**What is the Potential Agency of Change in the Present Period?**

It has been argued by some critics of Marxism that the working class is no longer a realistic agency of social change in the era of contemporary capitalism. But does this mean that there is possibly an alternative expression of the potential for the revolutionary transformation of capitalism? This is an issue that will be analysed in this article based on an evaluation of two important books on the subject of the character of the exploited and oppressed within the context of contemporary capitalism. Amory Starr has written a book: “Naming the Enemy” (Zed books, London 2000) in which the issue of the character of capitalism in its present form is discussed and in relation to this understanding an elaboration of a perspective of social change is outlined. It is not being suggested that the character of capitalism has been changed in the contemporary era. Instead, the aim of the realisation of profit by the process of competition between increasingly powerful companies is the basis of the organisation of the world economy. He outlines how the domination of capital is being intensified in the recent period in terms of the practical expression of the ideology of neoliberalism: “Neoliberalism which, was made hegemonic in the 1980’s, is the political discourse/ideology that recommends deregulation, privatisation and the dismantling of the social contract. The political leaderships of so-called democracies have been convinced, and have in turn been convinced their constituents, to accept corporate hegemony as a way of organizing the economy. Nations (and localities) can increasingly be counted on to subsidize the costs of corporate projects. Neoliberalism advertises the market as a space of freedom, which is compared favourably with formal political processes, and promises that free market’s will do their best at supporting the productive social contract and procuring the maximum goods for consumption. Consumer choice replaces citizenship as the pre-eminent right.” (p16-17) It is also established that this perspective can only be realised by increasing the economic power of capital over labour, and so it would seem logical that what is required is that the workers attempt to act in a collective manner in order to oppose this intensification of the process of exploitation within the present system of production. However, this possibility would seem to be complicated by the apparent complexity of the character of the exploited and oppressed which seems to consist of many diverse cultural and social groups, such as different ethnic groups, the aspect of sexuality and diverse nationalities. Furthermore, there are may types of occupation and this could indicate a sectional rather than a collective basis of defining economic interests. Therefore, it could be suggested that people try to overcome the domination of their identity, but they are not primarily motivated to act to transform the character of the economic and political system. Instead, they aspire to achieve improvements within the present system and in this manner are not receptive to more revolutionary perspectives of socialism as the alternative to the domination of capitalism. Furthermore, the working class that has been traditionally perceived as the primary agency of the revolutionary transformation of the present economic system is in a process of decline, but its possible important collective role for the realisation of change has not been replaced by a new and equally effective agency of the possibility for the overcoming of the domination of capitalism. The point is that the various cultural movements that are opposed to aspects of discrimination are based on an attempt to achieve improvements within the system. They do not have an inherent affinity with the objective of socialism which was assumed to be expressed by the character of the working class. Therefore, forms of important struggle develop but it is about the obtaining of improved recognition of the rights of a given oppressed group within the limits of the capitalist system. The aim is the end of discrimination within the present system rather than the aspiration to achieve what seems to be the more difficult objective of the revolutionary transformation of society. But there is an important problem for the advocates of the aims of various oppressed groups: can they achieve the aim of greater recognition of their objectives and so end aspects of social and cultural inequality without the transformation of the character of society? This issue tends to be ignored in terms of the emphasis placed on the importance of immediate aims. There is the assumption that the realisation of these objectives will result in the creation of a society based on the principles of genuine cultural and social equality. But this approach means that the issue that is ignored concerns whether such egalitarian aims can be realised within capitalism. It should be the task of revolutionary Marxists to outline the importance of the attainment of socialism in this context. However, they tend to obscure the significance of this objective in terms of an adaptation to the role of the various movements for cultural equality. However, the issue of globalisation would seem to overcome these various limitations. The opposition to the character of globalisation which is based on the intensification of the domination of capitalism within the world economy would seem to suggest the necessity of a socialist alternative. But it could also be indicated that this possible principled perspective is obscured by the influence of the view that what is required is a different form of capitalism as the alternative to the domination of the world economy by multi-national companies. Therefore an important question is asked by Starr about the movement against globalisation: “Is the movement revolutionary, sweeping away and replacing existing systems, or does it attempt to use existing institutions for its own purposes?”(P42) The very character of the activism of the movements of contemporary struggle would actually seem to suggest that this issue is not directly addressed, but in practice it is assumed that what is required is the realisation of progressive changes within the present capitalist system. Hence the issue for Marxists is do they attempt to influence these anti-globalisation movements in a socialist manner, or do they still concentrate on trying to revive the importance of the role of the workers. This issue will be a central aspect to be discussed in this article.

However, it could be argued that even the mention of this issue has become dogmatic because of the important economic and social changes within society. The role of the working class has become less significant and so the character of opposition to the objectives of what has become a capitalist economy based on the reactionary ideology of the importance of neo-liberalism is no longer based on the distinct role of the workers and is instead based on the activity of various protest movements. These can be defined as being anti-corporatist rather than in favour of socialism. There objectives can be summed up as: “Struggles against structural adjustment are implicitly anti-corporate. They oppose and seek to reverse government collusion with corporate priorities, they refuse the legitimacy and necessity of adjustment policies, and they insist upon national sovereignty in the face of the neoliberal onslaught. All over the world, peoples movements are forcing national governments to examine the effects of domestic neo-liberal policies…..People are pushing their governments to acknowledge that facilitating corporate projects does not alleviate poverty; this is a challenge to modernization theory.”(p51) But it could be argued that there has been little success in this regard and that instead the various pro-capitalist national governments have continued to implement economic policies that are based on the interests of the present economic system rather than motivated by the objectives of the various protest movements. Indeed, it could be suggested that the major problem is that the forms of opposition to the policies of the national governments has not been able to establish the effectiveness of their various forms of protest. This is the very point. The various oppositional groups have been content to be a form of rejection of the objectives of the economic system but they have not established the effectiveness of a strategy of genuine change that would result in the realisation of different objectives. Starr can outline the importance of the development of a variety of popular national movements of opposition to the objectives of national governments in relation to the promotion of globalisation, but he apparently cannot indicate the success of these protests in terms of being able to genuinely modify and change the character of the policies that have been promoted by the various administrations. In other words, the empirical description of the role of various forms of dissent concerning the objectives of globalisation is not connected to a convincing conclusion that this has resulted in the genuine modification of the policy of pro-capitalist governments. Instead, it is being assumed that an inherent process of the realisation of progressive change is connected to the emergence of popular movements of protest. But it could be argued that the actual results of these developments mean the general failure of these forms of mass opposition in relation to the issue of changing the policy of the various establishment governments. Hence there is an issue of the failure of the protest movements to achieve their objectives which is not being accepted by Starr. Instead, the assumption of the success of the various protest movement is not being outlined in convincing terms. Instead, it could be suggested that what is more plausible is to suggest that despite the importance of various forms of mass struggle their objectives have not been realised. Indeed, the reasons for this failure will have to be discussed in greater detail.

Starr outlines importance of peace movements but seems unable to indicate any actual successes of this form of protest. However, since he wrote his book it could be argued that the development of the opposition to war in Iraq in 2003 did result in a genuine popular movement for peace, and led to a form of agitation that was important in relation to the involvement of people in rejecting the militaristic aims of the governments of the UK and USA. But the problem was that what was a protest movement could not establish the importance of objectives that could genuinely influence the actions of the governments involved in this situation and instead the issue of the relation of the objective of peace to wider aims concerning the role of policy was ignored and the result was the importance of a protest movement that had limited objectives. It could be argued that this aspect was what was responsible for the success of this protest in terms of popular support, but it also meant that the movement knew what it was against but could not articulate what it advocated in terms of the character of international relations. Therefore, once the situation was apparently resolved in relation to the end of the conflict in terms of the stabilisation of the conflict the forms of protest began to decline. The protests had not resulted in a change of policy, and indeed Starr accepts the general failure of the various activist movements. But he considers that such a failure was implicit in the single- issue character of many of the protest movements. This means that they have a limited approach that is also ambitious because it is assumed that it is possible to change the approach of various governments that are actually opposed to the realisation of the objectives of the mass movement. Hence it is necessary to generalise the character of the forms of protest.

He contends that this development is being established by the various movements formed in opposition to capitalist globalisation: “The basic idea of ‘people’s globalism’ or ‘globalization from below’ is that people all over the world are commonly threatened by environmental degradation, abuse of human rights and un-enforcement of labour standards, and that powerful global alliances can be forced to make corporations accountable to people instead of elites…..Instead of wielding the nation state as a defence against globalization, these movements perceive the need to globalize resistance to match the globalized structure of neoliberal exploitation.”(p83) Therefore: “This movement is consonant with Marxist and international humanitarian hopes. Workers of the world – that is, all those dispossessed by the ravages of corporate hegemony unite and rebuild the world! It is a hopeful vision that assumes the possibility of international, democratic, non-violent revolution to be achieved by the rising up of people’s movements everywhere. Corporations are wrong because they generate manifold injustice. The movements of this mode are devotedly democratic, holding Western democratic ideals both as fundamental ideals for their movements and as the anvil on which to shatter corporate rule.” (p83) But the problem with this perspective is that whilst it outlines the perspective of anti-capitalism what is being indicated is only what the various protestors are against and the problem is that this does not establish what they are actually advocating. The issue is that anti-capitalism evades the issue of what is being considered in terms of the only credible alternative social formation, which is socialism. Furthermore, are we actually expecting the possibility that radical change can occur within capitalism that in some sense realises the objectives of the anti-capitalist movements? In other words that the aims of anti-capitalism can in some manner be promoted within the very limits of the system that is being challenged and opposed? It could be argued that these are the very ambiguities of the anti-capitalist movement which whilst it is rejecting the role of important aspects of capitalism is also not prepared to support the alternative of socialism in a definite manner. In other words what is meant by globalisation from below’. Is this perspective merely an expression of opposition within the acceptance of the limitations imposed by capitalism, or does it mean genuine advocacy of a socialist alternative to capitalism? This strategic issue would seem to be n important tension within the anti-capitalist movement. Therefore because of this limitation it could be argued that anti-capitalism is not an adequate substitute for the role of the objectives of a movement based on the definite advocacy of a socialist alternative to capitalism. But it could also be suggested that the very radical ambiguities of anti-capitalism are what explains the success of this movement. The very lack of political clarity enables it to express the aim of radicalism in a popular manner. In other words, the actual popularity of the anti-capitalist movement is expressed by the fact that it has become an expression of opposition and protest about the various problems of the present type of society. The apparent dynamism of the role of mass movements enables it to generate popular support because it does not express the perspective of trying to create a genuine alternative to the capitalist system. Instead, the importance of opposition to the capitalist system indicates that the politics of protest has important popular appeal and so results in the generation of the dynamism of mass struggle as an aim in itself. The actual issue of what would be the basis of the realisation of an anti-capitalist society becomes essentially to be considered as an irrelevant issue. Hence this movement is defined in terms of what it is against rather than what it advocates. Indeed, it could be argued that this movement does not have the aim of the transformation of capitalism. Instead, it makes a moral appeal to the presently dominant ruling class to introduce measures of an anti-capitalist character. But this means that the illusory character of making an appeal to the capitalist class to act in an anti-capitalist manner is not recognised. This contradiction is present because what defines this form of protest is the justification of the role of struggle as an end in itself. There is not a genuine attempt to transform the character of society. Instead, it is being suggested that the capitalist system can acquire moral and ethical dimensions that would enable the objectives of this movement to be accepted by the major defenders of the present system. The problems with this approach are that this perspective is unrealistic. For example, it is not generally possible for the ruling class to suddenly become consistent supporters of ecological policies or the modification of the system in terms of the realisation of the economic and political interests of the people. Hence it is still a revolutionary approach that aims to transform the character of society that is the only realistic manner in which the objectives of popular protest can be realised. But it is this very approach that is considered by the protestors to be unrealistic and instead they maintain the importance and plausibility of the possibility of the reform of the present system. In other words, the dynamism of mass protest can bring about the realisation of the objectives of the anti-capitalist movement. But how can the aims of anti-capitalism be achieved within a capitalist system. This question is never answered by the supporters of this standpoint because they consider that it is a revolutionary approach that is illusory. The result of this ideological approach is that these so-called anti-capitalist movements do not develop a genuine anti-capitalist perspective that would aim to realise a different and more emancipatory type of society. Instead, it is being suggested that anti-capitalist objectives can be realised by the reform of the present capitalist system. The vague hope is that the success of this process would result in the development of genuine changes within capitalism. However, the failure of previous attempts at the reform of the system would seem to indicate the problems involved with this perspective. The development of activist protest is not sufficient to change the character of capitalism if this aspect is not connected to the attempt to end the hegemony of the present economic system. Certainly, the anti-capitalist movement can begin the process of undermining the domination of capitalism but the prospect of ultimate success has to be connected to the development of a perspective of the revolutionary transformation of society. But it is this very perspective that is often not accepted as necessary by many anti-capitalist protestors.

However, this criticism of the prevailing strategy of the adherents of the anti-capitalist movement does not mean that the importance of this development can be ignored by Marxists. It would be sectarian to deny the significance of this form of mass struggle in the name of the continued importance of the necessity to develop the class struggles of the workers against capitalism. Instead, what is obviously called for is the necessity to develop important forms of political unity between the anti-capitalist movement and the traditional role of the attempts of the workers to engage in militant struggle via the role of the trade unions. Therefore, it Is an important necessity of Marxists to develop a programme of action that could combine the aspirations of the anti-capitalist movement with the aspirations of the workers to realise improved economic conditions. In this manner a programme could be developed which would relate the new contemporary possibilities of the anti-capitalist movement to the traditional potential of the workers to achieve gains within capitalism and so in that manner realise an increasing economic and political strength of all those that are opposing the exploitative character of the present system. The successful development of this type of alliance could as a result create the conditions to establish a movement that would increasingly aspire to change society in a revolutionary manner. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the very separate character of the various forms of opposition to capitalism which means that the system is able to maintain its domination because of this apparent weakness of these forces of mass movement. But an important problem has been that the Marxist organisations have generally failed to outline a strategy for revolutionary change in relation to these new circumstances connected to the increasing importance of the role of various types of anti-capitalist movements. This problem has primarily been because the obvious issue of the connection of the aims of anti-capitalism to the necessity for the revolutionary transformation of capitalism has not been made in systematic and convincing terms. However, this criticism does not mean that we should reject the importance of the continuing role of the working class within society. Instead, we should emphasise the potential for the unity of contemporary and traditional forms of opposition to the domination of capitalism. In this manner we can actually establish the possibility to develop the potential for enhancing the potential of the various forms of contemporary and traditional political organisations of a left wing character to be able to oppose the system in effective terms.

However, an immediate objection to this perspective is that it ignores the fact that the anti-capitalist movement essentially aims to realise its objectives in terms of reforms and not by revolutionary change. For example, the ecological movement aims to improve the present capitalist system by the realisation of its objectives as a result of influencing governments to introduce green type policies. The various green parties that have been established do not aim to end capitalism but instead aspire to make this system more receptive to the necessity of the development of measures that are based on the interests of ecology. This is obviously a correct point. However, it is the very task of Marxists to suggest that the most effective manner to realise ecological aims would be connected to the successful realisation of a socialist society that was not based on the role of capital accumulation. The emphasis on this perspective would not mean ignoring the importance of trying to achieve progress within capitalism in terms of the importance of mass struggle in order to achieve ecological changes that could be realised within the present limitations of capitalism. But the principled point that would be made by Marxists is that in order to establish the consistent successful realisation of ecological objectives would require an end to the dominant role of capitalism. This is because there is a basic contradiction between the character of capitalism and the possibility to realise green principles and policies. Therefore, the very successful achievement of ecological aims that goes beyond some limited, even if important gains, would require the realisation of a socialist society that is based on the recognition that the primary aim of profit has to become connected to the consistent possibility to achieve ecological objectives. Limited gains can be made within capitalism, but ultimately the most effective manner by which these aims can be realised is by the attainment of a different type of society, or socialism. Therefore, what is necessary is to connect ecological aspirations to this type of perspective. But it will be argued that the approach of green parties has been based on what can be realised within the present capitalist system. This point is valid, but it indicates the necessity of revolutionary Marxists to try and gain the support of the green parties and movements for the aim of socialism. The Marxists have to try and increase the influence of the view that a different socialist society is necessary in order to facilitate the possibility to actually consistently achieve the realisation of ecological objectives. Therefore, it would not be in the interests of principled politics for the Marxists to gloss over the present political differences they have with the various green organisations. They have to reject the reformist approach of the greens in the very interests of the perspective of the interests of the ecological standpoint. But the problem has often been that many Marxist groups have tended to ignore the issue of this necessary promotion of a revolutionary approach as opposed to the reformist standpoint of many of the green organisations. This type of opportunism does nothing to enhance the credibility of the Marxist groups. Instead, they seem to be irrelevant and so it would seem that what is primarily required is the role of the green organisations in order to realise ecological aspirations. Instead, it would be more principled and effective for the Marxist groups to outline the reasons why ecological concerns can be most seriously established by the successful attainment of a different socialist type of society. However, in a significant sense the major problem in the approach of the Marxist organisations is that they tend to adapt to the role of the ecological organisations in terms of providing political support and do not outline a coherent approach in relation to the importance of green issues. Paradoxically this approach does not provide a genuine basis for the development of unity between the forces of Marxism and the ecological movement. Instead, it is necessary for the socialist organisations to outline in greater detail the importance of the aims of the greens in terms of their possible connections to the perspective of socialism. This approach would uphold the perspective that only with the realisation of socialism can the possibility to effectively realise the objectives of the ecological movement can be established. In this context the role of the Marxist groups should be to outline a conception of socialism that would establish the relation of ecological issues to be understood in this context of the character of a different and emancipatory type of society. But instead of this political development the activism of the Marxist groups means that they adapt to the role of the green organisations in an opportunist manner. This approach does nothing to convince people about the apparent merits of the socialist alternative and so because of these limitations there is no establishment of a genuine political relationship between the ecological movement and Marxism. Instead, it is the very activism of the Marxist organisations which means that the result is essentially a pragmatic connection of these groups to the green movement. As a result of these limitations, it would seem to be more practical and feasible to essentially support the aims of the ecological organisations and consider the role of Marxism to be irrelevant. Indeed, this is the essential outcome of the limitations of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. It seems to be more practical and feasible to generally attempt to realise the aims of the Greens within the context of trying to realise changes within the capitalist system. Hence it is the very activism of the Marxist groups that means they are unable to develop a feasible and convincing understanding of ecological issues which would also suggest that they had a relevant role in the attempt to realise the aims of the green movement. This limitation would seem to be connected to the apparent antiquated and irrelevant role of Marxism. It seems to be more realistic and practical to be an adherent of a single- issue campaign than to support a perspective of what seems to be the unfeasible aim of socialism. The result of this situation is that Marxism seems to be a situation of decline when compared to the apparent dynamism and increasing importance of campaigns like the ecological movement. But the result of this failure to establish a connection between the ecological movement and Marxism is that the green issue is defined in a reformist manner of what can be achieved within capitalism. The role of Marxism is still required if this type of campaign is become more consistently connected to the aim of socialism. Failure in this context does not mean that the ecological issue has inherent reformist aspects. Instead, the problem is the lack of success in achieving the development of a genuine political relationship between the green movement and revolutionary socialism. The result of this problem is that Marxists have tried to become relevant by merely accepting the polices of the ecological organisations. However, this type of opportunism actually convinces nobody about the importance of Marxism. Instead, it seems to be more feasible to be a green activist, and in this context agitate to realise the adoption of ecological policies within the context of capitalist society. In other words, the important problematical issue is that the forces of revolutionary Marxism have not adapted to the challenges of the present. They still have programmes and perspectives related to issues in the past. It could be suggested that Marxism is a rigid doctrine that is unable to accept the importance of continual political development in order to be relevant. However, this view essentially becomes an excuse for a failure to innovate and to relate to the changing political situation. The point is that Marxism will only be credible if it develops an approach that is able to establish the importance of changing political developments. In this context it is necessary to develop an approach that is both principled and flexible in relation to the increasing role of single-issue campaigns. It is necessary to connect the aim of socialism to these objectives in a manner that is both flexible and principled. But instead, the forces of Marxism have tended to act in a pragmatic manner by merely accepting the importance of green issues and has not connected them to the aim of socialism in a systematic manner. Only individual Marxist intellectuals have outlined the possible relationship of ecological questions to the aim of socialism. But the achievement of this theoretical development has not become an aspect of the programme of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. Instead, these groups continue to outline a rigid programme of class struggle that is not related to the challenges of the present period. This includes the failure to relate the aim of socialism to the aspirations of movements like that of the greens. Formally it could be argued that the Marxist groups acknowledge the importance of ecology in terms of the outlining in their programmes of the green issue. However, it is questionable whether this recognition is established in terms of what relation this development has in connection to the enhancement of the realisation of the aim of socialism. This type of failure would seem to suggest that it is more realistic for a green campaigner to try and obtain the attainment of their objectives in terms of a successful campaign within the limitations of capitalism. In this context the aim is to obtain the acceptance by contemporary governments of the objectives of the green movement. Hence the aim of changing society becomes essentially secondary in this context. Therefore, the failure of Marxist organisations to outline a credible strategy in relation to the role of ecology can only reinforce the apparent necessity of this approach. But there is a problem because in general the defenders of capitalism are reluctant to accept the importance of the green issue. This difficulty actually indicates the necessity for the realisation of a socialist alternative. The result of the significance of this problem indicates the limited success of the green movement. Such a criticism does not mean that a revolutionary approach will inevitable be more efficient in relation to the realisation of a successful perspective. Instead, the point that is being made is that without the successful establishment of socialism the possibility to be able to tackle green issues in a systematic and generalised manner will not become realisable. Obviously the ecological movement should attempt to realise reforms within capitalism, but in order to take the issue of the environment in a generalised sense the only perspective that is credible in this context is the attainment of the socialist alternative to capitalism. However, it is the lack of influence of this approach which means that the green issue becomes defined in an unpolitical manner, or as an ethical question that requires the role of political action. In this context most people acknowledge the importance of ecology but there is still controversy about how to realise green objectives in the most effective manner. It is the task of socialists to try and outline why only socialism can establish the possibility for the development of the economic and political conditions to be able to tackle ecology in the most effective manner. But the lack of the credibility and importance of the Marxist parties means that this development does not occur.

Starr makes the assumption that the increasingly international and inter-connected character of the world economy make it easier for workers to organise trade unions in international terms: “As assembly lines have stretched across the globe and production processes sufficiently flexible to make it easy to exchange one workforce for another nearly anywhere, unions have recognized the need to build global organizing capacity. This takes the form of company specific unions, which pursue their jobs from country to country organizing new workers; industry wide or sectoral unions; and international inter-industry solidarity campaigns. Labour’s new awareness has overcome the divide that formerly positioned first world workers standard of living as dependent on third world workers cheap labour.” (p88) This perspective seems to be an optimistic evaluation of the level of organisation of workers in the era of globalisation. Instead, it could be argued that the importance of the economic policy of austerity has led to the undermining of the role of the trade unions and has instead enabled the domination of capital over labour to be intensified. The aim of trade union unity in international terms has essentially been an objective of revolutionary Marxists which has essentially not been realised. Instead, it has become necessary to emphasise the importance of the defence of the material conditions of the workers in national terms because of the necessity to try and effectively oppose what is an offensive strategy by the forces of capital to undermine the material conditions of the workers. Hence the perspective of Starr would seem to be a hopeful assumption that is being imposed onto reality in a dogmatic manner.

Indeed, he contradicts this optimistic perspective when he also emphasises the situation of the adaption of the role of the unions to the interests of capital. He comments that: “Seeking improved wages and working conditions refutes the moral and social legitimacy of infinite corporate profits but does not reach beyond the corporate form or the corporate job, the ‘modernization’ paradigm of growth as the basis of social welfare, or excessive consumption as the foundation of the economy…..Union’s vision of economic life is totally dependent on the corporations. Unions are not putting resources into developing alternatives to ‘jobs’ as a source of economic security.” (p93) However this aspect of accommodation of the unions to the role of capital is only one aspect of their functions. It can also be suggested that their very role in the collective organisation of the workers in order to bargain with the employers means that they become opposed to the interests of the capitalists in effective terms. Obviously, they attempt to negotiate better conditions with the employers, but this very process can result in struggles in order to realise improved terms for the relationship with the forces of capital. Hence the role of the Marxist organisations would be to try and outline a perspective that connects the importance of the unions as defence organisations of the workers with the aim of the promotion of the possibility to develop a socialist organisation of society. However, it has been the situation of austerity which has undermined this prospect because what has resulted is the creation of economic conditions that favour the interests of the employers rather than the unions. Hence it is necessary for Marxists to connect strategies that encourage the collective activity of the workers to the prospect of ending austerity. In this situation there has to be a process of ideological change that would mean people do not consider that austerity is an inevitable aspect of the economic situation. This development would be facilitated by the increasing influence of the role of Marxist organisations and their programme for socialist change. But it is the lack of importance of Marxism which enables the perspective of austerity to be considered an inevitable aspect of the present economic situation. The importance of this economic aspect undermines the development of collective struggle by the workers. But the promotion of this possibility of collective struggle is necessary to both challenge the policy of austerity and in order to facilitate the prospect of progressive political change. But such a development means developing an effective challenge to the conservative leadership of the trade unions by the generation of militant rank and file struggle. However, such a possibility will be enhanced by an increasing influence of the role of revolutionary Marxism. But there is a problem in this context because the process of interaction of the organisations of Marxists with the trade unions is generally insignificant. This means the trade unions do not essentially acquire a character that would represent a more militant and revolutionary type opposition of labour to the domination of capital. Instead, the trade unions become on the defensive because of the situation of the offensive of capital in order to undermine the economic conditions of the workers. It would seem that the balance of economic forces favours the interests of capital and so it is difficult to develop the militant activity of the workers. However, the very imposition of austerity has occasionally led to generalised forms of collective struggle by labour. In this context the problem has been the conservative role of the trade union leaders who have acted to undermine the development of militant forms of activity. The essential issue is to develop the importance of the forces of revolutionary Marxism which would indicate the necessity of a militant strategy of class struggle. In other words, the period of collective bargaining and negotiation by the unions as their typical type of activity has been undermined by the increasingly crisis character of capitalism. The result of a dogmatic adherence to these forms of approach by the unions has been the increasingly development of a defeat of the workers by the role of the government and employers. However, the lack of influence of Marxism means that a more militant approach is not adopted by the unions. What this means is that the unions become increasingly ineffective organisations in relation to their traditional role as defence of the interests of the workers. This means an important task of Marxists is to propose policies that could facilitate the regeneration of the role of the unions. If this task is achieved, it could become possible to revive the ability of the unions to be defence organisations of the workers. Success in this context could transform the balance of class forces and so create the economic and political conditions for the revolutionary transformation of society. However, the very importance of problems in this context has led to questioning of the role of the trade unions. Marxists should reject this type of scepticism and instead try to advocate an approach that would facilitate the revival of militant class struggle. This is an important task because it is primarily in this context that the issue of the feasibility of socialism would become of relevant importance. In contrast the decline of militant forms of class struggle means that it seems that capitalism is a system that cannot be challenged by effective forms of opposition.

Therefore, in terms of what has been suggested it would still be considered that the role of the workers, as in relation to the trade unions, is still an important and essentially primary aspect of the possibility of the successful attainment of socialism. It could be suggested that there are other forms of struggles and social forces that have increasing relevance in this context, but that the role of the workers is of continuing significance. However, it has been suggested by many commentators that changes in the economy has led to new types of worker who do not correspond to the militant traditions of the past. For example, that the role of the white-collar worker is not likely to become supporters of collective forms of struggle. This view is not unimportant, but what is actually indicated is the necessity to develop a strategy that would unite the blue collar and white-collar workers around agreed objectives in defence of their interests against the domination of capital. It could be suggested that without the development of this type of alliance the struggle for a socialist alternative will be much more difficult. There is also the problem of the ideology of nationalism which has led some workers to support conservative type politics as a defence of the role of the nation. Hence there has to be a process of successful ideological struggle if the forces of the perspective of socialism are to make effective advances. The point is that the determinist view that the increasing crisis of capitalism creates inevitable type possibilities of transition to socialism has been shown to be falsified by the events of history. Instead, it is only the increased importance of a revolutionary approach that is able to express the generation of genuine possibilities of social change. In this context the role of the workers as a major agency of revolutionary transformation will still be important.

However, the issue of what Gramsci defined as the ideological hegemony of the interests of capitalism is an important aspect in relation to understanding the complex character of the possibility of social change. It has to be understood that the possibility for the present economic system to remain dominant is because people in ideological terms accept that it is superior and that alternatives are not a credible possibility. The influence of this approach does not mean that people are enthusiastic supporters of capitalism but instead that they cannot envisage the possibility to realise an alternative type of society. In this context the aspect of scepticism about the prospects for genuine change means that the aspect of inertia is sufficient in order to maintain the present system. This development is connected to the continued ability of the various political parties that defend capitalism to obtain electoral majorities. In this context it seems that the present social formation has popular support, and in contrast the influence of revolutionary Marxism is not significant. However, Starr considers that the role of socialist parties is important. He comments: “Socialism is certainly not dead. Beleaguered socialist parties continue to educate and to expand their politics through solidarity with people’s organizations. Many socialist parties continue to struggle for hegemony. These struggles emphasize democracy and social equity. They express international solidarity with other people’s struggles, but their discourse is primarily national. They support trade union struggles (which do not always support the socialist parties in return,) and they participate in electoral politics.” (p93-94) This view of the continued importance of the role of socialist parties does not actually establish their level of genuine effectiveness to be able to influence politics. Nor does it establish if the socialist parties are able to effectively realise their policies, even in a limited manner. Instead, all that is indicated is the importance of the various socialist organisations in the democratic process of the major capitalist countries. What is not being elaborated is how the various socialist parties tend to accommodate themselves to the limitations of the given electoral system in order to try and obtain majority support for the achievement of a prospect of becoming a government. In other words, the left-wing aspirations of socialist parties is indicated by Starr, but he does not indicate in detail the aspect of compromise that is an inherent aspect of their politics. The general reformist character of the socialist parties is not being established and instead the emphasis is on the promotion of democratic and left-wing values. In other words, the overall failure of the role of the major socialist parties is not established in this evaluation of their role and instead the emphasis is on the significance of the apparent effective promotion of the values of socialism within a capitalist society. But in general Starr seems to be inconclusive in relation to his analysis of the role of socialist parties. He is aware that they can accommodate themselves to the limitations of capitalism but on the other hand he also seems to imply that they can become a genuine expression of the possibility to transform the character of society. It is interesting that he does not seem concerned to promote the necessity of the creation of genuine revolutionary parties as a more consistent expression of the principles of socialism. Instead, whilst being aware of the reformist limitations of the major socialist parties he does not seem to advocate the importance of developing a revolutionary alternative to these organisations. Instead in an ambiguous manner he seems to accept the view that the socialist parties can overcome traditional reformist limitations and so become the expression of the possibility to realise genuine left-wing objectives. However, this perspective is not being outlined in a consistent manner. There is a general scepticism about the progressive potential of left-wing parties. His perspective in this context is indecisive.

This apparent ambiguity about the role of socialist parties is because he does not consider them as the primary basis of genuine change within capitalist societies. Instead, he considers that the role of economic cooperatives is more important in terms of creating transition to socialism: “Socialist economic institutions are anti-corporate, but more implicitly so than parties. Alternative institutions propose that socialist principles can be enacted on a local, everyday scale…..The development of alternative organizations is seen as a way to initiate community transformation, through the transformation of basic institutions of social reproduction. They are an effort to politicize daily life and to construct viable alternatives to the existing economic structure. This valuable experimentation could facilitate socialist transition, by providing models of dealing with issues of democracy, bureaucracy, diversity and coordination.” (p97) However it has to be questioned whether these cooperatives have this type of socialist character and principles. Instead, they generally adapt to the situation of the domination of capitalism and so provide a contrasting type of ownership of the process of productive activity within the present system. In this context it has to be questioned whether the role of the cooperatives could be the basis to generate the realisation of an alternative to capitalism within the present system. This is not to question the possible importance of cooperatives within a socialist society, but rather to suggest that their development within capitalism is not likely to generate the possibility of transition to socialism. Indeed, it could be argued that their character within capitalism is based on a process of adaptation to the imperatives of capital accumulation despite a different form of ownership of the various enterprises and industries. Nor do the cooperatives intervene within capitalism in order to try and promote the realisation of an economic alternative. Instead, it has to be suggested that it is still necessary to develop the political influence of parties that aim to realise a socialist type of society. These organisations can then advocate a strategy that would facilitate the ability of people to achieve socialism. In contrast the cooperatives tend to have a non-political character and adapt themselves to capitalism. They could become models of the organisation of a socialist economy, but they have no strategic importance within capitalist society in relation to the role of a perspective of change. Instead, there still seems to be no adequate substitute for the role of a revolutionary party with a programme of action in relation to encouraging mass struggle in favour of socialism.

However, Starr considers that there is an alternative to the traditional role of a socialist party in terms of the dynamism of the development of the spontaneous mass struggles of the people. He comments: “A striking new social movement burst upon the world stage in the 1990’s. It is striking for its internationalism, its ideological unity, its diversity, its size and effectiveness. Thousands of people’s organizations, including trade unions, environmental organizations, farmers and fish-worker’s associations, youth groups, women’s organizations, indigenous people’s organizations, anti-road activists, peace and human rights groups and many more are engaged in highly coordinated, articulate and celebratory mass protests against free trade agreements. Corporations are constantly criticized; democracy is always embraced and internationalism is actually achieved.” (p98) These mass movements made have achieved important victories in terms of their limited objectives, but what is not explained is how they can become the basis of the realisation of an alternative to the domination of capitalism. Instead, what is being indicated is the dynamism of various forms of protest, but what is the actual connection between these developments and the generation of increasing favourable conditions for the transformation of society. Indeed, it could be argued that the role of protest becomes a substitute for the necessity to establish a perspective for the transformation of society. Indeed, it could be suggested that these movements and mass organisations are not primarily concerned with the possibility of revolutionary change and instead aim to establish the realisation of reforms and improvements within the present capitalist system. Only the effective development of popular revolutionary parties could result in the influencing of these mass movements to become sympathetic to supporting the aim of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Therefore, the principled task is to connect the dynamism of these new forms of mass organisation with support for the aim of socialism. But without this development the dynamism of these movements becomes a process of adaptation to what is possible within the limits of capitalism. However, this point is not made by Starr who instead indicates the dynamism of the spontaneous role of these new mass movements in an uncritical manner.

For example, he outlines the importance of anarchism and various social movements but does not suggest how these forms of popular protest can generate increasingly favourable possibilities for the realisation of emancipatory change. Instead, it seems sufficient to outline the significance of these movements and to imply that in some inevitable manner they can contribute to the possibility of the realisation of social change. But the problem is that these types of movement are defined by expressing forms of discontent and protest against capitalism that has the form of activism, but the relation of this opposition to the present system does not seem to be connected to the recognition to develop a strategy of change. Instead, the various forms of activism become an end in itself, or the issue of the ultimate aims of the various movements becomes obscured by the emphasis on the role of the process of struggle and protest against aspects of capitalism. Nor do these protest movements seem able to establish the realisation of unity and the development of common action for agreed objectives. Instead, the given protest movement concentrates on its own aims and objectives and the issue of united struggle to transform the capitalist system does not become a priority. Instead, the only organisations that have a perspective for the demise of capitalism are the small Marxist groups. In contrast this issue is not discussed by the various protest movements and instead they know what they are against but are unable to articulate what they advocate in relation to the character of society. Instead, the forms of protest become an end in itself, and its is generally the traditional political parties that still emphasise the issue of how society should be organised and defined. Thus, the movements of opposition to aspects of capitalism are parties of protest, and they are reticent to define their aims in terms of the realisation of a different type of society. Instead, the role of dissent and protest become ends in themselves, and the various Marxist organisations tend to adapt to this type of approach. The result is that there is actually a political crisis of the forces of opposition to aspects of the capitalist system. These movements know what they are against in terms of opposing aspects of the role of capitalism, but they cannot define an understanding of the type of society that they would favour. Instead, the various forms of protest become an end in itself, and the forms of struggle are essentially defined in terms of the importance of organising the next demonstration. However, Starr seems to ignore these problems and instead contends that the dynamics of opposition to capitalism has an important potential: “The promise of anti-corporatism is its ability to develop a diverse and unified constituency mutually threatened by the corporate hijacking of economy and politics. Many possibilities for alliance have yet to be explored.” (164) But the problem is that this type of dynamic unity of oppressed groups does not generally occur because it actually proves to be difficult to unite the various forms of protest about aspects of capitalism. This is because each given movement tends to privilege the importance of their form of struggle and so they ignore the significance of the aims of the other types of dissent. The result is a collection of movements that do not generally unite around agreed perspectives and objectives. This is why a principled and effective Marxist party is required in order to develop and express a programme of action that could unite the various movements of protest on the basis of agreed objectives and support for a perspective for changing the character of society. But the Marxist organisations either ignore the importance of these movements of oppressed people or else they adapt to them and so do not outline a credible programme of action for the promotion of the transformation of society.

Indeed, Starr actually outlines a reason for this lack of the development of united struggle of oppressed groups because of a distinct emphasis on the importance of identity: “As identity has come to be seen by some social movement scholars as the prime mover of social movements, unity has seemed less possible. Groups are fragmented because their unique identity makes it hard to relate and trust one another.” (p166) But in an unconvincing manner he also suggests that there is a possibility to solve this problem of the apparent importance of diverse forms of identity: “While few of the movements organize on the basis of identity, many of them address the problem for which identity was the solution. Contrary to expectations, anti-corporate movements do not deny the idea of multiple oppressions, but centre it in their analysis of the enemy and in their visions of rebuilding the world.” (p166) But this vague reference to the importance given to the necessity to unite diverse social groups in the struggle against capitalism does not actually establish how this issue of diversity will be resolved in terms of support for a common programme of agreed action. Instead, this perspective is essentially a hopeful aspiration that is not connected to any convincing conception of the possibility to unite diverse social groups on the basis of a genuinely accepted policy of change. Instead there is only the vague aspiration that the distinct groups can achieve a common objective of anti-capitalism: “In becoming anti-corporate, identity based movements neither abandon their identity nor adopt a new one; they oppose corporations from their identity based stance, whilst also making connections outside from their identity politics mode.”(p167) But this ambiguous comment does not establish how and why identity based movements can establish a wider and more common form of agreement with other forms of protest about aspects of capitalism. What is the agreed policy or programme that would enable this type of unity to be realised? This issue is apparently not discussed and instead it is assumed that the unity agreement of diverse social groups can be realised in terms of the objective of anti-capitalism. But what does anti-capitalism actually mean beyond being a form of protest? This issue does not seem to be addressed in terms of the development of a coherent and convincing programme of struggle. Instead it is suggested in vague terms that: “This study suggests that identity may no longer be the most important organizing principle for social movements as they embrace multiple oppressions, confront corporations on many fronts at once and recognize allies who cannot be contained by an identity politics framework.”(p167) This comment seems to express a vague aspiration rather than express a convincing perspective of how the unity of diverse oppressed groups in opposition to global capitalism, can be realised. The primary problem is that a strategy for the realisation of progressive change is not being established in relation to this vague view that it is necessary to go beyond the sectional limitations of identity politics. Instead, what is being effectively suggested is that at a certain moment in the development of the various forms of diverse opposition to the domination of capitalism a type of unity of the different oppressed groups will result. But a strategy to achieve this unity is not being outlined in convincing detail. Instead, it is assumed that the challenges of the attempt to establish the aims of particular oppressed and exploited groups will create the basis of united action. This perspective seems to suggest that an automatic dynamism of the praxis of struggle will create this process of unity between the different peoples of society that will generate the possibility of the realisation of emancipatory change. But this perspective seems to underestimate the role of the influence of bourgeois ideology which acts to undermine the development of the militancy and dynamism of the role of oppressed and exploited groups within society. But primarily there is no elaboration of a convincing strategy that could facilitate the possibility of the development of a dynamic praxis of activity that results in the emancipatory transformation of society. Instead, there is only the outline of the aspect of the discontent of the various oppressed groups of any given capitalist social formation. But what is primarily neglected is the elaboration of the important role of the working class as the agency of change. Instead, there is indicated in a vague manner that the character of contemporary capitalism means that the workers no longer have a primary role in the process of trying to transform the character of society. But the problem is that this understanding is not based on the establishment of a convincing alternative social basis for the transformation of society in emancipatory terms. Instead, all that has been indicated by Starr is the necessity to understand the complexity of the role of diverse social agencies in relation to the realisation of the task of the overcoming of capitalism and replacing it with a new emancipatory alternative. However, this approach is unconvincing because there has not been the elaboration of a strategy that would unite the diverse subordinated groups within capitalism in an effective opposition to the system. Nevertheless, these criticisms do not express the convincing indication of how and by who can it be possible to realise an alternative type of society to replace capitalism. The point is that the various forms of critical opposition to the present system do not seem to be capable of overcoming the domination of capitalism. Indeed, it could be argued that this is not the purpose of these movements. But this criticism of the various movements of discontent within capitalist society can be considered to be of limited importance because it does not establish the validity of an alternative perspective. Hence the problems of both the orthodox Marxist and unorthodox approaches with regards to the issue of social change is that they seem to both fail to establish a convincing strategy of change based on the role of a discontented agency within capitalism. The problem is that the workers and the other oppressed groups do not act in accordance with the perspective of change advocated by both Marxists and non-Marxist revolutionary adherents. This situation would seem to indicate that capitalism is a system that cannot be challenged and replaced by the role of a discontented agency, whether that be the role of workers or any other subordinated group within present society. In this context all that Starr has achieved is to outline why various groups may be discontented with aspects of capitalism but he has not established the validity of the claim that the result of this situation can be the progressive transformation of society.

However, in another book, Guy Standing would suggest that the problems of the approach of Starr is because he is not aware of the emancipatory possibilities of a new social class that has emerged within contemporary capitalism. In his book: “The Precariat” (Bloomsbury, London 2011) he suggests that a new class is emerging in the present period that has potentially the ability to act in order to transform capitalism in an emancipatory manner. This class is the precariat. It is not necessarily defined in terms of an objective relation to the economic system but is instead the agency of discontent in the present period and so has become expressed in the subjective terms as being the expression of various forms of political and popular opposition to global capitalism. In other words, the precariat is defined as those people that have become dissatisfied with the character of the present economic system, and so are understood in these subjective terms rather than being primarily defined in terms of a stable relationship that characterised the situation between employers and wage labour. Thus: “In any case the division into wage labour and salaried employee, and ideas of occupation, break down when considering the precariat. The precariat has class characteristics. It consists of people who have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state, making it quite unlike the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationships of the proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare states. Without a bargain of trust or security in exchange for subordination, the precariat is distinctive in class terms.” (p9-10) This definition would seem to be problematical because it could be suggested that this description of the precariat is actually consistent with a conception of unskilled workers, who lack secure employment and instead have many different jobs. Thus, the assumption that the precariat is a distinctive class with its own objectives and interests could be considered to be problematical. Instead, what is being described is the traditional situation of the unskilled section of the working class, and so is not a new and distinct type of class. However, this is denied by Standing because he suggests that the unskilled workers generally have stable conditions of employment which is not the situation of the precariat. Instead, they are defined by the circumstances of economic uncertainty and constant changes in relation to occupation and conditions of employment. But this aspect could be considered to be an expression of what it means to be an unskilled worker. However, the major criticism of his approach is that he does consider part-time or temporary work as important characteristics of the precariat. Such a view only seems to confirm the view that he is essentially defining a type of worker as being in the precariat. This criticism seems to be indicated when he concludes that: “In sum, one way of looking at the precariat is seeing how people come to be doing insecure forms of labour that are unable to assist them to build a desirable identity or career.” (p19) There is nothing in this definition that does not suggest that what is being established is merely a different manner in which people who are unskilled or temporary forms of labour are being described. Such a group has always been a part of the working class in historic terms. Nor does this definition seem to challenge the validity of the Marxist view that it will be the workers who have the most stable forms of employment who will be the most effective potential agency of social change. It has to be questioned whether a group that, has insecure forms of employment, can develop the dynamic basis to become an expression of the possibility of social change via the role of collective forms of economic and political action. Instead, it would seem necessary for the precariat to establish an alliance with the proletariat in order to create the possibility of developing change within the character of capitalist society. Indeed, it could be argued that the precariat is a section of the working class and so the possibility to develop this type of alliance is feasible and could become the basis to establish the realisation of change in a contemporary capitalist society. But this criticism is not meant to deny the importance of Standing’s indication of the importance of the precariat to the contemporary capitalist economy. The role of this group of insecure workers is necessary in relation to the realisation of the objectives of capital accumulation. However, it could also be suggested that the situation of the precariat under capitalism has to be improved by obtaining more permanent forms of employment. Hence an immediate aim of the precariat should be to improve its status by obtaining more permanent forms of work, obtaining the right to be in a trade union and so being able to act to realise improved conditions of work and increased wages. Hence the temporary status of the precariat is something that has to be transformed and overcome even under the conditions of the capitalist economy. In other words, the subordinated and powerless condition of the precariat under capitalism means that it is unlikely to be a major agency of the transformation of the character of society. Instead, it is necessary to challenge the role of the precariat under capitalism. Only success in this context would enable it to become an agency of change.

However, it has to be suggested that the important development of the precariat within the capitalist economy does not mean that it has replaced the working class as the major agency of social change. The workers employed in collective terms in large enterprises, and sometimes organised in trade unions still remain the major agency of change. But it has to be accepted that the effective formation of an alliance of the traditional working class with the precariat can only enhance the possibility to achieve the transformation of society. Hence revolutionary parties still have an important role in the promotion of a socialist ideology that would attempt to persuade the workers and precariat of the necessity to strive to realise a revolutionary alternative to capitalist society. In this context there is a problem created by the apparent lack of credibility of the various Marxist parties. They have a lack of success in relation to the promotion of a socialist alternative. Instead, people consider that it is more realistic to adapt to the continuation of capitalism. This is a system which is generally accepted by both the workers and the precariat. Therefore, the domination of bourgeois ideology and the apparent lack of credibility of the revolutionary parties means that the realisation of the aim of socialism does not seem likely to be achieved. Instead, both the workers and the precariat adapt to the continuation of capitalism. In other words, the major issue becomes how can the Marxist organisations become more effective in political terms and so achieve success in relation to developing a popular influence of the aim of socialism. This means that the complex realisation of revolutionary consciousness is still a major aspect of contemporary capitalism and its development of the role of the precariat. There may have been important economic developments and related changes in the social structure, but the political tasks related to the issue of the transformation of society have not acquired a different character.

However, Standing considers that it is the very character of the precariat which means that it has difficulty developing a radical form of political consciousness. He comments: “One does not have to be a technological determinist to appreciate that technological landscapes shape the way we think and behave. The precariat shows itself to be as not yet a class-for-itself partly because those in it are unable to control the technological forces they face.”(p21) Therefore: “The precariat is defined by short-termism, which could evolve into a mass incapacity to think long term, induced by the low probability of personal progress or building a career.”(p21) In other words the very uncertain aspects of the employment situation of the precariat means that it has an inherent inability to be able to defend its interests in an effective manner. Instead, it is often defined by having to accept the imperatives of the system of capital accumulation. In this context the very complexity of the technological aspects of capitalism intensifies this problem of a lack of powerlessness within the relations of production: “In sum, the precariat suffers from technological overload without a lifestyle that could give them the control and capacity to sift the useful from the useless.”(p22) Therefore it would seem that the precariat is a subordinated class that has no ability to express a type of collective economic power that could represent the development of an effective opposition to the imperatives of capital accumulation. Therefore, it is an exploited social stratum which seems to be unable to express genuine economic and political possibilities to be able to act to overcome its subordination to the domination of capital. In this context Standing indicates the apparent differences between the precariat and the traditional working class in that the former is unable to achieve the level of consciousness and forms of organisation of this section of society: “This highlights a feature of the precariat at the moment. It has yet to solidify as a class-for-itself. One may depict a process of ‘falling’ into the precariat or of being dragged into a precariatised existence. People are not born in it and are unlikely to identify themselves as members with a glow of pride. Fear, yes, anger probably; sardonic humour, perhaps, but not pride. This is a contrast with the traditional industrial working class. It took time to become a class-for-itself but, when it did, it engendered a robust pride and dignity that helped to make it a political force with a class agenda. The precariat is not yet at that stage, even if a few in its ranks display a defiant pride, in their parades, blogs and comradely interactions.” (p26) But this very difference between the traditional working class and the precariat would seem to suggest that there are important difficulties that would undermine the possibility for the latter to be able to act in the collective manner of the former. In other words, there is often no form of collective economic organisation that would enable the precariat to act in the cooperative terms of the workers, who as a result of this aspect were often able to obtain improved economic conditions. Instead, the precariat has to economically act as individuals who are unable to establish any expression of genuine control over their conditions of work. Therefore: “Once jobs become flexible and instrumental, with wages insufficient for a socially respectable subsistence and a dignifying lifestyle, there is no ‘professionalism’ that goes with belonging to a community with standards, ethical codes and mutual respect among its members based on competence and respect for long-established norms of behaviour. Those in the precariat cannot be professionalised because they cannot specialise, and they cannot construct a steady improvement in depth of competence or experience. They face uncertainty of returns to any specific form of work and have little prospect of ‘upward’ social mobility.” (p26) This temporary and uncertain character of the work of the precariat and its often individualised aspect means that the collective power generated by the process of industrial production is lacking for the precariat. There is apparently nothing in their often uncertain and individualised form of economic activity that would indicate the possibility to develop collective action that could improve their situation. Instead, they are an exploited social stratum which is essentially unable to act to improve its economic conditions. This aspect would also mean that the precariat is not a possible agency of change except in terms of developing an alliance with more powerful economic forces. Indeed, Standing suggests that the uncertain economic situation of the precariat means that it is often inclined to support populist and right wing political viewpoints: “Tensions within the precariat are setting people against each other, preventing them from recognising that the economic and social structure is producing their common set of vulnerabilities. Many will be attracted by populist politicians and neo-fascist messages, a development already clearly visible across Europe, the United States and elsewhere.” (p28-29) But this possible reactionary development is an indication of the necessity to develop the influence of a revolutionary standpoint. This prospect requires the effective unity of the precariat with the more traditional sectors of the working class, who are often more likely to be organised into trade unions. But the approach of Standing does not seem to suggest this progressive possibility, and instead it is the very aspect of the exploited situation of the precariat which is generating reactionary political developments. This approach has to be rejected and instead we have to try and develop an understanding of the potential for change. The promise of this approach is that the very unsatisfactory situation of precariat has to be ended in a different type of society. Instead of the continuation of temporary and uncertain forms of work, the realisation of socialism would mean the possibility for secure types of employment to be realised. Any temporary work would have an exceptional character. Therefore, the promise of socialism is that the very end of the precariat will be the logical result of this new and emancipatory type of society.

But in contrast, as Standing indicates the very development of globalisation has led to the development of the increased importance of the precariat. Flexible and temporary work is replacing long term types of employment. He outlines how the era of stable and long-term forms of employment are increasingly being replaced by the situation of people increasingly becoming part of the precariat. However, the increasing aspect of the importance of economic uncertainty represented by this situation has led to developing popular support for right wing populist parties. It seems that the possibility of the realisation of authoritarian regimes is more likely than any progressive socialist alternative. But Standing considers that the very subordinated role of the precariat means that it could become an influential expression of the development of a genuine left wing type of politics: “The precariat wants freedom and basic security…..This is where the precariat is today wanting control over life, a revival of social solidarity and a sustainable autonomy, while rejecting old labourist forms of security and state paternalism.” This possibility can be realised because: “Although the precariat is not yet a class-for-itself, it is a class in the making, increasingly able to identify what it wishes to combat and what it wants to construct. It needs to revive an ethic of social solidarity and universalism, values rejected by the utlitarians” (p181) However the problem with this perspective is not that the precariat are unable to acquire a progressive level of political consciousness, but rather that they need allies in terms of unity with the traditional working class if the objective of progressive change is to become a feasible possibility. The point is that the precariat lacks effective economic power in isolation from the more traditional sections of the working class. In this context an isolated situation means that the precariat will not be able to achieve progressive objectives. Indeed, Standing admits that the very uncertainty of the situation of the precariat means that it could become supporters of right-wing forms of populism. Only the development of the influence of genuine socialism can promote the possibility of the progressive and effective unity of the workers and the precariat. Standing also correctly calls for the realisation of a basic income that would enable a material improvement of the situation of the precariat. However, it is ultimately necessary to struggle to transform the situation of the precariat within capitalism so that they can become an effective and stable part of the working class with secure forms of employment rather than the uncertainty of the present situation. This development should be part of the process of the development of the class struggle which would aim to achieve an improved situation for both the precariat and the working class in general. But whatever the outcome of this development the role of the precariat and the traditional working class should become an important aspect of the possibility to realise socialism. However, if this development is to occur it will also be necessary to realise the increased influence of a genuine form of Marxism which can outline a credible programme of revolutionary struggle for the realisation of a socialist society.