WHAT IS A CREDIBLE PERSPECTIVE OF CHANGING SOCIETY AND HOW DO WE CONCEIVE OF AN ALTERNATIVE?

There are not many books by left wing organisations that tackle the important issues of a strategy of change and what is the alternative type of society in detailed terms. But one of the exceptions to this situation is the book: “A World to Win” by Paul Feldman and Corinna Lotz. (Lupus books, London 2004) The starting point is that capitalism is not just a system of exploitation but has created the possibility to achieve the development of a different system of economic and political liberation: “Capitalist globalisation is contradictory in the extreme. It is highly destructive on the one side. At the same time, it contains possibilities for a society based on co-operation and need. A World to Win does not reject everything that has been created under capitalism. Instead, we demonstrate how a world market, global information and financial systems and the socialisation of production and distribution can be made into the foundations of a new society. We do not claim to have a total blueprint for this, but, our proposals, hopefully, show that another world is not only possible but is a realistic proposition. We argue for a break with private ownership of capital through a struggle for political power. This book explains the need for a revolutionary theory and organisation to make this happen.” (ppxx-xxi) But what will make this claim non-dogmatic is whether the very difficulties of this perspective of change are discussed in a detailed and perceptive manner. For example, how can the very small character of the revolutionary groups become the basis to develop the influence of a socialist standpoint within the people? In other words, how will it be possible to end the present political domination of the various parties that support the capitalist system and so be able to establish the credibility of an alternative that could become realised in practice? These questions have not been satisfactorily addressed by most Marxist groups. Indeed, it could be argued that such complicated issues have generally been argued. Instead, it has been assumed in a vague manner that the potentially progressive and dynamic aspects of various mass struggles will ultimately generate the political possibilities to achieve radical types of change. The fact that this perspective is usually falsified does not undermine the persistence of the various left wing political groups to insist on the credibility of this programme of change. Often this standpoint is based on a dogmatic repetition of the views of Trotsky’s transitional programme. Therefore, it is welcome that Feldman and Lotz have recognised the necessity to try and established the basis of a more detailed programme for revolutionary change. However, this intention does not in and of itself make their perspective credible and realistic. The challenge to the credibility of their intentions to outline a realistic programme of change is whether they address the important aspects of bourgeois ideology which in a convincing manner are utilised in order to obtain popular support for the present economic and social system. It is a principled intention that they aim to reply to the views of the defenders of capitalism, but do they carry out this task in an effective manner? They refer to the importance of mass movements of protest against aspects of the exploitation and oppression of the capitalist system. But how can these movements become transformed into becoming an expression of conscious and consistent opponents of the capitalist system? The very problem is that the activism of protest struggles seems to have become a substitute for the importance of an ultimate aim of the necessity of an alternative emancipatory society. But these struggles, even if they achieve limited success, are ultimately unable to alter the balance of power within society in favour of progressive change. However, the various left wing political organisations are even more ineffective. Therefore, the credibility of the book by Feldman and Lotz depends on the extent to which they are able to provide perspectives to attempt to tackle the difficulties in transforming various types of mass struggles into an effective attempt to transform society. It could be suggested that ultimately the various protest movements are of a marginal character and so cannot influence the character of the economic and political system in an effective manner. Hence do the authors outline a strategy of change that is able to tackle these problems in convincing terms. This is an important question that will have to be analysed in relation to establishing the level of credibility of the approach and strategy of the authors.

In other words, an important issue that explains the durability of capitalism is the role and influence of bourgeois ideology which explains an important reason why the system is able to be maintained and sustained. The point is that the role of an alternative perspective for how society should be organised has to tackle the fact that most people do not consider that the present type of society can be transformed and changed in a revolutionary manner. Hence the development of mass struggles usually has the limited objective of trying to establish changes within the character of the present social system. In this context the limited influence of the various revolutionary groups is an expression of their failed attempt to establish their importance and credibility by a process of opportunist adaptation to the various struggles that develop against aspects of capitalism. This means that the approach of Marxism is not utilised in a principled manner and instead it becomes the expression of the role of the activist character of the various forms of protest within the capitalist system. Such an opportunist approach does not mean that the influence of Marxism is being developed in an effective and principled manner. Instead, the Marxist organisations become merely the most energetic supporters of the various forms of protest struggle that is developing within the present system. In this context it is a theoretical advance that Lotz and Feldman promise to tackle the issue of how to achieve a socialist society. But if they are to be serious in relation to this intention, they will have to tackle the problem of the present insignificant character of the approach of revolutionary Marxism and so in this context seriously address how this issue is to be resolved. This means that it will not be sufficient to suggest that the development of the dynamics of mass struggle will somehow resolve these issues of the insignificance of Marxism. Instead, it will be necessary to try and establish that the Marxist organisations can increase the influence of their programme by trying to establish a more convincing perspective of how social change can be realised. It is welcome that this is one of the aims of Lotz and Feldman, but the important issue in this context is whether they will discuss in a serious manner the present marginalisation of Marxism, or will they instead suggest in dogmatic terms that this problem can be resolved by the adoption by the people of their perspectives for change. In other words, it would seem unavoidable that a process of ideological transformation has to occur that will facilitate the possibility of increased support for a socialist perspective. But how is this development to occur if people are generally influenced by the standpoint of bourgeois ideology? However, it is possible even in the introduction to their book that the authors underestimate the complexities involved in the process of change. They imply that the activist character of mass protests has already established an ideological situation favourable for revolutionary change: “On a global scale, mass movements challenge the status quo, in both the advanced capitalist countries and developing nations. The countless millions who opposed the illegal invasion of Iraq surprised everyone by their determined opposition. Many more people continue to protest against ecological destruction, the imposition of GM food, world bank financed dams that destroy communities and the loss of welfare rights. Many are deeply alienated from state and political institutions. The prevailing scepticism about existing “democratic structures” and processes is a healthy sign that political abstractions and phase-mongering do not fool people. New generations are better informed and educated and more aware of what is going on locally and globally than ever before, through a host of information sources.” (pxxi) But it could be suggested that this opposition to aspects of the capitalist system merely indicates that whilst people know what they are against, it is not yet apparent what they support as an alternative in an affirmative manner. Furthermore, these various struggles tend to have a temporary character and so do not become the basis of more consistent and effective forms of opposition to the capitalist system. This means that there Is no necessary connection between the role of protest and the recognition of an alternative to the present capitalist system. Instead protest becomes defined as an end in itself and so when the issues connected to the struggle seem to be resolved in even a limited manner then the particular struggle seems to decline or even ends. But most importantly there is no dynamic that connects the popular struggles with the aim of socialism. Indeed, it would seem that the aim of socialism is irrelevant because most of the participants in the various struggles believe that their objectives can be realised within the capitalist system. In other words, participation in the struggle is considered to be an end in itself.

However, implicitly the authors do recognise the importance of the transformation of the aspect of protest into becoming an expression of support for a revolutionary alternative: “The challenge is to transform the rejection of the old into a positive force to bring into being a new society. That requires people and organisations who can see the real possibility of how such a world can be formed, and act on that knowledge in a collective way.” (pxxi) This approach has the important understanding that the very character of the struggle which can develop against global capitalism can also express the very aim of the socialist society that can replace capitalism. The aspect of the solidarity of the struggle expresses in a possible manner the collective content and character of what would be meant by the aim of the attempt to establish a socialist society. However, if this aspect is to become realised it is also necessary to establish that the aims of the mass movement are not primarily about what can be established within capitalism as a result of the struggle. Therefore, a tension can arise between the practical emphasis on the immediate objectives of the struggle and the aim of socialism which often becomes defined as being of a secondary character or even an irrelevance. It will be interesting to establish whether the authors establish a convincing alternative to this type of dilemma of the various mass struggles. In other words, can they elaborate how it is possible to reconcile the short-term and possible long-term aspects of the various popular movements of opposition to capitalism? Indeed, do they even recognise these tensions? Their immediate standpoint would seem to suggest that they do not acknowledge these dilemmas and instead contend that the very dynamics of the mass struggles implies a possibility for the generation of the potential to facilitate a process of revolutionary change that leads to socialism. All that is necessary in order to provide the connection in this context is the influence of a principled Marxist party. But we would suggest that the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology is the very aspect that could be said to be ignored or essentially underestimated in relation to this perspective of the revolutionary possibilities of mass struggle. The point is that the development of protest movements generally accepted the limitations of capitalism and have considered that the very role of activism is sufficient in order to establish the objectives of the movement. In this context the various Marxist organisations have tended to adopt this very perspective of activism. The result of this situation is that the role of struggle is considered to be an end in itself and the aspect of socialism becomes to be considered to be an irrelevance. Hence the various parties have accepted this situation. Therefore, the issue for Lotz and Feldman is whether they are able to provide a convincing and principled alternative to the acceptance of the role of activism as an end in itself. Do they outline how it is necessary to establish that socialism should be the important result of the role of mass struggle? It could be argued that formally this is their intention, but this does not establish in an effective manner how this aim should be the logical conclusion of various forms of protest that occur against aspects of capitalism. Instead, what is important is that a strategy be developed which is able to connect the aspect of immediate struggles and objectives with the longer term aim of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. In other words, it is not sufficient for them to outline the various problems with the present system, instead it is necessary to outline how aspects of discontent with the limitations of capitalism can generate the possibility for the realisation of an alternative. If it can be shown that there are problems in this regard, then it could be argued that there is a contradiction between the aspects of theory and practice. The point is that it is not sufficient to be a critic of capitalism it is instead necessary to indicate how it can become transformed into the alternative society of socialism. In other words, does criticism of capitalism have a principled character in terms of outlining the possibility for its transformation into socialism?

The authors outline the increasing psychological problems associated with capitalism, but the problem is that this creates the impression of the workers as a suffering victim class, but this implies that it is not possible to change society because people who are undermined and weakened by the aspects of exploitation and oppression will not be able to act in an effective collective manner in order to change the character of society. Instead, it would seem that the alienation and exploitation associated with the capitalist system has led to the creation of an exploited class that has become accustomed to this situation of subordination within the relations of production. It is necessary to emphasise that capitalism is a contradictory type of system that has led to the combined aspects of both the perpetuation of exploitation together with the possibility of collective opposition to this situation. This is not to suggest that such a development will mean the inevitable success of the aspect of mass struggle, but it does mean that the domination of capital is a continually contested issue. But the problem is that there is no inevitable dynamic of change and instead the prospect of social transformation is dependent on the various mass struggles acquiring revolutionary objectives. However, this development is undermined by the small size of the Marxist groups and their general lack of credibility. Indeed, the authors explain how the process of globalisation has been accompanied by a successful offensive of the forces of capital since the 1980’s to undermine the strength of the workers and therefore promoting the economic conditions for the increased profitability of the economic system. The book outlines how globalisation, or the increased integration of the capitalist world economy, has been accompanied by the changing balance of forces in favour of the present system and to the detriment of the interests of the producers. Thus, it is concluded that the role of global capital has replaced the primary importance of national forms of capital: “Taken together, these developments amount to a qualitative change in the form of capitalism as a social system. The dictates of the global market economy drive the corporations, not the needs of any particular economy or country. The sheer concentration of economic power and its reach across national borders is unparalleled in the history of capitalism. The mega corporations and financial institutions now operate to an increasing extent independently of nation states and their governments…. States are reduced to the role of enablers, promoting and implementing structures within their own borders that facilitate globalised capitalism.” (p54-55) There is obviously a tendency towards the realisation of globalisation as described by the authors. But it is questionable whether this means that the aspect of national capital has become secondary and instead it would be more precise to suggest that there is a dynamic process of interaction of national and global capital. In a sense governments accept the importance of the aspect of global capital as the basis to define their objectives in relation to economic policy, but this is in order to promote the possibility of increasing the importance of national capital within the world economy. Therefore, it would seem more precise to suggest a situation of the interaction of national and global capital rather than a reductive relationship in which the former is merely subordinated to the latter. Ultimately global capital does establish the criteria for evaluating national economic performance, but this is in order to establish what is necessary in order for national capital to increase its importance within the world economy. Hence it would be dogmatic to merely suggest that the world economy has acquired a primary role in relation to the aspect of understanding the character of national capital. Instead, it would be more precise and not dogmatic to outline the significance of the interaction of these two aspects of economic activity. Obviously national capital cannot ignore the role of the world economy and its character is defined by this process of interaction. However, the ideology of nationalism is utilised in order to try and establish the support of the workers for the national capitalist state. This ideology has a false aspect given the relationship of national capital to the role of the world economy, but it is important in order to try and undermine the possibility for the workers to develop a class consciousness based on the international unity of people against the capitalist system.

The authors outline the process of the transformation of the welfare state, which was based on some limited concessions to the interests of the people, into a market state in which the aims of global capital have primary importance. It is argued in premature terms that the very aspect of the importance of parliamentary democracy is being replaced by the role of authoritarian forms of government: “The new market state is by its nature incompatible with previous forms of rule based on representative parliamentary democracy. An historic qualitative change is taking place in the way that the state functions.” (p96) But this is a problematical understanding because it could be suggested that it is the very role of parliamentary democracy that enables the political elites to introduce policies that are in the interests of national and global capital. The point is that the authors do not develop a conception of ideological hegemony that would explain the possibility for the various political parties, whether conservative or labour governments, to introduce policies that are in the interests of the capitalist class. In this context the aspect of parliamentary democracy is not undermined but instead because the basis by which these reactionary policies are introduced and implemented. The point is that there is something problematical about the parliamentary system which results in the development of pro-bourgeois governments which attempt to introduce measures that undermine the interests of the workers whilst consolidating the domination of capital over society. Hence the market state is based on the role of parliamentary democracy and is not in contradiction with it. The aspect of the ideological hegemony of this perspective ensures that parties that aim to uphold this approach of the interests of the global economy continue to be elected. However, the Jeremy Corbyn led Labour party briefly established the possibility for the realisation of a progressive alternative. This situation meant that the labour party became advocates of a reform programme that would attempt to modify the system in terms of the interests of the people. Hence it was necessary for the conservative party to resort to an ideology of popular nationalism in order to undermine the possibility of the electoral success of the Corbyn led Labour party. The fact that there was a contradiction between this popular nationalism and the interests of the role of capital in the global economy was considered to be acceptable if the result was the defeat of an increasingly left- wing labour party. Hence there was a theory and practice contradiction in the recent ideology of the Conservative party. In theory it was still committed to the role of the relation of national and global capital, but in practice it emphasised the importance of popular nationalism. But this acceptance of populism did not mean that any genuine concessions to the workers had been made. Instead, the approach of opposition to the European Union was considered acceptable in order to develop the mass support of the workers for the Conservative party. In practice the economic relationship of the UK to the EU would be maintained in terms of the role of a trade arrangement. But this very development is an indication of the ideological crisis of the Conservatives, they have to adopt increasingly irrational and contradictory policies in order to maintain popular support. It could be argued that in the long term that this accommodation to popular nationalism could become the basis of a contradictory approach towards the ideological acceptance of the importance of trade with the EU and even the role of the world economy. Therefore, the Conservatives have to ultimately express their support for a relationship with the EU and acknowledge the importance of the world economy. Thus, the acceptance of a popular form of nationalism cannot be tenable in the long-term. The alternative of the Labour party should not be to try and outline a rival type of popular nationalism but instead to promote a principled approach of internationalism as the basis for the progressive transformation of economic and political relations. However, there will always by a tendency for the Labour party to adapt to the influence of populist nationalism. Thus, it is necessary that Marxists intervene in order to promote the importance of internationalism. It is important to promote this internationalism in terms of opposing the interests of capitalism. The emphasis of Lotz and Feldman on the economic aspects of the relationship of the nation state and the world economy means that they cannot explain these ideological aspects of the present situation. In this manner their analysis of the economic and political situation is determinist and problematic.

It also has to be indicated that the claim of Lotz and Feldman that the development of the new market state is incompatible with the role of parliamentary democracy is a dogmatic claim. Instead, it has been possible for various conservative type politicians to utilise popular type views, such as nationalism, in order to ensure that an electoral majority is obtained for the introduction of the imperatives of the new global market economy. In other words, the issues that have led to the elections of these types of governments is of secondary significance but what is important is the economic policies that are introduced by these administrations. The result of these developments is to create a situation in which national political policy is based on the interests of consolidating the connection of national and global capital. The importance of these developments led to the transformation of the Labour party into New Labour which expressed these objectives in a consistent manner. It is necessary to recognise that New Labour could be elected on the basis of this programme of uncritical acceptance of the aims of global capital. However, in order to establish the popular credibility of this approach New Labour had to suggest that the interests of global capital were compatible with the role of the welfare state. In this manner it was suggested that the Labour government of Tony Blair was still carrying out its traditional support for the welfare state. But in practice the measures that previous Conservative governments carried out in order to undermine the role of the welfare state were not reversed by New Labour. Furthermore, the Trade Union Congress did nothing to oppose the implementation of increasingly measures of austerity by the Labour government because of their opportunist relationship to this administration. Only with the election of a Conservative administration did the TUC accept the necessity to mobilise its members against the imposition of austerity economics. But even this mobilisation was of a deliberately limited character. Hence it was necessary to establish different leadership of the trade unions if these organisations were to become an expression of the possibility to develop mass struggles against the imposition of austerity economics. There was popular support for this approach, but the trade union leadership has consistently acted to undermine the development of this type of militant mass action. The result has been that there has been the expression of no popular and militant opposition to the imposition of austerity economics. But such a situation could only transform the balance of class forces in favour of capital and against the interests of labour. The ultimate result of this situation is that discontent has been expressed in the reactionary terms of increased support for populist nationalism. This development led to majority support in the referendum for the objective of withdrawal from the EU. The alternative of even a limited form of internationalism based on support for the membership of the EU by the UK was rejected. This development indicated that the alienation of the people caused by the economics of austerity was being expressed in a reactionary manner by the popular rejection of membership of the EU by the people of the UK. The problem was that the supporters of the UK still being in the EU were not able to outline a convincing perspective of why the membership of the EU was in the interests of the people of the UK. Instead, this objective was defended in vague terms that did not seem to address the concerns of the opponents of the UK being in the EU. But possibly the most reactionary aspect of this situation was that a political relationship was established between the populist section of the Conservative party with sections of the working class who had previously supported the Labour party. The ultimate result of this development is to consolidate the interests of British capitalism based on the contradictory ideology of popular conservatism. In this situation it has not been possible for the Labour party to advocate a progressive alternative type of politics, and the result has been the election of a new right-wing leader. But it seems that under these new circumstances that it will be difficult to elect a labour government. Hence it is necessary to address the issue of how to recreate the popular appeal of the Labour party.

The book of Lotz and Feldman also outlies the importance of the ecological issues that are created by the development of capitalism. They outline the adverse consequences of the methods of genetic engineering and genetic modification. But this very criticism seems to suggest that the interests of the aspects of ecology imply the necessity to establish the role of simplified and self-sufficient economies. However, this is not the assumption being made and instead what is implied is that under a situation of the realisation of genuine participatory democracy these ecological issues will be resolved. But the various green advocates have a perspective of the necessity of the development of a more simplified economy if it is to begin to solve the ecological problems created by the level of industrial development. In other words, the major environmental problem is industrialisation and capitalism is considered to be a secondary aspect, but essentially this very issue is being understood in the combined terms of these two features by the authors in order to establish the relationship of these two aspects contrary to the views of the green activists. But can it be said that the realisation of the supremacy of the system of socialism will somehow resolve the ecological problems created by capitalism? In the chapter: ‘Action Plan for the ecological crisis’ (p269-291) the view is outlined that those who suggest that capitalism can be made compatible with green objectives express an impractical approach. The authors indicate that ecological aims cannot be reconciled with expansionist logic of capital accumulation, and instead require replacing the creation of exchange value with the production of useful objects, of use values. “Ending production based on capital accumulation will transform our ecology. We will replace the creation of exchange value with the production of useful objects, of use values. We will transform what we make, and the way in which we transform nature. Workers will cooperate internationally to plan production for the benefit of the majority. This will bring about a shift to farming for local food and a programme of infrastructure improvement to bring about the basics of housing, water and power to all. Urban planning will set out to redesign and restructure the cities and end the alienation of town from country. Eliminating massive over-capacity and a refocusing of the economy to the provision of the basic necessities of life will bring improved efficiency in the use of energy and raw materials, and lessen the impact on nature.” (p289) But does this general perspective provide the basis for the development of an effective ecological perspective in a different socialist society? The point is that an important objective is to continue the realisation of technological progress in the development of industrial production so that it becomes compatible with the aspect of ecological imperatives. In other words, the unrealistic aim of a simplified economy should be rejected as impractical because this would only result in the lowering of production that would decrease the material levels of income of the people. Instead, it is necessary to try to combine the aspect of increased levels of production in order to meet the needs of the people together with the attempt to establish effective standards in relation to the aims of the realisation of the interests of ecological criteria. This type of relationship has been rejected by many green economists who equate a more simple and austere type of economy with the aims of the interests of the environment. The approach of Lotz and Feldman is to suggest that a more austere type of economy would be able to meet the needs of the people if based on the aspect of equality. However, this view is ultimately impractical and the issue of increasing production is a necessary aspect of the development of the possibility for creating the material conditions for equality. Hence the actual realistic issue is to reconcile the aspect of the development of production with the realisation of ecological standards. In this manner the realisation of increased material affluence and equality is made compatible with the interests of the importance of the aims of ecology. The only alternative would be the apparent decrease in the material standards of the people in the interests of ecological imperatives. But this approach would be unpopular with the people and so would require an authoritarian regime in order to realise this perspective. Hence, there is no alternative to the attempt to reconcile green objectives with the aim of increasing the affluence of the people if a democratic type of socialism is to be realised.

But possibly the major problem with the approach of Lotz and Feldman is that they do not suggest what should be a principled perspective in order to connect the aim of socialism with ecological aims. The point is that most supporters of the ecological movement consider that they can achieve their aims within the present type of society. They have an approach of trying to persuade the various governments of the major countries to adopt a more ecological approach. In this manner they are essentially not interested in socialism which is considered to be an irrelevance in relation to the practical task of developing a mass movement in order to apply pressure on governments in order to adopt policies based on the aims of the ecological approach. It would seem that the only role of the various Marxist groups is to adapt to the reformist standpoint of the green movement. Indeed, it could be argued that this is what has happened in practice. Thus, the political aims of the ecological supporters are expressed by the green party in the UK. Hence it would seem that the role of Marxist parties in this context is irrelevant. They can only establish any significance by uncritically accepting the aims of green organisations. But because of this opportunism the very credibility and necessity of Marxist parties in relation to the ecological issue seems to be an irrelevance. Therefore, it is vital that the development of a perspective that would connect the aim of ecology with the objective of socialism has to be elaborated in a convincing manner. It is necessary that the various socialist parties outline in a more effective manner the point that the interests of the green movement can be realised most effectively and practically with the realisation of a society in which the aspect of the accumulation of capital is not the most important priority. This standpoint would not reject the importance of trying to achieve green objectives within the present capitalist society, but it would be understood that the ultimate and consistent expression of the aspect of ecological aims would require the development of a socialist society in which the accumulation of capital had been replaced by the realisation of human need as its most important objective. But why should the activists of the ecological movement listen to the small Marxist groups given that they can potentially begin to achieve their objectives in terms of the increasing effectiveness of their activism? In the present period the ecological activists will not listen to the insignificant Marxists about how to realise their objectives. Only the importance of the fact that it is difficult to achieve ecological aims within capitalism will begin to develop the possibility to achieve a more favourable response for the socialist approach to green issues. However, it is necessary that socialists do not compromise their views in order to establish an influence within the green movement. Instead, they have to outline the reasons why ecological objectives can be reconciled with the objective of increasing the material standards of the people within a socialist society. In the present period socialists have ignored these controversial issues in order to establish a popularity within the ecological movement in opportunist terms. But this opportunism has not been effective and presently the Marxist groups lack an influence within the green organisations. Only a patient and sustained process of trying to achieve support for the objective of connecting the ecological movement with the aim of socialism will establish the basis to establish the relevance and importance of Marxism to this form of activist struggle. But Lotz and Feldman ignore the complexities of the connection of socialism and the ecological movement and instead imply that people will support their perspective which is based on accommodating to a green conception of what an economy should be. However, the difficult and principled task is to convince the green movement that affluence is not a reactionary or irrelevant objective and is instead a necessary aspect of the development of a progressive and egalitarian type of economy. Indeed, socialists have to suggest that the problem under capitalism is not affluence but instead that this aspect has only been realised in a limited or temporary manner. In other words, it is not supposed affluence that has resulted in ecological problems. Thus, socialists have to openly suggest that we are in favour of the development of consistent and generalised affluence and that we suggest that this aspect can be made compatible with an egalitarian and ecologically minded type of society.

But why should the green movement accept the advice of the apparently smaller and essentially insignificant socialist organisations? It seems to be more logical and flexible for the various supporters of socialism to leave their small groups and instead join the increasingly important and popular green parties and activist groups. This type of action should not be opposed by Marxists in absolute terms if it is still possible to advocate a principled socialist approach within the various green organisations. However, the major aspect of whatever form of organisational activity is undertaken is to continue to openly uphold the necessity of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism in order to achieve progressive and egalitarian objectives. In this context it is not possible to dilute the view that green objectives can only be consistently and effectively realised with the development of a socialist society. We have to strive for improvements within capitalism, but we are aware that the consistent basis to achieve ecological aims means that capital accumulation will no longer be the major aspect of economic activity. Indeed, because capitalism has been the major cause of environmental problems it would not seem to be credible to believe that this situation can be transformed in an effective manner within the present system. Lotz and Feldman seem to ignore discussion of these issues and instead seem to imply that a socialist organisation with a consistent green perspective will become the primary expression of ecological objectives. This seems to be a naïve and dogmatic approach. Instead, the practical and principled issue is how to establish the connection of the role of green and socialist organisations. In this context it would seem to be unavoidable that a process of ideological struggle is carried out in order to try and obtain the support of the ecological groups for the aims of socialism. But this means that socialist organisations also elaborate how progress can be made within capitalism. It is necessary that Marxist groups do not reject the importance of a minimum programme that indicates what is possible within the limits of capitalism. Lotz and Feldman criticise the Green party for developing a perspective of ecological objectives to be realised within capitalism. (p282-284) But this approach is only unprincipled if the aim of change to a different socialist society is essentially rejected. On this issue the Green party seems to have an ambiguous stance. Thus, principled Marxists have to ideologically intervene and outline the arguments as to why the green programme can only be consistently realised with the attainment of a genuine alternative socialist society. The uncertainty and ambiguity of Green activists concerning the aim of socialism has to be contrasted with the expression of a popular programme of how socialism can realise ecological objectives. Lotz and Feldman provide a useful explanation of the role of socialism in this context: “Ending production based on capital accumulation will transform our ecology. We will replace the creation of exchange value with the production of useful objects, of use values. We will transform what we make, and the way in which we transform nature. Workers will co-operate internationally to plan production for the benefit of the majority. This will bring a shift to farming for local food and a programme of infrastructure improvement to bring the basics of housing, water and power to all. Urban planning will set out to redesign and restructure the cities and end the alienation of town from country. Eliminating massive over-capacity and a refocusing of the economy to the provision of basic necessities of life will being improved efficiency in the use of energy and raw materials and lessen the impact on nature.” (p289) This perspective seems to be a credible summary of how socialism will bring about the necessary changes in order to improve the ecological situation. But what is not explained in a convincing manner is how the presently small Marxist groups can convince the larger and more successful ecological movement of the necessity of this type of revolutionary ecological perspective. Instead, it seems to be more realistic and credible to adopt a green programme based on the objectives of reforming the character of the present type of society. However, Lotz and Feldman seems to be justifying the naïve assumption that the apparently coherent and superior character of their perspectives will create the possibility of developing popular support for the type of approach they advocate. This is a dogmatic and questionable approach.

In relation to understanding the character of the world capitalist economy and its limitations, Lotz and Feldman refer to the problem of the crisis of the falling rate of profit. However, it could also be suggested that this aspect only indicates important economic issues that establish the objective basis why the present capitalist system should be replaced by the possible superior alternative of socialism. But the important factor is the subjective aspect that at the level of consciousness people do not consider the practical feasibility to establish a superior alternative to capitalism. There is not a genuine support of the capitalist system and instead people are resigned to it continuing as the dominant type of economy because of the apparent inability to establish alternatives that are progressive and emancipatory. Lotz and Feldman refer to the fact that the role of cooperatives in capitalist society indicate the possibility of a different and more progressive type of economic system. However, the point is that these cooperatives adopt the aims of the process of capital accumulation, even if there is limited participation of the producers in the role of these organisations. What is not referred to are the struggles of the trade unions that could express the possibility to generate the conditions for the realisation of an alternative. The point is that if the trade unions adopted a perspective of the aim of workers management of the economy this development could result in a genuine challenge to the continued domination of capital over labour. In this manner the economic and political conditions are established for the workers to develop their level of organisation in order to be able to generate the possibility to establish the process of transition to a different type of economic system. Indeed, this potential has already been expressed by the development of workers cooperatives that in an important manner represent the possibility to realise a different and socialist type of economy. However, this prospect is generally undermined by the aspect of adaption of the co-co-operatives to the dynamics of the capitalist economic system. Hence there is no alternative to the necessity to develop class struggle with the perspective to transform militant collective activity into establishing the potential for the transformation of society. But the ideological influence of reformism generally undermines the development of this perspective of change. Furthermore, the recent defeats of the workers in the class struggle have often put the workers on the defensive and has meant that it is difficult to develop forms of mass action. In this context the very credibility of the trade unions is called into question and the result is the increased influence of reactionary views of nationalism and populism. It seems that the balance of class forces favours the interests of capital and so the very perspective of mass action in order to defend the role of the workers seems to have been undermined. However, Lotz and Feldman seem to underestimate the importance of this unfavourable balance of class forces. Instead, they emphasise the significance of mass actions for supposedly creating the conditions for progressive change: “Over the past decade, millions of people have taken to the streets throughout the world in massive demonstrations against the institutions and policies of corporate globalisation. Seattle in 1999 brought together a coalition of workers and activists from the industrialised and developing countries against the World Trade Organisation. A growing global consciousness formed in response to the power of the transnational corporations was transformed into militant protest.” (p171) But there is an important difference between demonstrations that are based on opposing aspects of capitalism and the policies of governments when contrasted to a constructive and principled perspective of an alternative type of society. In other words, the activists knew what they were against, but the issue of what they supported was not apparent. Hence, ultimately the demonstrations and protests ended, and the domination of the capitalist system continued. But the very process of adaptation by the left wing organisations to these developments meant that they could not promote an alternative type of society in an effective manner. Instead in a pragmatic manner they tended to adapt to the various popular actions occurring and so failed to utilise the situation in order to develop support for a different and emancipatory type of society. This opportunism only indicated the political problems of the Marxist groups.

The approach of Lotz and Feldman seems to overcome these problems of the activism of the majority of left-wing groups. They are outlining a conception of an alternative socialist society based on principles such as the development of a co-operative economy, ending alienation, utilising production to met human needs, and realisation of the potential of people. (p171) But the problem is how to transform this aspiration into the expression of a convincing and effective strategy of change. The approach of reformism is rightly criticised as an illusion based on such problematical principles as the attempt to make capitalism a progressive system that is able to meet human needs, Instead, they suggest that aspects of co-operative production that occur within capitalism are an indication of the possible feasibility of an alternative and progressive type of economy. But the problem that is not addressed is how to extend the importance of these forms of cooperative economic activity so that they replace the domination of capitalism? Indeed, it could be argued that the ideology and activity of this cooperative production and distribution is based on a process of accommodation to the requirements of capitalism. This means that any aspect for the potential of an alternative type of economy is being undermined by this acceptance of the necessity to relate to the objectives of the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the principles and aspects of an alternative type of economy is outlined in terms of the establishment of a connection between the aspect of the development of technology with the role of co-operative and collective forms of economic activity, but this understanding is not linked to the elaboration of a perspective of how to achieve this process of genuine social change. The problem is that progressive changes, such as developments in technology and the organisation of production presently occur under the situation of the domination of capital over labour. This means that the very advances in economic development occur in terms of being of benefit to the interests of capital. Only class struggle will bring about the possibility of changing this situation in a progressive manner. Therefore, the aspects of a different and emancipatory type of economy involving social ownership of the process of production and self-management of the forms of economic activity is indicated as a necessary progressive development but without the necessary connection as to how this objective can be realised. The problem is that the very continuation of capitalism tends to convince people that this situation is eternal and so cannot be transformed in a revolutionary manner. This means that it is not convincing to suggest that capitalism can be changed into a system based on the solidarity of the producers. In a vague manner Lotz and Feldman advocate the formation of a progressive government that can introduce the type of economic changes they support, but it is not established how this development will occur. The point is that it is necessary to elaborate a perspective of class struggle in order to establish a possible perspective for the realisation of the changes being advocated. Instead, it is suggested in a vague manner that: “Capitalism is a world system. It must be replaced with a new world system. There is no national solution to the crisis. We must act globally, but we can start locally.” (p198) This perspective may be correct in general terms but it does not tackle the problems involved in the struggle to realise this increasingly international system of socialism. The point is that the success of the revolutionary process may be limited to the role of national states. There will be the necessity to establish a credible programme of a national type of socialism before the development of the possibility of international revolutionary change. Instead, the authors only outline their perspective in terms of the aspect of the increasing success of an international process of class struggle and so they do not tackle the difficulties involved in the attempt to establish the success of this development. This means that the conception of international class struggle is defined in terms of a process of inevitable change that will result in the following situation: “As the socialised system matures it will identify, measure and satisfy all the basic needs of people throughout the world, according to criteria agreed through the democratic process. In a system focused on production for need rather than on an endless profit escalator, society will offer the potential for reducing working hours for those now in work, and for the hundreds of millions without work, the opportunity to provide for their families for the first time. Society will move forward decisively to the time when manual work becomes a smaller and smaller part of life and when everyone can live in the fullest sense according to their needs.” (p201) In other words the aim of socialism is outlined in terms of the inevitable realisation of the process of change. They cannot conceive of the importance of the difficulties that may undermine the realisation of this objective of international socialism. Nor do they have a starting point of the present weakness of the various political organisations that can be defined as being revolutionary Marxist. Instead, the assumption being made is that the objective developments that express the possibility for international socialism will have a development of correspondence in terms of the creation of the subjective factor that will enable the prospects for revolutionary change to be realised. But the situation is characterised by an important contradiction between the aspect of the objective and subjective. We could agree that the aspects of the development of the material and economic conditions for socialism are occurring as described by the authors, but the aspect of the problems involved in developing the subjective factor for change are not being overcome. Instead, there is only a collection of small Marxist groups which lack any popular influence. Thus, the aspect of discontent with capitalism often assumes a reactionary form in terms of the development of forms of populism and nationalism. In this situation the domination of capitalism is not being challenged by the manifestation of discontent within society. Instead, the development of mass unrest assumes reactionary forms. But these types of issues are entirely ignored by Lotz and Feldman who instead conclude from an economic determinist analysis that the material conditions are developing for what is assumed to be a process of inevitable revolutionary change. This means that they effectively ignore the complexity of the class struggle and instead emphasise its possibilities for the successful transformation of capitalism into socialism. But this dogmatic approach cannot establish an appreciation of the difficulties involved in trying to establish the development of the successful overthrow of the international capitalist system. Primarily the importance of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class is not being evaluated and analysed. Instead, it is assumed that people will inevitably be persuaded by the superiority of the revolutionary approach. But such a rigid approach cannot indicate the complexities involved in the attempt to develop the success of international class struggle. Indeed, this issue is not even addressed and instead the character of socialism is outlined in terms that assume that its realisation is an inevitability. However, if we evaluate these issues in a non-dogmatic manner then we should start with the very importance of the problems involved in trying to develop the success of international class struggle. Hence, we should begin with the very issue of the apparent small and insignificant character of the role of the Marxist groups. This honest understanding would then become the basis to establish the complexities involved in trying to develop the success of the class struggle. WE have to begin with the apparent durability of capitalism rather than assume that it is a system that is likely to be overthrown because of its presumed fragile character. Instead, we have to begin with the difficulties involved in trying to establish the possibilities for the demise of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. However, it could be argued that Lotz and Feldman have a dogmatic approach that conceives of the necessity and inevitability of the process of the realisation of socialism. Whilst not adopting the alternative of pessimism we instead have to outline in a detailed manner the difficulties involved in trying to realise the success of international socialism. But the determinism of Lotz and Feldman means that they cannot even consider the issues of the class struggle in terms of the importance of difficulties. Instead, they have to assume a perspective of inevitable success, especially if people are persuaded by their arguments! This determinism cannot establish in a perceptive manner the complex difficulties involved in trying to establish the success of the class struggle. Instead, assumptions are being made that the realisation of socialism is ultimately an expression of an inevitable process of determinism and ultimate success.

In other words, the major issue that is being ignored is the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology which generates the view that people should accept the continued domination of the standpoint of capitalism. This situation is combined with the low level of influence of the role of small revolutionary parties. But Lotz and Feldman seem to imply that these difficult aspects will somehow be resolved by people increasingly supporting the type of left-wing perspective that they are advocating. It is assumed that the principled and credible character of the proposals being made in favour of the aim of socialism will in some automatic manner result in increased support for the approach of a left-wing type of politics that they are advocating. Hence, they seem to associate the various protest movements with the expression of the possibility to develop a revolutionary movement of radical change. But this development has not occurred because the various supporters of the protest actions consider that they are sufficient in order to achieve their objectives. It is being suggested that the expression of militant struggle will somehow realise their aims. Hence, in this situation there does not seem to be a relevant role for revolutionary organisations, apart from becoming the expression of support for the role of the protest movements. However, Lotz and Feldman seem to ignore these difficulties and instead imply in a dogmatic manner that the apparently logical and principled nature of the aims that they are advocating will be ultimately expressed by the role of mass movements of opposition to capitalism. But the apparently credible nature of the aims that they are advocating does not mean that they will be inevitably supported and adopted by militant mass movements. Instead, the standpoint of these struggles will be to achieve their aims within capitalism. They will adopt what could be defined as a type of militant reformism. Therefore, it will be necessary for the various revolutionary organisations to carry out a process of intransigent and patient ideological struggle in order to try and establish the increased influence of their revolutionary approach. But instead in a dogmatic and almost naïve manner Lotz and Feldman consider that the superior character of their proposals concerning the organisation of society will develop mass popular support. This assumption is why they have to neglect the importance of bourgeois ideology because recognition of this aspect would undermine the dogmatic assumptions about the inevitable development of support for the perspective of socialism. In contrast to this naïve view, we have to suggest that a protracted process of ideological struggle is necessary if the increased influence of the standpoint of the aim of socialism is to acquire popular support. But this means that we have to establish that the very logical result of the various mass struggles should be the possible realisation of an alternative socialist type of society. In other words what is being proposed is the development of a process of interaction between the dynamism of the role of mass activity and the increased importance and influence of the aim of socialism. However, the possibility for the success of this perspective means that the forces of revolutionary Marxism have to criticise the illusions of the activists that they can achieve their aims within capitalism. But Lotz and Feldman do not directly address this issue and instead suggest that reform will not achieve the objectives of the various mass movements. In this ambiguous manner the revolutionary approach is being proposed, but this approach is not connected to opposing the limitations of the activist movements.

But the major problem is that the approach of Lotz and Feldman is based on an adaptation to the illusions of the perspectives of the activists. Thus, they do not openly advocate the realisation of a socialist type of society and instead call for the formation of a genuinely democratic government that will introduce various progressive changes. They support the formation of a: “Transitional state, basing itself on an economy producing for need, which can swiftly satisfy needs, both in Britain and internationally, will institute a truly democratic society for the first time.” (P222) This development will involve the expression of the self-organisation of the people in the administration of society, an end to the role of an elite state and the election of people to the organisations of the state. They suggest that this type of regime will end the domination of capitalism, but they do not connect this aspect to the necessity to achieve a socialist type of society. Thus: “The major impediment to a democratic society remains the unbridled power of the corporations and their relentless drive to expand and accumulate. Just as capitalist economic relations are a barrier to human progress, so to is the state that gives expression to the profit system. No more democracy can be squeezed out of capitalism. Regime change is the goal. The moment is opportune because the state has lost its legitimacy and authority which it can never recover. It is divided against itself, as the internal disputes over the invasion of Iraq and other issues have shown. By openly endorsing and promoting free market capitalism, the state leaves capitalism politically naked. In so doing, it exposes capitalism to a direct assault on its rule in ways that the state has set out to prevent and divert.” (p223) The major problem with this perspective is the view that the bourgeois state has developed a serious problem of legitimacy which means that the situation is becoming favourable to the possibility of genuine revolutionary change that will establish a democratic state. Hence the aspect of episodic periods of crisis for the authority of the state are being defined as moments that express a favourable possibility for the realisation of a revolutionary and democratic process of change. But the problem with this perspective is that the role of movements with these types of objectives has not been created by the expression of aspects of dissent concerning the policies of the various bourgeois governments of western capitalism. Indeed, the role of these mass movements is to try and realise a process of change of policy by these governments rather than express an aspiration to change the character of the administration of society. Thus, the aim of the anti-war movement concerning the Allied invasion of Iraq was not to overthrow governments but instead to try and persuade the existing governments to change policy. It is Lotz and Feldman who project revolutionary aspirations onto mass movements that are actually based on obtaining a process of reform of the policies of various bourgeois governments. In other words, in relation to the actual mass struggles there is not a situation of their expression of revolutionary type objectives, such as aspiring to create new types of democratic state. Instead Lotz and Feldman project their aspirations onto the mass struggles and in this manner imply that they could become the basis of the realisation of new types of democratic state. Thus, what seems to be ignored is that the various mass movements are based on the ideology of protest about some aspect of the system which they aim to modify and establish a different policy for the present bourgeois governments to carry out. In this context there is not significant support for the type of perspective that Lotz and Feldman are proposing. Instead, it would require the development of the increased influence and support for the revolutionary parties in order that the importance of a revolutionary perspective becomes genuinely significant. But this very issue is not addressed because it is instead assumed in a vague and hopeful manner that the possibility to establish mass support for a revolutionary perspective is being realised. The perspective is being outlined of the necessity to develop new democratic structures to replace the failed and elitist character of institutions like parliament. But how can this possibility be realised without the transformation of class consciousness? It will require the conscious rejection of the influence of the role of bourgeois ideology and instead the adoption of a different and radical revolutionary type of standpoint by the people. However, this possibility would seem to be difficult to realise given the insignificant influence of the various revolutionary type parties. Unfortunately, this is the very issue that is not addressed by the authors who instead suggest that their proposals for a democratic and popular society will be adopted in terms of developments in political terms. They advocate new assemblies in local, regional and national terms to replace the antiquated and elitist role of Parliament. But how will a mass movement with these objectives emerge without a transformation of the character of the political consciousness of the people? Thus, policies of a new democratic society are being advocated but the issue of how to develop popular support for these aims is not being outlined in a credible manner. The point is that the realisation of a different and effective form of participatory democratic system would require a transformation of class consciousness, but this is the very issue that is not being addressed. Thus, the aims are not being established in credible practical terms.

In other words, the issue of the importance of bourgeois ideology is possibly the most significant aspect that is not being addressed. In this context the connected problem of the apparent inability of the various revolutionary organisations to develop popular support is not analysed. Instead, it is assumed that a programme of progressive change, that will suggest the role of new democratic institutions for the introduction of these radical measures, will ensure that the problematical issue of the lack of influence of small revolutionary parties becomes resolved. However, we know from actual experience that this possible development is extremely difficult to realise. Revolutionary organisations have only acquired popularity by becoming relevant for the development of various mass struggles. Therefore, the outline of this programme for the realisation of popular democracy will not by itself solve the issue of the lack of influence of the socialist organisations being supported by Lotz and Feldman. But this critical point does not mean that their theoretical contribution is inherently futile. Instead, their ideas about a post-capitalist society make a useful addition to the understanding of the principles and objectives of a revolutionary regime that intends to transform society and end the domination of capitalism. However, the important problem not adequately addressed is how to obtain popular support for this radical perspective so that mass movements can act in a radical and conscious manner to try and realise the various proposals for a genuinely democratic and progressive government. Instead, a conception of history as the basis to understand the possible development of conscious and collective action in order to resolve its problems becomes the justification of the view that progressive change can occur in order to realise human emancipation: “Human beings as a whole cannot make history consciously as long as they are trapped in social classes, in which the interests of one class prevail over the another. Vast resources are expended fighting other human beings, rather than solving common problems. Humanity will only be able to direct and conduct its activities in a purposeful way when it has overcome domination by the restricted interests of increasing the wealth of a tiny minority. At that point we will enter the realm of real history.” (p305) But the problem with this understanding is that it represents a moral aim of the necessity of a society based on genuine cooperation and solidarity, and the aspect of how to achieve this type of emancipatory social regime is not established. The contentious issue is that the potential for collective action in order to realise progressive change is always being undermined by the ability of the ruling class to undermine the prospect of the development of effective mass struggle. Hence the solidarity of the people subordinated in the system is continually being weakened by the ability of the ruling class to utilise strategies of divide and rule in an effective manner. Therefore, the approach of Lotz and Feldman is ultimately based on a vague aspiration rather than the expression of a convincing perspective that change can be realised. In other words, they do not tackle the challenges posed by the importance of the hegemony of bourgeois ideology and its connection to an undermining of the development of collective mass struggle. Instead, the approach that they adopt is the subjective approach that collective action against the system ‘must’ occur. But this very expression of subjectivism cannot be a satisfactory basis to explain why and how forms of oppositional struggle can occur which will generate the possibility for the overthrow of the capitalist system. Ultimately their standpoint represents a vague hope that revolutionary change will occur. In other words, they consider that there will be an inevitable connection between the aspect of the role of protest and the development of what will become forms of revolutionary activity. But this prospect is not what has occurred within contemporary capitalism. Indeed, the very aspect of protest has itself become a major justification to reject the necessity of revolutionary change. It is considered that if the forms of protest are effective in terms of their level of popularity and militancy that the result will be the successful attainment of the aims of the movement. This understanding is not always false in that victories can be obtained by this approach, but in general terms the continuation of capitalism undermines the possibility to achieve the objectives of mass movements.

However, it could be argued that the major problem with the perspective of Lotz and Feldman is the assumption that mass struggle is the inherent basis of the development of the role of a revolutionary form of class consciousness. Obviously mass struggle is an important aspect of the possibility to develop increasing radical forms of activity and consciousness, but it is also necessary that these aspects are connected to the role of a revolutionary party that can promote the development of the ideas of socialism and suggest a type of perspective that can advance the possibility to transform the character of society. However, this very aspect has been complicated by the difficulties involved in trying to develop popular and influential revolutionary parties. Instead, what has occurred is the role of mass struggles that often only have very vague aims and objectives. The result of this situation is that the possible potential of the mass movements to be able to generate the prospect of radical change has not been realised. Instead, the struggles often decline without being able to achieve their objectives in a successful manner. In this context the problem of the development of an effective and principled relationship between the socialist parties and the various mass struggles is not established in a fruitful and effective manner. Indeed, often the parties remain irrelevant and the spontaneity of the mass movements is what characterises their activity. Therefore, the issue of the development of an interaction of party and class is a problem which has in the contemporary period not been resolved in an effective manner. Instead, the spontaneous character of the mass movements means that they often have an increasingly aimless character, and the result is the eventual decline or even defeat of these mass struggles. Therefore, the question of how to develop effective and popular revolutionary parties is a problem that has not been resolved because of the apparent insignificance of these organisations. But this issue is not addressed by Lotz and Feldman who instead assume in a dogmatic manner that the type of political perspective that they are advocating can acquire mass support because of its superior and principled character. But such assumptions cannot be made given the continual difficulties involved in trying to develop popular and effective revolutionary organisations. Instead in an idealist manner it is assumed that the apparently superior perspective of Lotz and Feldman will at some inevitable support result in the development of mass support for this perspective. However, this perspective is actually an assumption that lacks credible justification. Indeed, the difficulties involved in the successful development of revolutionary parties in the recent period is an indication that they underestimate the complexities involved in trying to create an influential socialist party. But it can also be suggested that this dogmatic assumption of the possibility to create a successful and popular revolutionary party is also the major limitation of the other Marxist organisations. They all seem to assume that at some undefined situation in the future that the people will begin to support them. In this context the various groups assume that a revival of the class struggle will result in the possibility for them to become popular and important political organisations. But the difficulties involved in trying to achieve the success of this objective are continually underestimated, and this includes the standpoint of Lotz and Feldman. Instead, we have to suggest that only when the groups become genuinely democratic and so are able to develop an appeal for the people will it become possible to establish that the problems involved in the creation of genuine revolutionary parties is beginning to be resolved. But even if an effective and mass revolutionary party is eventually created this would not mean that the potential for the successful realisation of socialism has become inevitable. Instead, the very character of social reality is based on a complexity that means it is dogmatic to assert that the ultimate realisation of socialism is inevitable. The complexity of society means that the aspect of the successful attainment of socialism depends on the outcome of developments within the class struggle. Hence the assumption of inevitable success of Lotz and Feldman is a dogmatic perspective that has often been falsified by the very complexity of the character of social reality. But the rigid approach being justified means that the importance of the complex character of society is generally being underestimated and the result is the assumption that socialism is inevitable.

However, this optimistic conception of the process of transition to socialism seems to be contradicted in the chapter of the book by Lotz and Feldman on the issue of ideology. They suggest that the dominant ideology of the capitalist system upholds the view that capitalism is the natural economic and political system and so the possibility of a genuine alternative is not feasible. Thus, the objective of revolutionary change cannot be successful in achieving a type of society that could be a viable alternative to capitalism. They conclude that: “Corporate globalisation has produced an all-pervasive, all-consuming ideology. A single view – that of the virtues of so-called free market capitalism – now dominates to the exclusion of all others in political and social consciousness. This ideology has incorporated into itself or obliterated what might have been considered oppositional outlooks that, while never challenging the fundamentals of the system, put forward alternative ways of doing things. Views that challenge capitalism are brushed aside by politicians, the media and the academics.” (p307-308) Thus it would seem that the defenders of the present system have an invincible ideological hegemony in relation to the apparent ability to convince people about the superiority of the system. This also implies that the supporters of socialism have not been able to promote this objective in a popular and effective manner. But it also has to be indicated that this ideological hegemony of the defenders of capitalism has been because they have realised important victories in the class struggle. The result of this situation in which the balance of class forces seems to favour the interests of capital means that it has been possible to suggest in a convincing manner that the possibility to realise a society that is not based on the principles of capital accumulation is not feasible. However, if there were success for the workers in the class struggle this would result in the development of the understanding that socialism could be a feasible and practical possibility. Thus, in order to develop increased support for the aim of socialism it is necessary to try and elaborate a perspective that would result in victories for the workers in the class struggle. In this manner the aim of socialism would begin to be conceived as a realistic possibility. But it has been because of defeats for the workers in the class struggle that the aim of an alternative type of society does not seem to be a feasible possibility. The fact that the balance of class forces favours the interests of the capitalist system seems to suggest that the possibility of radical change is too difficult to realise. In other words, the supremacy of the capitalist class in relation to the developments in the class struggle means that the popular influence of radical alternatives begins to decline. This is why developing the popularity of the aim of socialism has to be connected to the elaboration of a perspective that would facilitate the possibility for victories of the workers in the class struggle. In this manner it would no longer seem to be not feasible to aspire to realise an alternative and progressive type of society because the workers would be able to increase their strength and sense of solidarity by achieving success in the class struggle.

But instead of outlining this perspective and programme for the advance of the workers in the class struggle the authors essentially suggest that the major tasks involved in developing the increased influence of a revolutionary approach is philosophical: “Patently we need a philosophy that is capable of challenging capitalist ideas and philosophies. The struggles that erupt spontaneously against capitalism cannot by themselves lead to fundamental change. If they could, they would have done so by now. Systems of thinking that predominate under capitalism are part of their weaponry and are based on the preservation of the status quo. They do not in themselves prevent people from struggling. But they do play a key role in helping the ruling class to withstand and ultimately incorporate these conflicts while retaining power. We need a philosophy, a theory of knowledge, that is wholly independent of the status quo and its outlook in order to win a living, complex, high stakes conflict.” (p312) But the aspect of a philosophical standpoint is not the major aspect of the generation of the process of support for a revolutionary approach. The role of a dialectical materialist philosophy can only be an aspect of the creation of the increased influence of a revolutionary socialist approach within the working class. What has to be of primary importance is the necessity to develop the role of a programme for the victory of the workers in the class struggle. Obviously dialectical materialism can have an important ideological role in outlining the dynamic character of material and social reality and so establishing that change is an important aspect of the processes of transformation that define the possibilities for revolutionary development. Thus, dialectical materialism is an important aspect of the ideological expression of the objectives of socialism, but it cannot be the most significant expression of a revolutionary approach. Instead, what is the primary necessity is to develop support for a revolutionary programme for the transformation of capitalism into socialism. In developing the influence of this type of approach it will be possible to create an important sense of class consciousness within the workers and so generate increased popular confidence that it is possible to change society by the role of mass action. However, in contrast dialectical materialism as a philosophy cannot have this practical role and instead it is an approach that is most important in convincing people that reality is dynamic and so can be changed by the role of mass action. This means that dialectical materialism is not the most important aspect of the character of a revolutionary consciousness and instead can contribute in a secondary manner to the justification of the approach of principled socialism. What is of primary importance is the necessity to convince workers that the expression of the role of class struggle can ultimately achieve socialism, and so in this manner realise the aspirations of the workers for a more equal and just type of society. This means that what is actually of primary importance is to develop popular support for a programme of action that will create the prospect for the role of class struggle to become transformed into the possibility for the transformation of capitalist society into socialism. But such an understanding does not mean that the role of an action programme is of exclusive importance in relation to the development of support for the aims of socialism. Instead, it is essentially the aspect that has most significance in relation to the development of revolutionary class consciousness. In other words, there are many different aspects involved in the attempt to convince people of the necessity and emancipatory character of the aim of socialism. Indeed, this means that a conception of what is meant by socialism has to be elaborated by the Marxists in a popular and convincing manner. Thus, what is of primary ideological importance is to try and convince people that capitalism is not an invincible system that cannot be effectively challenged and replaced with a socialist alternative. In this manner the role of a dialectical materialist philosophy has an important role in trying to convince people that change can be a dynamic aspect of reality that is explained as matter in motion. However, what is of primary importance is to try and convince people that capitalism is not an invincible system that cannot be effectively challenged and replaced. The most important aspect of bourgeois ideology is the view that history has ended with the supremacy of capitalism. Thus, the most important theoretical task of Marxism is to indicate that the social contradictions of a system of economic exploitation has resulted in the possibility of class struggle that can result in the realisation of a socialist alternative. Hence the development of a programme of class struggle is one of the most important tasks of the Marxist party. But this task should not be defined in terms of the rejection of the necessity to outline the philosophical and historical materialist aspects of the Marxist approach. Instead, these aspects can be of importance when trying to convince people about the credibility and feasibility of the aims of Marxism. Nevertheless, what will generally be of primary significance about the possibility to develop popular support for the Marxist approach will be whether our programme for the development of the class struggle seems to be convincing and credible to people. In this context Marxists should not try to underestimate the importance of the difficulties involved in trying to develop popular support for what presently seem to be small and insignificant Marxist groups. The point is that the importance of the influence of bourgeois ideology seem to be significant in explaining why the capitalist system is presently not being challenged in effective terms. However, Lotz and Feldman instead suggest in vague terms that the elaboration of Marxist philosophy in convincing terms will somehow resolve these problems. This is a dogmatic perspective that underestimates the complexities involved in the development of successful Marxist parties.

The authors consider that the character of contemporary capitalism can be defined as global capitalism: “Capitalist globalisation is not an ephemeral and transitory phenomenon that stems from thoughts and ideas, or the particular policies of specific capitalists or politicians. Instead, globalisation represents the present structural development, or social being of the system within the imperialist stage of world capitalism. The essential economic component of globalisation is today expressed by the competitive and contradictory domination of transnational capital. This is the result of the transformation of national monopoly and finance capital.” (p327) We can agree with this observation in general terms it must be understood that this very change is actually often obscured by the continued importance and influence of the role of nationalism which seems to imply that the structural character of capitalism has not changed in the recent period. Indeed, the character of global capital is indicated by the fact that the aspect of capital accumulation within nations is defined by the objectives established by international organisations like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Thus, it would be most precise to suggest that there is a process of interaction between the national and global aspect of capitalism. The world economy establishes the criteria by which the process of capital accumulation occurs. Lotz and Feldman seem to be right to criticise Alex Callinicos for underestimating the importance of the development of the global economy, and they consider that he adapts to the reformist and activist logic of the anti-capitalist movement which seemed to suggest that by the methods of protest it could seriously undermine the continuation of the global capitalist system: “In other words, he sees the consciousness of the need to challenge capitalism as a system arising spontaneously out of the struggles or practical activity on this or that issue. Callinicos maintains that the “logic” of the anti-capitalist movement can resolve strategic questions because capital is ultimately not a structure. It is rather an expression of a policy that can be challenged or even overcome by the application of enough mass pressure.” (p329) But the problem is that this criticism does not establish what should be an alternative and more effective perspective for the development of economic change. The point is that Callinicos is right to indicate the importance of the mass movements against aspects of global capital. In this context it is necessary to advocate that these struggles become transformed into the expression of a conscious attempt to establish an emancipatory type of society. In other the problem is not with the protests, but instead that they fail to advocate a credible perspective for ending the domination of capitalism. But Lotz and Feldman are dogmatic because their emphasis on being critical about the views of Callinicos means that they seem to suggest that the anti-capitalist movement is essentially futile and unrealistic. Instead, it is necessary to engage with the anti-capitalist forms of struggle in order to attempt to promote the increased influence and importance of the standpoint of a revolutionary perspective of mass struggle in order to achieve the possibility to make progress towards the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Hence the problem is not the activism of the anti-capitalist movement but instead its perspective of the necessity to transform capitalism into becoming more progressive. However, does this criticism mean that we should reject a perspective of reforms in a total manner. Not necessarily. Rather we should only criticise a programme of reforms if they become the justification of the rejection of the necessity and importance of an overall revolutionary perspective for the transformation of society. Instead, it could be argued that the winning of reforms could become the basis to develop the very importance and increased influence of the revolutionary perspective that it is necessary to transform capitalism into socialism. In this manner the realisation of measures of ecological conservation within capitalism could become important as an indication of the possibility to make progress towards the achievement of socialism.

Lotz and Feldman suggest that the approach of Callinicos adopts the standpoint of reformist perspective of change: “The strategic question that obviously arises is how is it possible to prevent the logic of capital from integrating these reformist demands into itself? There is no objectively valid strategic answer to this problem. Instead, he can only outline the moral/ethical criteria of the programme of the new left reformist government.” (p330) But Callinicos could reply that the introduction of reforms could become the basis to undermine the power of capital if based on the dynamic importance of the influence of a mass movement. The crucial aspect is the development of a genuine relationship between the people and a principled left-wing government that enables a process of radical change to occur. In this manner the situation becomes more favourable to the possibility of developing a successful process of change to socialism. However, Feldman and Lotz suggest that this approach is unprincipled and unviable because the importance of ending the domination of global capital is replaced with a perspective of limited change as the basis to establish a dynamic of the transformation of society. But they suggest that this approach is not feasible and effective because the primary necessity to end the domination of capital over labour has become compromised by the perspectives of Callinicos. They conclude that: “His conception contains nothing on the importance of overcoming the TNC’s as a strategic aim of labour. Indeed, Callinicos has essentially replaced the class struggle of capital and labour with that of struggle between the nation state and the people. This formulation suggests that the nation state can be pressured and transformed into meeting the objectives of the mass struggles of the people. The objectives of the working class are effectively dissolved into the mass abstract democracy of the people.” (p331) Even if we accept that there is some justification of the criticism of the perspectives of Callinicos, it would still be rigid and dogmatic to reject any development of a process of reformist type change of capitalism. The point is do these reforms contribute to the genuine development of the increased influence and power of the workers within capitalist society? If the workers organise in a powerful and effective manner they can bring about changes that the bourgeois governments may have not wanted to introduce such as the eight hour day and the increased influence of the trade unions in the organisation of production. These possibilities means that we cannot define reforms as inherently expressing the interests of capital or the alternative possibility of increasing the power of the workers within the economy. Instead, any reform of the economic system has to be evaluated on its merits and in that manner opinions can be made as to whether they essentially contribute to the development of capitalism or alternatively represent the possibility to increase the influence of the workers within the economy. Hence it is necessary to reject a dogmatic opposition to reforms because it could be argued that they only contribute to the consolidation of the capitalist system. Instead, reforms of a popular character could express the potential for the realisation of a socialist type of economy. For example, the formation of the National Health Service indicated how a socialist type of economy based on the needs of the people could be established. Indeed, this development could have become the basis to establish a different and progressive type of economy. But the reformist limitations of the Labour government meant that this possibility was not realised. The point is that the aim of socialism has not been unrealistic and instead at various times the possibility to achieve this aim has been indicated by the possibilities of mass struggles. However there has been the continual problem of a failure to connect the importance of the class struggle with the apparent feasibility of the aim of socialism. The result has been the expression of a reformist consciousness that still accepts the continuation of capitalism. Hence the perspective of socialism has remained vague and is often only advocated by small parties of Marxists. In general terms the objective of socialism has not been connected to the role and dynamics of class struggle.

However, it could be argued that Lotz and Feldman underestimate the importance of these problems with their confident conclusion about the possibility to realise socialism in the contemporary era: “The conditions for revolutionary change are emerging day by day as the contradictions of life under global capitalism pile up and reach breaking point. In Britain, the history of past struggles and sacrifices, achievements, victories and defeats are with us. We can and will walk in the footsteps of the peasant’s revolt, the struggle of the Levellers during the English revolution, the Chartists who fought for the vote and built a national convention outside Parliament. The 1880s saw the formation of mass trade unions, followed by the sacrifices of the Suffragettes to achieve votes for women. The building of the Labour party, the sacrifice of ordinary people in two imperialist world wars, the building of the welfare state, the bitter struggles against Thatcherism and de-industrialisation and now against the market state and its foreign wars for global corporate interests all go up to make an inspiring history which will serve us well as we set out to overturn the old order.”(p349-350) But it could be suggested that this confident prediction of possible revolutionary and social change still underestimates the complexities involved in the attempt to create a different type of society. Primarily the various Marxist groups are small and without influence and the ideological importance of a revolutionary approach is still marginal. It has proved to be very difficult to create a popular and principled Marxist party that was able to advocate a revolutionary perspective in an effective and resolute manner. Instead, it often seems that it is very difficult to create the political conditions that would make radical change possible. Therefore, it could be argued that Lotz and Feldman do not tackle the difficulties involved in developing a successful process of revolutionary change. To some extent they are aware of the challenges involved in the attempt to realise social transformation, but these issues are still not tackled in a detailed and effective manner. But despite these problems they have still made a useful contribution to the literature of Marxist theory.