necessity to understand all the aspects of the situation of social reality, or to develop the theoretical ability to comprehend the balance of class forces and the possibilities for socialism that this situation represents. Instead the various Marxist groups tend to define themselves in terms of objectives which it is suggested can be realised, and so the various difficulties of the class struggle tend to be under-estimated.

In other words, the enduring limitation of the Marxist approach is to consider that the importance of the aspect of false consciousness of the workers implies that this issue can be resolved in a relatively uncomplicated manner in terms of increasing adherence to the Marxist revolutionary approach. However, in actuality false consciousness must have some basis in reality or is an expression of the fact that the very durability of capitalism implies that an alternative type of system cannot be realised. Hence people apparently accept this situation and so accommodate themselves to the continuation of capitalism because there does not seem the possibility of the establishment of a genuine alternative. Marx and Engels did not advance the aim of socialism sufficiently because of their reluctance to outline in detail what they meant by this objective. The enduring detrimental legacy of this reluctance has been a lack of understanding of what is meant by the aim of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. Hence it is necessary to overcome this reluctance and instead outline in what could be convincing detail an understanding of the characteristics of socialism. This understanding is possible because of the very advances made by capitalism in the generation of the very conditions that make the collective and cooperative organisation of economic activity a feasible possibility. However, Marxists are still reluctant to outline what is meant by socialism because they might be defined as being utopian and unrealistic. But this reluctance means that Marxists become critics of capitalism rather than genuine advocates of a genuine new type of society. Hence, they can relate to the discontent that develops within the present system, but they are not able to articulate what should be the alternative. Only a few intellectuals outside of the Marxist party structures have attempted to outline the principles and attributes of socialism. However, this type of useful theoretical understanding lacks generalised influence within the working class, and the various Marxist groups prefer a politics of activism rather than the promotion of the perspective of the socialist alternative. This means that Marxist become critics of capitalism and are unable to establish the reasons why this system should be replaced, by the alternative of socialism.

In other words the illusion that Marx promoted was the view that the class position of the working class, its domination and exploitation by capital, would provide what could be understood as an inherent tendency to both understand the present system and provide motivation for the aspiration to realise the socialist alternative. But the actual historical situation has not provided justification of this type of political confidence in the revolutionary role of the working class. Instead there is a tendency for the working class to accept its domination by capital if there does not seem the possibility to realise an alternative type of society. Hence the very role of Marxism is to try and promote a strategy of change and outline what is meant by the objective of socialism in the most eloquent and detailed terms. Only in this sense will the various class conflicts begin to acquire a conscious aspect that goes beyond the defensive limitation of the attempt to maintain social gains. But the very failure to realise these tasks by the organisations of Marxism has meant that the various forms of class struggle do not go beyond the limits of what is a defensive character. Indeed, the influence of Marxism has tended to be insignificant and so the various struggles of the workers are limited by their spontaneous and defensive character. But in this context the left-wing role of reformist organisations such as the Labour party led by Jeremy Corbyn can create increased expectations of the possibilities of social progress and reform. Hence it is the task of Marxists to relate to these developments and outline how the various policies of a left wing Labour government could become the basis of a process of change that has radical implications for changing the balance of class forces in favour of the workers. But the influence of nationalism led to the serious defeat of the Labour party at the general election and this indicated that the ultimate task is to develop the arguments in favour of socialism in a manner that is more convincing than the alternative claims made for the perspective of national greatness. However, such a development requires the creation of an effective Marxist party, and this possibility is presently undermined by the sectarianism of the various Marxist groups. The narrow concerns of the Marxists are possibly the greatest problem that undermines the realisation of an effective struggle for socialism.

However in a certain respect the orthodox approach of Marxism underestimates the difficulties involved in the development of class consciousness because it assumes that the very social location of the working class within the capitalist mode of production expresses an inherent capacity to the development of an understanding of the economic system and the related aspiration to try and realise socialism: “The proletariat is, by virtue of its location in the mode of production, in a privileged position in certain respects. From that location unfolds a perspective which enforces an awareness of some basic social realities, and this awareness is of great epistemological significance. The process by which the proletariat is impelled beyond the phenomenal forms of bourgeois society has an analogue in the scientific enterprise itself, insofar as that too involves the penetration of appearances to the reality behind…..The point is rather that the sense of its situation naturally available to the proletariat contains in embryo the possibility of a scientific understanding of society. The central scientific concepts may be seen as refinements of insights characteristic, in the first place of spontaneous class consciousness…What the proletariat is made aware by the virtue of its life experience are such realities as the existence of social classes, of conflicting class interests, of exploitation and its own status as a commodity. The concept of class struggle is perhaps the most obvious scientific precipitate of these insights. But the same relationship holds between the workers awareness of exploitation and the concept of surplus value, and their awareness of their role in the market and the concept of labour power. With these concepts is unlocked the entire scheme of the Marxist analysis of capitalist society. Thus it may be said that spontaneous proletarian consciousness provides the basis for science just as in a sense that a rational reconstruction of a scientific account of society could be given…..It is this way that one should understand the familiar claim that the science of society Is based upon or presupposes the class standpoint of the proletariat.”(p116-117)

This view of McCarney is very optimistic about the potential of the working class to spontaneously develop a scientific understanding of capitalism, which is presumably the basis to develop their conscious opposition to the system and motivate the development of an objective to create socialism. If this situation was actually an expression of the character of the working class, the role of the Marxist party would be superfluous. Instead there is a contradiction between an awareness of the situation of exploitation by capital combined with the view that the system cannot be transformed into a socialist type alternative. Hence it is the very role of the Marxist party to outline the reasons why the present capitalist system can be overcome by the collective action of the workers Therefore if an effective Marxist party is not created then this prospect of the overcoming of the domination of capitalism becomes very problematical. In this situation the workers are not likely to combine in collective forms of mass action in order to end the domination of capitalism and realise the socialist alternative. Instead an effective Marxist party has to be created that is able to outline the reasons as to why the system of socialism should be established. This does not mean that the Marxist party can act on behalf of the workers in order to be the most dynamic expression of a process of social transformation. On the contrary the role of the Marxist organisation is to promote the development of the willingness and capacity of the workers to transform society into socialism. In this context the role of the party is to promote the development of the importance of collective action by the workers if the system is to be transformed and socialism established. Hence the party can substitute itself for the revolutionary role of the workers. Instead there has to be genuine interaction between the role of the party and class. McCarthy outlines how the ideology of the workers has to be connected to the importance of science. It is the task of the revolutionary party to provide this aspect of science and its connection to the requirements of the development of class struggle. But McCarthy seems to imply that this relationship is established by the inherent dynamism of the class struggle. However important events in contemporary history has indicated that this approach is not an accurate expression of the potential of the class struggle. Instead the spontaneous struggles of workers have often not realised its revolutionary potential because of the lack of the role of an effective Marxist party with a credible strategy for change. However, this criticism does not mean that the elitism of Lenin’s ‘What is to be Done’ is being justified. This approach of Lenin seemed to imply that a party could express the revolutionary role of the workers and so as a result would effectively carry out the political tasks of the workers. This approach is problematical because the party becomes the agency of history and the workers assume a subordinate and passive role. Furthermore, this approach has not proved to be effective in relation to the events of history The Russian revolution of October 1917 occurred because of the interaction of party and class in the role of the Soviets. The failure to establish the success of other possibilities for the overthrow of capitalism has been because of the inability to establish this type of principled relationship between a genuine Marxist party and class. Such a failure has been connected to the reactionary influence of the role of Stalinism and Social Democracy which has meant that the perspective of the party acting on behalf of the class has in some sense been justified. But the very limitations of Social Democracy and Stalinism to express the aspirations of the working class has meant that such a situation has resulted in the resurgence of the influence of right-wing forms of ideology of populism and conservatism. This development has only undermined the possibility of the creation of the political conditions for the progressive transformation of society by the role of the working class.

In this situation of what seems to be an irreversible decline of socialist politics it would seem to become appropriate to discuss whether there are different and possibly more effective strategies for the realisation of a progressive type of political aims. This issue is discussed by Matthew Flinders in ‘Defending Politics’ (Oxford University Press, 2012). The major objective of this work is to establish in the tradition of Bernard Crick that the role of politics is important to develop a type of genuine political democracy that can become the basis to improve the economic and political situation of the people. In this context the issue of capitalism versus socialism is considered to be less important than the objective of democratic change that in an effective manner can change the balance of forces in favour of the realisation of changes that will facilitate the improvement of the social conditions of the people. Hence the most important problem is the increasing indifference of people concerning the role of politics because of its apparent limitations and this situation of increased pessimism about the effectiveness of politics that no longer seems to be genuinely democratic has to be replaced by a renewed confidence that engagement with democracy can bring about changes of benefit to the people. Hence the is to create a system of government in which the role of the free market economy is changed by government intervention on behalf of the people: “The central ambition of a democratic political regime is therefore not to deliver some idealized notion of a perfect society but a more basic…form of governing that is generally stable and broadly acceptable to all citizens (i.e. not perfection but a workable and more modest version of an integrated, mutually respectful, and above all stable system of rule.”(p7) Hence the objectives of what is a democratic form of politics will modify the character of the role of the market so that it acts on behalf of the people and in this manner brings about the possibility of social progress and more equality within society. The importance of the role of politics will be sufficient to generate this type of progressive change. But what is not explained is how this type of development is to occur. Will it require the importance of mass actions, or a general election that results in a left-wing government? Furthermore, can the objectives of egalitarianism via the importance of popular democracy be realised in terms of the problem of the limitations imposed by the present capitalist system? In an important manner this issue cannot be effectively resolved by the author because he has to assume that the present economic and political system is what is required despite its various limitations. The point is to try and improve this system via the role of increased democratic engagement with the political process. Therefore, the perspective being adopted is that of the possibility of reform and transformation of the system without the necessity of revolutionary type of change. This approach means that the major problem that is being established is the alienation of people from the political system because of the apparent limitations of politicians who seem to be unprincipled and self-interested. In this context the aim is to establish the conditions for the renewal of the political system in democratic terms. But what is the precise character of this objective? What does it mean in terms of the balance of power? In other words, how is it possible to establish the creation of a genuinely democratic system without the transformation of the economic character of productive activity by the end of the domination of capital and the establishment of the hegemony of the role of labour. These issues do not seem to be an important concern of the author because instead the objective of overcoming the political apathy of the people and so creating a democratic political system is his major concern. In this context the development of a democratic system will create the conditions for the advance of social progress. But it can be argued that the character of capitalism is not based on the objective of the realisation of what would be an authentic system of democracy. Instead it expresses a formal type of democracy that is most conducive to the realisation of the interests of the capitalist class. Hence the issue becomes how can the present limitations of democracy be overcome, and a better and more effective form of democracy be established? Flinders is concerned with this issue, but he also assumes that the process of change to a more superior and more participatory type of democracy that is able to introduce social changes can be realised on the basis of the present capitalist system. But why should the beneficiaries of the present economic and political system accept the necessity of the introduction of these types of progressive changes. This is the important issue that is not being addressed. Furthermore, how can what he considers to be an apathetic general public become motivated to strive to realise this process of social and political change? The problem is that he outlines the limitations of the lack of democracy within society, but the apparent cynicism of most people does not seem to be conducive to the development of a situation in which change to a more accountable system can occur. Instead he outlines the importance of the discontent and cynicism of the people, but this situation does not seem to be receptive to the generation of mass struggle in order to transform the present political system in a democratic manner.

Indeed Flinders considers that the present democratic system is generally credible but that it has been undermined by the increased cynical view of people and that it is necessary to develop the conditions for increased support of what is a generally effective system: “In most of the developed world democracy has fulfilled majority of our demands. It has delivered clean water and food, universal education and healthcare, old age pensions, and social protections in the form of sickness cover, redundancy pay, employee rights, and a minimum wage. Democracy has broken the link between politics and fear that still plagues large parts of the world. Democracy…has brought us many of those things we take for granted as essential elements of a civilised life. Despite this, large sections of the public in Western Europe and North America, and elsewhere, seem increasingly disappointed with what democratic politics delivers, how it operates, and believe that in some sense it is failing. It is undoubtedly true that democratic politics is not perfect, but my warning is simply that politics matters far more than most people realize and that democracy is far more fragile than many people appreciate.”(p38) Hence the most important issue seems to be the cynicism and apathy of the majority of the people which results in the lack of genuine support for the actual achievements of democratic society. In this context the major objective would seem to be the necessity to change the attitudes of the people rather than facilitate changes to the economic and political system. This is because the actual system is generally of a satisfactory character, but it is not sufficiently appreciated as a result of the influences of the cynical attitudes of the people. But it could be argued that this cynicism has arisen because of the situation of the lack of the realisation of genuine economic and political involvement of the people in the organisation of society. Hence this is the issue to be tackled and therefore it would be possible to overcome the influence of popular cynicism. But the immediate issue that arises is how to motivate cynical people to act in order to being about the required changes? It would seem that this task requires the motivational role of important aims and objectives such as the perspective of socialism. An important merit of socialism is that it is an expression of how the people can develop a type of economic and political system based on a situation of accountability and control. In this context the overcoming of cynicism would require the development of the popularity of an alternative to what seems to be the limitations of the present character of the democratic system. But this is not the perspective being adopted by Flinders. Instead he wants people to appreciate the advances of democracy in a more enthusiastic manner. To him it is necessary for the achievements of the present to be recognised in more affirmative terms. Hence the aim is not the transformation of the system but instead a change in the attitudes of the people concerning the present political system. In this manner people will become more motivated to strive to realise additional changes in order to make the system more effective and able to realise the aspirations more adequately. To Flinders people have to reject their cynicism and non-involvement in the political system and instead become more active and responsible, and in this manner become active rather than passive citizens. Therefore, there is nothing inherently wrong with the system, instead what has to be changed are the present cynical expectations of the people.

There may be some credibility to this view but what is the cause of apathy? Could it not be argued that the very character of capitalism does not encourage the participation of the people in economic and political terms. Hence the influence of cynicism can be undermined and overcome by the generation of a policy that encourages the people to decisively influence the character of their activity. But it could be argued that such a development cannot be realised within the present economic and political system. Instead it could be suggested that this possibility requires the transformation of society. However, as an alternative to this standpoint Flinders contends that the very attitudes of the people can be unreasonable and over-ambitious, and the result of this aspect is the development of cynicism. Hence the vey character of democracy implies the imposition of various forms of restraint on the logical realisation of what could be the irrational attitudes of the people, and so the aim of democracy is to overcome an tendency for the realisation of an ungoverned type of anarchy. Hence this approach implies that a political elite is still required in order to ensure that the necessary forms of social regulation are enforced and that the aspirations of the people do not result in a situation of anarchy. Thus, the very character of a credible form of democratic politics implies imposing limits on the role of the people and so the various politicians have to retain a superior role in the realisation of responsible measures that uphold the overall interests of society. But this implies that the present system has to be upheld but that is improved by the creation of a more effective relationship between the public and the political elite. However, the ultimate responsibility for the policies required to improve the character of society will be the elite. This standpoint is quite compatible with the view that capitalism is a system that should continue to be dominant because that is the basis of the present economic and political social formation. The assumption being made is that the elite that is dominant within society is the most effective in relation to the task of the organisation of society. Hence the discontent of the people cannot provide a constructive alternative to the present situation. Instead what has to be carried out is the modest improvement of the present system and in that manner encourage a greater level of constructive engagement with the system by the people. This standpoint would deny the validity of the alternative of socialism because that would be considered to be a rejection of the rationality of the present role of the elite in the organisation of what is defined as a democratic type of society. Hence the cynicism of the public concerning what has emerged of monitory democracy has to be rejected as a reactionary alternative when compared to the necessity of the importance of genuine democratic politics under the rule of a progressive elite.

The point being made is that Flinders cannot recognise any progressive aspects of the discontent of the people with the present democratic character of society. Instead this unrest can only be understood to be an expression of irrationality and prejudice or a reactionary opposition to the very democratic aspects of the political system. Hence his approach is a justification of what is presently dominant and a rejection of any attempt to transform the situation in a collective manner. Instead this aspect of discontent if realised in terms of its reactionary objectives can only result in the creation of what would be an intolerant type of society. There is a contradictory relationship between the role of populism and the interests of the maintaining of a democratic system. Instead only the continued rule of a progressive elite can ensure that the principles of democracy are maintained and expressed. Therefore, the conception of a participatory democracy is a contradiction in relation to its objectives because this situation can only result in the domination of various forms of authoritarianism. Hence the success of democracy is established by its ability to undermine the potential for the realisation of a situation of disorder based on the role of a situation of public unrest. In other words: “The concept of democracy …. without any acceptance of the need for restraint …. can fuel the irresistible growth of public demands to the point at which they become unrealistic. The result is a decline in authority for politicians and the political system. This gradual but constant erosion of public belief, trust, and faith in political institutions, political processes and politicians leads to the collapse of any broad commitment to the public interest. This is reflected in the amplification of self-interested demands by individuals and sectional groups alongside a general decline in the discipline and sacrifices required for the common good. Democracy therefore rests upon the need to achieve a delicate balance between governing capacity and populism.”(p48) In other words a balance has to be established between the expression of the popular will and the continuation and strengthening of what has to be the crucial role of a democratic government. There is no possibility of the validity of democracy being expressed without its relationship to the coherence and stability of the role of government. In other words, democracy means the government acting on behalf of the aspirations of the people. Any other development can only result in the possibility of social unrest and the inability to establish a situation of orderly and effective government. This approach implies that democracy is expressed by the role of a political elite presiding over the present economic system of capitalism. Only the dominant influence of elites can establish the aims and objectives of society and in this manner, it is possible to establish the realisation of the principles of progress in an effective and orderly approach.

Therefore, the apparent choices for society seem to be between forms of orderly democratic government or the rejection of all forms of administration in the name of liberty. This latter approach is based on the expression of an absolute individualism as opposed to the forms of social discipline imposed by the role of an accountable democratic type of society. In terms of these choices the issue of socialism does not seem to be relevant. Instead capitalism is assumed to be the superior economic system because it corresponds with the role of democratic government. The aim of socialism is defined as being unrealistic and its potential for the realisation of human emancipation without the domination of capital is effectively rejected. Instead democracy is understood to be the system in which political choices can be made in the most consistent and fair manner on the basis of the understanding that capitalism is the superior economic system. However, the apparent ability of the present economic system to be able to meet the needs of the people often contradicts the expectations of the people who consistently have aspirations that cannot be realised in reality; therefore the role of democracy is to undermine the tensions caused by this apparent failure and instead attempt to meet the needs of the people in the most effective manner. In this sense the contradiction between expectations and what can be possible is resolved in the most harmonious manner. But such a situation requires the continuous and smooth role of a democratic political system. The criticism of this approach by socialists would be that the continuation of capitalism means that the principles of democracy cannot be realised in a consistent and effective manner. This is because the interests of capital will be favoured in this situation instead of the aspirations of the people. For example, the welfare state is continually being undermined because of the interests of the principles of economic efficiency. Only the transformation of political power and the realisation of socialism can resolve these questions of the genuine lack of democratic accountability of the capitalist system. This is an issue that Flinders considers can be resolved in terms of reform rather than revolutionary transformation. The problem is that the forces favouring reform are increasingly undermined by the offensive of capital to uphold an economic system even if this means undermining the social interests of the majority of the people. Flinders wants to defend the rationality of the political system against the possible unreasonable expectations of the people which can be defined as populism. But this means that he defends a possible of austerity as being logical and sensible given the limited resources of any form of economy and society. But what he does not discuss is whether these resources could be utilised in a more effective manner in terms of the creation of an alternative socialist type of society. In other words, his approach has to be dogmatic because he can only envisage the continuation of capitalism and the prospect of a different system is considered to be not feasible. However, this means that he implicitly accepts the view that capitalism is the only rational system.

However, there is also a possible contradiction in the approach of Flinders. This is because he is against the perspective that the role of the market should not be questioned. He is in favour of the importance of responsibility in how the market is organised so that the system of capitalism is modified by the principles of social responsibility and the welfare of the people. However, he considers that the reason for the dominating role of the market is because of the imperative to realise the constant increasing expectations of the consumer, and so does not consider that the domination of capital over labour is the primary economic issue. The point is that it is the requirements of capital accumulation that transform the role of labour into an expression of consumer requirements. On this basis it is possible to realise the process of the extraction of surplus value. Every worker has to become a consumer in order that surplus value can be made. But instead of making this connection the emphasis of Flinders is on the acquisitive role of the consumer in terms of the importance of market demand and the development of an ideology that defends the aims of greed and inequality. But such aspects are connected to the character of the economic system. The fact that workers become consumers does not mean that this aspect defines the system. Instead economic activity is still based on the exploitation of labour by capital. Only in this context can the role of the market be understood. Indeed, if the role of the market was the most important aspect of economic activity the workers would be continually paid high wages in order to buy consumer goods. But increasing the tendency towards low wages in order to promote higher profits has meant that society is increasingly based on the creation of goods that cannot be sold. The result is an economic crisis for the shops that sell consumer goods. Hence the problem is not that of high market demand but instead the increased inability to realise the interests of the consumer because of the increasing contradictions of the capitalist system. The necessity to realise high profits is connected to a declining market for goods. But instead of outlining the contradictions of the capitalist system, Flinders instead emphasises in a one-sided manner the limitations of the role of the consumer market. H considers that the objectives of the market influence all aspects of the economy and politics in a detrimental manner, but this means that he blames the people for the limitations of the capitalist system. The point is that people as market consumers do not have primary economic or political power. Instead consumers only respond to the objectives established by the capital-labour relation. The objective should be not to limit the apparent excesses of the role of the market, but instead to transform the objectives of the system by overcoming the domination and continuation of the capital-labour relation.

Instead of this standpoint Flinders considers that the progressive aim should be to uphold the social objectives of the public sector and in this manner modify the domination of the role of the market. But he considers that the reason for this increased influence of the market at the expense of the interests of the public sector is because of the increasing demands of the public as a consumer or a process of transformation from democratic citizenship to the approach of consumer citizenship. Hence the people are responsible for the various limitations of society. But in actuality it has been governments which have promoted this development and the role of the people has been secondary in this context. Furthermore, the people have often become concerned about the undermining of the role of public services. In the context of austerity various governments have aimed to decrease public expenditure, and in this manner attempt to revive the economy. This approach has not been popular and so it cannot be said that the public are responsible for the decreased importance of the role of the welfare state. Instead it is governments acting in what they consider to be the interests of capital which have introduced austerity politics, and in this manner undermined the importance of public services. Hence the central issue is not the consumer against the role of the welfare state but rather the priorities of governments acting in the interests of capital that is the problem. The only manner in which this situation can be transformed is not to vaguely suggest that the process of democracy should be enhanced but instead to connect the role of democracy with the advocacy of a perspective that will facilitate the realisation of socialism. Instead of this standpoint in a vague manner Flinders considers that the possibility to reconcile the role of a progressive and democratic type of capitalism can be connected to the aspirations of the people. In a vague manner he defines the important issues that of politics versus markets, but in actuality the role of politics has been to uphold the importance of the market within a capitalist society and the situation of austerity. This situation can only be changed by increased support for a socialist alternative rather than the vague approach of the defence of politics versus the market. In other words, the approach of Flinders is to blame the people for undermining the ability of politicians to limit the importance of the market. But in actuality it has been the politicians who have introduced various strategies that have resulted in the increased importance of the market at the expense of the role of the public sector. These politicians have been motivated to defend the interests of capitalism in periods of economic recession. In this context the possibility to develop an alternative approach has been undermined by the very illusions of the people in the validity of the market. The actual options are not politics versus the markets but instead the utilisation of genuine progressive politics to undermine the importance of capitalism.

What is being outlined is that Flinders considers the motivations of the people to be irrational and often unreasonable and that these aspects can be overcome by the reestablishment of the credibility of democratic government. Hence, he is contending that the people are often defined by populist and emotional views that are not compatible with the requirements of genuine democratic politics. But this implies that the politicians can express a progressive elite that could be capable of the introduction of policies that uphold a genuine conception of the role of the public interest that is able to promote the most progressive possible understanding of the actual public interest. Hence, he is implying that the rule of the elite is the basis to reconcile the views of the public with what should be a progressive type of politics. But this development actually requires the formation of left wing social democratic governments that would be seriously committed to the introduction of reforms and the defence of the welfare state. But Flinders does not make this type of recommendation. Instead his approach is generalised and not related to the actual character of politics. He is reluctant to support any type of left-wing politics as the only alternative to the politics of support for the market despite having this approach as an aspect of his perspective. Hence there is no strategy for change and instead only a vague commitment to democracy and the importance of politics as the alternative to the domination of the market. Hence his approach is based on generalities that have no genuine relationship to the actual character of politics and the importance of the development of the actions of government. His vague defence of the role of politics versus the market is not translated into what this means in terms of the importance of political organisations. Hence, he cannot support the role of left-wing Social Democracy even though this viewpoint would seem to be the logical result of his approach. Instead his standpoint is limited to the vague advocacy of the importance of democracy and the role of politics, but this is not outlined in relation to the importance of establishing a definite political perspective. Instead the emphasis is on opposing the irrationalism of the public and the pro market approach of various governments. There is no outline of a definite programme by which the objective of democracy can be advanced and effectively established. Instead Flinders knows what he is against in terms of an emphasis on the role of the market, but his alternative is only outlined in the most generalised terms. Therefore it is not surprising that in an elitist manner he blames the people for supporting the importance of the market and so are responsible for the various limitations of the present economic and political situation: In other words the outline of the problems of the present situation in terms of the influence of irrationalism and the unreasonable demands of the public would seem to express the importance of a situation of political crisis rather than the possibility to overcome this situation and realise a progressive alternative. Thus the conclusion of Flinders in terms of an assertion of optimism seems to be unconvincing: “Revitalising politics, building a set of authentic political relationships and forging a more optimistic view of the future therefore depends on us all taking responsibility for the depth and nature of democratic politics in the twentieth first century.”(p186) But there is no strategy for this perspective apart from the vague view that it is necessary to oppose the influence of irrationalism and greed. But how can people presently defined by uncritical support for the role of the market as individual consumers become the basis of the expression of a collective and democratic form of politics? Instead of this unsatisfactory ambiguity we would suggest that the limitations of the role of the market and the capitalist system can only be ended by the realisation of an alternative socialist system. But this issue of socialism is never mentioned by Flinders instead he accepts the continuation of capitalism and the necessity of democratic improvements to that system.

However, none of these criticisms in and of themselves indicate the feasibility of the socialist alternative. It is still necessary to discuss the feasibility of socialism. One of the few attempts to outline what is meant by socialism has been elaborated by Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes in ‘Imagine: A Socialist Vision for the 21st century’(Canongate books, Edinburgh, 2000) In an important manner this book is immediately problematical because it is based on the possibility of the realisation of socialism in Scotland. This perspective is questionable because the issue of the relationship of Scotland to the rest of the UK has to be outlined in a systematic manner, and then the importance of the realisation of socialism in Europe and the world has to be analysed in some level of thoroughness. However, despite these limitations the issue of socialism is outlined in systematic terms, and this is related to an understanding that the problems with capitalism, such as the generation of poverty and unemployment have not been resolved in advanced economies like the UK. In this context the important issue is that it has become increasingly difficult to overcome and resolve the continuation of acute inequality within capitalism and so the importance of a socialist alternative is still relevant. However, the problem that the authors will have to address is whether it is possible and credible to develop support for socialism given the fact that the capitalist system seems to be omnipotent and not likely to be transformed by mass action. There may be popular discontent, but this does not mean that political action to generate the realisation of a socialist alternative is a feasible option given the difficulties involved in creating the possibility of the active participation of the people in a form of revolutionary type politics. The authors outline the situation of the intensified exploitation of the working class of the UK since the 1970’s, but how Is this apparently subordinated and defeated class to acquire the capacity to change society? Instead the very indication of the ability of capital to be able to impose low wages on the working class would seem to suggest that the workers have become defeated over the recent period. Hence how can this apparently adverse situation be transformed into the opposite of the development of an increased capacity of the workers to engage in collective action to transform society? The book argues that the capitalist system still requires the role of the workers in order to create wealth, but the point is can this increasingly exploited class acquire the necessary ability to be able to overcome its subordinated situation. What is being suggested is that the present situation is characterised by increasingly low wage employment, but this vey development does not indicate the development of the capacity of the workers to change the character of society. Instead the subordination of labour seems to have become an inherent aspect of social reality. The only genuine prediction in this situation is that the increased importance of technology will mean the constant tendency for increased unemployment. The working class is being portrayed as a class that is unable to define its own destiny because of the omnipotent power of capital. This analysis is considered to be a criticism of the character of capitalism, but its apparent adverse implications for the possibility of the realisation of socialism are not acknowledged. The criticism being made is that it is not meant to deny the importance of an offensive of capital against labour over the past fifty years, but instead to establish the necessity of the development of a strategy that will generate a challenge to this development. How can what seems to be a defeated class create the necessary collective strength to reject the aims of capitalism and conservative governments? But the apparent unwillingness to tackle this issue of the situation of what seems to be a subordinate class without an power and ability to change society in its favour means that the authors become critics of capitalism, but apparently lacking any understanding of the viability of alternatives. Hence, they comment: “But capitalism has turned into a gigantic obstacle blocking the advance of civilisation. Far from being a vehicle for human progress, the profit system more than ever before, retards, distorts, corrupts and stifles science.”(p66) However, the point is that these important limitations do not represent the possibility of an alternative if the apparent ability to continue to impose the domination of capital over society remains unchallenged. Instead in a vague manner there is the vague claim that the role of computer technology could become the basis of the realisation of a system of popular democracy. But how is this aim to be realised? What is the strategy that will realise this objective, in terms of the creation of popular support for the aim of progressive political developments? The authors are good critics of the present system, but this approach is not satisfactory in relation to the There is a vague commitment to the objective of the realisation of direct democracy but this is no more than an ambiguous intention that has little relationship to the elaboration of a coherent and convincing strategy for the realisation of socialism.

Arguments are made for the expansion of the importance of public services and for the land to be genuinely owned by the people but how is this development to occur? Who will generate the necessary collective and social power to realise this type of objective? It is outlined how the very character of capitalism is based on the role of cooperative labour, and the call is made for the creation of a socialist and democratically planned economy. It is suggested in dogmatic terms that in this situation people would become more important than profit. But how is this prospect to be realised? How can popular support for this objective to be developed? The answer is not outlined in terms of the elaboration of a perspective to develop the class consciousness of the workers of Scotland to promote the realisation of the advance of socialism, but instead on the notion of the conception that people are inherently more progressive in Scotland: “Many people rightly support independence because they believe that an independent Scotland would be more egalitarian, more left-wing, more socialist in outlook than a ‘Cruel Britannia’. Certainly, the balance of forces in Scotland is more heavily weighted in favour of the working class than in Britain as a whole. The influence of socialism is deeper. The forces of right-wing conservatism are weaker. The political centre of gravity is significantly further to the left.” (p127) But what is sufficiently acknowledged is that this emphasis on the importance of the politics of Scotland could be of benefit primarily for the interests of the Scottish National Party. Instead it is argued that the SNP has right wing politics that will not satisfy the working people of Scotland. However, what is underestimated is that the claims and aspirations of nationalism could become more important than the rival standpoint of socialism. The approach of socialism is most compatible with internationalism and so is not easily reconciled with nationalist aspirations. Hence this apparent difference could mean that nationalist aspirations become more important than socialism, and this is what happened in relation to the political development of Scotland. The nationalist aspiration became more emotionally convincing to the people of Scotland and the result was the decreasing influence of the role of the Labour party and the connected undermining of the aim of socialism. In this context the Scottish Socialist party could only thrive by adapting to this situation in an opportunist manner. The overall result meant that the influence of internationalism connected to the socialist approach was replaced with the domination of a nationalist approach. The result was the supremacy of the SNP.

Hence the aim of the authors to support the formation of a socialist government in Scotland was problematical because the result of the promotion of the aspiration of the importance of national independence in order to create a progressive political development could only be to the benefit of the SNP. This meant the objective of socialism was rejected in favour of the importance of national aspirations. The actual aim of the realisation of socialism could only be consistently upheld in terms of a united struggle of the workers of the UK in favour of this objective, and this development would also have to be part of the attempt to create a united socialist states of Europe. However, the authors contend that the successful struggle to end the role of the poll tax indicated that this possibility of socialism is a feasible alternative. But unfortunately, this possibility was never realised and instead the capitalist system was stablished by the role of the New Labour government and then the imposition of austerity by the Cameron led Tory administration. The result of these developments was that the working class has been on the defensive in comparison to the situation of the offensive approach of various Conservative governments. The SNP government in Scotland has not been able to provide an alternative in this situation and has instead accommodated to the imposition of austerity. In this situation the forces for socialism have become fragmented and has often split, with the result that they are generally ineffective. The Labour party has only one member of parliament in Scotland. The authors outlined the argument in favour of a democratic conception of socialism based on the involvement of the people in the process of its administration and development. This is a worthwhile aim but what is not outlined is how to obtain the support of the people for this objective. The argument is made in favour of a genuine democratic system of participation by the people in the process of the organisation and administration of society, but what is not explained in adequate terms is how the influence of the established parties will be overcome in order that this possibility can be realised. Reference is made to various examples of where the workers have made advances in the organisation of society but how will this understanding undermine the powerful appeal of the SNP concerning the perspective that social problems can be resolved if Scotland is able to form its own national government with the aim of establishing increased prosperity? These issues are evaded and instead it is assumed that a situation of increased autonomy or independence for Scotland will enhance the possibility of the introduction of revolutionary measures by a Scottish socialist government. But such a development requires the capacity for a socialist type party to be able to overcome the alternative attraction of the ideas of Scottish nationalism. What is not anticipated is that Scottish nationalism could utilise aspects of socialism in order to enhance its own appeal for the working class. Indeed, this development has resulted in decreased support for Scottish forms of socialism and the Labour party. The inability to establish socialism as a credible alternative to the appeal of nationalism was shown to be a failure. In this context the attempt of the authors to utilise various aspects of a nationalist approach was shown to be problematical. The point was that in this situation people preferred adherence to a consistent nationalist approach rather than the confused attempt to combine nationalism and socialism.

The authors would argue that their standpoint is based on a consistent promotion of internationalism. They contend: A fully fledged socialist society could never be achieved within the borders of a small country such as Scotland. The eradication of all social and economic inequality could only be achieved on an all-European, or perhaps even a world scale. Nonetheless a Scottish socialist government could at least begin to move in the direction of socialism by taking control of the key sectors of the economy, by introducing workplace and community democracy, and by implementing radical and popular reforms which would set an example for other countries to follow.”(p190) However what is not acknowledged is that this very possibility would mean that the appeal to the importance of the role of class would have to become more important than the rival influence of nationalism. Only the generation of the influence of an internationalist consciousness within the Scottish workers would create the ideological and political conditions for this perspective to become feasible. The argument is made that advances in modern technology mean that the introduction of a planned and democratic economy is possible, but the issue that is avoided is the creation of a mass consciousness that could become the basis to realise this perspective. The problem that is not tackled is that it is the very influence of nationalism which undermines the creation of an international class consciousness which could generate the struggle for socialism in Scotland. Hence the outline of a useful understanding of the possibilities of socialism is not connected to the recognition that the most influential aspect that undermines the credibility of this alternative is the apparent rival importance of the ideology of nationalism. This point could be applied to the UK in general. Therefore, there seems to be no alternative to the recognition of the important necessity to outline the merits of internationalism in a practical manner. Such an approach is connected to the emphasis that we are already in a global economy but that this situation is presently connected to the domination of capital over labour. Hence the only manner in which this aspect can be overcome is by the generation of a succession of revolutionary developments which can represent an undermining of the global domination of capital.

It will be argued that it is too difficult and complex to overcome and replace the influence of nationalism within the working class. However, the point being made is not that the necessary national basis of the process of revolutionary transformation is invalid but instead that this aspect can only be successful in terms of the development of a genuine process of international change. That is why the influence of a national consciousness is inadequate in relation to the task of international revolution. Indeed, it could be argued that it is inconceivable that a process of radical social change can be developed without the generation of recognition of the importance of international action by the working class. McCombes would generally agree with this point, but it is related uneasily to the view that socialism can be realised in Scotland in national terms. Hence there is an uncertainty in his approach in terms of an unresolved emphasis on the importance of the national and international aspects of the revolutionary process. But in actuality the influence of nationalism has been reactionary in Scotland because it has been utilised to reject the importance of the aims of socialism. This development is an indication that only the influence of consistent internationalism can generate the necessary class consciousness required to promote the realisation of the aim of socialism. This analysis does not mean that the role of the nation is unimportant in relation to the aims of the class struggle. But instead that the importance of the nation has to consistently connected to its relationship to the advance of socialism in national and international terms. In a sense McCombes makes this point but he also obscures it by not clarifying what should be a principled relationship of the national and international in the process of class struggle. What is being suggested is that the analysis that is being developed by McCombes outlines in a dogmatic manner the assumption that the people of Scotland have an inherent capacity to strive to realise the aim of socialism. But this means that the people of England are also being implicitly defined as being reactionary and opposed to the aspirations that are expressed in Scotland. The result of this apparent assumption is that the elaboration of a perspective to create the conditions for the struggle for socialism within the UK is not outlined. There is no detailed mention of the situation in the UK as a whole, and the result of this apparent omission is that it is only possible to conceive of socialism as something that is unique to the people of Scotland, and the result of this type of emphasis means that the character of socialism as an international aspiration has to be effectively denied. But primarily the influence of the SNP is underestimated. Instead it is assumed that the period of the ideological and political supremacy of the SNP will be brief and that this situation will soon be replaced by the increasing popularity of socialism in Scotland. This assumption proved to be illusory and instead the actual development was that of the decline of socialism and the influence of the Labour party and this aspect was replaced by the overwhelming popularity and influence of the SNP. Th result of this situation was that the SNP developed a reform type of agenda in order to consolidate its appeal to the working class. This meant that the decline of the approach of socialism seemed to have become irreversible in Scotland. However, this situation has also been expressed by the increasing ascendency of the Conservative party in England, with the result that the Labour party seems to be in a situation of irreversible decline. This development is an indication that the influence of nationalism can be an effective expression of the ability to undermine the influence of the approach of socialism. What is necessary is for the forces of socialism to be able to develop a coherent and effective strategy that can relate to and provide an alternative to the standpoint of nationalism. This development has to be connected to an indication of the arguments in favour of the approach of internationalism. It has to be outlined how internationalism is not an abstract doctrine but is instead an expression of the interests of working people and the aim of creating a type of society based on the principles of social equality. But at present the approach of internationalism has no popular support and is generally not understood as being important when compared to the role of national traditions. But what is also important is to develop a strategy for change that would indicate the importance of the objective of socialism in relation to the possibility of social and economic progress. Most people have no understanding of what is meant by socialism and instead associate this approach with the role of Stalinism. The Labour manifesto was generally ignored as being irrelevant because of its ultimate objective of the realisation of a socialist form of society. Hence the Labour party was defeated in the 2019 general election because its left-wing aims were not understood by the people. Instead the Tory slogan of ‘get Brexit done’ had much more popular support. This situation was an indication that the Tories could express mass support because of their connection to what were considered to be nationalist themes. The same point could be made about the SNP in Scotland. Hence the perspective of socialism was undermined and defeated because of the lack of a connection of this objective with the apparent nationalist aspirations of the people of the UK. In this manner the interests of capitalism could be defended and upheld even if this objective was never mentioned by the supporters of the Conservative party. The approach of nationalism had a powerful emotional meaning that undermined the alternative of an appeal to the role of class struggle. Indeed, the various Marxist parties seem to be in a situation of irreversible decline and yet they are not apparently aware of this situation. Instead they can uphold their politics in a complacent manner because they are seemingly ignorant of the problems expressed for Marxism by the situation of a low level of class consciousness. Instead they seem to compensate for this dire situation by a continual advocacy of various forms of activism that would seem to be able to transform the present situation. In this context it is necessary to try and uphold the approach of Marxism in a more convincing and effective manner. Only in these terms can support for Marxist objectives be generated.

Another attempt to outline the standpoint of socialism is made by Sean Matgamna in his book: ‘Socialism Makes Sense’, Imprint digital, Exeter 2018) The arguments in support of socialism are outlined in terms of a discussion of the alternative between capitalism and socialism. An advocate of capitalism contends that this is an economic system that is able to realise the material needs of the people in the most effective manner. The view of Matgamna is that this defence of the present system is dogmatic and ignores the importance of inequality and the exploitation that is necessary to maintain capitalism. The character of socialism is outlined in the following terms: “Socialism is human solidarity, beginning as a system of 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 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. The socialists are the consistent democrats.”(p17) This perspective is based on what is considered to be the logic of the role of the class struggle of the workers: “Socialist ideas are built up from the history of capitalism, from working class battles and other experiences, and from Marx’s analysis of capital. Socialism will build on the science, the technology, the co-operation, the working-class solidarity, developed within capitalism but free from the being poisoned by exploitation and all that generates 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 private profit. Operated in the interests not of profit for a few, but of everyone.”(p18) This development will be realised by the importance of the realisation of the logic of working class solidarity: “Working class solidarity here and now is a weapon in the class war: workers stand together and look out for each other. It is also a manifestation inside capitalism of the human solidarity of the socialist society we will build ….. Working class solidarity embodies here and now the common humanity of human beings living in the dog-eat-dog conditions of capitalism.” (p19)

The problem with this approach is that it would seem that the development of the political conditions for socialism via the realisation of the collective logic of the role of the working class should be an inevitable and inherent aspect of the character of capitalism. But this aspect has been undermined by the problem of the development of the class consciousness of the workers to a level that would be adequate for the realisation of socialism. This issue has also been complicated by the role of working- class parties that accommodate to the limitations of capitalism and so contribute to the undermining of any possibility of the generation of revolutionary aspirations within the working class. Furthermore, the genuine Marxist parties are often small and divided, and so lack credibility which means that the objective of the realisation of socialism becomes marginalised. The overall result of this situation is that it seems that despite its limitations the system of capitalism seems to be the most credible. Matgamna tries to deny the importance of these problems by saying that socialists are motivated by the noble aims of economic equality and social justice, but this contention does not tackle the apparent lack of credibility of the various rival and sectarian forces advocating socialism. The crisis of the revolutionary organisations would seem to imply that the objective of socialism cannot be realisable, and that instead socialism represents an aim that has some coherence in theoretical terms but lacks credibility as a feasible strategy of change. Instead the very political limitations of the various revolutionary organisations would seem to imply that socialism is an objective that lacks strategic and political credibility. But Matgamna tries to deny the importance of these problems and instead suggests that its inherent superiority as opposed to the limitations of capitalism will continue to generate its relevance. But the problem with this standpoint is that the very inability to develop mass support for the objective of socialism would seem to undermine its theoretical and political credibility. The point is that we have to begin from the situation of the apparent crisis of the socialist approach if the development of policies in this context are to be elaborated. In other words, the addressing of the issue of the crisis of socialism. Instead Matgamna’s assumption of the inherent superiority of principled socialism undermines the possibility to develop a recognition of the assertion of socialism in a situation of the overall crisis of this ideology. The problem with the credibility of his arguments is that if socialism is a rational and progressive alternative to capitalism why is there an apparent situation of the profound ideological crisis of this approach? There is no seeming answer to this question apart from the assertion that genuine socialism always manifest itself despite various distortions like Stalinism. However, what is ignored with this understanding is the actual importance of the major modification of the standpoint of socialism which had the form of reformism or the view that improvements could be made within capitalism without the necessity of revolutionary change. This was the major political basis for the marginalisation of a revolutionary socialist approach, and this standpoint continues to be the most dominant expression of how the objective of socialism is understood and conceived. Hence the forces of revolutionary Marxism have to develop an approach that would express its relationship to reformism. Can it enter into alliance with social democracy in order to generate the advance of the objective of socialism? This issue is not sufficiently addressed by Matgamna because it is assumed that this prospect of a relationship of unity between Social Democrats and Marxists has become unprincipled given the right-wing trajectory of social democracy in the recent period. But this apparent omission of the discussion of an apparently important aspect of political strategy actually results in the failure to outline how the process of transition from capitalism to socialism can be understood in convincing terms. Instead in a moralistic manner the validity of socialism is asserted because of the various limitations of capitalism and so the ideological influence of the proponents of capitalism is not sufficiently addressed and nor is a strategy for the realisation of socialism. Instead the aim of socialism is outlined in terms of the inherent limitations of capitalism. We can agree with this point, but this approach cannot establish why people should become motivated to strive to realise socialism, and nor is a coherent strategy for change established in relation to the challenge of overcoming the domination of capitalism. Matgamna indicates the influence of ideology which is utilised in order to undermine the credibility of the socialist alternative but an important reason why this ideological standpoint becomes important is because the apparent domination of bourgeois ideology seems to be invincible. The political basis for the realisation of socialism seem to be problematical when compared to the capacity for the defenders of capitalism to generate popular support for the continuation of the system. Matgamna accepts this point but also outlines the importance of the aspect of exploitation of labour by capital which continually generates the possibility of discontent and unrest that can result in social transformation. But the problem with this perspective is that it does not seem to have been very successful in the period of the system of capitalism.

Instead of sufficiently addressing this point, Matgamna indicates the continuation of the importance of class struggle because of the situation of the exploitative domination of labour by capital: “The profit drive is therefore the all controlling mainspring, regulator, and determinant in the system. That will remain so until conscious, democratic overall planning replaces profit and competition as the mainspring – until the workers who are now the basic exploited class take collective ownership and substitute free cooperation for “wage slavery”. 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 those conflicts. We educate ourselves about politics and society in the process.” (p49) This perspective would seem to imply that there is a dynamic of the intensification of the class struggle caused by the situation of the exploitation of labour by capital. But if this understanding was accurate, why has it not resulted in the successful realisation of the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism? Matgamna. The, point is that there are important economic, political and ideological reasons why the collective aspects of the social role of the working class has not led to the successful realisation of socialism. This situation is also connected to the importance of the influence of Social Democracy and Stalinism which has meant that the aspirations of the workers has been modified in terms of the interests of these movements. In this situation the influence of the alternative of revolutionary Marxism has been miniscule and the spontaneous dynamic of the class struggle has not been sufficiently powerful to generate the possibility of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Indeed, the workers would not consider that their aims can be most effectively realised by the creation of a new type of economic and political system. Hence the actual marginalisation of authentic forms of Marxism has meant that the possibility to connect any discontent of the workers to the aim of the revolutionary transformation of society has not become a feasible possibility. But how is the development of the influence of genuine Marxism to occur? This is an issue which Matgamna seems reluctant to address and instead he is content to merely assert that the struggles of the working class are a regular aspect of the character of capitalist society. This point may be valid, but it does not explain that these various struggles are not able to create the political conditions for the demise of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. Instead there seems to be the vague expectation that some moment the generation of the conditions for the successful transformation will occur. But the point is that this perspective underestimates the importance of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class. The point was made by Gramsci that the ideological hegemony of the ruling class has to be ended if the alternative of socialism is to be realised. But this development is not occurring in the present and instead various forms of justification of the present system are influential and essentially unchallenged except by a minority of Marxists. The workers themselves seem to have accepted the supremacy of capitalism. The point is that an effective strategy of change has to be developed and become popular if the aim of socialism is to become credible. But Matgamna seems reluctant to outline this programme of action for the class struggle. Instead there is an awareness of the importance of the defeats of the working class in the process of mass actions, but this awareness does not seem to be connected to an importance to advance a perspective for social change. Instead there is just the assumption that the capitalist system cannot undermine the importance of situation of antagonism between the major social classes. What is not recognised is that the importance of tensions between the major classes has not resulted in the generation of a dynamic of a process of social transformation. Indeed, it could be argued that capital has been successful in its offensive against the gains made by the working class within capitalism. In this context the challenges of the present situation have to be addressed and tackled. But it is questionable whether Matgamna has been able to provide a satisfactory basis to address the importance of the continued domination of capitalism and the connected decline in importance of the influence of the working class within society. Instead the objectives of socialism as the outcome of the role of the class struggle are emphasised in a dogmatic manner. The actual apparent durability of capitalism is not analysed in any effective detail and as a result the arguments in favour of the feasibility of the socialist alternative can only be indicated in rigid and dogmatic terms. This means that the approach that is being defended is to some extent being reduced to the justification of a collection of assertions. These assertions are not necessarily false, but they do require additional reasons in order to make them convincing and supportable. Instead in an assertive manner the objective of socialism is being outlined in terms that has little relationship to the actual complexity and difficulties of the class struggle. In this context it is considered as nothing more than the justification of capitalism to be sceptical about the possibilities for the success of the workers in the class struggle. Hence these dogmatic assertions do not address the actual challenges posed by the apparent lack of success of the workers over the period since the offensive of capital which has been generated by the onset of the period of austerity since the 1980’s. Matgamna admits that there has often been serious defeats of the workers in the class struggle, but that these defeats can never be decisive because of the very fact that the capitalist system needs the working class in order for the process of production and the creation of wealth. This point is obviously valid, but this does not mean that it has been possible to develop a situation of the transformation of the potential collective strength of the workers into becoming an expression of the capacity to overthrow the system. Instead what has been obvious is that the situation of the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie which has meant that the possibility to realise the successful attainment of an alternative system has rarely been realised and instead the durability of capitalism seems to be a permanent aspect of social reality. Hence the following comment of Matgamna seems to be dogmatic: “In all societies and in all history, the basic exploited class revolts. Revolts again and again. In our history, the working class has risen from defeats again and again and again. That is the other side of defeats. Every victory of the bourgeoisie is incomplete. It cannot win outright, because it needs to preserve the working class to do its work.”(p51) This point seems to be uncontroversial and an expression of the character of social reality, but this does not mean that the workers can represent a genuine possibility to realise an alternative type of society because of important political and ideological limitations. Instead of seriously discussing this issue, Matgamna instead asserts that the revival of class struggle is inevitable, and that this development will result in a challenge to the domination of capital. But such a possibility is not a general feature of the situation and it could be argued that the workers have effectively accepted the continuation of the capitalist system. What would transform the situation would be the development of an effective revolutionary party with mass support. In this manner the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class could be challenged and undermined. Matgamna instead of seriously tackling this question refers to the basic cooperative character of the trade unions and of the role of the working class in struggle. This may be valid, but unfortunately these attributes are not sufficient in order to generate the necessary capacity for the workers to overthrow capitalism. Instead what is required is the development of a credible strategy that will establish the important aspects that can facilitate the realisation of the collective character of the workers in terms of mass action to overcome the domination of capitalism and establish socialism. But instead of recognition of the importance of this approach the standpoint of Matgamna is based on the vague view that the solidarity of the role of the class struggle will somehow develop the necessary pre-conditions to overcome the domination of capital. But there have been many examples of the actions of the workers to defend their interests, but this has not resulted in the realisation of socialism because of the very fact that this has not been the aim of these struggles. Instead the defence of the interests of the workers within capitalism has been the major motive of the role of collective class action, and the aim of socialism has been considered to be irrelevant in this context. Only the influence of a revolutionary type party has led to an increased popular support for the objective of socialism. But without the influence of a credible socialist party it seems that the aim of socialism is practically not feasible. Hence the vital task is to create a convincing revolutionary party that would have influence within society. In that manner the aim of socialism would no longer seem to be impractical and instead would assume possible practical possibility of being realised. The role of the party in this context is to promote the development of a consciousness in support of the objective of socialism within the working class. But such an interaction of party and class can only become feasible if the programme of the party seems to be credible and can generate popular support. In this context the workers could potentially become adherents of the policy of the socialist organisation, and in that manner an authentic development of an interaction between party and class could be generated which would generate the prospect of the revolutionary transformation of society. However, the enduring lack of a revolutionary party means that the workers instead are under the ideological hegemony of the standpoint of capitalism. It is difficult to establish the basis for an advance towards socialism in these circumstances. What is required for radical change is an interaction of the role of the Marxist party with the potential of the collective strength of the working class. This point is not sufficiently expressed by Matgamna would instead emphasises the inherent capacity of the workers to change the character of society.

Matgamna does indicate the importance of a revolutionary party for the process of influencing the workers to become advocates of socialism. It is understood that without the importance of the role of the revolutionary party the possible discontent of the workers cannot be transformed into a successful struggle for socialism. There is also a general understanding that the process of possible revolutionary change has been undermined by the role of Social Democracy and Stalinism. But the argument about the necessity of a revolutionary party is only asserted and not established in terms of the importance of the development of a strategy that promotes the possibility of change to socialism. This is an important task that is connected to the aim to create a credible revolutionary party with a programme that can facilitate the class consciousness of the workers becoming revolutionary. The point being made is not that strategy can establish the guarantees of the development of support for socialism within the working class. Rather that people understand what a given Marxist party is advocating in terms of the aim of socialism. Furthermore, in relation to the aims of the revolutionary organisation people are able to evaluate what is required in order to bring about the transformation of society. Traditionally the classic revolutionary strategy has been expressed by Trotsky’s Transitional Programme. We would suggest that this approach has to be connected to the actual conditions of present capitalist development and the situation within the working class. In relation to the UK we would suggest that the attempt to develop a consistent left-wing character of the Labour party acquires crucial importance. The formation of a left-wing trajectory of the Labour party could facilitate the realisation of a government that was based on the introduction of genuinely progressive reforms. On this basis the struggle for socialism could be advanced. But these promising possibilities will not be advanced if an influential revolutionary party is not created within the UK. This point could be applied to all the countries of the world.