UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURE TO REALISE SOCIALISM

The issue of the failure to realise socialism is connected to an evaluation of the present character of the prevailing system of capitalism. If it can be shown in a convincing manner that capitalism is an efficient type of society that is able to realise the aspirations of the people it could be argued that the aim of socialism is a dogmatic perspective that would not improve the conditions and well being of the members of this present social formation. It could also be suggested that capitalism is a type of system that is able to realise the aspirations of society in the most effective manner. In this context it could be suggested that the aim of socialism is a perspective that will only be supported by the dogmatic adherents of Marxism and left wing radicalism. Steven Pinker has outlined a defence of capitalism in his book: ‘Enlightenment Now’ (Penguin Books, London 2018) He upholds an approach that contends that various pessimistic conceptions of the situation of humanity are false and that instead the various types of societies based on the capitalist system are undergoing a general situation of progress and the improvement of the conditions of the people. His overall position is that of the defence of the role of the Enlightenment or the view that the influence of liberal intellectual thought can promote the progress of the various forms of society that are connected to the capitalist system. The assumption being made is that the only alternative would be some form of reactionary regression that led to the undermining of economic efficiency and its connection to the importance of liberal democracy. The intellectual background of the era of the enlightenment is the influence of the progressive role of philosophy and its emphasis on the possibility for humans to act in a rational and progressive manner and the connection of this approach with the importance of science for the realisation of the improvement of the social conditions of the people. These aspects were connected to the importance of the influence of humanism or the rejection of the religious basis of the defence of reactionary forms of society that justified the oppression and domination of people in the name of tradition and the repudiation of the role of reason. This standpoint was connected to a non-dogmatic adherence to the importance of progress, but this did not mean the acceptance of an unrealistic understanding of the necessity for the total transformation of society in terms of the objectives of aims like socialism. Instead this progress was based on the realisation of the potential of the existing forms of society which had led to the development of capitalism. Hence the enlightenment was based on an emphasis on the efficient forms of the creation of wealth and the related rejection of a dogmatic adherence to the necessity of redistribution or the demise of the capitalist system in the name of unrealistic aims like socialism. This meant it was necessary to improve the types of society which had been created by the generation of the importance of the realisation of wealth creation which was integrally connected to the role of capitalism. Thus, the system which had to be aspired to and realised was that of a democratic form of capitalism. In order to ensure the stability of the emerging capitalist system it was necessary to promote the importance of peace between nations, and to overcome any development of international tensions and conflicts between nations. In this manner forms of social progress could be realised in terms of a situation of peace and prosperity.

A Marxist would contend that this is an understanding of capitalism that glosses over its contradictions and problems. Marxism would suggest that these limitations indicate the possibility and necessity for the development of socialism. But Pinker would contend that these aspects have generally been resolved in terms of the importance of the continuation of capitalism and as a result the alternative of socialism would not be an improvement in relation to this situation of generalised progress in the context of the apparent superior aspects of capitalism in economic and political terms. Therefore, the aspects of uncertainty and the limitations of human activity and consciousness can be overcome by the overall development of progress: “So for all the flaws in human nature, it contains the seeds of its own improvement, as long as it comes up with norms and institutions that channel parochial interests into universal benefits. Among these norms are free speech, nonviolence, cooperation, cosmopolitanism, human rights, and an acknowledgement of human fallibility, and among the institutions are science, education, media, democratic governments, international organizations and markets. Not coincidentally, these were the major brainchild of the enlightenment.” (p28) Thus it is assumed that the periods of international tension and conflict and the role of poverty and unemployment were aspects of modern capitalist society that could be overcome and replaced by a generalised situation of progress and social improvement. The modern system was based on the principles of enlightenment that could create a situation of intellectual aspiration to ensure that the various problems of society were overcome and that instead a type of progress became realised. The result has been the increasing realisation of forms of affluence and social prosperity, and the various situations of poverty are increasingly being replaced by a situation of generalised progress. Hence Pinker suggests that the major criticism of the importance of the enlightenment has been the reactionary role of religion and its emphasis on the rejection of the significance of secular objectives for the improvement of society, together with the approach of regressive forms of nationalism that reject the necessity for the cooperative development of what is an international community. The overall approach of these regressive forms of belief systems is to suggest that society is in a situation of inherent and inevitable decline and that the problem is the contemporary emphasis on the importance of science and modernity. Hence the assumption that is being made is that regression to a less advanced type of society would be welcome and an alternative to the various limitations of the expression of the forms of modernity.

In relation to these various expressions of reactionary views, Pinker seems to be right to suggest that they do not represent a progressive alternative to the problems of the present. But it is interesting that Pinker does not seem to accept that the approach of socialism could express the only genuine alternative to the limitations of what he defines as the enlightenment. The point is that socialism does not aim to reject the progress of modernity, but instead aims to consistently realise the advances of the present in terms of the formation of a system that would realise enhanced social power for the people. Instead it is an implicit assumption of Pinker that there cannot be a progressive alternative to the type of capitalism that is presently dominant in global terms. Instead he contends that the only form of society that could challenge capitalism would be a type of regression to what have been an expression of what has been present in the past. Hence to him the choice is between an expression of tradition or the acceptance of the advantages of modernity. But it could also be argued that socialism is an expression of the most progressive aspects of the present, and that this development could realise the genuine emancipation of the people. But Pinker implicitly rejects the validity of this perspective because he considers that this type of approach is ultimately a justification of authoritarianism or is actually unrealistic. Instead he assumes that the present is the expression of a type of society that cannot be improved upon in a progressive manner. Therefore, he is assuming that the capital-labour relation is the most superior type of society and that it can only be modified rather than changed in a transforming manner. Thus, it is being suggested that capitalism is the highest form of society and that any attempt to replace it with socialism will be an expression of social regression. But this assumption means that he accepts the capital-labour relation as the type of economy and basis of society that cannot be improved or transformed. But how does he explain the fact that this type of society has led to a situation of constant discontent and attempts to transform it? He can only provide an explanation that considers that Marxism was an ideology that was false and yet was able to achieve mass support. Hence the supporters of Marxism and socialism were influenced by a false consciousness that motivated the attempt to defend the illusory aim that their objectives were realistic and progressive, and which could realise a viable alternative to capitalism. Hence the objectives of Marxism were likely to end in failure because of being an expression of an inherent illusory perspective, and instead only the continuation of a democratic type of capitalism was both progressive and realistic. But this assumption ignores the fact that historical development has generally posed the possibility of a socialist alternative to capitalism. Therefore, the credibility of the approach of Pinker depends on whether he is able to convincingly indicate that capitalism is an effective alternative to socialism. However, he does not seem to be concerned with this issue because of the uncritical assumption that capitalism represents progress which can only be resented by intellectuals of a reactionary inclination. It is being assumed that the character of the progress of modernity will be of benefit to all the members of society, and so the approach of the views of its critics is based on dogma and the rejection of the advances that have been made by the advances of civilisation. In this manner the approach of socialism can be dismissed as being based on the view that ignores the benefits of capitalism for the interests of the members of contemporary society. But this approach ignores the uncomfortable fact that the advances made under capitalism are distributed unequally because of the character of the system and that the gains are distributed unequally in favour of the large monopolies. This is one reason why discontent is a continual aspect of capitalism. But Pinker can dismiss the importance of this aspect of questioning of the values of the present system by equating it with a rejection of the advances represented by progress. To him it is not possible to suggest that there could be a system that is more progressive in its character than the present capitalist society. Instead he equates the influence of discontent with the standpoint of pessimism and the failure to recognise that society is generally and continually making progress in economic and political terms. Such a standpoint does not recognise that the approach of socialism is connected to the view that is confident about the possibility to achieve greater progress on the basis of the creating of a new type of society that is for the benefit of the majority of the people instead of the present advantages that are in the interests of a minority of capitalists and establishment politicians. Therefore, he blames the development of discontent with the situation in the present with the influence of the role of the media which has a tendency to report negative news. Thus, discontent is defined as an expression of a tendency for pessimism in consciousness and this means that he can reject the view that there could be anything seriously wrong with the present character of capitalist society. But how does his approach explain the tensions and conflicts within society? His answer is that there are problems which can cause discontent within society but that such developments can be resolved because of the generally progressive character of modern civilisation. Hence, he rejects any suggestion that the contradictory aspects of social reality might require a revolutionary form of resolution in terms of the creation of a different social formation. Instead any problems that occur within social reality can be resolved in terms of the application of goodwill and compromise and the majority of people will aspire to realise such a development. In the context that it is possible to resolve any social tensions it would be illogical and unreasonable for people to aspire to aim for the establishment of a socialist alternative. Instead the benefits of the present will always outweigh the uncertain advantages of an unknown and uncertain future that could be defined as socialism. Indeed, he considers that the influence of the views of those that are pessimistic about the prospects of society is much more influential than the alternative aspirations of socialism. But he rejects this approach by suggesting that the present capitalist form of society has advantages that express its progressive character in the following terms: “Abundance is better than poverty. Peace is better than war. Safety is better than danger. Freedom is better than tyranny. Equal rights are better than bigotry and discrimination. Literacy is better than illiteracy. Knowledge is better than ignorance. Intelligence is better than dull-wittedness. Happiness is better than misery. Opportunities to enjoy family, friends, culture and nature are better than drudgery and monotony.” (p51) Pinker assumes that capitalism will inevitably be able to realise these types of advantages and that it is a system that is based on the possibility to enable the talents of individuals to be achieved. Hence because of this assertion of the successful character of modern capitalist society the assumption that a socialist alternative could be more emancipatory is the claim that could only be made by a dogmatic Marxist who is oblivious to the advantages of the present. But Pinker’s standpoint is dogmatic because it is based on ignoring the contradictions and tensions of a capitalist system that has undergone serious economic crisis since the 1980’s. This means he also ignores the reasons for the development of social polarisation and class struggle, and so denies the importance of the development of discontent within society because of the role of economic crisis and austerity. The point is that the alternative of socialism is still credible because of the very limitations of capitalism. But Pinker ignores these issues because of his dogmatic assertion that capitalism is the superior and only feasible type of society.

Pinker contends that the health and prosperity of the people of the world has continued to improve despite the adverse consequences of the role of repressive dictatorships during the 20th century. The assumption is that the ability to be able to create the conditions for the well-being of humanity has continued to improve. The reason for this development is that the progress made in the process of wealth creation has enhanced the ability to realise the material interests of all sectors of society. This situation is connected to the advance of science and the related ability to be able to create the types of goods that met the material needs of people. Such a development is connected to the creation of economies in which the realisation of the needs of people is an important consideration. The assumption being made is that the development of a situation of successful entrepreneurs is connected to the creation of cheap consumer goods that express the requirements of society. Such a development is related to the rise in incomes of the majority of the people in global terms. There is still considerable poverty, but it is being progressively overcome by the continued creation of the development of successful economic activity. The overall tendency is towards the undermining of the importance of global poverty and its increasing replacement by a situation of growing affluence. These developments have meant the discrediting of socialism which has been associated with the unsuccessful planned economies of Stalinism: “For reasons we have seen, market economies can generate wealth prodigiously while totalitarian planned economies impose scarcity, stagnation, and often famine. Market economies, in addition to reaping the benefits of specialization and providing incentives for people to produce things that other people want, solve the problem of coordinating the efforts of hundreds of millions of people by using prices t propagate information about need and availability far and wide, a computational problem that no planner is brilliant enough to solve from a central planning bureau. A shift from collectivisation, centralised control, government monopolies, and suffocating permit bureaucracies…..to open economies took place on a number of fronts beginning in the 1980’s.” (p90) Thus the equation of the character of socialism with bureaucratic command economies is utilised in order to indicate the apparent superiority of capitalism and to establish that socialism was not a viable and durable economic and political system. Hence it is concluded that socialism could not continue to function given the apparent superiority of capitalism. It could only be a matter of time before socialism was undermined and ended by its own apparent limitations and instead capitalism asserted its domination over the world economy. In this situation it would seem that the possibility for the regeneration of the influence of socialism would be undermined by its own internal limitations. In this context it was being argued by Pinker that there was no viable alternative to capitalism. Instead the issue of the generation of advances for working people could only be realised in terms of the economic growth and success of capitalist economies. The very credibility of capitalism has indicated the inferiority and lack of credibility of the socialist alternative. The result is that socialism has become an ideal that no longer has mass support, and instead it has become generally accepted that there is no economic and political alternative to capitalism.

This perspective seems to assume that capitalism has overcome its contradictions and limitations and become a system that is able to consistently and increasingly realise the material needs of the people. But the onset of the crisis of 2008 and the imposition of policies of austerity was an indication that the contradictions and limitations of capitalism has not been resolved in an effective manner. Instead the development of the economic problems of the economic system began to revive support for an alternative based on the interests of working people. In this context the approach of socialism became relevant for a new generation of workers and intellectuals. Pinker would contend that in overall terms the system of capitalism has effectively generated wealth that is able to realise the material needs of people and has proved to be superior to the alternative of socialism. But this viewpoint ignores the importance of the aspect that capitalism is based on the exploitation of labour. This means that the system of capitalism must ultimately express the development of discontent that creates the possibility for the realisation of an economic and social alternative. However, Pinker would claim that the continued progress of capitalism in terms of increased affluence is able to overcome the possible development of any form of unrest and opposition to the system. His standpoint is based on the assumption that capitalism is able to make continued progress and be able to improve the situation of the people in a consistent and regular manner. Hence his approach is based on the assertion of an uncertain prediction about the future of capitalism which may not be realised because of the continued possibility of crisis and the development of unemployment and the generation of poverty. However, the potential for the generation of economic uncertainty does not mean that the system will be overthrown because this possibility depends on the development of the class consciousness of the workers. But increasingly discontent with the system has led to support for right wing populism rather than support for the approach of socialism. It is assumed by many people that the option of the alternative of socialism is not realistic and instead a different variation of capitalism is what is more realistic. This situation is confirmed by the inability to develop mass revolutionary parties of opposition to the present economic system. In these circumstances the capitalist system will continue to be dominant and the possibility for the realisation of a socialist alternative will be problematical. Hence it could be argued that Pinker is being more realistic to consider that the only option is the continued growth and development of capitalism. However, this prospect is continually being undermined by the crisis of capitalism, and this situation indicates that it is still in the interests of working people to strive to realise an alternative to the present system. In other words, the perspectives of Pinker are one-sided and dogmatic and are based on the underestimation of the importance of the aspect of the contradictions and limitations of capitalism. However, it is still an important task to develop mass support for a socialist alternative, and presently this task is not being realised in a successful manner. In these political circumstances the capitalist system will continue to be dominant despite its tendency for crisis and decline.

Pinker contends that the overall effect of globalisation and increased industrialisation is the creation of a situation of increased material goods and prosperity for the people of the world. The assumption is that the continued development of this tendency of economic development will create the conditions to end the situation of poverty. What is being argued is that the very logic and character of capitalism is the basis to realise affluence for the people who had previously been subject to a situation of poverty. But the point is that this possibility will not end the continued domination of labour by capital and the possibility for the tendency to undermine the development of a higher standard of living in the name of the interests of profit and capital accumulation. In this situation only the creation of strong trade unions can provide the most effective basis to realise the development of higher wages and better conditions for the workers. But at present the workers of the third world are often exploited in order to create the possibility of high profits. Only the organisation of the workers into effective trade unions can change this situation. In contrast Pinker has the dogmatic assumption that the very development of capitalism can result in the automatic possibility of a better situation for the workers. This standpoint is based on assumptions based on his viewpoint about the increasing progress of the system that is not based on the utilisation of statistics. Instead we would argue that if the workers continue to be unorganised the actual result of the role of labour is the generation of super-profits for the employers. In this situation the affluence of the workers will not be created. However, the problem is that even if we dispute the accuracy of the standpoint of Pinker this does not mean that an alternative perspective of the necessity of socialism has proved to be convincing. Instead the situation is that the workers of the world are being exploited by the forces of capital and are unable to generate the consciousness for the support of opposition to capitalism. In this context we would argue that it is still necessary to develop popular socialist parties that can outline the reasons why capitalism should be replaced with socialism. Hence Pinker seems to be right in empirical terms to imply that there is no alternative to the attempt to develop improvements for the working people within the context of the continued of capitalism. The point being made is that capitalism seems to be the only feasible system because of the lack of support for the socialist alternative. In this context capitalism will continue to be dominant despite its limitations because of the inability to create popular support for the prospect of the creation of socialism. Pinker considers that the success of capitalism makes the argument for an alternative of socialism irrelevant. We can dispute this viewpoint, but capitalism will continue to be the dominant system if there is a continued failure to develop support for the realisation of socialism. Capitalism is dominant not because it is increasing prosperity, contrary to the optimistic approach of Pinker, but instead because of the continued failure to develop the popularity of a socialist alternative. But the very success of capitalism is problematical for the system because it creates and increasingly important and powerful working class that may become increasingly discontented with the continuation of the present economic system. Therefore, the ascendency of capitalism is not without its challenges and contradictions.

Pinker elaborates his standpoint by suggesting that the major problem for most societies is not about inequality, but instead is connected to the role of poverty. It is quite possible for inequality to increase and yet poverty may decrease. Increased social spending in many societies has led to a decrease in poverty and this is the major pattern that has been established by the continued generation of increased economic growth. Pinker’s standpoint is summarised in the following manner: “Inequality is not the same as poverty, and it is not a fundamental dimension of human flourishing. In comparison to well-being across countries, it pales in importance next to overall wealth. An increase in inequality is not necessarily bad: as societies escape from universal poverty, they are bound to become more unequal, and the uneven surge may be repeated when a society discovers new sources of wealth. Nor is a decrease in inequality always good, the most effective levellers of economic disparities are epidemics, massive wars, violent revolutions and state collapse.” (p120) But what this view ignores is that the generation of inequality is based on a situation of the development of a situation of economic power that favours capital as against the interests of labour. Inequality also means that the social programmes that are necessary to uphold the interests of the workers and middle class are often neglected and not implemented. Only a change in the balance of power can realise a situation in which the workers can realise their interests in the creation of social reforms and in that manner decrease the level of inequality within society. Instead it is assumed by Pinker that an unequal society is essentially in the interests of working people because it is efficient and based on the importance of the aim of economic growth which creates the material basis for the realisation of social reforms. Hence a prosperous capitalism is the objective basis for the successful possibility of the introduction of reforms that benefit the majority of society. But this standpoint ignores the fact that the capitalist class has generally supported a minimal state based on low expenditure and so is opposed to the introduction of reforms that are considered to be expensive and unnecessary. Hence it has been vital for the political agitation of the working class and socialist parties and governments for the introduction of what could be described as the welfare state. Furthermore, these social reforms have been undermined by the policies of right-wing governments since the 1980’s which have attempted to end the role of welfare state in terms of the interests of capital. Only the militant and mass action of the working class can ensure that the gains of the welfare state are maintained. In this context it is vital that left wing parties are elected into government in order to uphold the role of the welfare state. The forces that support capitalism are not genuine supporters of the end of poverty but instead in terms of the interests of the present economic system are prepared to contemplate the continuation of both inequality and poverty in relation to the aim of the enhancement of capital accumulation.

Pinker develops the important argument that the very advantages of increased industrial growth include the possibility to create the policies required to tackle the issues posed by the environment. He outlines reasonable suggestions for the possibility to develop the economic and political measures that can tackle ecological issues without that meaning the undermining of the standpoint of economic progress. But what is not tackled is the issue that an economic system based on the primary objective of the accumulation of wealth will express the necessary motivation to introduce measures to improve the environment. The interests of capital will seem to be the major basis for the undermining of the introduction of what is required in terms of tackling the major issue of climate change. Instead Pinker seems to be complacent when he comments that: “Problems are solvable. This does not mean that they will solve themselves, but it does mean that we can solve them if we sustain the benevolent forces of modernity that have allowed us to solve problems so far, including societal prosperity, wisely regulated markets, international governance, and investments in science and technology.”(p155) The assumption being made is that the forces of capitalism have the basis of the ingenuity and incentive to introduce measures to tackle the issue of the environment. But this seems to be a complacent view given the tendency of the economic system to primary uphold the interests of profit instead of the requirements of the environment. Only the introduction of socialism can ensure that ecological measures can be introduced in a consistent and effective manner. However, the various activists have an important role in continuing to establish the importance of the environment and their actions can bring about limited success. But only the replacement of capitalism with socialism can bring about the realisation of a more favourable situation that can establish the possibility to tackle issues of ecology in the most serious and effective manner.

Pinker outlines that the world is becoming more peaceful with the end to the era of world war and instead the problem has become limited to the development of serious civil war. But the tendency is to establish the conditions for the realisation of peace in international terms. He comments: “Over the long run, a world in which all parties refrain from war is better for everyone. Inventions such as trade, democracy, economic development, peace keeping forces, and international law and norms ae tools that help build that world.” (p166) But this optimistic view ignores the major reason for conflicts which is the striving of contending forces to economic and political control areas that are contested by rival forces. In this context the role of ideology is connected to antagonistic economic reasons why the development of military conflict occurs. The system of capitalism is the basis of war despite its complex ideological reasons for this development. Hence it is not an irrelevant view to suggest that only with the end of capitalism, which is based on the role of antagonistic nation states, and its replacement by the genuinely international society of socialism, can realise a situation in which the prospect of war is effectively ended. This is because the role of nations as the basis of economic and political activity has genuinely been replaced with the importance of international society in which the only major division is that between the different forms of economic activity that occurred. Under socialism a situation of international cooperation will have been established that enables the subordination of nations by more powerful ones to be ended. Obviously, it could be argued that under socialism there are still ideological reasons for the development of tensions and conflict, but the overall harmonious character of socialist society should undermine the generation of rivalry that results in war. However, if the success of the process of change to socialism is only partial in international terms and so there are still some remaining capitalist societies this situation could result in disputes between the countries of capitalism and socialism. Hence in these circumstances it would be the responsibility of the socialist countries to act to resolve issues in the most peaceful manner.

Pinker also contends that most societies are becoming more democratic and are based on systems of universal suffrage and competition between rival political parties. But the issue is whether this is a situation in which people are able to choose between the genuinely opposite standpoints of capitalism and socialism. Most systems of universal suffrage are based on the competition of parties that often have a similar policy, but which are divided by different political traditions. Hence it is interesting that when the Labour party in the UK elected a genuinely left-wing leader in Jeremy Corbyn he was immediately criticised as not being suitable for the office of Prime Minister. Hence the character of the political system of most countries is not a challenge to the continuation of the domination of capitalism, and instead represents a confirmation of this situation. Instead of recognition of these limitations to the character of democracy, Pinker contends that the influence of democratic systems is to make the various societies more progressive in its legislation and attitudes. Democracy results in the introduction of measures of social reform and the increased influence of progressive attitudes regarding how society should be organised and developed. This aspect could be considered to be an important benefit of the role of democracy within various societies, but we also have to suggest that it has been the influence of reformist and socialist organisations that have led to the introduction of progressive measures such as the creation of the welfare state. Parties that have been based on an uncritical support of capitalism have been reluctant to promote policies that improve the character of society in terms of the influence of social reform. Hence there is nothing progressive about the role of democracy, which has often been exploited in order to express the influence of parties with reactionary attitudes. Only the development of progressive parties with mass support has enabled democracy to be utilised in a progressive manner in order to realise the aims of reform such as the introduction of the welfare state. It is also necessary to establish that in the context of the domination of the capitalist system there has been a reluctance to realise the principles of economic democracy, and generally the absolute economic domination of the capitalist has remained unchallenged. Only the influence of the trade unions has created some situations in which forms of workers management have become possible. The absolute power of the capitalist can only be genuinely ended with the introduction of socialism.

Pinker also contends that the struggle for equal political rights of women and minority groups is being successfully realised and that progress continues to occur. This perspective implies that the ability of what have been oppressed strata of society to influence the politics of many societies is being established in the present circumstances. But the problem is that the issue of what is meant by the character of influence is not defined in an adequate manner. The point is that the political system of many formally democratic countries is defined by a political system in which people vote for competing parties based on the role of rival elite groups. In this context the ability of the various sections of the people to become the expression of control of their destiny is still limited. This does not mean that democratic gains have not been made, but the character of the political system is still defined by the realisation of the interests of elites. Indeed, an alternative situation is unlikely given the character of the present system to favour the interests of the capitalist class. This situation does not mean that the significance of democracy is irrelevant, but it does mean that it is limited and that the struggle for the overall liberation of oppressed social groups has to be continue until it is successfully realised. But such a situation would require the realisation of a different economic and political system of socialism that would be able to genuinely establish the successful introduction of measures that enable the various forms of oppression to be overcome. However, it has been argued that the attempt to introduce socialism has not been successful because of its lack of democratic credibility. But this issue could be resolved by the acceptance of the necessity and importance of the competition of different parties in the socialist system. It also has to be understood that the defenders of the capitalist system have never genuinely accepted the importance of the rights of the oppressed groups within society. Only political struggle has realised the rights of women’s suffrage. Only the adherents of socialism were the consistent advocates of democratic rights for oppressed groups. In contrast Pinker seems to imply that capitalism is a system that automatically grants the realisation of rights for minority sections of society. If this is his impression it represents a wrong assessment. The point is that the realisation of the rights of oppressed groups is the result of determined struggle and the overcoming of the indifference of the ruling class. There is nothing inevitable about the possibility to acquire rights because of the apparent progressive character of society. Instead only the success of strategies struggle enables the possibility to extend the democratic rights of oppressed groups within society. Such a development is often based on the rejection of the conservative inertia of society and the determination to overcome the indifference of the ruling class about the aim of the extension of democracy. In this context the most consistent supporters of the objective of the obtaining of democratic rights has been the role of socialists and in this manner they have understood that the process of the strengthening of democracy can express a process of change that facilitates the possibility for the realisation of socialism. Hence Pinker’s implicit assumption that the character of democracy and the rights of oppressed groups is connected to liberal democracy is a questionable view and instead such gains have been realised despite the opposition of the capitalist class and the elite to the merits of the aims of the oppressed sections of society.

However Pinker is right to suggest that the advance of education can only be of benefit to society in terms of the expansion and increased influence of the skills necessary for economic and social advance. However, his assumption that equates this development to the role of liberal capitalism is a questionable assumption. Instead it has to be said that it has often been the role of socialist parties and trade unions that have struggled to develop the quality and importance of mass education. The inherent tendency of the capitalist system has been to reduce the significance of education in terms of its contribution to the development of the economy. It has been the role of socialist intellectuals and trade unions who have argued about the merits of education and have opposed the development of a cheap labour economy based on the restrictions imposed on the ability for people to obtain high quality education. The point being made is that the progressive advances in society such as increased access to education have not been an inherent aspect of the capitalist system and it has also been the role of socialist parties and trade unions to struggle in order that the aim of a good education should become available to all members of society. The assumption of Pinker is that there is some inherent progressive aspect of capitalism that results in the realisation of the importance of education, but this is a fallacy that is a distortion of reality. For example, it was a post war Labour government in the UK that introduced measures that enabled access to better forms of education for working class pupils and ultimately promoted the realisation of the egalitarian principles of comprehensive schooling. This development has also encouraged increasing access to universities for the working class, and so the possibility of genuine social mobility has been enhanced. None of these developments may have been possible without the progressive intentions of the labour movement. In other words, it has been the role of socialist politics that has facilitated these types of developments within capitalist society. But the onset of recession and austerity has meant that the prospects for social mobility have been increasingly undermined. In other words, it is the tendency for the operation of capitalism to continually undermine the continuation of the progress that has been made towards the creation of an egalitarian society. These types of developments only indicate that only with the realisation of socialism will it be possible to establish a consistent situation based on the promotion of the principles of equality.

Pinker contends that it is an important advantage of modernity that the leisure time of people has increased, and people have more appliances that enable them to take advantage of this situation. The role of computers has enabled people to be able to develop their potential in both work and leisure. This point is valid, but it ignores the fact that the importance of the system of capitalism means that the primary objective of the role of technology is to generate the maximum profits for the capitalist. As a result, the liberating possibilities of new technology is still being reduced to the realisation of the aims of the owners of the means of production. This means that the situation of exploitation and alienation in the process of production has not been overcome. The only manner in which this situation can be transformed is when the workers are able to realise management and control of the process of production. This development will only be consistently realised with the socialist transformation of society. It is the domination of capital over labour which means that the progressive potential of technology is not being realised and this situation has to be changed if the genuine possibilities of these advances is to be generated in a consistently progressive and emancipatory manner. But Pinker can only envisage the realisation of the potential of technology in the present because he cannot envisage any important problems with the present capitalist system. Indeed, he considers that it is this system which has led to technological advance and the progress that has been made towards the consistent realisation of rewarding work. But a Marxist would contend that if genuine progress is to be made towards the consistent development of the liberation of the process of production it is necessary that the limitations imposed by the domination of capital be ended. Pinker cannot comprehend this type of reasoning because he considers that it is capital and modernity that is bringing about the liberating character of the process of work in the present. But only when the workers are able to define the objectives and content of work will it be genuinely possible to suggest that the potential of technology has been achieved in a progressive manner in terms of workers control of production.

Pinker admits that there is considerable level of unhappiness within society but does not consider that this undermines the validity of the advantages of modernity. Hence, he does not evaluate whether this unhappiness could be related to the lack of power that most people have within contemporary society. Could it be that if people were able to establish greater influence over their work situation and in relation to politics, they would become happier? Instead Pinker considers this issue in primarily individual terms because he cannot envisage any reason why it is necessary to improve the quality of society. But it could be argued that alienation at work caused by the lack of power of the worker is an expression of a situation of the denial of the realisation of creativity that results in the sense of discontent. Hence the enhancement of the ability of the worker to be able to define the objectives and character of work could transform this situation and so result in a greater sense of self-purpose and enhanced individual confidence. The result of such a development would be the generation of increased happiness. But instead of making such observations Pinker’s uncritical understanding of modern society means that he can only define unhappiness in terms of individual psychology and so ignores its possible social causes.

In general, Pinker considers that society is making genuine progress because of economic and technological advances and political reform. The result is the constant improvement in the well-being of the members of most societies. He summarises the situation in the following terms: “The poor may not always be with us. The world is about hundred times wealthier today than it was two centuries ago, and the prosperity is becoming more evenly distributed across the world’s countries and people. The proportion of humanity living in extreme poverty has fallen from almost 90 percent to less than 10 percent……Catastrophic famine, never far way in most of human history, has vanished in most of the world, and undernourishment and stunting are in steady decline. A century ago, richer countries devoted one percent of wealth to supporting children, the poor and the aged, today they spend almost a quarter of it. Most of the poor today are fed, clothed and sheltered….Poverty among racial minorities has fallen, and poverty among the elderly has plunged.”(p322) But the point is has this situation been caused by an inherent progressive tendency of capitalism to generate a situation of increased well-being and affluence for people because of its economic dynamism, or is this development generally the result of collective action by trade unions and socialist inspired political parties? The various supporters of capitalism often considered that the prosperity of the system required that wages be low and that the collective character of the workers should not be allowed to inspire the promotion of better conditions and higher wages. Hence the ideology of the system was based on the view that the authority of the capitalist class should be omnipotent and that the social power of the workers should be limited to what was profitable for the capitalist system and the increasing wealth of the entrepreneur. Hence the aim of higher wages and a better standard of living was the aim of the workers despite the views of the individual capitalist. This aspiration was increasingly connected to the objective of electing reformist parties or even the objective of the overthrow of the capitalist system. In general terms it was the increasing influence of the workers that led to the rise in the standard of living for the people. But even in periods of austerity and recession, as occurred after 1980, the objective of the capitalist class and their parties has been to decrease the level of wages of the workers in order to increase profits. Hence, contrary to the views of Pinker, there has been no inherent tendency within capitalism that has led to increased wages and improving social conditions. Instead the level of wages has depended on the situation within the class struggle, and it has been the objective of the employers not to grant wage increases because this was considered to be detrimental for profits. Only the enhanced social power of the workers has led to the possibility of mass affluence, and this situation has not been because of an automatic progressive character of capitalism. The greater access of people to items of sophistication has not been because of any supposed benevolence of the capitalist system but instead because such goods increased the profits of the capitalists. The increased well being of capitalism has been based on the creation of increasingly sophisticated goods, and the related ability to sell these items to the population. Hence there is nothing progressive about capitalism and instead its objectives are defined by the increasing possibility of enlargement of profits. This has been the basis of the creation of technologically advanced goods, or in order to sell them in competitive market conditions. But it has been the influence of the workers that at various times has led to the realisation of progressive Keynesian policies that have promoted a situation of full employment and increased affluence. It would be an illusion to suggest that it has been capitalism which has an inherent progressive character to enhance the realisation of mass affluence. Instead only the importance of the workers, via the role of the trade unions, that has led to this development. But in order to uphold the objective of maximum profit the various governments that have represented the interests of the capitalists have been prepared to impose policies based on austerity and so undermine the ability to continue to improve the standard of living. In contrast Pinker is under the illusion that capitalism is a benevolent system that is dedicated to the objective of increasing mass affluence. But this is a caricature that has little relationship to actual developments. Only the collective strength of the workers is able to realise a situation in which the potential for mass affluence is realised. In this context the weakening of the power of the trade unions has led to an effective lowering of the level of wages in the recent period of austerity. Only the prospect of success in the class struggle will enable the workers to improve their material conditions. Pinker is indifferent to this dynamic of the balance of class forces because he can only envisage a benevolent character to capitalism which implies that the standard of living of the people of the world has constantly improved. But what explains this development? We would suggest that it is not because of any progressive tendency of capitalism to consistently improve the material well-being of people but is instead because of the increased influence of the working class and peasants within society. The greater social power of the producers explains their ability to be able to improve their social situation in terms of increased material affluence. This development has occurred despite the constant efforts of the capitalists to decrease the value of wages in the interests of the realisation of greater profits.

Pinker contends that the capitalist system has an inherent tendency to become more democratic, prosperous and able to provide increasing leisure time for people. The assumption is that what is occurring is a constant process of transformation that results in the possibility to improve the social conditions of the majority of the people of the world. The major problems are those of ecology and the issue of over-population. But Marxists would contend that this aspect of progress does not overcome the continuing problem of the fact of the domination of labour by capital which results in exploitation and alienation. The problem of the power of capital over labour means that the possibility to create a situation of genuine progress still has to be resolved. Pinker would contend that these issues are only the concerns of the few remaining Marxists and that most people are content with a situation of increased affluence and the realisation of full employment in the countries based on capitalism. The aim should be to maintain this situation of progress and prosperity whilst trying to resolve the outstanding issue of the challenge of the environment. However, Marxists would dispute this view and suggest that the continuation of the domination of capital over labour means that people are not satisfied with their situation and instead will attempt to transform so that their ability to define their own destiny is realised. This means that the aim of socialism will not become irrelevant because this would mean the development of a situation in which people could genuinely define their destiny. The point is that whatever progress is made under capitalism it is ultimately a system based on the importance of the role of domination, and so this means that the producers will not be satisfied with this situation and instead will continue to try and transform the present type of society into one that is based on the ability of the producers to be able to define the conditions of their activity. Capitalism cannot realise this possibility because it must be based on the subordination of labour within the process of production. Pinker tries to ignore this aspect and instead assumes that all of the people within society are united in the aim of realisation of the principles of prosperity and stability. But this understanding glosses over the aspect of economic uncertainty and austerity which results in the continual generation of poverty and unemployment. The only manner in which these adverse aspects can be overcome is by the realisation of an alternative in which the majority of the people have the democratic ability to define their situation in terms of genuine control of the process of economic and political activity. But this is the very aspect that Pinker ignores, he does not discuss the issue of power and instead assumes that all the people of contemporary society are effectively united in relation to the objective of prosperity and progress. This means that he imposes a rigid and vague conception of the character of society instead of discussing in detail the various contradictions and tensions of contemporary capitalism. As a defender of the present system he cannot accept that it could have a problematical character. However, these criticisms do not mean that there is popular support in the present for the realisation of an alternative type of society. Instead capitalism, with all its limitations, does continue because of the lack of any form of organised opposition. This is not because people are necessarily content but instead because of a scepticism about the validity and possibility to realise an alternative. In this context most political parties assume that the capitalist system is superior and that it is not possible to realise the alternative of socialism. Hence it is the task of Marxism to indicate and effectively contend that the aim of socialism has not become unrealistic. But the very present ineffectiveness of Marxism makes this task very difficult. Until this issue has been resolved with the growth of the influence of Marxism the capitalist system will continue because it will seem that it not possible to establish the alternative of socialism.

Pinker does accept that there has been a situation of a decline in economic growth since the 1970’s but he contends that this situation obscures the increasing importance of developments in technology which have ultimately contributed to material progress. But in overall terms there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of issues of social provision and so the progress of society is still a constant aspect of actual developments. In this context the major problem is defined in terms of the role of authoritarian populism, but this can be undermined by the continual development of economic progress and affluence. In this context Pinker does not consider that Marxism is a genuine alternative. Instead he can only contemplate the importance of the role of liberal democracy as the effective opposition to populism and the necessity to continue to develop its defence in terms of the indication of the merits of the present economic and political system. This is a realistic possibility because the various forms of populism are based on irrationalism and the rejection of the advantages expressed by modernity. Pinker has made an important point, and it is necessary that the various forms of Marxism do not become a variety of populism. Instead Marxism has to recognise the advantages of the present system and attempt to connect them into the arguments for a socialist alternative. The Marxist conception of the necessity of replacing capitalism by socialism should not be based on the defence of various forms of traditionalism and nostalgia for the past and instead has to be connected to the importance of relating the various economic developments of capitalism to the potential to develop an alternative type of society. It is not Pinker’s defence of modernity that is a problem, but instead his association of this standpoint with the uncritical support of capitalism. We would suggest that the progressive gains of modernity can be most genuinely developed by the creation of a socialist society. This would connect the aspect of economic growth to the interests of the producers and of society in general.

Pinker contends that the character of ideas should be based on the principles of rationality and reason and the related rejection of reactionary ideologies that deny the validity of the aim of progress. He contends that these principles are generally realised in societies based on the freedom of the market and liberal democracy. But it has to be suggested that often the basis of progress of these types of society have been the role of reformist organisations that with the support of the majority of the working class have introduced measures to increase the ability to realise the social progress of society. The point is that there has been no automatic imperative that has led to material and political improvements in capitalist societies. Instead it has been the actions of political parties and trade unions that have led to the introduction of measures of social progress, often against the objections of conservative type parties and the capitalist class. It has been the influence of left-wing opinion within capitalist society that has led to the introduction of the welfare state, and it has been the political role of conservative type parties to undermine the credibility of the welfare state. Indeed, this development has often occurred since the 1980’s. Hence there is nothing inherently progressive about liberal democracy that results in the automatic realisation of the material welfare of all of the people. Instead improvements are the outcome of the results of class struggle. Therefore, the following view of Pinker is an oversimplification. He contends: “The empirical picture at present suggests that people flourish most in liberal democracies with a mixture of civic norms, guaranteed rights, market freedoms, social spending, and judicious regulation.” (p365) This claim is not entirely inaccurate but it ignores the importance of class struggle which has led to the possibility of capitalism acquiring progressive aspects. The various forms of political activity and collective action has led to the possibility to introduce improvements to the capitalist system, which has meant that the role of liberal democracy can be utilised in terms of the interests of the welfare of the majority of society. Pinker ignores the importance of this development, and instead contends that the major opposition to the possibility of modern society making continual advances is the role of right-wing forms of irrationalism. This point may be valid, but it ignores the importance of the limitations of the significance of the actions of the ruling elites that have often encouraged this type of irrational standpoint. In other words, the conservative parties have often been the major expressions of the defence of reactionary views in order to oppose any generation of support for a socialist type of approach. In contrast to this type of understanding Pinker outlines the major issue in terms of the contrast between rationalism and irrationalism, but he does not indicate the reasons for this polarisation which are ultimately about the motivation to improve society as opposed to the various types of justification of the present situation which are based on the defence of the system in an uncritical manner.

Pinker contends that the major problem is the influence of the approach of irrationalism as opposed to rationalism. This understanding may be important in that irrationalism upholds a conservative approach that denies the importance of the aim of social progress, but the major issue is that the capitalist system is based on the generation of reactionary ideas that are often in opposition to the role of a rational understanding of social reality. This is because the defence of what is present is based on a rigid opposition to the progressive possibilities of the necessity of the improvement of the system because of the interests of various groups that have an interest in maintaining the status quo. Pinker ignores the importance of this view and instead contends in a dogmatic manner that: “However, long it takes, we must not let the existence of cognitive and emotional biases or the spasms of irrationality in the political arena discourage us from the Enlightenment idea of relentlessly pursuing reason and truth. If we can identify ways in which humans are irrational, we must know what rationality is. Since there is nothing special about us, our fellows must at least have some capacity for rationality as well.”(p383-384) This view reduces the issue of rationality to an issue of individual psychology, and so ignores the possibility that the present economic and political system may have some characteristics that encourage the generation of irrational influences that undermine the consistent possibility to act and think in a rational manner. Indeed, it could be argued that the very character of capitalism could be defined as having an irrational character when compared to possible alternatives. But this is not what is being suggested by Pinker because he dogmatically assumes that capitalism is the most rational economic and political system. Hence any criticism of the system can be defined as being irrational and so the major alternative of socialism can be considered in these terms. This standpoint is not entirely implausible given that capitalism has progressive aspects, but it can still be argued in an effective manner that socialism can overcome the limitations of the present and develop a superior alternative because it is based on the aim of the realisation of human potential. Instead Pinker would claim that this aspiration is realised most effectively by the capitalist system.

Pinker also contends that capitalism is the most superior system because it is able to utilise the achievements of science in the most effective manner. He outlines that the opposition to science is upheld by the most reactionary anti-enlightenment adherents. The argument is that science is the most effective manner in which the world can be understood and that its approach is to develop the basis to improve and transform social reality. But what is not recognised by Pinker is that the very advances of science can be limited and distorted by the reduction of their understanding to the realisation of the objectives of the present economic system. This limitation can only be overcome by the realisation of an economic system that is able to express the aspirations of science in the most consistent manner. In this context the role of science would not be reduced to the interests of the accumulation of capital. Instead the welfare of humanity would become the primary and authentic expression of the role of science and in this sense the problems imposed by capitalism would be overcome. However, it is also necessary to recognise that advances have been made under capitalism and that the role of socialism would be to consolidate rather than reject the importance of the advances that have been made.

Pinker also connects the character of modern society with the approach of humanism which is defined in the following manner: “The goal of maximising human flourishing – life, health, happiness, freedom, knowledge, love, richness of experience, may be called humanism.”(p410) If the capitalist system was able to achieve these aims it would be genuinely able to describe it as progressive and it would not be necessary to replace it. Indeed, under the system of capitalism there has been the influence of philosophers with progressive aspirations, and the increased importance of the aspirations of oppressed groups. Pinker outlines how the approach of the enlightenment has led to the increasing importance of the standpoint of empathy and the necessity of the evaluation of human actions in terms of the criteria of morality. Pinker makes the valid point that the role of religion should be evaluated in terms of whether it is consistent with these humanistic principles. But he makes the valid point that possibly the most influential reactionary standpoint is that of nationalism. However, what is not discussed is the issue as to the role that these anti-progressive views have in the perpetuation of unjust societies. In this context he does not evaluate whether the very system of capitalism is able to benefit from the influence of various reactionary ideologies. In this context he does not discuss whether it could be socialism that is able to outline a progressive alternative to the various reactionary approaches in the most convincing manner. The point is that it is the character of a reactionary ideology to defend the status quo, and it is the system of capitalism that expresses the interests of the ruling class in the present. In this context the role of reactionary ideology is to provide a justification of opposition to effective change and to instead defend the interests of prevailing ruling elites. Only socialism can outline a conception concerning why it is necessary to overcome the limitations of the present. In this context it is an illusion upheld by Pinker to suggest that capitalism is a system that generates an automatic and constant expression of social progress. Instead this progress has often been obtained as a result of the mass actions of parties and trade unions. If this action had not occurred, it is questionable as to whether this action would have occurred. But Pinker ignores this point and instead contends that the present system has an inherent and inexorable dynamic for continual improvement in terms of the realisation of the material and social needs of the people. However, even if we can criticise Pinker in these terms this criticism does not necessary make socialism a valid alternative. Instead we still have to provide the convincing reasons as to why socialism is the only genuine prospect for overcoming the limitations of capitalism. But if nobody is prepared to strive to achieve socialism then this approach is not very convincing. Instead it would seem that people have generally been prepared to accept the continuation of capitalism despite its limitations. Indeed, Pinker considers that the only possible alternative to the modernity of the present is a situation of regression to various reactionary options for society. However, we would contend that it is still a mistake to effectively reject the socialist alternative. Instead it is possible to develop convincing reasons as t why socialism should replace the limitations of capitalism. But the problem is that this very elaboration of the conception of socialism has not been developed in convincing detail. The result of this situation is that Marxism becomes reduced to a protest movement that is opposed to the limitations of capitalism and yet is not able to outline the reasons for the realisation of an alternative in convincing detail. This means that the standpoint of Marxism and genuine socialism has little mass support, and the result of this situation is that the ideology hegemony of capitalism is not being challenged. Therefore, it is an urgent task of Marxism to elaborate what it means by socialism and why this objective has to be realised in a progressive and democratic manner. The failure to provide this type of viewpoint can only mean that the alternative defence of capitalism by people like Pinker remains convincing. His approach has the apparent merit that he can outline what is occurring in reality that seems to suggest that the defence of capitalism is both coherent and impressive. He can point to reasons as to why the system is progressing and that it is based on the increased influence of the role of democracy. In contrast the apparent attempt to realise socialism seems to have ended in failure. But it is important to also suggest that because capitalism is based on the exploitation of labour this means that the working class can never be consistently reconciled to the apparent merits of the system. In this context it is still the task of Marxists to try and relate to this aspect of discontent and to outline an alternative form of society. It is still premature to suggest that capitalism is an eternal system that cannot be overcome and transformed. But unfortunately, Marxists have often become reconciled to the apparent durability of capitalism. Only the elaboration of the conception of socialism can overcome the influence of this standpoint.

However, it could be argued that the present system of capitalism could be improved by the introduction of a programme of reforms. This is the approach upheld by Raoul Martinez in ‘Creating Freedom’ (Canongate books, Edinburgh 2016). He contends that there are important challenges for humanity which can be resolved in order to achieve a better type of society. But there have been limits to our consciousness which have undermined the realisation of this potential and these aspects have to be resolved if people are to become motivated in order to realise an improvement to the present situation. He contends that the standpoint that we are responsible for our actions has been utilised in order to justify the development of exploitation and oppression. Instead we have to establish control over our destiny in a more meaningful manner, or that enables us to be able to define the character of society in dynamic terms. This view implies that it has been limitations in consciousness that has led to the justification of a situation of the role of exploitation and oppression. This point may have some validity in that social systems have developed which humans are increasingly unable to control and influence, but the possibility of change to something better and more worthwhile depends on the importance of the effectiveness of strategies of action. Is Martinez supporting a perspective that would realise a genuine development of a situation of emancipation? This is the issue that has to be discussed. Martinez does outline the view that a system of genuine and fair values requires the creation of a society based on the principles of equality and the ability for people to thrive and realise their potential. But what does this mean in more precise terms? Does this viewpoint mean that capitalism should be the system in which the aim of equality and the realisation of talent is expressed? Martinez outlines how capitalism is the system that practices and justifies inequality in terms of a situation of differentiation of rewards for work. He comments: “In terms of economic renumeration, talent and hard work mean little if they are not granted the right conditions in which to flourish. Human potential is squandered on an enormous scale because of the extreme inequalities of opportunity that exist in the world.” (p65) This view would seem to be an argument in favour of a socialist system as an alternative manner in which it would be able to reward the process of work in a more egalitarian and fair manner. He does outline the necessity of the distribution of rewards for work in terms of the principles of need and fairness rather than being an expression of the logic of market norms. This approach would be superior to the acceptance of the logic of the imperatives of capital as the basis of the level of renumeration for work. But the point is how is this unequal situation to be transformed? The logic of the approach of Martinez would seem to imply that the only reasonable basis for the establishment of an egalitarian system of rewards is to establish a different social system such as socialism. But this is not the approach being advocated. Instead what is being implied is that it is necessary to strive to improve the present character of the existing economic and political system. But the question arises: if the capitalist system gains by the situation of unequal rewards for labour why should its representatives welcome change? The apparent answer to these problems is that the present system of capitalism has also led to the development of the role of democracy which implies that people may be able to transform the character of the system by the utilisation of the popular voting system. However, Martinez is also aware that the character of the present political system results in the manipulation of the democratic system in the interest of the continued domination of elites. The parties upholding the interests of the capitalists tend to be elected into government. Furthermore, the influence of reactionary ideologies such as monetarism have ensured that the policies of governments conform to the interests of the capitalist system. Therefore: “When democratic power fails to regulate the market to protect the public interest, market power regulates democracy to protect the corporate interest.” (p137) The question arises: how can this situation be challenged and changed without the realisation of the successful process of a transformation of economic and political power. This is the very question that the approach of Martinez does not seem eager to address.

As a critic of capitalism, Martinez ably indicates the various limitations of an economic system that allows for the absolute power of the role of the market. He outlines in detail the various problems associated with an uncritical acceptance of the importance of capital, and he concludes that the present economic system is not ethical. He comments: “The market does not care about…..fairness and justice. It does not care about how hard people work or how kind they are. But people do care about these things, and that’s what ultimately matters.” (p175) Such a comment would seem to suggest that the capitalist system cannot be improved and reformed and so the only possible development is to realise a new type of society. But that is not the perspective of Martinez. In a vague manner he outlines the argument in favour of people being able to be creative and so control their own destiny, but this approach does not mean being in favour of the realisation of an alternative type of society. Instead in a vague manner he advocates the realisation of freedom, which is defined in the following terms: “To make freedom an organising principle of society is to recognise the importance of being able to determine for ourselves what it means to live well, to see this capacity as an integral form of human flourishing. Many have claimed that capitalism does just that, that the free market enables people to consume what they desire, work where they want, and pursue what they value – but this is to ignore the impact of inequality on the distribution of power, the profound imperfections of the markets, and the greedy, selfish and materialistic values it fosters.”(p234) This comment would seem to imply the necessity of an alternative economic and political system but this is not the conclusion made by Martinez. Instead despite his serious criticisms of capitalism he is not advocating its replacement by the alternative of socialism. He does vaguely support the realisation of freedom, but what does this mean? The only conclusion that can be made is that he is defending the perspective of the realisation of a more ethical type of capitalism despite his critique of this system because of its justification of exploitation in the name of freedom. The point is that he can only be an inconsistent critic of capitalism because of this refusal to support the alternative of socialism. In a vague manner Martinez can advocate the realisation of creative freedom and the necessity to question forms of domination, and he outlines the importance of forms of democratic organisation of the economy including an enhanced role for public corporations. He concludes that: “Our immediate task is to use social power, the power of people working together, to deepen democratic control over the state and use the state to overcome concentrated economic power.” (p308) But what does this mean in precise terms? How can the existing type of state, which has generally upheld the interests of the capitalist class, become an expression of the dynamics of what would be revolutionary type interests? This strategic question is not addressed. Instead the perspective of change is based on an emphasis on good intentions, and the aspect of how they are to be realised is not seriously considered. The view is outlined that is necessary to democratise the state, but how is this process to be realised without the role of actions that express a process of revolutionary change? Ultimately the approach of Martinez is based on the ethical approach that asserts that humans are capable of actions based on empathy. But the point is that in order to realise the principles of empathy it is necessary to successfully establish an alternative type of society. But Martinez does not discuss this possibility if revolutionary type change is to be genuinely realised. Instead in a vague and unsatisfactory manner he contends that: “If enough of us change the way we think about politics, democracy, freedom and each other, our actions will cease to reproduce the world as we know it.” This standpoint is an expression of vague expectations rather than representing a serious approach concerning the development of a strategy that can promote the realisation of genuine social change. The vague hope is that the generation of collective empathy will be sufficient to generate the transformation of the economic character of society. But this hope is not a satisfactory substitute for the development of a serious strategy that would aim to replace capitalism with socialism.

However, this criticism of various defences of the capitalist system does not establish the validity of the Marxist alternative which has to be analysed in more detail. A defence of the approach of Marxism is outlined by Martin Hagglund in: ‘This Life: why Mortality Makes Us Free’ (Profile books, London 2019) His starting point is a criticism of the religious view of belief in the possibility of eternal life. Instead he upholds a secular standpoint that emphasises the importance of the mortality of humans and the related necessity to develop the potential of humanity as a result of this situation. Only a secular approach can genuinely concern itself with the importance of the development of the possibility for humanity to express the principles of the necessity to create the conditions for the realisation of the potential of humanity to flourish because it is based on the understanding that the aspiration of eternity is false and so the only concern that is important is the recognition of the importance of the generation of the conditions for human progress and flourishing. The religious approach emphasises the importance of love of God as being primary and the significance of solidarity with humanity is not a central concern. It is necessary to recognise that the present situation is one in which the potential for the realisation of cooperation and genuine community of humans has not been realised. Instead we have to strive to achieve this situation: “The emancipated potential of secular faith is a possibility and far from being achieved in our current state of secularisation, which should not be conflated with an emancipated form of secular life. Moreover, in being achieved, secular life will always remain fragile, since it is sustained only through our commitments. The recognition of finitude does not provide any guarantee that we will care for one another in the right way. The recognition of our shared finitude is a necessary condition for the demand of mutual care to be intelligible, but this recognition is in no way sufficient for actual mutuality. Rather, our dependence on one another and the fragility of our lives call for us to develop institutions of social justice and material welfare. Our ability to treat each other justly depends on how we have been treated and cared for in turn, all the way from our first experiences of parental love to the organisation of the society in which we find ourselves. Only a secular perspective allows us to focus on these normative practices – our forms of upbringing, education, labour political governance, and so on, as essentially matters of what we do, as practices for which we are responsible and that have to be sustained or questioned or revised by us, rather than being given by nature or supernatural decree.”(p11) The consciousness of the importance of the role of social reality enables a sense of responsibility for our own actions in terms of norms and the realisation of the conditions of material well-being. But this promotion of what is the expression of freedom is based on the understanding that our situation is finite, and that the standpoint of religion is based on a rejection of the importance of the aspects of initiative and self-responsibility for our actions. The ideological character of religion is that it rejects the importance of the development of a strategy for human liberation because of its emphasis on the significance of the eternal. Only the approach of the secular can establish a perspective of how it is possible to connect human activity and consciousness to the realisation of the conditions for genuine human freedom. This is because of the recognition that what is important is the finite situation of human reality and the related understanding of the necessity to improve the social and political conditions of actual human practice in order to create the ability to control our destiny. This standpoint is connected to Marxism because Marx recognised that the character of the organisations of the working class could facilitate the development of practices that expressed the principle of solidarity. Marx outlined how the practices of the workers represented the possibility for freedom but the exploitative limitations of the domination of capital undermined the realisation of this prospect. Hence the strategic objective should be to facilitate the ending of the subordinate role of labour within the capitalist system.

However, there is an important problem with this perspective. How can the forces of labour, and humanity in general, develop the consciousness necessity to transform this situation of the domination of capital? Hagglund only establishes the importance of the limitations associated with the domination of capital over labour, and he does not outline a strategy for the ending of this situation apart from outlining the moral importance of the realisation of freedom. In this context the difficulties involved in opposing the influence of bourgeois ideology and rejecting the domination of capital over labour are not really indicated because of the dogmatic emphasis on the possibility for people to strive to realise the secular faith of freedom: “The struggle for freedom is an act of secular faith because it is committed to a form of individual and collective life that is essentially finite. This commitment to a free, finite life is implicit in all forms of resistance to exploitation and alienation. The only ability that can be exploited and alienated – and the only one that can be liberated is our ability to own the question of what to do with our time, since that ability is presupposed by all forms of freedom. The ability is certainly developmental and in need of cultural formation, but without faith in such an ability the idea of freedom is unintelligible. To be responsive to the exploitation or alienation in someone’s life, you have to believe in the fragile possibility and the intrinsic ability to own her time. The same secular faith is exhibited by anyone that takes up the struggle against her own oppression. To understand yourself as being exploited or alienated you have to believe that you have a finite, precious time to live and that your own life is being taken away from you when that time is taken away from you.”(p25-26) Hence the assumption is that a person can only genuinely understand that they are being exploited when they recognise the importance of the finite character of human existence and so become motivated to overcome the domination of capital which has resulted the undermining of the realisation of the potential of humanity. Only when it is understood that there is no eternal life can people become genuinely motivated to strive to overcome the various limitations of the capitalist system. But because this awareness has only been understood in limited and inadequate forms has meant that people have not acted to try and transform this situation in an adequate manner. It has been limitations at the level of consciousness, the inability to recognise the importance of finite existence, and its emancipatory possibilities, which has resulted in the failure to overcome the domination of capital. Whatever merits in this approach it does not sufficiently establish that it has primarily been the influence of bourgeois ideology that has led to the failure to replace capitalism with socialism. Generally, people understand the importance of the finite character of human reality, but this has not provided the primary motivation to challenge the domination of capital. Instead the influence of bourgeois ideology has led to a failure to generate the motivation required to oppose the present economic and political system in an effective manner. This aspect has been combined with a lack of clarity about what s meant by socialism, and so people are reluctant to strive to realise what seems to be an unknown type of society. However, Hagglund seems to be right to suggest that a conscious awareness of the importance of the fragile and temporary existence of humanity could provide an important aspect of the motivation to strive to realise a better type of society. But the lack of this awareness is not the major limitation that has undermined the development of poplar support for socialism. Instead the view that capitalism is the only practical system would seem to be the important factor in this regard. It has been a lack of confidence in the working class concerning the viability and efficiency of socialism which has undermined the development of popular support for this objective. The influence of the view that capitalism is a superior economic and political system has undermined the generation of mass support for an alternative type of society. Hence the primary problem is not the issue of the influence of religion and belief in an eternal life but instead the lack of belief in the possibility and validity of a socialist alternative. It also has to be established that adherents of religion might not be opposed to socialism because of this belief. Indeed, it is quite possible that the influence of religion could motivate adherence to socialism because of a possibility compatibility in terms of moral adherence to the principles of solidarity and the influence of an ethical standpoint. Hence the major aspect that undermines the prospect of the realisation of socialism is not the rejection of a secular belief in the name of religion but instead the influence of bourgeois ideology that results in scepticism about the prospects to establish a viable socialist society. The influence of religions can be complex and is not necessity to the detriment of support for socialism. Instead the aspect that is most detrimental to the motivation to strive for socialism is the general scepticism about the feasibility of an alternative to the present system. The result of the influence of this attitude is to generate support for parties that uphold the aims and objectives of capitalism and so undermine the possible to develop adherence to the organisations that claim to be proponents of socialism. In other words, the influence of bourgeois ideology is an important aspect of the generation of scepticism about the feasibility of socialism. In this context the issue of belief about eternity is increasingly of secondary importance in what are often secular type societies. Furthermore, belief in eternity is not necessarily opposed to the aims and objectives of socialism because this approach could represent the basis for ethical type criticism of the limitations of what are defined as societies without the ethical guidance of religion. In other words, the role of religion is complex and often contradictory. It can be the justification of the domination of the ruling class in the name of conservative moral values, but religion can also become the basis of criticism of the moral limitations of what are defined as secular societies. Hence the role of religion in ideological and political terms is complex and often of a contradictory character that has reactionary and progressive aspects. Hence the attitude that Marxists should have about religion is that it is a matter of individual belief, and that it would be dogmatic and rigid to reject it because of a belief in eternity. It is quite possible to adhere to the standpoint of socialism without making categorical claims about the reactionary character of religion concerning it belief in eternity. Instead it would be more principled to criticise religion for its tendency to be conservative and opposed to the importance of progressive views about the character of society and its limitations. In this context it is possible to indicate the tensions between the implicit emphasis on the principles of solidarity and morality in religion and its accommodation to what could be defined as the anti-ethical character of capitalism. In this context the problem is the accommodation to the values of capitalism by the institutions of religion and not its belief in eternity. Indeed, it is quite possible to strive to enhance the realisation of a better society and yet still adhere to an acceptance of eternity. In contrast, Hagglund is suggesting that it is a belief in eternity which is the major problem undermining the development of conscious action in favour of a better type of society. But we are not necessarily indifferent concerning the limitations of capitalism if we also believe in eternity. Indeed, the very values expressed by conceptions of eternity could also be utilised in order to develop criticism of society. This does not mean that religion could become an adequate substitute for Marxist analysis but instead that the character of religion is not necessarily opposed to the aspiration for socialism. In other words, instead the issue is about how to indicate the possible tensions in the views of religion and in that manner outline what could be a principled and constructive relationship between religion and Marxism that is not based on either a justification of accommodation or rigid differentiation. Hence it would be more constructive if the issue of eternity is considered to be a matter of individual preference whilst the primary objective is to develop popular support for the aim of the improvement of society by the realisation of the aim of socialism. In this manner the adherents of Marxism and socialism would indicate that their objective is to facilitate the replacement of capitalism with socialism. This means that the actual central political task is to develop a strategy that can facilitate the realisation of socialism and to outline a conception of socialism that is convincing and that could generate popular support and a willingness to being it about. In this context the issue of secularism versus belief in eternity is generally an irrelevant issue. The role of religion would only become relevant if it is explicitly utilised in order to undermine the influence of socialism. Religion has been used to uphold conservative type values, and in this sense it should be criticised, but this defence of capitalism is not necessarily connected to a belief in eternity. Instead the role of religion in this context is to become the basis of the justification of capitalism or the acceptance of the secular present as the basis of its belief system. In other words, Marxism should criticise religion for its defence of capitalism and not concerning a belief in eternity.

There is a primary reason why the approach of Hagglund is problematical. Humans have no choice but to primarily orientate themselves to recognition of the importance of the necessity of organising their lives in terms of its actual existence on the earth. Hence whatever a person’s belief system they will have to orientate priorities in terms of the realisation of the tasks posed by the necessity of the imperatives established by social reality. This means the consciousness of people has to be about how to manage and achieve the aims established by the role of work and family obligations. In this context the belief in eternity is connected to the interpretation of the requirements of daily tasks and challenges. This means that it is necessary for people to be guided by how they understand how to realise the issues raised by social reality in the most effective manner. Humanity cannot be impractical and indifferent to the requirements posed by the challenges of society. In this context the influence of a belief in eternity is connected to what it means to be a human. Hence there is no impractical belief system and instead it has an inherent understanding of the most effective manner by which the tasks of social reality can be realised. In this context the standpoint of socialism is connected to the view that it is potentially a superior approach in relation to the tasks created by the necessity to organise human activity. In this manner the major contradiction is not between a belief in eternity or recognition of the mortality of humans but is instead about the contrasting merits of capitalism or socialism as the basis to establish the principles of social activity. Hence the major choice is not between a secular faith or belief in relation and eternity but is instead about how to organise social activity in the most effective and emancipatory manner. The actual issue is about the respective merits of capitalism or socialism and issues of religion and faith are matters of individual choice and belief systems. The point being made is that it is an authoritarian view to suggest that society can only be rationally organised without the role of religion and its illusions about eternity. Instead the approach of religion is an issue of individual choice, and so it would be authoritarian to suggest that it is necessary to promote the realisation of a situation in which the role of religion is actively discouraged. Instead as Marxists we should concentrate on elaborating the arguments as to why capitalism should be replaced with socialism and this means that the issue as to what is meant by socialism has to be elaborated in convincing detail. In this context the major problem for Marxists is the support for capitalism that is expressed by people despite this situation being against their class interests. Therefore, the task is to develop the reasons as to why socialism can be the progressive alternative to capitalism. This means elaborating the understanding as to why capitalism is a problematical and exploitative system that can be replaced with a genuine alterative of socialism. In this context it is important to develop a strategy that would express the possibility of mass action in order to realise this possibility. Hence the major problem in this context is not the issue of belief in eternity but is instead about the scepticism that is present concerning the prospect of realising the socialist alternative. It is argued that capitalism corresponds to the character of human nature, or doubts are raised about the ability of people to bring about social transformation. Few people are genuinely enthusiastic about capitalism, but many doubt the possibility to realise the process of change that would create the socialist alternative. Hagglund considers the question of motivation for action in different terms. He emphasises the recognition of the importance of projects that have a mortal character. This point is valid, but the issue is what type of belief system influences our actions. If we accept the system of capitalism, we will not be motivated to alter this situation. Therefore, the prospect of change depends on the generation of the influence of a consciousness that becomes defined by the objective of socialism. It is the choice between capitalism and socialism which defines the character of reality. In contrast the issues of eternity or secular faith are matters of individual belief systems. It is true as Hagglund contends that mortality is an inevitable aspect of what it means to be human, but this does not define the process of motivation concerning support for capitalism or socialism. Instead we have to recognise that the character of the capitalist system is problematical and so can be replaced by a superior and more liberating alternative. The actual major choice for humanity is between capitalism or socialism.

This criticism does not mean that the reasons that Hagglund develops in order to justify secular faith are wrong. He outlines the importance of caring for others and the role of norms that establish what ought to be as an alternative to the present. He also indicates the importance of faith in a better future and the necessity to recognise the precious character of things and people. Furthermore, the possibility of failure should not discourage people from trying to realise their projects, and this approach is preferable to the emphasis of religion on eternity in contrast to the striving for the attainment of emancipatory aims. Therefore, there is a difference between most expressions of religion and the aim of human emancipation in that the emphasis of the latter is on what could be possible in terms of the transformation of the conditions of social reality as opposed to the promise of eternity. But this difference is less important when religion is considered as a form of faith in contrast to the aim of socialism which is about the perspective of human emancipation. The being made is that for a Marxist religion is problematical in that it generally does not consider that it is about the creation of a strategy of human emancipation. The aims of religion are different to those of the politics of socialism. In this sense there are different objectives of religion and the advocacy of socialism. But this distinction should not mean that religion and socialism are necessarily incompatible because the various ethical codes promoted by the various types of religion could be said to be compatible with Marxism and its perspectives. The major difference between religion and Marxism is that only the latter is concerned with the elaboration of a strategy of human emancipation in the form of the realisation of socialism and communism. This is why the general approach of religion is not a substitute for Marxism in strategic terms. But this difference does not mean that there is an inherent opposition between religion and Marxism. Indeed, it is not a futile exercise to indicate aspects of similarity and so outline reasons that could develop an understanding of possible forms of convergence in terms of aims and ethical norms. Hence as Haggland outlines people have a sense of spiritual freedom which is related to the character of their human activity and its norms and values. But Haggland contends that there is a basic incompatibility between the religious and secular concepts of spiritual freedom because of different views about eternity: “Even in a religion like Christianity, which places great emphasis on individual freedom, leading a free life is not an end in itself. Rather our freedom is a means towards the end of serving and being saved by God. The service of God may take the form of caring for the poor and destitute (as in man forms of Christianity), but the goal is not to emancipate the poor so that they can flourish on the basis of their own evolving commitments and lead their free, finite lives as ends in themselves. The goal of religious salvation is not to emancipate our finite lives but to save us from the finitude that is the condition of our freedom. As soon as emancipation becomes the goal, we have moved from a religious to a secular practice of care, in which our aim is freedom and not salvation. We do not seek liberation from finite life, but rather the liberation of finite life.” (p211) This comment sums up the apparent differences between religion and Marxism but in terms of actual practice as opposed to the apparent conclusions of doctrine, Marxists and Christians can work together in terms of shared objectives. In practice there can be unity even if there are differences of doctrine. This is because in practice all humans can be motivated to aspire to create an improved type of society and in this manner the objectives of religious people and Marxists can become compatible despite differences of doctrine. Hence the actual issue is to recognise these similarities and to create the political context for agreed objectives and in this manner advance the realisation of a perspective of human emancipation. In other words, the actuality of important theoretical and doctrinal differences need not undermine the possibility to develop a strategy of common action for the improvement of the situation of humanity between religious people and socialists.

Hagglund utilises his understanding of the importance of finite time to suggest that the system that would be able to express the imperatives of this conception is a socialist society in which people have the initiative to be able to decide how to utilise their time in a productive and creative manner. The understanding of the finite character of life enables to evaluate what is of value and so should be the basis of priorities in terms of the process of production. Hence the character of necessity is that it is an expression of what has to be realised in order to met the material needs of people, whilst the realm of freedom is the sphere of the expression of the intellectual and spiritual requirements that express the potential of people. Marx outlines how the development of socially necessary labour time is the basis of surplus value and the wages of the worker. This means that wages are the expression of the character of capitalism because this development enables capital accumulation to occur. Hence the basis of the overcoming of the domination of capital is to create a situation in which the reduction of labour to socially necessary time based on the interests of capital is replaced by a situation in which the character of labour becomes socially available free time as the basis of the character of economic activity. This means that labour has the ability to define its economic tasks without the obligations of having to realise the imperatives of capital. In other words, labour has the ability to be able to define the character of value in terms of the role of labour as free time. The role of labour has not ended but its relation to value has been changed because of the end of the alienating domination of capital as the basis for its generation. Indeed, the time given to the production of goods based on socially necessary labour time can be reduced with the increased role of technology and instead the character of labour becomes based on the realisation of the principles of socially necessary labour time. This means that labour becomes the genuine subject of production in terms of the creation of goods based on its interests rather than the character of economic activity being defined by the interests of capital. The realisation of a situation of the dominating influence of socially available free time is the expression of the liberation of labour from the exploitative imperatives of necessary labour time which is connected to the aims of capital to extract surplus value from the workers. What is theoretically important under a society without the domination of capital is a re-evaluation of the character of value so that it no longer has its alienating purpose and instead is based on the interests of labour and the realisation of communism. But in an important sense the character of value is problematical in terms of the tendency for the role of labour to be dominated by its imperatives and so the primary objective is to liberate the importance of socially available free time as the basis of a communist society. This means a reduction of socially necessary labour time to what is required in order to meet the needs of a communist social formation. The relationship of the spheres of freedom and necessity will be decided by the role of a system of genuine democracy, and this aspect is connected to the importance of the collective ownership of the means of production and the end of the influence of capital within the economy. Collective ownership enables the principles of democracy to be expressed because the absolute control and domination of capitalists within the process of economic activity has been ended. The sphere of social labour is based on the objective of the realisation of common needs and this enables the creation of the activity of freedom and the ability to realise the potential of people. The commitments of democratic socialism are based on the importance of a secular faith that emphasises the importance of the realisation of tasks in the present, and a spiritual commitment to the interests of society. Increasingly the character of the realm of necessity will be defined by the influence of the realm of freedom and so the importance of work that is of a boring character will become replaced by the imperatives of the realisation of the creativity of the increasing character of production.

This seems to be a reasonable description of the major features of a possible communist type of society. But what is not discussed is how to develop support for the realisation of this perspective ad what would be the political features of the system. In other words what would be the character of the role of political parties. Instead it is assumed by Haggland that the apparent superiority of communism when compared to capitalism will create the necessity support to realise this objective despite the actual problem of the present actual acceptance of the capitalist system and the failure of the Stalinist attempt to realise what they defined as socialism. Hence he does not tackle in a serious manner the uncomfortable fact that most people seem to accept that capitalism cannot be opposed by an alternative and instead the apparent support for Marxism is not significant and most political parties are based on the objective of presiding over capitalism. Hence, we have to outline the politics of socialism in a more effective and popular manner. In this context Haggland has made a contribution in terms of establishing in effective terms the principles of what would constitute the socialist alternative conception of society, but it is also necessary to outline a credible minimum programme that could result in the election of left wing parties into government. In this context the attempt to implement these programmes would result in the intensification of the polarisation between the working class and the supporters of capitalism which could create the conditions for the success of the revolutionary transformation of society. In this context the elaboration of a credible conception of socialism would then become important as an ideological aspect to motivate the increased radicalism of the opposition to capitalism. Instead in a vague and un-theorised manner Haggland implies that revolutionary change is necessary if the realisation of communism is to become possible, but the aspects of this approach are not developed. There is a commitment to mass struggle in terms of the inspiration provided by individuals like Martin Luther King, but this analysis is not elaborated in more precise strategic terms. Instead it is concluded in vague terms that: “Needless to say, there is no guarantee that we will succeed in achieving democratic socialism. Even if we do succeed, kit may take more generations than we would like to imagine. What I have sought to show is that we can get there – that we can recognise the principles of democratic socialism as our own commitments, that we can make sense of life beyond capitalism – and that there is never time to wait. To make our emancipation actual will require both our political mobilisations and our rational arguments, it will require our general strikes and our systematic reflections, our labour and our love, our anxiety and our passion. We have a chance to achieve democratic socialism if we grasp that everything is at stake in what we do with our finite time together. We only have a chance to make it a reality if we help one another to own our only life.” (p389) This comment seems to be an expression of a vague commitment to the possibility of an alternative to capitalism rather than the basis of a strategy to achieve this aim. We have to develop a more effective conception of the strategy that can generate mass support in order to achieve the realisation of an alternative to capitalism. This means being aware of the difficult challenges and that the problem is that most people presently accept the durability and necessity of capitalism. Hence, we have to elaborate a perspective that could result in the creation of support for socialism. This involves the creation of a minimum programme that could facilitate the possibility to develop support for socialism. In this context the problem with the approach of Hagglund is that he considers that it is sufficient to outline a convincing explanation of what is meant by communism and expect that this can generate the possibility to create mass support for an alternative. Certainly, it is necessary to outline what is meant by communism, and this will be important in the possibility to develop opposition to capitalism, but we also have to outline a strategy that will indicate how this perspective can be realised. This means the issue of the challenges posed by the task of the generation of a revolutionary consciousness within the working class have to be evaluated in a more effective manner than the brief mention of these issues by Haggland. However, in an important but limited manner he has begun this task by outlining the arguments in favour of the communist alternative to capitalism. This aspect has to complemented by the development of a strategy that can relate to the task of the development of class consciousness. However, Haggland has provided and important contribution in relation to this task in terms of the arguments of his important work.

The major problem which Haggland does not address is how to develop support for the socialist alternative given the lack of popular support for Marxist parties. It is possible and feasible to outline what we mean by socialism, but this does not resolve the issue that such an approach seems to be impractical because few people believe that it can be realised. Thus, the ultimate problem is the issue of the domination of bourgeois ideology which means that there is general scepticism about the feasibility of the realisation of an alternative to capitalism. This means it is quite possible to outline what is meant by socialism but this very development is not likely to attract support because it is generally considered by most people that the capitalist system is durable and is not likely to be changed in terms of the realisation of a socialist alternative. Therefore, the central task becomes about how to create effective Marxist parties that would then develop support for socialism. The possibility of this development is not presently advanced because of the sectarianism of the various Marxist groups. They reject the possibility of unity in the name of the specific credentials of their given organisations. Therefore, it is necessary to create a policy that could generate the prospect of the realisation of unity between what have been rival groups. This process would be advanced by the development of support for a common programme as the basis to advance the realisation of the aim of socialism. Obviously, such a development would not guarantee the prospect of popular support for Marxism, but without this type of progress it will not be possible to create a united Marxist voice that could develop an appeal for working people. What would be central to this type of development would be the elaboration of what is meant by socialism and why we should struggle to realise this aim. Such a theoretical process would be connected with the elaboration of a credible strategy about how the aim of socialism could be realised. It is true that this type of progress will not guarantee the possibility of making advances towards the realisation of the aim of socialism, but without such a development the attainment of this objective will be effectively impossible. Hence the primary problem is not the lack of popular support for socialism but is instead explained by the sectarianism of the various Marxist groups. The result of this situation is one of the reasons why the task of the elaboration of the aim of socialism is being neglected and instead Marxism is considered to be a doctrine justifying differences from rival organisations. Only the overcoming of this sectarianism by the recognition of the importance to develop a common strategy to realise socialism can begin the process of the creation of a credible Marxist alternative to capitalism. In this context the attempt to obtain popular support for the Marxist aim of socialism could acquire a serious and effective character. Ultimately the problems involved in the inability to develop mass support for socialism is because of the problems associated with the task of building a credible Marxist organisation. However, the individual contributions of people like Hagglund can contribute in a useful manner concerning what we mean by socialism. His work is a useful addition to the conception of socialism, even if he does not outline an effective strategy by which it may be realised. Nor does he address the issues associated with the lack of a credible revolutionary organisation. What we would suggest in this regard is that in relation to countries like the UK it is possible to develop an understanding of possible common objectives that would facilitate the potential to create an effective Marxist organisation. On this basis a relationship with the Labour party could be developed that would advance the realisation of a left Labour government that would be the basis of the introduction of measures that would make the realisation of socialism a possibility. In this manner the political confidence of the working class would be advanced and so the conditions would become more favourable for socialism to become a credible possibility. The lack of realism of Haggland is that he does not discuss these types of issues and instead considers that providing an effective interpretation of Marx’s conception of the communist society will be sufficient in order to generate popular support for this objective. But in actuality the major issue to be resolved is the development of a relationship between the working class and Marxism which could as a result generate favourable possibilities for making effective advances towards the realisation of socialism.