WAS LENINISM THE BASIS OF TOTALITARIANISM?

It would seem to be uncomplicated to suggest that Lenin was the originator of the approach of totalitarianism. The regime founded by Lenin seemed to uphold the express the justification of the domination of a one party, and this meant the promotion of the importance of political repression and the denial of the ability of the people to be able to express views that were not endorsed by the Bolsheviks. Indeed, it could be argued that the basis of the standpoint of Lenin was developed initially in his work: ‘What is to be Done’ which seemed to suggest that only the party could express the most principled aspects of the class consciousness of the working class. This standpoint seemed to imply that the role of the party would be primary in defining the character of socialism and so the importance of the workers would be to accept the directives of the party concerning how this type of alternative to capitalism is created. Hence the development of the one-party regime after 1917 was not a surprise and instead seemed to express the character of Lenin’s understanding of Marxism. However, this view ignores the importance of Lenin’s views in 1917 which was based on the recognition of the importance of the democracy of the Soviets, and so represented the view that popular democracy should express the political structure of the workers state. This standpoint seemed to be confirmed by the elaboration in ‘State and Revolution’ of a conception of participatory economic and political democracy, which would mean that working people would administer society, and so this suggested that the role of the party was to promote this development of a society based on the principles of accountability and the withering away of the role of a coercive state. But the situation after the revolution was not conducive to the possibility to realise these principles of the conception of the realisation of socialism by the participatory role of the workers and peasants. Firstly, there was an adverse international situation which was not generally favourable to the advance of the process of international revolution. The Soviet regime had to agree a treaty with Germany that limited the territory of the new state and so undermined the possibility to establish a stable regime based on a sizeable territory in which to begin the construction of socialism. Secondly, the role of the factory committees was weakened by the economic problems which meant that enterprises did not have the raw materials necessary in order to create products. The result of this situation meant that one man management was imposed in order to try and establish some credible level of economic efficiency Thirdly, the civil war began which meant that the issue of the survival of the regime became of primary importance and so the importance of the development of a participatory democracy was entirely secondary in terms of the necessity to create a society that was based on the necessity to realise victory in the civil war. Fourthly, the Bolsheviks made the mistake of introducing war communism which meant that a coercive policy was adopted towards the peasants, and this meant there was no incentives for the peasants to produce food for exchange with the goods of the industries. The result of these adverse circumstances meant that the regime was based on the importance of the role of a party-state bureaucracy that could only sustain its continued domination in terms of the significance of the ascendency of the elite. In this context the possibility of the development of a society that was aiming to realise socialism was not possible. But to what extent was this situation the result of the views of Lenin? This is what has to be analysed and conclusions made. Initially we can suggest that adverse circumstances resulted in the promotion of the approach of authoritarianism, and so this would imply that there was a contradiction between theory and practice. But this possible conclusion is complicated by the fact that Lenin continually justified the policies of the Bolsheviks in terms of the perspective that they were necessary in order to facilitate the possibility to realise the ultimate aim of communism. Hence there seems to be a tension in the approach of Lenin between the contending perspectives of the approach of socialism from below and socialism from above. What has to be determined is which of these positions is more compatible with the overall views of Lenin, which are continually changing in accordance with different circumstances. In order to provide answers to these questions it is necessary to relate them to the views on Lenin that are outlined by Andrzej Walicki in his book ‘Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom (Stanford University Press, California 1995)

This writer considers that Lenin had a fanatical support for the principles of Marxism but that he modified them in accordance with the conditions of Russian society. In this manner Lenin’s conception of freedom was always related to the situation of Russia and the necessity to overcome and resolve the problem of poverty and the related economic issues. His approach was initially based on support for the perspectives of Plekhanov and his understanding that capitalism had to develop within Russia before socialism was possible. But this standpoint became modified in terms of the development of class struggle that indicated the increased importance of the role of the working class. But this very development led Lenin to adopt an authoritarian understanding of the relation between party and class: “Those who possess true knowledge should not yield to the opinions of the ignorant majority. Lenin assumed that only Marxism was the only vehicle of true knowledge and that party intellectuals, initiated into the secrets of this world transforming knowledge, were potentially at least, a sort of gnostic aristocracy endowed with a superior capacity for finding correct, truly Marxist answers to the topical problems of the movement. Grass-roots workers leaders could not compete with them, because the workers perspective was necessarily too narrow, limited by a sort of parochial sort of empiricism.”(p294) This view is a caricature because Lenin was concerned to indicate the importance of the party for opposing what he considered to be the limitations of spontaneous consciousness within the working class which was based on the role of trade union activity. This approach was defined as being limited by the illusions of what he would consider to be the standpoint of bourgeois consciousness. But what this understanding did not recognise is that trade union activity would result in the opposition of the forces of labour to the interests of capital, and in that manner, this would indicate how trade unionism was connected to the role of class struggle. Hence the result would be that the immediate struggle of the working class could create the basis of the development of the aspirations of the workers to reject the interests of capital. In this context the role of a revolutionary party would logically seem to be about the promotion of the ability of trade union struggle to achieve its potential in terms of the possibility to challenge the very power of capital. But the issue is whether the approach of Lenin is able to achieve this type of conclusion or does he in a more elitist manner uphold a position that seems to deny the dynamic possibilities of the role of the class struggle. Is the class struggle nothing more than the expression of the leadership of the party in relation to the development of the activity of working class?

It is important to recognise that Lenin was concerned in his pamphlet ‘What is to be Done’ (collected works volume 5) to reply to the supporters of the Economist trend who seemed to justify the view that the working class should concern itself with economic questions whilst the intelligentsia is motivated by political issues such as the role of the Tsarist regime. So, in this manner he associates the ideology of spontaneity not with the working class but instead with a rival ideological trend that is based on the apparent rejection of revolutionary Marxism. The argument of Lenin is that the reliance on spontaneity dynamics of the class struggle is not sufficient to establish support for revolutionary Marxism: “We have said that there could not have been Social Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.”(Lenin p375-376) In a certain sense Lenin is outlining the actual development of Marxist theory as the expression of the role of intellectuals in the conceiving of the conception of the arguments in favour of socialism and against capitalism. But it is also implied that because of this development the role of the Marxist party, which is based on the influence of the intellectuals, will define the character of the struggle for socialism. It is implied that the working class should be subordinated to the party elite in the attempt to establish the possibility of the realisation of a social alternative to the domination of capitalism. This means that the working class does not seem to have a dynamic and important role in the attempt to overcome the capitalist system and that instead the intellectuals provide a primary guidance in the expression of the potential to establish a revolutionary alternative. This perspective also implies that the role of the revolutionary party will be primary in the aftermath of the overthrow of capitalism and that it will express an elite guidance as to who the workers should act in order to facilitate the advance and progress of socialism. In other words, Lenin has apparently outlined the justification of the role of a totalitarian dictatorship based on the supremacy of the revolutionary party within society. The fact that it supposedly expresses the historic interests of the working class is an indication that the party has the capacity to be able to define the objectives and aims of a socialist type of society. This is not necessarily the standpoint of Marxism which is based on the conception of the role of a multi-party democracy as the basis of the political system, and on this basis of the apparent importance of dialogue and discussion the workers are able to participate in the creation of a system of economic and political democracy in order to promote the realisation of socialism. But this standpoint seems to be rejected by Lenin, who instead considers that the superior level of consciousness of the revolutionary party means that it should have a dominant role within the society that has overthrown the domination of capitalism. The apparent ability of the party to express the historic interests of the working class means that it has the justification to be able to dominate and so determine the character and aspects of the post-revolutionary society.

This standpoint is not necessarily the expression of orthodox Marxism which was defined most eloquently by Rosa Luxemburg in her writings on the mass strike. She outlined the importance of the interaction of the dynamism of the working class with the strategy of the party in order to facilitate the possibility to overthrow capitalism. This perspective would logically imply that the character of the post-revolutionary society would be based on the importance of the primary role of the participation of the workers in the realisation of socialist aims that they had contributed towards the realisation in terms of their dynamic social role. This situation would imply the importance of multi-party democracy which would enable the workers to be able to establish their views in a tolerant and agreed manner. But the position of Lenin would seem to contradict this approach because he could only apparently conceive of the possibility of the one and genuine or authentic revolutionary Marxist party to be able to express the interests of the working class. In this manner the apparent justification of the rule of the Marxist elite seems to preclude the importance of the realisation of the principles of genuine democracy. Lenin would justify his position in terms of the understanding that the spontaneous struggle of the working class cannot overcome the limitations of trade unionism which is based on the influence of bourgeois consciousness. But such a rigid formulation seems to deny the possibilities of trade union struggles and how the generalisation of such struggles could become the basis to facilitate actual opposition to capitalism and so create the potential for the overthrow of the system. For example, it was the trade union influenced workers of 1905 who established the soviets and so in this manner promoted the potential for the overthrow of Tsarism. But the Bolsheviks seemed to deny this potential in a sectarian manner because they instead insisted in rigid terms on the leadership of the Marxists and so underestimated the importance of the dynamic role of the workers. The result of this rigid insistence on the dominant role of the party was to actually isolate the party from having any connection to actual developments in the class struggle. This criticism does not mean that the issue of the influence of bourgeois ideology in relation to the working class is not an issue, but the point is that the development of mass struggle can transform attitudes. Hence it is the task of Marxist organisations to combine propaganda for socialism with the elaboration of a strategy that can facilitate the development of mass movements of opposition to the capitalist system. But such a perspective does not seem to be part of the approach of Lenin. Instead he seems to assume that the role of the party should have a dominant role in the process of the overthrow of capitalism. This criticism of Leninism does not mean that the issue of the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class is not important. It is necessary for the party to develop ideas that attempt to reject the importance of bourgeois ideology in relation to the attitudes of the proletariat, but this aspect should be combined with the attempt to promote the development of a mass movement of opposition to capitalism. In one sense Lenin’s approach is ambiguous because he does accept that the struggles of the working class can acquire political dimensions, but this understanding is not connected to the elaboration of a perspective for the development of the possibility of the self-emancipation of the working class. Instead the apparent ascendency of the party in relation to the role of the working class is assumed, and the logical outcome of this relationship would be a type of society claiming to be socialist that was based on the domination of the Marxist party.

Lenin justifies his standpoint in terms of an emphasis of the importance of political struggle, in which the significance of economic demands has to be located. This means that all the various oppressed strata such as the peasants and intellectuals should also be mobilised for opposition to the autocratic system. This seems to be common sense in that it is necessary to undermine the domination of the Tsarist system if political progress is to be made, and in this manner it seems correct that the revolutionary party should have a democratic programme that can facilitate advance in relation to the aim of the overcoming of Tsarism in relation to the possibility of making progress towards socialism. But this perspective would imply the necessity of cooperation between different parties in terms of establishing a society in which the principles of democracy were very important. In this context the emphasis on the primacy of the revolutionary Marxist party would seem to contradict this perspective and instead it would seem to express a dogmatic stance that contradicted the character of the popular nature of the process of democratic revolution. Lenin does not seem to analyse the apparent ambiguity of his standpoint because his major emphasis is about the various limitations of the Economist trend. But his conception of the popular character of the democratic revolution would imply that the role of a single and exclusive revolutionary party is problematical because what is required is an alliance of different opposition parties within society, and also it is necessary to mobilise the role of the workers and peasants in order to facilitate the realisation of the objectives of democratic revolution.

Lenin outlines the apparently different character of the role of the party and working class in the following manner: “The political struggle of the Social Democrats is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organisation of the Social Democrats must inevitably be of a kind different from the organisation of the workers designed for this struggle. The workers organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organisation of revolutionaries, meaning revolutionary Social Democrats). In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organisation, all distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, must be effaced. Such an organisation must perforce not be very extensive and be as secret as possible.”(p452-453) This standpoint is understandable because of the situation of repression in the Tsarist regime, but it des not mean that the objectives of the struggle of the workers and the party should be effectively different. The point is that the party should attempt to generate support for political objectives in terms of the development of the economic struggles of the workers, and indeed this development did occur in the 1905 revolution. If the party insists on the importance of political demands in a rigid and elitist manner it could mean that it becomes isolated from the dynamics of the class struggle. Instead of the development of this problem it is necessary for the party to indicate the potential of the economic struggle to become an integral aspect of opposition to the Tsarist system. In this manner the class struggle of the workers becomes part of what is an emerging democratic revolution. Such a development did occur in 1905 with the emergence of the role of the Soviets who combined political demands such as the advocacy of the formation of the Constituent Assembly with the demand for the shorter working day. But the Bolsheviks could not recognise the potential of these developments because they could only conceive the situation in terms of a rigid conception of the political character of the democratic revolution. This one-sided limitation was initially outlined in the approach of ‘What is to be Done’. But the problem was that the development of the 1905 revolution indicated the ability of the workers to outline political demands in terms of their own class aspirations, and so Lenin’s distinctions were shown to be outmoded and dogmatic. The point was that the revolutionary character of the working class based on its economic subordination to the interests of capital was shown to become the basis of the promotion of political demands for a democratic republic. This was not what Lenin and the Bolsheviks were prepared for because of their elitist and rigid view that the Marxist party should provide an omnipotent role of leadership of the workers in terms of the expression of a revolutionary strategy. Instead the very dynamism of the working class in 1905 should have become the basis for the modification of the strategy of the Bolsheviks in terms of the promotion of the perspective of political power to the Soviets.

In other words, the attempt to project the approach of ‘What is to be Done’ onto the events of 1905 seemed to have been problematical because of the actual revolutionary dynamism of the working class which was underestimated by the Bolsheviks. This problem was ultimately based on the justification of a conception of ‘socialism from above’ in which the role of the party was about directing the workers in terms of the achievement of political objectives such as the success of the democratic revolution. The very conception of the hegemonic importance of the party in the generation of the conditions for socialism seems to have been undermined by the actual dynamics of the class struggle, which only Trotsky seemed to have understood in a dynamic and audacious manner. In this context to what extent was Lenin’s actual strategy for the 1905 revolution connected to the actual developments of the creation of a mass movement of opposition to Tsarism. Did he in any manner modify his apparently rigid conception of ‘socialism from above’? This question can only be addressed In terms of analysing Lenin’s ‘Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic revolution” (Collected works volume 9) In an evaluation of this work will enable us to be able to determine if Lenin considered that the character of socialism was still based on the effective hegemony of the party over the working class. This issue is of importance to Lenin who in an ambiguous manner contends in the beginning of his work that “There is not the slightest doubt that the revolution will teach Social Democratism to the masses of the workers in Russia.”(p17) But what does this mean in terms of the relation of the party and class. Does it mean that the workers have taken the initiative in the development of the revolutionary process, or is it instead that the workers have merely accepted the necessity of the leadership of the Social Democrats? Trotsky would claim that the workers have become the dynamic expression of the revolutionary process in terms of the creation of Soviets, which are a contender for the potential to realise an alternative form of political power. But could it be said that Lenin addresses this issue in an effective manner? Instead Lenin contends that the revolutionary process will confirm the validity of the programme of the Social Democrats which still seems to justify the view that what is being outlined is a type of conception of the importance of a form of socialism from above. Lenin is adamant that the task of the development of the trade unions has to be secondary to the formation of a revolutionary government which presumably would be based on the dominant role of the revolutionary party. But in practice these aspects are not contrasted in a counterposed manner because the significance of the trade unions can be expressed in terms of the development of the influence of the soviets which are based on the connection of the trade unions to the logical realisation of militant action in terms of the creation of a government based on the soviets. The outcome of the dynamic importance of the trade unions is that they express the logical possibility to become the basis of the soviets and in this manner can then challenge the power of the autocratic order. Instead of this connection Lenin outlines the strategic importance of the trade unions as being of secondary significance when compared to the task of the realisation of a revolutionary government. He comments: “Undoubtedly, we still have a great deal to do in educating and organising the working class, but now the gist of the matter is where should we place the main political work in this work of education and organisation? On the trade unions and legally existing organisations, or an insurrection, on the work of creating a revolutionary army and a revolutionary government? Both serve to educate and organise the working class. Both of course are necessary. But in the present revolution the problem amounts to this: which is to be emphasised in the work of educating and organising the working class, the former or the latter?”(p19) But there is not a contrast between these two aspects because the importance of the mass organisation of the workers in the trade unions facilitates the development of the class consciousness necessary to promote popular support for the perspective of a revolutionary government. Indeed, the expression of this development is represented by the soviets which are the logical outcome of the mass struggles of the workers which have been based on the role of the trade unions. Hence it is a strategic mistake to counterpose the apparently inferior role of the trade unions in relation to the task of the formation of a revolutionary government. Instead these aspects are connected in terms of the dynamics of the development of the class struggle. The militancy of the workers based on the activity of the trade unions makes them also supportive of the aim of the realisation of a revolutionary government, but this form of administration is effectively based on the importance and influence of the role of the trade unions as indicated by the development of the soviets. But this process questions the view that the revolutionary party has a dominating role in the process of change, and instead the party is only influential to the extent that it has influence within the trade unions and soviets. Lenin seems to reject this understanding of the importance of socialism from below because he can only contemplate the formation of a revolutionary government based on the significance of a party that acts and thinks on behalf of the working class. But such a development could mean the justification of a form of authoritarianism in which the party has absolute power because of its claim to be acting and speaking on behalf of the working class. This standpoint seems to express the viewpoint of authoritarianism despite Lenin’s apparent inability to recognise this limitation. But such a problem could be resolved if he explicitly supported the formation of a revolutionary government based on the legitimacy of the role of the soviets. In this manner any party with a majority in the soviets would be accountable to the interests and aspirations of the workers. Only in this manner would it express the development of a genuine workers government, or a type of administration based on the principles and premises of a popular form of sovereignty. But Lenin does not seem aware of these issues because the only form of government that he considers to be principled is one in which the party is the leadership of the working class, and so the task of the workers is to obey the directives of the party and in this context the importance of the revolutionary role of the working class is reduced to the actions of the party. This standpoint seems to be a recipe for the rule of the revolutionary party and the reduction of the importance of the working class to obeying the imperatives established by the party in terms of strategy and tactics. The workers seem to have no basis for political initiative when compared to the hegemonic role of the party.

However, Lenin would dispute this criticism because he would also suggest that his aim is the creation of the importance of an elected constituent assembly on the basis of the formation of a democratic republic. But these apparent democratic aspects are still connected to the necessity of the formation of a revolutionary government which would have the initiative in taking all the major decisions. The role of the working class would still be supportive in this context. Lenin tries to deny the importance of the issue of the accountability of this government to the working class because such a connection can only be established by the important role of the soviets. Instead it is assumed that a revolutionary government connected to the role of the proletarian party will act as the instrument of the process of the realisation of the democratic revolution. The importance of the activity of the workers is obscured by the apparent strategic importance of the revolutionary government, which it is assumed is connected to the leading role of the Marxist party. Lenin justifies his position in terms of applying a form of democratic logic. He contends: “Whoever wants to arrive at socialism by any other path than that of political democracy will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and political sense. If any workers should ask us at the appropriate moment why we should not go ahead and carry out our maximum programme we should answer by pointing out how far from socialism the masses of the democratically minded people still are, how undeveloped class antagonisms still are, and how unorganised the proletarians still are.”(p29) But this comment ignores the importance of the development of the soviets that indicates the practical expression of the combination of the bourgeois democratic and proletarian revolutions. The very class consciousness and level of activity of the workers is indicating the potential for a form of proletarian revolution which is connected to all achieving tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution such as the creation of the constituent assembly. But instead of indicating the importance of the militant action of the workers, Lenin can only emphasise the apparent problem of the lack of consciousness and level of organisation. However, there is an important paradox in this situation: if his analysis genuinely explained the situation the possibility of struggle by the workers would be inexplicable. But instead of this apparent paradox the working class has already proved to be the effective leadership of the struggle against Tsarism. In 1905, when Lenin wrote his work, the working class was indicating by the militancy and ambitious character of its activity that it was the genuine leadership of a process of democratic revolution. In this context it was Lenin who was not able to understand the authentic revolutionary character of events and instead was ignoring the importance of the soviets and the possibility to form a revolutionary government on this basis. Instead it was his conception of a revolutionary government that was limited to bourgeois democratic tasks that was not equal to the demands of the situation. Indeed, in this context for Lenin to complain about the lack of class consciousness of the workers was inexplicable. Instead Lenin’s perspective was antiquated when compared to the level of militancy of the workers in the major industrial centres. Lenin was advocating the formation of a revolutionary government on the basis of the realisation of a democratic revolution, which was in a sense appropriate, but this approach was based on the neglect of the importance of the soviets. In other words, the workers by their militant actions were indicating the connection of the process of bourgeois democratic revolution with the proletarian revolution. It was the dogmatic approach of the Bolsheviks that was not equal to the dynamics of the class struggle, but this limitation was connected to the rigid view that the Bolsheviks should instruct the working class in the character of the revolutionary process. Hence the Bolsheviks could apparently not learn from the workers what were the appropriate tasks of the class struggle. This standpoint was an indication of the limitations of the authoritarian character of the Bolsheviks. They were unable to comprehend the lessons of the actual class struggle as it developed in 1905. Instead the Bolsheviks proved to be less ambitious than the workers who were starting to support the aim of ‘All Power to the Soviets’. This situation was an indication of the differences between the approach of socialism from above when compared to socialism from below.

The perspective of Lenin is to promote the victory of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry that will facilitate the development of capitalism in the most democratic manner and advance the possibility of an international revolution that will as a result increase the potential to make progress towards socialist revolution in Russia: “Without dictatorship it is impossible to break down that resistance and repel counterrevolutionary attempts. But of course, it will be a democratic, not a socialist dictatorship. It will be unable (without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary development) to affect the foundations of capitalism. At best, it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy, including the formation of a republic, eradicate the features of Asiatic bondage, not only in rural but also in factory life, lay the foundations for a through improvement in the conditions of the workers and a rise in their standard of living, and – last but not least – carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe. Such a victory will not by any means transform our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution, the democratic revolution will not immediately overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships, nevertheless the significance of such a victory for the future development of Russia and of the whole world will be immense. Nothing will raise the revolutionary energy of the world proletariat so much, nothing will shorten the path leading to its complete victory to such extent as the decisive victory of the revolution that has now started in Russia.”(p56-57) This perspective is credible to the extent that it is based on the connection of the Russian revolution to international possibilities of the advance of world socialist revolution, but it is also based on a schema that can only envisage the workers establishing a bourgeois democratic republic. But the actual development indicates the aspiration of the workers to become the dominant social force via the role of the Soviets. Would the success of Soviet democracy mean that the workers would be content with the creation of a democratic republic that did not go beyond the limits of capitalism? Lenin can attempt to evade answering these types of questions because he considers that the authentic revolutionary role of the party means that it has the correct strategy and is the only basis for the expression of the genuine interests of the workers. In this manner the establishment of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, in terms of the hegemonic role of the Marxist party, is what is sufficient to express the interest of the working class under the given conditions. With this perspective he can avoid having to develop strategic conclusions based on the development of the soviets. Hence what is rejected is the importance of a perspective of socialism from below and instead only the role of a revolutionary government based on the importance of the authentic Marxist party can express the interests of the workers. The workers are unable to define their class interests, even though they have created Soviets for this very purpose. Instead in an unrealistic manner Lenin claims that the working class is supporting the perspective of the Bolsheviks in 1905 despite the lack of effective support for this contention. Indeed, it could be argued that Lenin is defending an imaginary schema about the formation of a revolutionary government based on the primary role of the Bolsheviks when there is no justification for this viewpoint. Lenin does mention the development of a determined struggle by the workers and peasants but he does not provide content to this evaluation, and instead assumes that the result of this struggle will be the supremacy of the role of the Marxist party. He does maintain that only the proletariat in alliance with the peasants can be consistent supporters of the aim of democracy, and this is a credible point. But the relation of this perspective to the role of the soviets that have actually been created by the workers, is not mentioned. Instead the only principled outcome of the dynamics of mass struggle is defined by the formation of a revolutionary government that will be dominated by the Bolsheviks. Only they can express the historic interests of the workers and so act accordingly to express the logic of a popular democratic revolution. Only the Bolsheviks can represent the aspirations of the workers and peasants, and so in this manner the role of the effective development of party dictatorship is connected to the mass struggles that have occurred in order to create the possibility of this development.

It could be argued that it is not credible to suggest that Lenin had an authoritarian approach based on his perspective of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. Instead he was in favour of the role of a democratic republic that would express these interests and be the basis to promote the most progressive development of capitalism in order to generate the conditions for transition to socialism. But the only active expression of this process of transformation is the role of a revolutionary government which presumably would be dominated by the role of the authentic expression of Marxism, which is the Bolsheviks. Only the party would be able to direct the actions of the workers and peasants in a principled manner that would facilitate the possibility of advance towards socialism. In this context despite formal references to the activity of the workers there is no suggestion that they are the primary exponents of a process of change and advance towards the realisation of the objective of socialism. Instead it is assumed that the party has the hegemonic and directing role that would enable the workers to be able to realise their interests. Hence this implicitly authoritarian standpoint seems to be an expression of the practices of the Bolsheviks after 1917. Hence the early works of Lenin seem to represent the justification of an authoritarian approach in which only the character of the party has the ability to define and represent the interests of the workers. In this context the workers do not seem able to act in a dynamic manner that is able to express their own interests. It is interesting that Lenin’s work on the 1905 revolution makes no mention of the role of the Soviets, and instead the only importance of the workers is that they can contribute towards the formation of a revolutionary government that would be dominated by the Bolsheviks. In contrast Trotsky understood the dynamic role of the workers as expressed in the role of the Soviets. This was an indication that Marxism could be interpreted in a dynamic manner that was able to explain and support the role of the workers in the attempt to define the situation in accordance with their interests. But Lenin’s elite conception of the role of the revolutionary party meant that this understanding defined his interpretation of perspectives and the aims of the Marxists. In this context the workers should be merely the dynamic expression of the creation of a democratic dictatorship, and the active expression of this situation would be the policies of the party. There was no apparent recognition of any dynamic interaction of party and class in this situation. Certainly, the party would act in accordance with the aspirations of the workers, but this aspect would not be based on a process of genuine dialogue between the government and the working class. In this manner Lenin was outlining his first major justification of the role of a party dictatorship and the emphasis is on the primary importance of a revolutionary government that is based on the influence of the Marxists.

However, whilst this standpoint could be considered to have authoritarian aspects it would seem wrong to also suggest that it was of a totalitarian character. This is because whilst Lenin was upholding the rule of the party elite this aspect was considered in terms of the role of the democratic republic based on the role of the Constituent Assembly which would presumably represent the ability to limit the power of the actions of the party government. Also, the formation of the Constituent Assembly would imply that the result of elections could mean the end of the domination of the Bolsheviks and the establishment of a different form of government. In this context the Bolshevik administration would not have absolute and unaccountable power that could not be challenged and even replaced with the formation of a different government because of the results of elections. But what was elitist was the view that only the Bolsheviks had the character and politics to represent the interests of the working class. In this context the role of the workers was to merely support and uphold the aims of the Bolsheviks. There was no suggestion that the working class could have a dynamic role that would become to define the character of the class struggle and so influence the expression of the aspiration for socialism. However, this elitism seems to be of an authoritarian and not totalitarian character because whilst the conception of party supremacy in the democratic republic is justified this elitist view is based on the acceptance of the necessity of some form of interaction between the role of party and class. The perspective of the absolute power of the party is not being justified.

The views of Lenin became modified in 1917 when he recognised the importance of the role of the Soviets as a rival to the influence of the bourgeois provisional government that developed after the overthrow of Tsarism. In the ‘Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution’ (Collected Works volume 24) he outlines how the situation is characterised by dual power and the aim is to achieve the realisation of the political power of the Soviets, which express the aspirations of the workers, peasants and soldiers. In other words, Lenin recognises that the character of the process of struggle in 1917 has made the previous perspectives of the Bolsheviks antiquated. The working class is spontaneously increasingly in favour of the aim of realising the domination of the soviets and so the Bolsheviks should develop a perspective based on this sentiment, and this would mean that the attainment of Soviet power would achieve the formation of a type of society that was inspired by the role of the Paris Commune. In other words, in contrast to his position in 1905 Lenin has adopted a position that is based on the apparent dynamics of a genuine revolutionary process, and as a result he understands the importance of the role of the Soviets. This means that the approach of Lenin is more consistently based on the recognition of the importance of the realisation of the dynamics of class struggle, and in this manner connecting the role of the Bolsheviks to the spontaneous aspirations of the workers to translate the influence of the Soviets into becoming the basis of a new type of political power. The role of revolutionary leadership is about an interaction between party and class so that both these aspects are united in common aims of rejecting the bourgeois character of the government and in this manner also repudiating the opportunist approach of the leadership of the Soviets. It is the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who have acted in an elitist manner because they refuse to express their popular and democratic support in the realisation of the power of the Soviets and instead accommodate to the interests of the bourgeois government. In contrast the Bolsheviks attempt to uphold a revolutionary perspective that unites the aspirations of working people with the objective of realisation of the power of the Soviets. The aim of this approach would be to establish the control of the working class over the economy, and as a result this would be organised in order to resolve the issues of the various limitations caused by capitalism. Hence, the approach of Lenin is to uphold a perspective in which the role of a revolutionary government, which has its legitimacy from the Soviets, has the task to solve the outstanding issues caused by the imperialist conflict and the crisis of capitalism. It is the Soviets that establish the democratic character of the revolutionary government and this means that the administration has popular support and is accountable to the interests of the people.

This position is theoretically justified by the book: ‘State and Revolution’(Collected works volume 25) It is interesting that the approach of his work of 1905 which emphasised the importance of the role of a Marxist revolutionary government is replaced by the significance of the establishment of the ascendency of the working class: “The exploited classes need political rule in order to completely abolish all exploitation, i.e., in the interests of the vast majority of the people and against the insignificant minority consisting of the modern slave owners – the landowners and capitalists.”(p408) This standpoint is connected to an emphasis on the importance of the role of the proletariat for being able to carry out the necessary struggle that will result in the political overthrow of the domination of capital and the establishment of the conditions required for advance towards socialism: “The overthrow of bourgeois rule can be accomplished only by the proletariat, the particular class whose economic conditions of existence prepare it for this task and provide it with the possibility and the power to perform it. While the bourgeoisie break up and disintegrate the peasantry and all the petty bourgeois groups, they weld together, unite and organise the proletariat. Only the proletariat – by virtue of the economic role it plays in large scale production – is capable of being the leader of all the working and exploited people, whom the bourgeoisie exploit, oppress and crush, often not less but more than they do the proletarians, but who are incapable of waging an independent struggle for their emancipation.”(p408-409) Hence it seems that the issue of the leading role of the party has been replaced by the importance of the dynamism of the working class to transform society in a revolutionary manner. The aspect of party leadership of the workers has apparently been replaced with the elaboration of the capacity of the working class to be able to undermine capitalism in a revolutionary manner and so create the conditions for advance to the realisation of a socialist society. In these terms the approach of Lenin seems to be similar to that of Marx and the apparent emphasis on the importance of party hegemony in the revolutionary process has been effectively rejected. Furthermore, the importance of the working class in the act of the transformation of society would imply that the character of the post-capitalist social formation would have similar principles in terms of the role of administration of the producers who have the primary responsibility and capacity to create a new socialist society. But there is an apparent tension in this approach because Lenin also contends that: “By educating the workers party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the whole system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising the social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.”(p409) This comment indicates that there is an aspect of contradiction in the approach of Lenin, because on the one hand he has outlined the importance of the dynamic role of the working class in the revolutionary process and the organisation of socialism but on the other hand he seems to maintain that the party will be the dominant aspect of this process of change and transformation. But in overall terms the standpoint seems to connect the importance of the role of the working class with the character of the society established after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. This point is indicated when he comments that: “Marx’s theory of the state, i.e., the proletariat organised as the ruling class, is inseparably bound up with the whole of his doctrine of the revolutionary role of the proletariat in history. The culmination of this role is the proletarian dictatorship, the political rule of the proletariat.”(p409) This latter formulation does not indicate the importance of the role of the revolutionary party, and instead the emphasis is on the ability of the working class to carry out a process of revolutionary change and so because of this development being able to define and influence the creation of a new type of socialist society. In this context it seems that the role of the party is merely to support the ability of the workers to be able to change and transform society. Hence it would seem that in overall terms the authoritarian aspects of Lenin’s approach between 1902-1905 seem to have been generally rejected. The apparent justification of socialism from above has been replaced with support for the understanding that the working class is able to define its possibilities in terms of the creation of society because of its inherent revolutionary potential. In this context the role of the party is to become the most conscious adherent of these possibilities. It could be argued that this approach still justifies the role of a one-party dictatorship. But this conclusion would be premature because the emphasis of Lenin is about the importance of the dynamism of the working class and its capacity to change society. In this context the role of the revolutionary party is to be supportive in terms of the activity of the workers in bringing about a new socialist form of system. Indeed, the importance of the party is not elaborated in any detail in this analysis and so we have to assume that Lenin has the approach that what is important is the actions of the workers in carrying out revolutionary change and then creating the contents of a socialist society. In this manner the issue of the dictatorship of the party is not emphasised and instead what is important is the development of a genuine dictatorship of the proletariat, which presumably will have the form of the functioning of Soviet democracy. It could be argued that this approach is unrealistic, but it does seem to be the perspective of Lenin in 1917 when writing ‘State and Revolution’. The issue that arises is to what extent did this standpoint consistently express the views of Lenin.

The aim of the process of revolutionary change is to introduce a new form of democracy based on the importance of new institutions that replace the bourgeois parliament and which are more accountable to the interests of working people, and an economy and form of administration that is organised by the working class. The basis of the new type of society will be the realisation of the principles of democracy in the organisation of the economy and the political system: “To develop democracy to the utmost, to find the forms for this development, to test them by practice, and so forth – all this is one of the component tasks of the struggle for the social revolution. Taken separately, no kind of democracy will bring socialism, But in actual life democracy will never be “taken separately”; it will be “taken together” with other things, it will exert its influence on economic life as well, will stimulate its transformation; and in turn will be influenced by economic development, and so on.”(p457-458) Thus the character of the role of the economic aspect cannot be separated from the expression of the principles of democracy which must mean the management of the economy in terms of the ability of the producers to be able to define its objectives, and in this manner a plan of production will be developed. This situation must also mean that the political system is connected to this character of the economy, and so whilst the institutions of parliament have been ended, this does not mean that forms of democratic accountability do not occur. Instead new institutions based on the principles of political democracy will be created. But this understanding does not outline the role of multi-party democracy and instead it seems to be assumed that the importance of parties is replaced by delegates that represent the direct interest of the workers. However, despite these ambiguities there is no suggestion that the system should be based on the importance of the domination of the revolutionary party. However, it is maintained that democratic rights of the capitalists will be ended in order to facilitate the ability to express the democracy of the majority of society. This view does not recognise that the ending of democratic rights for one section of society could establish a precedent in which the democratic rights of all the people become undermined in the name of the interests of the revolutionary aims. What is not understood in this context is that if the revolutionary regime is able to realise the needs of the people in a satisfactory and effective manner it would be surprising if the advocates of the old system of exploitation should become popular. Instead it should be quite acceptable to allow the supporters of capitalism to organise because the superiority of socialism should ensure the democratic basis that means the system is able to continue. Hence this view does express an aspect of authoritarianism in the approach of Lenin, but it is secondary to his recognition of the necessity to ensure that the system is continually democratically accountable and supported by the majority of the people. This emphasis on the democratic character of socialism is sufficient to minimise the aspect of authoritarianism in his position.

Indeed the importance of democracy means that the role of the state as an apparatus of coercion becomes increasingly less important and instead the role of democracy supersedes the necessity to continue the role of coercion of the former employers: “ Furthermore, during the transition from capitalism to communism suppression is still necessary, but it is now the suppression of the exploiting majority by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the “state”, is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state. It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage labourers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will start to disappear.”(p468) Thus the apparatus of coercion is actually based on the importance of the democratic character of the political system which is based on the importance of the accountability of the economic and political structures to the interests and aspirations of the majority of the people. In this manner the role of democracy ensures that the aspect of coercion becomes minimised and is generally nothing more than the defence of the popular character of the regime in relation to the possibility of counterrevolution. But the importance of democracy in the political system should ensure that coercion is not a necessary aspect of the system. Instead the principles of democracy should mean that the system is able to continue because it this aspect is connected to the realisation of the interests of working people. In contrast the coercive character of the bourgeois state was important because that was because of the necessity to defend the interests of the minority against the majority. Hence the aim is for the withering away of the state in the socialist society because its coercive functions become increasingly irrelevant. In this context the aspiration is to realise the ability of the people to administer the economy and society without the necessity of the role of the state. This is a society based on the possibility for the principle of participation to replace the importance of subordination to bureaucratic and dominating forms of organisation of the economy and political structures. In this context the initial aim is to achieve the importance of workers control over the economy: “Until the “higher” phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the strictest control by society and the state over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption; but this control must start with the expropriation of the capitalists with the establishment of workers control over the capitalists, and must be exercised not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of armed workers.”(p474-475) Hence the perspective is that the situation of political democracy of the people will be expressed in terms of the possibility to establish economic democracy of the producers, or the ability of the workers to be able to define the objectives and aims of the process of production. This implies that ay plan of production will be developed in terms of the influence of the workers who will establish the level of output that is necessary in order to realise the needs of society. This situation of the organisation and administration of the economy by the producers will be accompanied by the supervision of the activity of the state apparatus by the people who will ensure that the realisation of its functions are compatible with the economic tasks of the organisation of production in order to met the needs of socialism. Thus, in all the economic and political aspects of the conception of the process of transition from socialism to the classless communist society, Lenin outlines the importance of the dynamic participation and involvement of the workers in the organisation and development of the economy. Indeed, in this context there is no systematic mention of the primary importance of the party, and instead all the emphasis is on the role of the working class in the activity of the creation of the basis to advance to the communist society. However, there is no elaboration of what the character of the political system should express in terms of the role of democracy, and the conception of workers control and popular administration of the state is only outlined in brief detail. This means that Lenin has only outlined the principles of the popular organisation of a socialist society and the issue of the role of the state is only mentioned and not elaborated in more convincing detail. Nevertheless, Lenin has outlined the basis of a conception of a valid emancipatory understanding of the principles of transition to a genuine socialist society. The problem is that this approach is not able to consider the complex difficulties of the situation in Russia in 1917-18. Hence what has been outlined is a utopian approach that cannot be realistic in terms of the problems of the Russian economy in 1917. This means that it would seem inevitable that he would have to justify in 1918 the importance of the role of the party for developing an approach that could be able to comprehend the issues of the problem of economic decline. In this manner the emancipatory standpoint of State and Revolution would become undermined. But we have to suggest that Lenin has at least outlined an approach that expresses a model for the possibility of working people to be able to define and influence the character of economic and political activity after the success of the revolutionary process. Lenin has outlined an admirable understanding of the character of socialism from below that could be an inspiration in relation to the task of constructing a genuine socialist society. But the problem was that this approach could not be realised in the complicated situation of 1917. Hence the issue was whether the Bolsheviks could uphold an emancipatory approach in relation to the challenges of the post-revolutionary circumstances.

It is argued by people like Walicki that the standpoint of Lenin’s ‘State and Revolution’ is not opposed to the justification of the development of a bureaucratic society based on the domination of a single party. Certainly, it is possible to establish comments that seem to express this viewpoint. But the point is that ‘State and Revolution’ is primarily based on the attempt to connect the historical lessons of Marx’s analysis of Paris Commune with the type of society that should be developed in 1917. In this context the emphasis is on the importance of the role of the working class in the development of the character of society in economic and political terms. This means that the economy should be based on workers control and the workers should also have the primary role in the administration of the state. In other words, the working class within the organisation of the Soviets will be the basis of how society will be developed after the revolution. This point is confirmed by the various articles that Lenin wrote in 1917 justifying the aim of the role of the overthrow of the political power of the Provisional government by the role of the Soviets. In the ‘Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government’ (Collected works volume 27) the emphasis on the continued importance of workers control is modified by a recognition of the necessity of resolving the problem of productivity and the importance of discipline within the process of economic activity. The recognition of the serious character of the economic problems of the emerging Soviet state means that the principle of self-administration of the economy and society, which has been articulated by Lenin, is now starting to be questioned, even if Lenin does not yet establish any definite proposals to try and improve the situation. Hence the element of pragmatism concerning the importance of practical problems is already resulting in a questioning of the conception of the emancipation of society via the role of the working class. In his article ‘Left Wing Childishness’ (CW 25) Lenin elaborates his understanding in terms of the necessity of the proletariat to oppose the petty-bourgeois (peasant) disorganisation of the economy in the interests of profit. This implies the necessity to impose coercion against the peasantry in order to obtain the necessary grain in order to feed the cities. But what Lenin does not recognise is that this approach can only result in the justification of coercion as a method for resolving an important issue of economic policy. The logical necessity to encourage the development of a cooperative connection between the interests of the workers and the peasants seems to be rejected with this apparent justification of an authoritarian economic policy. He does not recognise that the workers and the peasants have a common interest in the expression of shared economic interests in the exchange of industrial goods for agricultural products and instead his standpoint anticipates the coercive policy of war communism. Indeed, he seems to consider that both the peasants and workers are opposed to the interests of the Soviet state, which has implicitly become defined by the role of the party elite that acts on behalf of the interests of society. Hence, he criticises the workers and peasants in the following vehement terms: “We know perfectly well that the economic basis of profiteering is both the small proprietors, who are exceptionally widespread in Russia, and private capitalism, of which every petty bourgeois is an agent. We know that the million tentacles of this petty bourgeois hydra now and again encircle various sections of the workers, that instead of a state monopoly, profiteering forces its way into every pore of our social and economic organism.”(p336-337) Thus the apparent aspirations of all sections of the people have apparently become counterposed to the aims of the party which has become the only genuine guardian of the objectives of socialism. This means that the role of the politically conscious vanguard, or the party is the most important expression of the possibility to defend the objectives of socialism. Only its leadership of the working class can ensure that the creation of a planned (state capitalist) economy can be carried out, which will become the basis of the success of socialism. This point is outlined in the following terms: “When the working class has learned how to defend the state system against the anarchy of small ownership, when it has learnt how to organise large scale production on a national scale, along state capitalist lines, it will hold if I may use the expression, all the trump cards, and the consolidation of socialism will be assured.”(p338-339) Thus with this type of argumentation it is inevitable that Lenin effectively criticises the role of the factory committees and supports the introduction of one man management in terms of the interests of economic efficiency. Such an approach was obviously inevitable under the circumstances, but it was not connected to a continued adherence to the importance of working-class influence concerning the development of the process of production. Instead Lenin has effectively committed himself to a bureaucratic conception of socialism from above that is based on the primary role of the party elite and managerial strata in the organisation of the economy. Formal reference to the importance of the role of the workers cannot obscure this apparent rejection of the approach of ‘State and Revolution’.

The problem was that the factory committees were not able to organise production in an effective manner because of the effective undermining of their ability to obtain the necessary raw materials required for the creation of industrial goods. The result of this situation was the demoralisation of the workers who effectively were reduced to exchanging parts of the factory equipment in order to try and realise the possibility of obtaining food. This meant the factory committees were discredited because of this inability to organise the process of production and instead people preferred the defensive role of the trade unions in order to uphold their interests. In this situation it seemed logical to try and organise the process of production by the introduction of one-man management. Lenin’s approach was only a response to an emergency situation and was not based on any expressed preference for this development. But this situation occurred alongside the decline of the role of the soviets which became dominated by the party and were no longer an expression of the aspirations of the working class. Hence the party presided over a dis-functional economy, and the result of this situation was the justification of the introduction of forms of cohesion in terms of the justification of authoritarian rule in terms of the role of one party dictatorship and the discipline of one man management in the economy. Such a situation was also justified by the civil war which meant that discipline had to be imposed in order to ensure the minimal production of goods necessary to support the war effort. But the effective suppression of the Mensheviks in this situation was a mistake because the leadership of this party by Martov meant that they provided critical support for the Bolshevik regime, but this was not sufficient for the Bolsheviks who seemed to aspire to the creation of a one party regime which meant that all forms of dissent were considered to be an expression of a reactionary standpoint.

Lenin defended the approach of the Bolsheviks in the systematic manner in his pamphlet: ‘Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky’ (Collected Works volume 28) In this work Lenin contends that: “The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by laws.”(p236) The problem with this definition is that it denies the democratic aspect of the process of revolutionary transformation in which organs of the democratic will of the workers indicate the necessity for change and the end of the domination of the capitalist class, and that these organs of popular aspirations should then become the basis of the character of the revolutionary regime. Without this aspect of dynamic democracy, the situation is created in which the party of the proletariat could become dominant in an oppressive and absolute manner and in this context effectively define the objectives of the post-revolutionary society. Such a situation can only be rejected if the system is based on a situation of agreed rules and laws that regulate the actions of the revolutionary administration according to the genuine aspirations of the people. If the government does not have to respect the process of the rule of law it could become absolute in its sovereignty and in that manner acquire an authoritarian type of power. This criticism does not mean that the revolutionary regime should not defend itself from the possibility of counterrevolutionary overthrow by the reactionary forces, but the point is that this defence should not be based on the rejection of the role of a constitution and law which have been democratically agreed by the representatives of the people within the various elected assemblies and soviets. The point is that without the role of law the power of the revolutionary government becomes absolute and unregulated, and in this manner acquires an authoritarian domination over society. It is instead in the very interests of the working class to develop a situation of constitutional and legal authority for the revolutionary government. Without this aspect the domination of the authority becomes absolute, and in that manner, it is no longer accountable to the working class in any sense. It is in the very interests of the working class and its revolutionary aspirations to create a legal system that enables the actions of the revolutionary government to acquire genuine constitutional authority. Indeed, in that manner the development of the legitimacy of the workers state means that its actions and proposals acquire the character of law and so are more likely to be accepted as valid by the general population. In this context the popular support of the revolutionary administration will become greater and so the attempt to overthrow this regime will be rejected by the mass of the people as being against their interests. But if this revolutionary regime is based on the justification of forms of absolute power which means that its actions are not based on the importance of the rule of law it will only be considered to be authoritarian and so in this context the attempt to overthrow It by the method of counterrevolutionary struggle becomes considered to be legitimate. This is indeed the view of Kautsky, and Lenin considers that his approach is based on the acceptance of the superiority of bourgeois democracy. But despite this stance, Kautsky is also outlining the limitations of absolute power in the name of the interests of the proletariat. Lenin does not reply to this point directly and instead assumes that the Bolshevik government can only act in the interests of the working class. But the point is that this aspect becomes problematical because the government is no longer accountable to the workers because of the demise of the rule of law and the decline of the role of any form of effective democratic accountability of the government to the people.

However, Lenin rejects this criticism and instead contends: “Proletarian democracy, of which the Soviet government is one of the forms, has brought a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world, for the vast majority of the population, for the exploited and working people.”(p246) And: “The Soviets are the direct organisation of the working and exploited people themselves, which helps them to organise and administer their own state in every possible way. And in this it is the vanguard of the working and exploited people, the urban proletariat, that enjoys the advantage of being united by the large enterprises, it is easier for it than for all others to elect and exercise control over all those elected. The Soviet form of organisation automatically helps to unite all the working and exploited people around their vanguard, the proletariat.”(p247) But this defence of Soviet democracy as the expression of the character of the revolutionary regime is problematical because its effectiveness has been replaced by the increasing importance of one party rule. Formally this may seem to be an expression of the role of the Soviets, but in practice the Soviets have become passive and without any genuine political power and instead the Bolshevik party has become the most dynamic and important aspect of the role of the state. Instead of the Soviets democratically expressing the will of the workers and peasants, the most dynamic and effective expression of the process of the political system has become the functioning of the state in terms of the hegemony of the party elite. Thus, Lenin’s reference to the role of the Soviets is effectively an illusion that has no real connection to the character of the political system that is increasing authoritarian. Hence the following claim of Lenin seems to be problematical. He contends: “Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy; Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.”(p248) Certainly the influence of bourgeois ideology means that it is difficult to elect a left wing type government in a capitalist society, and so in that sense it is problematical to define this situation as being genuinely democratic. But the rule of the Soviets, which potentially could have expressed the role of a form of popular democracy, has been replaced by the situation of the domination of a single party. In this context the possibility for the Soviets to have a democratic character has been replaced by the authoritarian domination of the exclusive power of the Bolsheviks. This development means that the role of the Soviets has become formal, and instead effective power is with the role of a party elite. In the name of the interests of the Soviets, Lenin supports the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly because this resulted in the end of the possible rival influence of an alternative centre of political power. But what is ignored is that the major party in the Constituent Assembly was the Social Revolutionary party which expressed the aspirations of the peasants. The result of this action was to alienate the major party of the peasants from the possibility of a coalition government with the most important party in the Soviets, which was the Bolsheviks. Hence this action did not strengthen the role of the Soviets, and instead isolated the Bolsheviks because of the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly. The more sensible and principled approach would have been to try and resolve the issue of political power in terms of a process of accommodation between the Soviets and Constituent Assembly. Instead of this prospect the actual development was towards the intensifying of the process of the development of one-party rule.

But Lenin was being principled and realistic when he contended that the various problems of the Russian revolution could be overcome by the progress of international proletarian revolution. In this manner the Bolsheviks were correct to emphasise the importance of the development of the international struggle for socialism. He could contrast this with the Social Democratic accommodation to the interests of capitalism. Hence Lenin was right to suggest that the Russian revolution was ultimately justified by its connection to the possibility of the progress of world revolution. But what he did not seem to recognise was that this very possibility of progress was connected to the development of the most genuinely democratic regime in the revolutionary state. This development would enhance the support of the international working class for the attempt to create the possibility of international revolution. Lenin does not seem to understand that it is the very authoritarian aspects of the Bolshevik regime that will create the most scepticism within the international working class about the necessity to develop a world revolution based on the aspiration for socialism. The point is that the working class of Europe had become accustomed to the traditions of bourgeois democracy, despite its limitations and so would not support the justification of one-party rule. In this manner the development of authoritarianism was undermining the very possibility of the progress of world revolution. But Lenin could not recognise this point because he considered the Bolshevik regime to be a genuine expression of the role of Soviet power. This failure to recognise the importance of the aspect of bureaucratic regression in the character of the regime was the main aspect that undermined the ability of the Bolsheviks to represent their revolutionary society as the justification of world revolution. But this point did not seem to be understood by Lenin, who instead considered that any criticisms of the policies of the regime were motivated by the type of opportunist views upheld by people like Kautsky.

But possibly the major error of the Bolsheviks concerned its position on the role of the peasants. The position of Lenin is summed up in the following comments: “Things have turned out as we said they would. The course taken by the revolution has confirmed the correctness of our reasoning. First, with the “whole” of the peasants against the monarchy, against the landowners, against medievalism (and to that extent the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois democratic). Then, with the poor peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited against capitalism, including the rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers, and to that extent the revolution becomes a socialist one.”(p301) What was not understood was that the peasantry was not necessarily strictly divided in these terms, the role of the peasant commune meant that the peasantry were often united in the various villages despite the importance of income disparities and differences in relation to the ownership of land. Thus, the peasants were united in relation to the policy of war communism and the attempt to coercively obtain grain from the countryside in the name of opposing the influence of the kulaks. Lenin is quite explicit that the agricultural policy of the Bolsheviks is based on the application of coercion: “The Soviet republic sends into the rural districts detachments of armed workers, primarily the more advanced from the capitals. These workers carry socialism into the countryside, win over the poor, organise and enlighten them, and help them to supress the resistance of the bourgeoisie.”(p3030-304) This comment also includes the illusory view that such a coercive policy can result in the support of sections of the peasants for war communism and the obtaining of food from the countryside. Instead the whole of the peasantry was effectively opposed to this repressive imposition of the aims of the state, and the fact that it provided no incentive for the supply of food to the cities. Hence the views of Lenin are based on the illusion that war communism results in the support of sections of the peasantry for this coercive policy. These illusions are intensified by reference to the fact that the process of transformation to the collective character of agriculture is maturing. In other words, Lenin is apparently ignoring the discontent within the peasantry which means that it is generally reluctant to supply food to the cities because of the lack of the possibility of the exchange of their goods for items that would enhance the ability to create agricultural items. But instead of recognising the importance of this issue, Lenin instead justified this apparent policy of coercion in relation to the peasants, which is defined as opposition to the kulaks. This administrative and repressive approach cannot actually result in the increase of food for the cities, the apparent dogma of the aim of socialist revolution in the countryside seems to obscure the understanding of this actual situation. The actual result of this policy is the alienation of the peasants from the attempt by the Bolsheviks to obtain food. This means that the obvious necessity to provide incentives for the peasants to produce food for the cities is not recognised. Instead the authoritarian approach of war communism is justified as opposition to the role of capitalism in the countryside. Only in 1921 are the limitations of this approach recognised.

Indeed, in the period 1918-19 Lenin in the article ‘Achievements and Difficulties’ (Collected Works volume 29) admits that it is not only the rich peasants who are engaging in trade n order to obtain profits from agricultural production. He comments: “The problem is how to approach the peasants in the course of practical work, how to organise the poor and middle peasants so as to be able at every step to combat their gravitation to towards the past, their attempts to go back to free trade activities, their constant striving to be “free” producers.”(Volume 29 p79-80) He does not seem to recognise that it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of this situation in order to relate to it in terms of developing a form of exchange of goods with the peasants. Instead they are being alienated by the coercive character of the policy of war communism. Indeed, the urgency of this type of policy modification would seem to be apparent given the increasing problem of food shortages, but instead in the name of ideology and the supposed aim of advancing the interests of socialism in the countryside, Lenin cannot seem to recognise what is logically necessary. There are hints of the necessity of a different policy, but instead Lenin consoles himself with the prediction that grain will some become available in areas like the Ukraine. What he still seems reluctant to accept is that only a different type of policy will ensure the prospect of actual increases in the supply of agricultural products for the cities. In the name of dogma this necessary change of policy is not being admitted by Lenin and instead he continued to adhere to war communism despite its limitations. This rigidity was not primarily because of an authoritarian logic but instead as a result of dogmatic opposition to any form of capitalist economic activity and so the result was opposition to the peasants trying to sell products for gain. This means that Lenin is still reluctant to accept a policy that would adapt to this situation and instead he still insists on the continuation of war communism. The result of this rigidity is that the workers have to try and develop this own ability to trade with the peasants, and so forms of informal exchange occur despite the disproval of the state authorities. The terrible limitations of this situation would make change inevitable. But the immediate problem was the dogmatic position adopted by the Bolshevik government concerning the issue of commodity production and exchange. The rejection of this possibility meant that the fiction of a socialist relationship between the city and countryside was enforced in terms of the role of the coercive approach of war communism. The rejection of the importance of any type of market relationships meant that the only alternative that was adopted was the role of coercion in the expression of economic relationships. This was not because of the conception of socialism as a system without the role of commodity exchange and the market but was instead based on an apparent distrust of the power of the more prosperous peasants, or kulaks. The understanding was that the kulaks should not be able to become more influential in the economy because of an ability to be able to determine the conditions of economic activity via the ability to trade. Instead the myth of the development of socialism was based on the understanding that all forms of private trade and production should be strictly regulated by the role of the workers state. In this manner it was being suggested that the advance of socialism based on the increased importance of the industrial economy could be upheld in the most illusory manner. Ultimately this delusion had to be replaced by the acceptance of the role of private trade and production with the advent of the New Economic Policy.

However, there is ambiguity in the views of Lenin because in his report to the eight congress of the Russian Communist party concerning work in the countryside (volume 29) he emphasises the importance of rejecting the role of coercion with regards to the activity of the middle peasants. He accepts that the middle peasants are not exploiters even if they have their own land and organise the development of production. This is an admission that war communism has often degenerated into a situation of opposition to the aspirations of the majority of the peasants. But he does not mention how the interests of the middle peasants should be realised except for the ambiguous rejection of the role of coercion. Thus, what is still being supported is the continuation of war communism but that it should be administered in a more selective and less repressive manner. What is being admitted is that the present policy of war communism has had its problems and so he calls for it to be administered in a more rational manner, but it is not quite apparent what this means. Therefore, there is still no acceptance of the possibility to develop the ability of the peasants to engage in trade. Instead the present policy of war communism should be continued but in a more rational manner. This means it is not accepted that war communism is itself an irrational approach that does not encourage the peasants to increase production of food because they have no incentive for this task. Instead the dogma of socialism being a system without commodity exchange still define the approach of Lenin. One the one hand he is aware of the limitations of war communism as a system of coercion, but on the other hand he still cannot conceive of any alternative. The result of this situation is that the proletariat-peasant alliance has become a formality and the actual issue is how to recreate this relationship in terms of providing an incentive for the peasants to produce food for the cities. In this context the introduction of the New Economic Policy becomes a formality and the only issue is when this will occur. But the actual introduction of the NEP is an indication that the aims of the Bolsheviks can be modified in a pragmatic manner and it becomes accepted that the introduction of an economy without the role of the market is unrealistic in the situation of the importance of the private production of the peasants. This development is an indication that the Bolsheviks under Lenin’s leadership were ultimately prepared to accept the necessity of compromise and so did not have an aim of the creation of a society in which socialism meant the end of the role of the market. Instead it was necessary to accept the importance of the role of the peasants and to develop a compromise in these terms. Thus, there was ultimately an element of realism in the approach of Lenin which led to compromise. The result was the consolidation of the proletariat-peasant alliance in terms of the introduction of the NEP. It was Stalin who ended this situation because his aim of the absolute power of the party elite contradicted the continuation of the NEP. In contrast Lenin ultimately understood the importance of the accountable of the actions of the party to the aspirations of the workers and peasants, even if this relationship was often realised in bureaucratic terms.

In ‘Economics and Politics’ (Collected works volume 30) Lenin differentiates between the working peasants who are sympathetic to the aims of the workers state from the peasants who are motivated by the possibility of profit from selling their grain. This standpoint indicates that he still does not acknowledge the importance of incentives in order to facilitate a process of mutual exchange between the city and countryside. Instead the perspective is still based on the importance of war communism and the supposedly voluntary supply of grain by the poorest peasants to the cities. This view is an indication that Lenin has a position that is based on illusions and so he is unable to accept the problems caused by the role of war communism and instead outlines an ideal conception of the relationship of the peasants and workers. The aim is still to transform the commodity character of peasant production in socialist terms, but it is not outlined how this will be established. At the seventh congress of the Soviets Lenin outlines the perspective of the government in the following terms: “We know full well that the landowners and capitalists have been defeated but not destroyed. The class struggle continues, and the proletariat together with the poor peasantry must continue the struggle for the complete abolition of classes, attracting to their side all those who stand in the middle, and by their entire experience, their example of struggle they must ensure that all those who until now have stood in the ranks of the wavering are attracted to their side.”(CW 30 p250) The problem is that this approach is outline in terms of a slogan and there is not explicit policy of how this aim can be realised. Instead there is a form of authoritarian ethical socialism in that the apparent political supremacy of the proletarian regime should result in the support of the majority of the peasants for the aim of socialism. But this understanding is an illusion, of which Lenin was probably aware of, because in actuality the majority of the peasants are in opposition to the approach of war communism. The continuation of this policy means that the character of the regime must in some sense be an expression of the justification of repression and the rejection of any form of compromise that could result in the enhancement of the support of the peasants for the aims of the Bolsheviks. But in a report to the central executive committee of the Soviet Lenin is at least aware of what has to be done in order to establish a genuine relationship between industry and agriculture. He comments: “We shall not be afraid of working ten or twenty years, but we must prove to the peasants that in place of the old separation of industry and agriculture, this very deep contradiction on which capitalism thrived and which sowed dissension between the industrial and agricultural workers, we set ourselves the task of returning to the peasants the loan we received from him in the form of grain, for we know that paper money, of course is not the equivalent of bread. We must repay this loan by organising industry and supplying the peasants with its products. We must show the peasants that the organisation of industry on the basis of modern advanced technology, on electrification which will provide a link between town and country, will make it possible to raise the level of culture in the countryside and to overcome, even in the most remote corners of the land, backwardness, ignorance, poverty, disease and barbarism.”(CW 30 p335) Hence Lenin has an awareness of what has to be realised if a genuine relationship between the workers and peasants is to be realised. The industries have to become effective suppliers of cheap and good quality goods for the peasants, and in this manner the productivity of agriculture will be enhanced. It will be the creation of a genuine workers and peasants alliance on the basis of the role of a genuine economic relationship between city and countryside that will overcome the necessity of the coercive role of war communism. In this economic manner the democratic possibility to develop the support of the workers and peasants for the Soviet state will have been created and enhanced. The necessity of coercion in economic relations will have been overcome by the importance of economic progress in the generation of an effective relationship between the interests of the workers and peasants.

Implicitly Lenin is acknowledging that war communism is both authoritarian and inefficient and so should be replaced by a more genuine and authentic relationship between workers and peasants based on the development of the economy. In this manner it will be possible to establish connections between city and countryside that are no longer based on the apparent necessity of the role of the coercive approach of war communism. But the problem is that there is no practical suggestion as to how this perspective can be realised in the short-term and in this context replacing the present coercive approach of war communism. Instead Lenin considers the possibilities of progress in abstract propaganda terms as indicated by his speech to the ninth congress of the Russian communist party when he comments: “Millions of working people in a country that was anything but educated could achieve this organisation, discipline and centralisation only because the workers had passed through the school of capitalism and had been united by capitalism, because the proletariat in all countries has united – and united the more, the more advanced the country, and on the other hand, because property, capitalist property, small capitalist property under commodity production, disunites.”(p447) Hence what is being suggested is that the advance of the process of world revolution is effectively resolving the economic problems of the Soviet state, but there is not a valid basis for this contention because of the difficulties of the advance of world revolution and the continued failure to construct an effective alliance of the workers and peasants. Such a difficulty is being obscured by the triumphalist rhetoric of Lenin and so the limitations of war communism are glossed over in this apparently complacent manner. He also tries to confirm this understanding in terms of the apparent triumphalist view that the influence and economic power of the rich peasants is not able to challenge the domination of the workers state: “The petty-bourgeois property owners are disunited, those who have more property are the enemies of those who have less property; and the proletarians by abolishing property, have declared open war on them. There are still many unenlightened and ignorant people who are in favour of any kind of freedom of trade, but who cannot fight when they see the discipline and self-sacrifice displayed in securing victory over the exploiters; they are not with us but powerless to come out against us.”(p457) In these comments Lenin does not express any possibility of accommodation between the workers state and the interests of the rich peasants, and instead only justifies an approach based on vigorous struggle in order to undermine the influence of these discontented forces. In this context there is still no acceptance of the necessity of compromise and the attempt to reconcile the interests of the workers state with those of all sections of the peasants. Instead war communism is still being upheld as the only basis for the development of economic relations between the workers and peasants, and this situation is justified as the opposition of the interests of capitalism and socialism. But in a contradictory manner Lenin is also advocating the importance of one-man management of industry based on the role of bourgeois experts. Hence in this manner he recognises the importance of compromise in terms of the necessity of the promotion of economic development. In this context there is a tension between pragmatism and dogmatism in his conception of the character of economic policy. This contradiction was to be resolved in 1921 with the advent of the New Economic Policy and the acceptance of the necessity of trade in order to promote the creation of a genuine economic relationship between the peasants and the industrial sector of the economy. In a certain manner Lenin upholds his continuation of the role of war communism by suggesting that the peasants are themselves disunited between poorer and more affluent sections. But this sociological standpoint is utilised in a manner to justify the coercive character of war communism, and in this manner the role this policy has in alienating the peasants from the interests of the workers state is not admitted. Thus, Lenin does not accept that there is a necessity to create incentives for all of the peasants, both poor and more affluent, in order to encourage them to produce goods for the city. This dynamic is not accepted by the rigidities of Lenin’s position.

In the ‘Thesis on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International’ Lenin outlines the major aspects of the process of transition to socialism after the realisation of the political power of the working class: “First – overthrow the exploiters, and first and foremost the bourgeoisie, as their principal economic and political representative, utterly rout them and crush their resistance; absolutely preclude any attempt on their part to restore the yoke of capital, and wage slavery. Second - win over and bring under the leadership of the communist party, the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, not only the entire proletariat, or its vast majority, but all who labour and are exploited by capital, educate and organise, train and discipline them in the actual course of a supremely bold and ruthlessly firm struggle against the exploiters; wrest this majority of the population in all the capitalist countries from dependence on the bourgeoisie; imbue it, through its own practical experience, with confidence in the leading role of the proletariat and of its revolutionary vanguard. Third – neutralise, or render harmless, the inevitable vacillation between bourgeois democracy and soviet power to be seen in the class of petty proprietors in agriculture, industry and commerce – a class which is still fairly numerous in nearly all advanced countries, although comprising only a minority of the population – as well as in the stratum of intellectuals, salary earners, etc., which corresponds to this class.”(CW volume 31 p186) Hence this perspective is effectively about the importance of the role of the revolutionary party in ensuring the realisation of the discipline and acceptance of the domination of the role of the workers state. The activity of the party is necessary in order to supervise various class forces which might not be sympathetic to the aims of socialism, and also to facilitate the organisation of the economy in terms of the objectives of the aspirations defined by Marxism. In this sense the primary importance of the party is defined by its ability to ensure that often discontented classes that might not support the aim of socialism still act in accordance with this objective. Thus, the party has an important, possibly primary role, in ensuring that the various classes and social strata act in accordance with the objectives of socialism. This would seem to be an authoritarian role because there is no apparent suggestion of any democratic legitimation of the socialist regime. Instead the apparent superiority of the socialist aims of the party would seem to express the principal character of this type of society, and in this manner, it is possible to regulate the activity of the various social strata in accordance with the perspectives of Marxism. There is no possibility that the people will have the choice of being able to vote to end the revolutionary regime because the assumed superiority of socialism implies that people will voluntarily accept the legitimacy of this type of society. Thus, the ideal being defended by Lenin is a type of benevolent despotism in which the majority of the people will come to accept the importance of the supremacy of the party and so support the realisation of its objectives of socialism. There is no longer any mention of the character of the regime without the importance of the dominating role of the party. Only in this manner is it possible to create thee economic and political conditions for the creation of an efficient socialist society. In this manner the various non-proletarian strata will come to accept the domination of the party and its objectives of socialism. The major problem with this standpoint is that it seems that a process of effective brainwashing is an important aspect of the acceptance of the domination of the revolutionary party, as the following comment seems to imply: “In fact it is only after the proletariat, supported by the whole of the majority of the only revolutionary class, overthrows the exploiters, suppresses them, emancipates the exploited from their state of slavery and immediately improves their conditions of life at the expense of the expropriated capitalists it only after this, and in the actual process of an acute class struggle, that the masses of the toilers and exploited can be educated, trained and organised around the proletariat under whose influence and guidance, they can get rid of the selfishness, disunity vices and weaknesses engendered by private property; only then will they be converted into a free union of free workers.”(p187) Lenin would consider that this is a voluntary process of transformation of consciousness and its expression in the development of the objectives of socialism, but it is apparent that the role of the party is vital in order to create the conditions for the workers to support this approach. The primary aspect of this perspective is that the party educates and trains the workers and the people in general in the importance of the carrying out of the tasks necessary in order to realise socialism. There is no sense in that the party is inspired by the people but that instead the major aspect of this process of change and transformation is connected to the leadership role of the party in relation to guiding the people to the successful attainment of socialism. In this context the importance of democratic institutions seems to be irrelevant and instead the criteria by which the objectives of the process of revolutionary transformation are achieved is in terms of the superior and firm guidance of the party. This approach would seem to be a justification of authoritarianism because the ability to realise the objectives of socialism is dependent on the importance of the party realising its vanguard role in the most firm and resolute manner. The importance of institutions like the Soviets seems to be not relevant in this context because what is of primary importance is the vanguard role of the party which effectively instructs the people on how to realise the objective of socialism.

However, this conclusion would be premature because Lenin in what seems to be a contradictory manner also insists that only in terms of the role of the Soviets can the working class achieve the realisation of the aim of socialism: “Finally, it is only after they have been really emancipated from the yoke of the bourgeoisie and of the bourgeois machinery of state, only after they have found an opportunity of organising in their Soviets in a really free way (free of the exploiters), that the masses, i.e., toilers and exploited as a body can display all the initiative and energy of tens of millions of people who have been crushed by capitalism. Only when the Soviets have become the sole state apparatus is it really possible to ensure the participation, in the work of administration, of the entire mass of the exploited…….It is only in the Soviets that the exploited masses really begin to learn – not in books, but from their own practical experience – the work of socialist construction, of creating a new social discipline and a free union of free workers.”(p188) Hence there would appear to be a tension between the apparent emphasis on the hegemony of the single revolutionary party on the one hand and the commitment to the genuine participation of the people in the Soviets in the expression of the administration and organisation of society. Lenin would suggest that this tension is only formal because in actuality the party provides leadership to the working class in relation to its task of the development of socialism. In this context the Soviets express the democratic manner in which the leadership of the working class by the party is exercised, because ultimately the party is accountable to the Soviets. But the problem is that this perspective is an expression of wishful thinking because in actuality it is not possible for the workers to be able to criticise the role of the party in any effective and democratic manner. Instead the concept of the party as the vanguard of the class is an expression of the justification of its omnipotent power. In this context the conception of Soviet democracy is effectively a formality because what is important is the primary role of the party in the organisation of society. What Lenin does not seem to recognise is that Soviet democracy can only become effective if there is the ability of parties to organise and be elected by the workers. The effective ban on even the role of the Mensheviks is an indication that what is apparent is the development of a one-party regime. In this context the importance of the Soviets can only be a formality, and the result is the government of society by the party and not the Soviets. Instead the Soviets have become essentially formal organisations that lack any effective political power. They are dominated by the party bureaucrats and it would be effectively impossible for the Soviets to defy the will of the party. Hence Lenin’s optimistic reference to the importance of the Soviets can only obscure the character of the actual power relationships within society which are based on the omnipotent power of the role of the party. Lenin’s emphasis on the importance of the Soviets is an attempt to project aspirations onto reality, but this cannot deny the actual character of the power relations within society. Lenin does sincerely want to establish genuine Soviet democracy as the basis of the organisation of society, but in practice he also has to justify the domination of the party.

The contradictions of the approach of Lenin are indicated in the following comment: “The dictatorship of the proletariat is the most determined and revolutionary form of the proletariat’s class struggle against the bourgeoisie. This struggle can be successful only when the most revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat has the backing of the overwhelming majority of the proletariat.” (p190-191) This comment is on the one hand an emphasis on the interaction of the relations between the party and class. The party can only exercise power when it is accountable to the class and in a principled manner expresses its aspirations. But on the other hand, the actual primary role of the party is assumed to be the only manner in which the relation of party and class can be defined and exercised. The importance of the party is its principled leadership of the class, and so it is assumed that this leadership can only be exercised in a genuine manner in which the role of the party is to facilitate the emancipation of the class in terms of advance towards socialism. The historical justification of the party is the expression of its ability and capacity to be able to continue the completion of its task in terms of maintaining the ability of the workers to realise the aims of socialism and communism. In this context there is no suggestion that the interests of the party and class could become undermined. Hence the party is not accountable to the class because only the party is able to provide the leadership and strategy necessary for the realisation of socialism. Instead the role of the class is to become supporters of the policy of the party because that is the only basis by which the emancipation of the working class is realised. This means that Lenin does not really outline the importance of the dynamism of the role of the workers because what is important is instead the relationship between party and class. Essentially the relationship of party and class is about the acceptance by the workers of the directives of the party, but this assumes that the party can consistently express the ability to be able to define the interests of the workers and the aim of socialism in a principled manner. In this context how is the party to be made accountable to the class if the party undergoes a process of bureaucratic degeneration and so become opportunist and more concerned with the privileges of a new elite? Lenin does not effectively address this issue because he does not seem to consider that this possibility could be realised. However, in an unexpected manner this question does become important in terms of the controversy and differences that Lenin has with Trotsky concerning the trade union question.

Trotsky has logically assumed from the apparent logic of Lenin’s views on the relation of party and class that the issue of the independence of the trade unions has to be subordinated to the aims of the party and state apparatus in terms of the requirements of economic development. But apparently unexpectedly Lenin does not adopt this position. He opposes the views of Trotsky in his article: ‘The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky’s Mistakes.” (Collected Works volume 32) On the one hand Lenin still contends that the dictatorship of the proletariat is exercised through the role of the party. There is no suggestion that the workers organised in the Soviets and trade unions have this responsibility. The role of the trade unions is to organise the workers in the process of production and the defence of their interests in this context. But the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat is still defined by the role of the vanguard party: But the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of that class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts (by imperialism in some countries) that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard that has absorbed the energy of the class.”(p21) Therefore Lenin’s defence of the importance of the trade unions as opposed to Trotsky is still based on the supremacy of the role of the party in defining the objectives of socialism and the role of the working class in that context. Therefore in this manner he is not denying the ultimate necessity of the trade unions to accept the leadership of the party, and so in that context the trade unions become subordinated to the directives of the role of the party as the most dominant aspect of the state apparatus. However this approach is modified to the extent that Lenin also recognises that the character of the workers state is based on an expression of bureaucratic distortions, and this means the workers require the necessity of defence of their interests in relation to this state such as the important role of the trade unions. Furthermore the trade unions have an important role in the organisation and management of the process of production, and in that manner the principle of workers control is established in a limited manner in accordance with the complexities of the situation and the overall importance of the development of one man management. Presumably Trotsky would claim that this situation is illusory, and that the actuality consists of the subordination of the trade unions to the importance of the organisation by the economy by the workers state which should be explicitly recognised as the basis for economic development. However, Lenin disputes this reasoning and contends that whilst the communists are administering the state there is a necessity for the workers to develop the skills of participation in the organisation of the economy which is carried out in terms of the role of the trade unions. In other words, it is being suggested that the trade unions are not adequate to express the dominant role in the process of the organisation of the economy but they still have an important role in this regard and that this is expressed in terms of the consultation of the trade unions with the economic organs of state and by providing advice to the managers of the various enterprises. Trotsky would contend that this is an illusory view that does not explain the apparent current inability of the workers to have an influence over the development of the process of production. He would imply that it is the party state, economic plan and the role of the managers that is the basis of the actual organisation of the process of production. Trotsky’s view is possibly the most accurate expression of what is occurring in terms of the organisation of the economy by the state and the enterprise managers. The situation is expressed by the role of socialism from below and so Lenin’s position is illusory. But the merits of Lenin’s position are that he elaborates the potential importance of the trade unions and so outlines what should be the situation if an economy based on the principles of democracy is to be developed. He does possibly gloss over the importance of actual developments, which possibly express the views of Trotsky, but in a sense, he outlines the importance of participatory democracy if the economy is to be organised in the most dynamic manner. Therefore, Lenin contends that Trotsky’s effective view that the workers do not have the expertise to be able to organise the economy in an efficient manner is a justification of the role of the bureaucratic state and so should be rejected as a principle, even if this is the situation in the short-term. To Trotsky the trade unions only have the limited role of defence of the immediate interests of the workers, but Lenin contends that they should aspire to become the basis of the technical and administrative management of production. In this context the role of one-man management should be considered as temporary, and what is the major principle of how the economy should be organised is based on the important role of the trade unions. He outlines the necessary relation of party and trade unions in the following manner: “The party is the leader, the vanguard of the proletariat, which rules directly. It is not coercion but expulsion from the party that is the specific means of influence and the means of purging and steeling the vanguard. The trade unions are a reservoir of the state power, a school of communism and a school of management.” (Once Again on the Trade Unions p98) This perspective indicates the contradiction between the contrasting approaches of socialism from above and socialism from below in the approach of Lenin. On the one hand the affirmation of the monopoly political power of the party as the primary expression of the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but on the other hand the emphasis on the importance of the trade unions for becoming an important aspect of the organisation of production. But what Lenin does not recognise is that there may be a contradiction between these two aspects, and so the primary role of the party has to become defined by the exercise of genuine democratic accountability. Only in this manner would the political regime become compatible with the aspiration to realise genuine economic democracy based on the development of the primary role of the trade unions.

But despite the various inconsistencies in the approach of Lenin, the justification of the importance of the trade unions in the organisation of the economy is at least a formal defence of the standpoint of socialism from below and the modification of the general adherence to the conception of socialism from above based on the primary role of the party. The effective commitment to economic democracy is an expression that the development of one-man management is not satisfactory in the long term and has instead to be replaced by the increasing importance of the role of the trade unions. But in his summary speech on behalf of the Central Committee to the Tenth congress of the Russian Communist party Lenin outlines how the potential for economic democracy cannot be realised in the short term because of the decline of the role of industry. He outlines in reply to the views of the Workers Opposition that is based on syndicalist illusions because: “It is syndicalism because – consider this carefully – our proletariat has been largely declassed; the terrible crisis and the closing down of the factories have compelled people to flee from starvation. The workers have simply abandoned their factories, they have had to settle down in the country and ceased to be workers. Are we not aware of the fact that the unprecedented crises, the civil war, the disruption of proper relations between town and country and the cessation of grain deliveries have given rise to a trade in small articles made at the big factories – such as cigarette lighters – which are exchanged for cereals, because the workers are starving and no grain is being delivered.”( Summing Up Speech on the report of the central committee) Thus Lenin outlines how the adverse economic and political situation has led to the decline of the role of industry and so undermined the social cohesion of the working class in this situation. The result is that it is difficult to apply the principles of workers control and increased influence of the role of the trade unions in this situation. Instead only the importance of the state can attempt to try and maintain even a semblance of economic cohesion. In these very difficult circumstances, the aspiration to increase the role of the trade unions in the process of production has to become a long-term aim. Lenin contends that this understanding does not mean a lack of confidence in the capacity of the working class to organise society but that instead the issue is the importance of the adverse economic situation and the necessity to facilitate measures to bring about a revival of industry and agriculture. In relation to industry there is no alternative to the role of one- man management. Only the success of this aspect will create the conditions for a form of economic activity based on the increased importance of the trade unions. This means that only the resolving of the immediate economic issues of the ending of the decline of industry and the connected revival of agriculture will create a situation in which it becomes practically possible to apply the principles of socialism in relation to the tasks of economic development. The point being made is that it is not the preferred option of Lenin to emphasise the role of one-man management and the centralised role of the state in the organisation of industry, but this aspect has become necessary because of the serious character of the situation. In this manner it is important to compromise principles concerning the development of the economy in order to facilitate an immediate development of production. But it is assumed that in the long term the circumstances will have improved that makes the possibility to genuinely introduce economic democracy based on the role of the trade unions will become a feasible possibility.

Lenin’s standpoint has also been seriously modified in relation to the peasantry. In his ‘Report on the Substitution of a Tax In Kind for the Surplus Grain Appropriation System’ it is acknowledged that the repressive measures of war communism have not led to genuine agreement between the workers and peasants regarding economic aims and interests. Lenin admits that the policies of the state concerning the peasants was a mistake and that it needs to be corrected. What has to be established is a situation of trade between industry and agriculture based on the ability of the peasants to be able to exchange their products for money or goods. Lenin now considers that the approach of war communism was based on the situation of the civil war and should not in any sense be considered the general basis of policy towards the peasants. In a ‘Report on the Tax in Kind’ Lenin defined the principles of the relations between the workers and peasants in the following manner: “In the event of a workers revolution in a country with a predominantly peasant population, with the factories, works and railways taken over by the working class, what in essence should be the relations between the working class and peasantry? They should obviously be the following: the workers producing in the factories and works, which now belong to them, all that is necessary for the country – and that means also for the peasants, who constitute the majority of the population – should transport all these things on their railroads and river vessels and deliver them to the peasants, in return for the surplus agricultural produce.”(p287-288) The emphasis is not on the continuation of a situation in which the peasants were forced to supply grain to the cities but instead a genuine process of exchange is developed, and this will provide the peasants with an incentive to create food for the people. It may be necessary to facilitate this situation by the promotion of the role of small enterprises which can help to provide the industrial goods needed by the peasants. It is now admitted that war communism was an emergency system that was connected to the requirements of a specific situation and that in contrast the New Economic Policy should become the basis of a long-term promotion of an exchange of products between industry and agriculture. In other words, it is implicitly accepted that there were problems with the recent approach of war communism because it was based on the application of repression of many sections of the peasants. Only a policy of incentives can provide a better economic situation in terms of the creation of incentives for the process of production.

What Lenin has created is a more convincing conception of the process of transition to socialism than that outlined in ‘State and Revolution’. He has recognised that the issue of the relations between industry and agriculture are the most important aspect in relation to the development of a genuine process of transformation to socialism. It is not credible to try and create socialism based on the coercion of the peasants and the denial of the importance of their contribution to the economy in terms of the production of grain. Instead of the failed approach of war communism it is necessary to develop the New Economic Policy which will mean an emphasis on providing incentives for the production of the grain of the peasants in terms of a genuine process of the exchange of goods. In a country in which the majority of the people are peasants this is the only approach that can facilitate the creation of the material conditions that will make socialism possible. This system can also become increasingly democratic in terms of the increasing importance of the role of the trade unions and the role of the Soviets. Ultimately the isolation of the regime will make the complete realisation of socialism a difficult possibility but the very success of the creation of a viable economy based on the cooperation between the workers and peasants will mean that the Soviet society can become an inspiration to encourage the development of international revolution. But a tragedy occurred in terms of the terrible repression of the Kronstadt uprising. This situation was an indication of the increasing isolation of the regime before the superiority of the introduction of the New Economic Policy could become apparent. In these adverse circumstances the temptation to consolidate the party dictatorship was generated and so the introduction of the New Economic Policy occurred in terms of the continuation of the rule of the single party. Ultimately this contradiction had to be resolved with by the development of a relationship between the NEP and the flourishing of the NEP, or else the ending of the NEP in order to perpetuate the role of the party dictatorship. Ultimately Stalin was to promote the latter option. This was the genuine creation of a totalitarian regime that ended the promise of the NEP to develop a connection between a moderate economic approach and the possibility for the expression of genuine Soviet democracy. Therefore, the problem was the continuation of the role of a one-party regime. In these circumstances the possibility to develop authoritarianism was always likely.

Lenin came to recognise that the problem with the initial approach of the Bolshevik government was the illusion that socialism could be promoted in an immediate and short-term manner. Instead he comments: “Owing to our cultural backwardness we cannot crush capitalism by a frontal attack. Had we been on a different cultural level we could have approached the problem directly; perhaps other countries will do it in this way when their turn comes to build the communist republic. But we cannot do it in the direct way.” (Speech to the second congress of Political Education departments, (Collected Works volume 33 p72) This was effectively an expression that the approach of war communism had been an important mistake. Instead it was necessary to develop an economic relationship between industry and agriculture: “The state must learn to trade in such a way that industry satisfies the needs of the peasantry, so that the peasant may be able to satisfy their needs by trade. We must see to it that everyone who works devotes himself to strengthening the workers and peasants state. Only then shall we be able to create large scale industry.” (p72) In other words it was accepted that the interests of the workers should not be at the expense of those of the peasants. Instead the character of society should be understood to be a workers and peasants state that meant that both of these classes had mutual interests, and in order to realise them this means that there has to be a policy of cooperation that is able to achieve the realisation of common aims. This means that the peasants’ aspiration to achieve prosperity by the means of trading grain was no longer considered to be opposed to the interests of the working class, and instead the industrial economy should try to create products that realised the economic requirements of the peasants. In his speech to the seventh Moscow Gubernia conference of the RCP, Lenin made this point explicit when he commentated: “By the spring of 1921 it became evident that we had suffered defeat in our attempt to introduce socialist principles of production and distribution by “direct assault”, i.e., the shortest, quickest and most direct way. The political situation in the spring of 1921 revealed to us that on a number of economic issues a retreat to the position of state capitalism, the substitution of siege tactics for “direct assault” was inevitable.” (p93) But in an important sense this very retreat was not a rejection of the validity of the aim of socialism but was instead recognition of what had become the most feasible manner in which this objective could be advanced. It was necessary to accept the defeat of the attempt to develop socialism in the most short-term and direct manner and to instead adopt the necessity of a long term but effective manner in which aim could be realised. Lenin still insisted that this process was a retreat, but this was actually based on the recognition of the genuine support of the peasantry for socialism because this objective had become related to the realisation of their self-interest. Formally, Lenin justified his position as being a retreat and the necessity of the resumption of an offensive for socialism in the future, but in actuality his practical position was that the basis of the creation of the socialist economy was based on the establishment of the connection between industry and the countryside in terms of the role of trade.

But did this emphasis on the importance of the role of the market in order to sustain the worker-peasant alliance undermine the importance of the trade unions in the organisation of the economy? Lenin studied this question in his article: ‘The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy CW 33 p185-196) Lenin admits that the introduction of the market in order to generate trade will create challenges for the socialist state: “In particular, a free market and capitalism both subject to state control and are now being permitted and are developing; on the other hand, the socialised state enterprises are being put on what is called a profit basis, i.e., they are being reorganised on commercial lines, which, in view of the general cultural backwardness and exhaustion of the country, will, to a greater or lesser degree, inevitably give rise to the impression among the masses that there is an antagonism of interest between the management of the different enterprises and the workers employed in them.”(CW 33 p184-185) Lenin is aware that the importance given to the profit motive could create the possibility of the regeneration of the dynamics of the capital-labour relation and the development of exploitation in this context. But these very possibilities in an indication of the importance of strong trade unions in order to uphold and defend the interests of the workers. Lenin understands that differences can develop between the organs of the workers state who are concerned to increase the productivity of the workers and so realise the objectives of a plan and the interests of the workers. This is why the role of the trade unions is needed in order to reconcile these possibly opposed interests. The trade unions should defend the interests of the workers without undermining the objectives of the plan and the objectives of management. In these terms it is to be hoped that strikes in order to settle disputes can be avoided. But Lenin also contends that the trade unions should not have a role in management of the various enterprises. But this does not mean that they should not have an influence over the process of the development of productive activity, and they should be involved in regular consultations with management. In the sense that the trade unions are schools for communism means that they have and educative role in developing the responsibility of the workers for the tasks of production, and in this context, they train workers to become potential managers of industry. Thus, on the one hand, Lenin admits that workers management of production is not yet a realistic possibility, and so the major task of the trade unions is to defend the interests of the workers, but on the other hand any responsible management will consult with the trade unions about how to achieve economic objectives in the most efficient and progressive manner.

The above outline of the necessity to reject war communism and to introduce the New Economic Policy, combined with the emphasis on the importance of the trade unions is an indication that Lenin has reconciled the contrasting perspectives of socialism from above with socialism from below. The supremacy of the role of the party is not questioned, but this very importance is based on the acceptance of the concerns and aspirations of the workers and peasants. In the long-term questions would become raised about the supreme power of the party, but in the short term the apparent credibility of the party was expressed by the introduction of the NEP. It would require the success of a process of counterrevolution in the party to undermine the credibility of this conception of transition to socialism. Lenin was indicating in 1921 that the period of authoritarian control of the party had to be ended and replaced by an economic policy that was based on the importance of the principles of consensus. In an important sense, Lenin understood that the present situation defined as state capitalism was temporary and had to be replaced by higher forms of economic development, but at least he seemed to be proposing realistic objectives that would be able to achieve these aims. Lenin understood that what was occurring was a retreat, he summed up the perspective that he was advocating at the eleventh congress of the Russian Communist party in the following words: “We possess political power; we possess a host of economic weapons. If we beat capitalism and create a link with peasant farming we shall become an absolute invincible power. Then the building of socialism will not be the task of that drop in the ocean, called the Communist Party, but the task of the entire mass of the working people. Then the rank and file peasants will see that we are helping them and follow our lead. Consequently, even if the pace is a hundred times slower, it will be a million times more certain and more sure.”(p285) The illusions in war communism are being rejected in this manner, instead the success of the construction of socialism depends on the success of the NEP combined with the advance of international revolution. In other words the only basis of the accrual advance towards socialism is when the leadership of the Communist party is connected to the successful realisation of the aspirations of the workers and peasants: “In the sea of people we are after all but a drop in the ocean, and we can administer only when we express what the people are conscious of. Unless we do this the Communist party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses, and the whole machine will collapse. The chief thing the people, all the working people want today is nothing but help in their desperate hunger and need; they want to be shown that the improvement needed by the peasants is really taking place in the form they are accustomed to. The peasant knows and is accustomed to the market and trade. We were unable to introduce direct communist distribution. We lacked the factories and their equipment for this. That being the case, we must provide the peasants with what they need through the medium of trade, and provide it as well as the capitalist did, otherwise the people will not tolerate such an administration.”(p304-305) Thus Lenin is admitting that without the introduction of the NEP the Bolshevik government would not have deserved to remain in power. This observation is an indication that the NEP is being understood as an expression of the long term basis of the economic approach of the Bolsheviks because it is the basis of the possibility to consolidate and strengthen the worker-peasant alliance and in that manner ensure that genuine advances are made towards the realisation of socialism. It is also the view of Lenin that the one party dictatorship should be maintained in order to consolidate the role of the worker-peasant alliance and in that manner the apparently reactionary policies of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries should not be allowed to undermine the consolidation of this perspective of the role of the NEP as the basis of socialism. Hence there is a tension in the approach of Lenin, on the one hand the justification of the continued importance of the omnipotent supremacy of the role of the exclusive vanguard party and on the other hand the acceptance of the necessity of compromise and pragmatism in the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means there are contradictions in the approach of Lenin, but the very success of the NEP would create the dynamics to develop a more tolerant and democratic form of politics. The basis would be generated for allowing parties like the Mensheviks to function. The necessity to regenerate Soviet democracy can only compliment the development of the economy on the basis of the role of the NEP.

In other words the standpoint of Lenin indicates that whilst there are still aspects of authoritarianism in his perspective, this is modified by a policy of compromise in which it is accepted that it is necessary to obtain the consent of the workers and peasants for the approach of the party. The party still rules on behalf of the interests of society, but this means the importance of the introduction of policies that the people will agree to and so act to realise because such policies express their own aspirations. Only in that manner can advance towards the creation of socialism be ensured and progress made in the realisation of that objective. Therefore, Lenin would reject the suggestion that he was aiming to create a totalitarian type of society because that would contradict the intention to develop socialism based on the genuine support of the workers and peasants. Totalitarianism could only be established in terms of a regime that oppressively dominated the people, but this is not the objective of Lenin. Instead he wants to reconcile the role of a party regime with the possibility to also express the aspirations of the workers and peasants in the process of the possibility of creating an authentic socialist society. In his article ‘Our Revolution’, Lenin suggests that the present position is an expression of how to uphold a new perspective of how to create socialism in Russia and in that manner generate the possibility of international revolution: “What if the complete hopelessness of the situation by stimulating the efforts of the workers and peasants tenfold, offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilisation in a different way from that of the West European countries? Has that altered the basic relations between the basic classes of all countries that are being drawn into the general course of world history?”(Our Revolution p478) This comment is not a justification of socialism in one country, but rather that the very development of socialism in the Soviet federation is the basis to inspire the possibility of world revolution which would complete the realisation of a more emancipatory society. But the point being made is that the revolutionary society has to have a feasible approach towards the building of socialism if it is to inspire the working class of Western Europe to follow this example. This point is made explicit in the article ‘Better Fewer but better’ when he comments: “Thus, at the present time we are confronted with the question – shall we be able to hold on with our small and very small peasant production, and in our present state of ruin, until the Western European capitalist countries consummate their development towards socialism?(p499) This is the most important issue because the revolutionary state can only achieve a limited development of the economy, but the issue of the realisation of socialism requires the progress of the world revolution. In this context it is necessary to promote an effective policy that can facilitate the strengthening of the worker-peasant alliance until this aspect is consolidated by the progress of world revolution. Lenin outlines the policy in the following terms: “What tactics does this situation prescribe for our country? Obviously the following. We must display extreme caution so as to preserve our workers government and to retain our small and very small peasantry under its leadership and authority. We have the advantage that the whole world is now passing to a movement that must give rise to a world socialist revolution.”(p499) Thus the tragic one-sided character of the positions of Bukharin and Trotsky was that the latter emphasised the importance of world revolution whilst the former outlined the importance of the NEP and the worker-peasant alliance. Trotsky was considered to neglect the role of the peasantry in the emphasis ion industrial development and Bukharin considered the NEP mainly from the standpoint of the peasants. The result of this one-sided approach was that they did not express the overall complexity of the position of Lenin. Stalin was to challenge these limitations in his support for Bukharin’s conception of socialism in one country which became the ultimate justification of the formation of a totalitarian regime based on the systematic exploitation of the peasants and workers, and in which all aspects of intellectual expression were undermined.

Instead of the Stalinist claim that socialism was being completed by the Bolsheviks, Lenin commentated that: “We do not have enough civilisation to enable us to pass straight on to socialism, although we have the political requisites for it.”(p501) This meant the importance of the worker-peasant alliance was vital: “We must strive to build up a state in which the workers retain the leadership of the peasants, in which they retain the confidence of the peasants, and by exercising the greatest economy remove every trace of extravagance from our social relations.”(p501) In that principled and pragmatic manner a form of viable society can be established that is based on the realisation of the aspirations of the workers and peasants for increased prosperity. In this manner the Soviet regime can be consolidated and maintained until the advance of world revolution becomes the basis to make further progress in the creation of socialism. The importance of these comments is an indication that Lenin does not consider the role of repression as an appropriate aspect of the consolidation of the regime. Instead it is necessary to obtain the consent of the people in terms of the continued progress of economic development which enables prosperity to be created. The workers are able to obtain the goods produced by the peasants, and the peasants are able to acquire industrial products. In this manner consent for the revolutionary regime is developed. Obviously at some point the demand will be made for the introduction of genuine multi-party democracy. But at that point the very success of the Bolsheviks should ensure that they are able to win in elections to the soviets. Thus, Lenin has outlined a credible understanding of making progress towards socialism in terms of economic improvement and the related growing consent for the objectives of the regime. To some extent the period 1924-28 was a continuation of this approach despite opportunist limitations in relation to international policy. But the increasing domination of Stalin led to the formation of a totalitarian regime that undermined any possibility of advance towards the realisation of genuine socialism. The result of Stalin’s hegemony was the emphasis on the extraction of a surplus from the peasants and workers. This regime could only be maintained in terms of the increased role of a coercive state. Lenin between 1921-23 had rejected the validity of this standpoint and outlined a viable policy of transition to socialism. But Stalin represented the interests of an emerging bureaucratic class that utilised omnipotent power over the state in order to create a totalitarian regime. This was a rejection and not a continuation of the legacy of Lenin. Indeed, Lenin was increasing aware of the reactionary ambitions of Stalin in 1923 but was unable to oppose the realisation of the omnipotent power of Stalin. Lenin does provide arguments in favour of authoritarianism during the period of war communism, but these are rejected with the onset of the NEP. This policy development provided for a more democratic and economically rational conception of advance towards socialism, which was connected to the aim of international revolution.

Walicki contends that Lenin’s support for the New Economic Policy did not mean the rejection of an inherent authoritarianism: “Thus, Lenin’s commitment to the NEP did not weaken the totalitarian features of his ideology and mentality. Indeed, the loosening of the Communists grip on the economy increased his fear of freedom and pushed him towards repressive policies in other spheres. He continually strove for total control, regarding this as inherent in the very nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”(p321) But this view underestimates the importance of the realisation of a situation of economic freedom for the peasants and its connection to the character of the policy of the regime. The problem was that some vehement critics of the Bolsheviks could not be reconciled to the situation and instead still supported the counterrevolutionary forces that had been involved in the civil war. In this context such critics were allowed to go into exile. Despite this issue the overall freedom of the people had been enhanced because the peasants were allowed to produce and trade without being repressed and the situation of the workers also improved. This situation was bound to result in increased toleration within society. But Walicki cannot recognise the importance of these developments because of his view that equates socialism with the denial of the possibility of freedom. Walicki contends that Lenin could not support in a consistent manner the conception of freedom because of his rigid adherence to the importance of the dictatorship of the party. But Lenin was able to reconcile this perspective with the increased freedom of the peasants and concern for the interests of the workers. The period in which it could be argued that freedom was repressed, the era of the civil war and war communism, was replaced by the possibility for a type of freedom to become expressed within society in terms of the increased ability to realise the aspirations of the workers and peasants. Walicki rejects this type of defence of Lenin because he considers that Lenin’s very support of socialism is opposed to any genuine conception of freedom: “But how was full freedom to be combined with the strictest discipline and control, a control embracing all spheres of life, from labour to consumption? Lenin did not see this as contradictory because he was concerned with collective freedom of the working class, not with freedom of individual workers, with freedom as rational self-mastery, not freedom in pursuit of different particularist aims; with freedom as conscious realization of a single aim common to the entire class and inherent in its historical mission, and not with freedom as aimless pluralism and “unconscious” spontaneity. Workers were to be liberated as a collective entity, not as individuals or members of different interests groups.”(p336) But this criticism can only envisage the character of authentic freedom in terms of the absolute autonomy of the individual and not in terms of the connection of the interest of the individual with the role of the collective. The only society that is compatible with the approach of Walicki is that of capitalism. He can only reject the collective aims of socialism as being inherently authoritarian, and in this manner, he criticises Lenin. But Lenin is trying to indicate that the collective emancipation of society from the exploitative limitations of capitalism is the basis to achieve the interests of the individual such as the expression of the potential of people and the overall possibility of a higher quality of activity. The only manner the approach of Walicki can be expressed is in terms of the absolute power of the individual capitalist to exploit the collective character of the workers. In contrast Lenin recognises that the collective liberation of the working class is the basis to achieve a type of society in which genuine individual freedom or the ability to realise potential becomes possible. To some extent this approach was compromised during war communism, but this objective was promoted in the period of the NEP. It was in the era of Stalinism in which the interests of the individual become subordinated to the interests of the absolute state in a totalitarian manner. Walicki obscures the difference between Leninism and Stalinism because he considers all forms of society claiming to be socialist as the justification of totalitarianism. Lenin was not always a supporter of individual freedom, but his overall approach did not reject the importance of individual freedom. This emphasis was recognised in the period of the NEP, and this type of society became the basis for the conception of socialism. Stalin defended totalitarianism not because he was a genuine Leninist or socialist, but instead because he became the defender of a new type of exploitative society. Lenin would have rejected this development in the name of freedom and socialism.