WHAT IS A CREDIBLE PROGRAMME OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE?

Most of the Trotskyist groups have promoted a programme for revolutionary change based on their interpretation of Trotsky’s transitional programme. This means that what is being advocated is the development of various forms of mass struggle that will ultimately result in the possibility of social change. But the actual history of contemporary capitalism has not expressed this prospect and instead it seems that most people accept the domination of the present economic system. In other words, one of the most important tasks for Marxists is to develop an approach that would aim to address the reasons why people consider that capitalism is a system that cannot be challenged and transformed in an effective manner. This means that a programme of revolutionary Marxism would have to address the reasons why people consider that capitalism cannot be undermined and as a result transformed in radical terms. But this is the very issue that is not addressed by the various programmes of the Marxist groups. Indeed, the parties also ignore their present insignificance and instead assume that at some moment in the future people will begin to support their various programmes for revolutionary change. However, this expectation is not realised and instead the capitalist system seems to be increasingly stabilised because of the continued support of the people for the various political parties that support the present system. For example, many workers in the UK have become followers of the Conservative party because of its adoption of a populist perspective. In contrast the various Marxist groups seem to increasingly decline and seem to be unable to develop any type of popular support. But despite this situation they still advocate revolutionary programmes for the development of mass action which they expect will be realised at some moment in the future. The promotion of these apparently illusorily approaches means that the various groups do not address the issue of their increasing irrelevance and instead they seem to dogmatically assume that at some moment in the future the people will become supporters of their specific revolutionary perspective. In other words, the very issue that the Marxist groups seem to ignore is the lack of credibility of their particular small organisation. Instead, it seems to be dogmatically assumed that the aspect of the specific insignificance of the groups will be overcome by the development of the class struggle. But the very defensive situation of the workers in relation to the present character of the class struggle means that these predictions of the creation of the popularity of the various revolutionary parties does not occur. Instead, the marginalisation of the Marxist groups continues, and this situation seems to call into question the very validity and practicality of these parties. Given this serious situation there does not seem to be the possibility that the Marxist groups can advocate a credible programme of change. The important point is why should people support the aims of what seem to be increasingly insignificant parties that lack any apparent possibility to develop mass popularity. However, it could be suggested in more confident terms that an expression of a possible credible programme of change would begin with these difficult aspects of the marginalisation of the Marxist organisations. In other words, the initial aspect of a programme would be based on how the Marxist party would begin the process of trying to develop increased support. But it would not be satisfactory to suggest that in some inevitable manner the very dynamics of the class struggle will somehow resolve the problem of the present insignificance of the Marxist party. Instead, the revolutionary organisations have to be able to outline convincing reasons why they can contribute to the development of possible success of the various forms of action of the types of struggle. Indeed, if struggle is not occurring, they have to be able to outline credible suggestions of how and why mass actions can be developed despite the apparent importance of an unfavourable economic and political situation in this context. But this very effectiveness of this programme of change is called into question if there is not present the role of a Marxist party that can be able to provide a relationship to the aspect of mass struggle. Indeed, this organisation would have to be able to outline a feasible perspective that could facilitate the development of various forms of popular action. But there are important reasons why this possibility is generally not realised.

The most significant reason why the promotion of a programme of change is not credible is because it is not based on a recognition of the difficulties involved in the attempt to establish progress in the class struggle. Instead, it is assumed that the collection of demands being advocated by the Marxist groups are adopted by the workers this would automatically result in progress being made in the situation concerning the realisation of militant aspirations. But the problem with this assumption is that what is being underestimated is the very determination and skill of the ruling class to oppose any aspiration of the collective role of the workers. The point is that under most circumstances the capitalist class has the power and ability to oppose in an effective manner the aspirations of the workers for even modest changes to the system. This is why it should be part of the very programme of revolutionary Marxism to have an understanding of the complex challenges posed by the attempt to make even modest progress in relation to making advances in the aims of the workers. In other words, the recent situation of the class struggle has been characterised by the offensive of capital against labour, which has been indicated by the importance of the policy of economic austerity. Therefore, it has been difficult to make even modest gains by the workers and instead the period has increasingly been expressed by the undermining of the influence of the trade unions within society. The problem has been that it has been difficult to develop the credibility and feasibility of a programme for the immediate defence of the interests of the workers in this situation. Instead, it seems that the forces of capital have an almost absolute power and capacity to be able to impose their objectives onto a seemingly powerless working class. This situation would seem to imply that the immediate and urgent priority is to develop a perspective of how to realise the defensive aims of the workers in this situation of the offensive of capital. But this task is not being carried out by the Marxist groups because of a preference for the development of programmes of action that seem to have no relation to actual developments in the class struggle. However, this apparent dogmatism of the Marxist organisations means that they advocate programmes that seem to have little relation to the actual situation and challenges of the immediate class struggle. Instead in abstract terms the various programmes of the revolutionary groups are based on traditional theory, such as being an essential reproduction of Trotsky’s transitional programme, rather than being an expression of an attempt to tackle the issues posed by the contemporary class struggle. Therefore, it is not surprising that the various programmes make no attempt to tackle the issue of the increasing support of the workers for forms of populism that are based on the rejection of the objectives of international socialism. Indeed, it can be concluded that the issue of ideology is not tackled by the various revolutionary programmes and instead the dogmatic assumption is made about being in a pre-revolutionary situation with the potential for the immediate development of challenges to the domination of capitalism. This type of understanding has little to do with the actual situation in which the forces of capital seem to have been able to go onto the offensive against labour. In other words, it is necessary to develop a credible programme for the class struggle based on the actual situation of the offensive of capital against labour rather than justify an imaginary situation of a more favourable development of the supposed imminent development of militant struggles. The point is that only when the forces of labour are able to make defensive gains against capital will it be possible to even conceive of the promotion of a more ambitious perspective of offensive forms of mass struggle. In this context the immediate programmatic development is to outline to the workers the difficult challenges posed by what has been a successful imposition of an offensive of capital based on the imposition of the approach of austerity. Hence clarity has to be established about the present situation and any illusions about an imminently mobilising working class against capital has to be rejected. Instead, what has to be developed has to be a recognition of the necessity of a perspective of defensive struggle. The very gains of the workers have to be upheld against the attempt of the forces of capital to continue to undermine these aspects of the interests of the people.

In other words what would seem to be an important task in the present is to facilitate the development of the collective role of the workers to able to defend the gains that have been made under capitalism, such as upholding the importance of the trade unions and the influence that the producers have been able to realise within the present economic system. Hence it is necessary to oppose the attempts of the forces of capital to develop absolute economic power within the workplace. This means the importance of the trade unions to be able to intervene in order to uphold their interests has to be maintained and consolidated. This means opposing the attempts of the capitalist class to utilise the policy of austerity in order to undermine the influence of the workers and trade unions within the relations of production. Only success in terms of these defensive tasks would enable the workers to be able to undermine the attempts of capital to enhance its domination within the relations of production. The development of the possibility of the workers to oppose the aims of capital in this situation of austerity economics would begin to change the balance of class forces within the process of production in favour of the workers. The success of these defensive tasks would create the ideological conditions which would mean that more ambitious and offensive perspectives could begin to be advocated by the revolutionary forces. But presently the success of the capitalist class in its ability to impose austerity economics and politics means that the balance of class forces is not in favour of the advocacy of more ambitious and offensive demands. The overall result of the present situation is the imposition of a policy that facilitates the continued undermining of the importance of the workers within the relations of production. This means that the various Marxist groups are demoralised by this situation and so they are unable to promote the role of an effective perspective of class struggle. It would seem that the supporters of the capitalist system have established an invincible situation that seems to imply that it is very difficult to oppose its continued domination. The result of this situation is the effective political crisis of the Marxist groups who do not seem able to promote a credible programme for the workers. But what this situation actually indicates is the necessity to modify the perspectives of the Marxist groups. The orthodox assumption that the advocacy of what are defined as transitional demands in order to generate mass struggle and the possibility of revolutionary change has been shown by events to be a dogmatic perspective. Instead, what is immediately apparent is the necessity for the workers to concentrate on the defensive tasks of trying to maintain the gains that have been made within the capitalist system. In order that success is realised in these terms requires that the objective of capital to intensify the process of exploitation of labour has to be opposed in a more effective manner. This means that the workers have to recognise the aspects of the perspective of capital and so establish a policy in order to defend the gains of labour. If the workers are not successful in this context the basis to intensify the process of exploitation within the relations of production will have been advanced and so the forces of labour will become weaker and less able to oppose the objectives of capital. In other words, transitional demands that connect immediate objectives of the class struggle to the aim of the overthrow of capitalism are not of immediate relevance. Instead, what is of importance is the necessity to oppose the attempt of capital to establish an undisputed domination within the relations of production. In this context the very importance of the role of the trade unions is being called into question by the increasing supremacy of capital within the relations of production. Therefore, the trade unions have to defend their importance in the economy and to support defensive objectives that enable them to realise this aim. In this context the role of the revolutionary party is to outline policies that express the possibility to develop the collective significance of the workers and in this manner oppose the attempts of capital to intensify its exploitation of labour. Without success in this context, it will be dogmatic to advocate a programme of class struggle that is not connected to an understanding of the importance of the necessity to achieve initial victories in these defensive tasks.

In other words, the major problem with the various programmes of many of the left groups is that they are not connected to the importance of the balance of class forces. Instead demands and objectives are raised in a timeless and absolute manner that are not related to the aspect of the present relations between capital and labour. This means that demands for the development of the class struggle tend to be absolute and timeless and not connected to the actual situation of the corresponding strengths or weaknesses of the workers. In the present context of the offensive of capital what is of prime importance is to develop a perspective for the defence of the interests of labour. But the dogmatic optimism of many of the Marxist groups means that this issue does not seem to be understood in a credible manner. What actually results is the effective irrelevance of the Marxist parties in relation to the tasks of the class struggle because they seem unable to recognise the defensive character of the present economic and political situation. It is necessary to understand that without the victory of the workers with regards to defensive tasks the possibility of offensive developments will be seriously undermined. This means that recognising the importance of the present role of the defensive is not the justification of imposing limitations of the scope of the class struggle. Quite the opposite. Instead, only success with regards to defensive issues will enable the possibility of the process of movement to more offensive objectives to become a more credible prospect. But this understanding does not seem to be understood by the Marxist groups that instead outline ambitious programmes of revolutionary forms of class struggle. These perspectives are not based on recognising the importance of the balance of class forces in relation to the development of the perspective of mass struggle. Instead, what is being justified is a type of programme based on the imposition of a conception of what the given Marxist group would like to occur instead of outlining a programme based on the attempt to understand the present situation of class struggle. This means that the various programmes are an expression of subjective imagination instead of being based on an attempt to understand the present balance of forces of the class struggle. But such an approach is not helpful because it is the justification of the imposition of the aims of the revolutionary group onto the character of reality. In this manner the issue of the aspect of the balance of class forces is not being addressed in serious terms. It could be argued that this issue of subjectivism seems to be a general problem that influences the policies of most groups. The result is a collection of programmes that do not attempt to connect their aims to a serious understanding of the balance of class forces. It could be suggested that the above approach is a justification of pessimism with regards to the possibilities of class struggle, but we would suggest that it is necessary to outline the most objective understanding of the importance of the balance of the class forces in relation to establishing a programme of action. It is the failure to realise this type of criteria which means that most of the programmes of the various Marxist groups are the justification of an over-confident stance that is often undermined by the actual aspects of the class struggle. In other words, it is not being pessimistic to establish in the most perspective and consistent manner the difficult character of the present tasks of the class struggle. Only in these terms will it be possible to develop a programme of action that is based on the actual class struggle rather than being an idealist imposition onto reality. The failure to develop this type of credible programme means that the various groups tend to justify a perspective based on how they would like things to occur rather than being based on a genuinely honest understanding of the balance of class forces. This is why it could be suggested that the various Marxist groups have an approach that is based on the projection of aspirations onto the character of social reality. The result of this situation is that they seem unable to appreciate the importance of the actual difficulties of the class struggle. This means that disappointment and demoralisation become the expression of this imposition of the role of imagination onto reality. Such a situation often leads to the crisis of the given Marxist groups and the development of splits and the process of the very undermining of the development of what could have been the creation of an effective Marxist party.

The problem is that the various Marxist organisations tend to underestimate the importance of the problems created by their insignificance and as a result elaborate a programme of change that has little relationship to this unfavourable situation. In other words what is being ignored is the issue of how to create a popular and credible revolutionary party that would be able to relate to the class struggle in terms of an effective intervention. Instead, it seems that the various small Marxist groups are essentially irrelevant in political terms and so are unable to interact with the workers in terms of the promotion of a programme of social change. Therefore, it would seem that the initial task is to try and create one united revolutionary party that would be able to promote the importance of and agreed programme for making progress in the class struggle. But it has to also be suggested that the credibility of this perspective would be established in terms of its recognition of the very difficulties involved in trying to achieve success in relation to the aspect of attempting to undermine the domination of capital. But this aspect is ignored and instead programmes are developed and advocated that seem to have little relationship to the difficulties of the class struggle. Primarily the very importance of the marginalisation of the various Marxist parties is ignored and instead it is assumed in dogmatic terms that they can become popular as a result of the inevitable vindication of their programmes because of an assumed understanding that they will become influential in relation to establishing a connection to the dynamics of the class struggle. Obviously, this is the aim of the promotion of any revolutionary programme, but the point is that there is no inevitable development of its popular credibility. Instead, the workers have to become convinced that the programme is the most convincing expression of their interests. In other words, in order to achieve popular support, the programme has to establish the importance of the necessity to defend and uphold the immediate interests of the workers. But this is the very aspect that is often neglected and ignored by the Marxist groups in relation to their elaboration of a programme of change. In this context it would be necessary for the programme to outline a strategy of how to oppose the attempt of capital and bourgeois governments to impose austerity and the subordination of the workers to this objective. This means that it is necessary to promote a strategy of defensive struggle in order to express the possibility for the workers to be able to develop collective and effective opposition to the attempt to impose austerity. Instead, they will in a limited but principled manner aspire to reject cuts in government expenditure and will attempt to uphold the interests of the public sector such as the role of an effective national health service. In reply to the view that this approach is limited and inadequate it is necessary to indicate that the success of this approach will actually express the aspect of dual power within society. The workers and the trade unions will in an effective manner have an influence in relation to the character and objectives of government policy. Hence the attempt to defend the principles of the welfare state is not merely a limited standpoint but instead also expresses the importance of the influence of the workers within society. Without the success of this defensive role, it would not be possible in the future to adopt a more offensive and ambitious political stance. Indeed, this defensive task is connected to establishing genuine influence over government policy, and so in this manner an aspect of dual power is being expressed. The workers and the trade unions will be indicating that they do not passively accept government policy and instead are attempting to establish their influence concerning how this aspect is being expressed and realised. In this context the workers are also trying to maintain the principles of the welfare state despite the attempt by the ruling class to undermine this aspect because of the role of austerity. The effective defence of the welfare state is an important aspect of a revolutionary approach because this aspect represents the influence of the working class within society. Only success in this context can enable the possibility for progress to more offensive and ambitious aims to become realistic. But it could be suggested that general failure in this task has meant that it has become more difficult to develop a process of effective mass struggle to promote the realisation of the aim of a socialist society. Hence, there is nothing moderate or cautious about the objective of defence of the welfare state. On the contrary, success in this context will enable more ambitious struggle for revolutionary change to become feasible.

In other words, the welfare state represents the expression of the interests of the workers within capitalist society. It is a gain that has to be defended in militant terms. But the successful imposition of austerity has undermined this possibility and instead resulted in public expenditure cuts that have led to the erosion of the role of the welfare state. The very problems involved in the development of a defensive form of class struggle to uphold the principles of the welfare state has meant that the balance of class forces increasing favours the interests of capital rather than labour. This situation indicates that there is nothing moderate or limited about defensive struggles. On the contrary they have to be waged in effective terms if the balance of class forces is to be to the advantage of the workers and not capital. But it is the failures in this context which has enabled the aims of capital to be realised without the development of credible opposition. Only the success of defensive struggles will mean that the workers can establish the necessary confidence and increasing level of power and influence that will enable them to possibly go onto the offensive in the future. Therefore, it cannot be suggested that there is something limited and moderate about defensive struggles. On the contrary the success of defensive struggles can change the balance of class forces in favour of the interests of the workers and so enable the possibility to develop more offensive forms of mass activity. It has been the vey inability to develop defensive forms of mass action which has enabled the capitalist class to achieve important victories in the class struggle. In this context it can be suggested that the very lack of a credible defensive strategy has enabled the ruling class to achieve forms of reactionary progress that have undermined the role of the welfare state. Only the declining influence of the working class still ensures that the welfare state has not been entirely undermined. Hence the aim should be to advocate what could become a popular perspective of defence of the welfare state. There is nothing moderate or limited about this approach. Instead, such an objective could become the basis to renew the importance of class struggle. Only success in this context would change the balance of class forces within society in favour of the interests of the workers. In these terms the economic and political conditions would be created for a process of political transition to the advocacy of a transitional programme in which the demands raised would indicate the importance of the revolutionary transformation of society. But it would be abstract and dogmatic to raise transitional demands before the balance of class forces has changed that would make them increasingly credible. Instead, the present adverse situation in which the workers are on the defensive means that the most realistic aims are connected to the attempt to maintain the gains that have been made within capitalist society. Only success in this context would enable the perspective of transitional demands to acquire a genuine potential for their realisation. This point is often not understood by any dogmatic Trotskyist groups that do not seem to recognise the importance of the balance of class forces when outlining an action programme for the class struggle. But the point is that a sustained period of austerity has expressed the success of the forces of capital in the class struggle. This has meant the influence of the workers has been undermined in capitalist society. Consequently, what is called for is a programme of defensive struggle to uphold the role of the welfare state, or at least to end the continuation of austerity. But the very dogmatism of the various Trotskyist groups does not seem to recognise these issues, and the result is they justify abstract programmes of change that are not connected to a credible understanding of the character of the present economic and political situation. This means that in idealist terms the aspiration for change is imposed on the situation in a dogmatic manner and the importance of the present balance of class forces is not considered to be a significant aspect of the development of political perspectives. The result of this dogmatism is the justification of forms of idealism in which the various groups impose a perspective onto reality based on what they would like the situation to be rather than being a credible expression of an understanding of the importance of the balance of class forces.

In other words, the aspect of the situation of the importance of the class struggle is crucial for the possibility to develop a feasible perspective of change. The present situation has been characterised by the effective offensive of capital against labour in terms of the imposition of the role of austerity. However, the workers have been unable to oppose this development because of the lack of an effective defensive strategy in order to try to uphold the gains expressed by the role of the welfare state. In this context the various revolutionary organisations have not been helpful because they have not advocated a perspective that attempts to defend the gains of the workers in this situation. Instead, they have tended to be disorientated by the various important aspects of this offensive of capital against labour. The result of this inability to outline a perspective that is based on the actual situation as it actually is expressed by empirical developments means that various imaginary type perspectives are being promoted that have no effective connection to the actual defensive character of the present class struggle. In other words, the immediate task is to develop activity to defend the gains of the workers in the post-war period, and the issue of an attempt to express a revolutionary struggle for political power is not generally relevant. But the problem of what has become an adverse balance of power is not understood by many of the Marxist groups who continue to promote a programme of class struggle that is not connected to actual developments. In other words, they impose a programme based on what they would like the situation to be instead of relating policies to the present aspect of often unfavourable balance of class forces. The point is that unless the workers succeed in relation to these defensive tasks the prospect of advancing to a higher level of class struggle is difficult to envisage. This recognition of the problems of the present situation is not an accommodation to pessimism but instead is the contrasting acceptance of an understanding of the issue of an unfavourable balance of class forces. Since 1980 the various bourgeois governments have been able to impose an austerity policy on a defeated working class. The political organisations of social democracy have often assisted in the realisation of this approach. Often the trade unions have been defeated in the attempt to uphold the interests of the workers. In this context the labour movement has become demoralised and has begun to accept the imposition of austerity economics. But the various left-wing groups have not understood the challenges of this situation because of the idealist projection of an imaginary conception of what is occurring instead of relating to actual developments in the class struggle. However, the Socialist Workers Party would claim that their concept of the downturn was able to explain these developments of a balance of forces that favoured the interests of capital. But they arbitrarily rejected their own perspective despite the serious defeats of the miners in 1984-85 because of what they perceived as a revival of class struggle in the late 1980’s. In these subjective and superficial terms, they attempted to gloss over the importance of an adverse balance of class forces and instead considered any expression of militancy as the revival of the class struggle. This meant that in the justification of a new optimistic perspective the actual difficulties of the development of mass struggle became minimised. Thus, the one-sided defeatism of the downturn perspective was replaced with the shallow optimism of an approach that underestimated the importance of the development of a balance of class forces that favoured the interests of capital. In these subjective terms the defensive tasks of the working class were not understood. But the other groups did not promote a more principled and superior approach because they tended to outline versions of the transitional programme, like Workers Power, which was not actually related to the importance of the aspect of the balance of class forces. What was not understood was that the successful defence of the gains of the welfare state by the workers would have represented a victory that would have created the economic and political conditions for a revival of more ambitious forms of class struggle. But these issues did not seem to be understood by the various left-wing groups which tended to impose a conception of social reality in terms of their idealist expectations rather than developing a more serious understanding of the tasks posed by the actual balance of class forces.

The point is that an offensive of the forces of capital has occurred in the last forty years in order to undermine the influence of labour within the economy. This has resulted in a change in the balance of economic power in favour of the interests of capital. In this situation even the right to belong to a trade union has been undermined. Hence it is not feasible to advocate an offensive of labour against capital. Instead, it is necessary to outline a defensive programme of action that would rally the forces of the workers in defence of their gains, especially the attempt to maintain important aspects of the welfare state. This objective would primarily mean the attempt to maintain the remaining aspects of the public sector and the National Health Service. These aspects, whatever their bureaucratic limitations, express the political economy of labour within the capitalist system. Indeed, this point is understood by the parties of the ruling class, which is why they are acting to end the role of nationalisation within the economy. But the problem has been that the trade union leaders have refused to advocate a policy for the defence of the remaining aspects of the public sector and instead have tried to uphold an approach of accommodation with the parties of the ruling class. This is why it is necessary to strive to democratise the trade unions so that they can become more responsive to the aspirations of their members. Obviously, such developments would not mean that the trade unions would be able to achieve inevitable success in the class struggle, but at least the conditions would be created in order to make these organisations more accountable to their members. The point being made is that it is necessary to try and establish the conditions that would make defensive victories possible in this situation of the sustained offensive of capital against labour. It is necessary to advocate an end to austerity economics and politics, and to instead call for the revival of the importance of the welfare state. Some Marxists might suggest that this is a limited approach that is not based on the development of the role of a revolutionary struggle against the forces of capital. But the point is that success in relation to these defensive tasks would create the economic and political conditions for a possible more ambitious struggle against the domination of capital. However, the situation of the continued decline of the importance of the influence of the workers within the economy is undermining the possibility to develop the generation of effective forms of mass struggle to uphold the interests of labour. This adverse situation indicates the importance of this defensive strategy and the necessity to organise to act to defend the gains that have been made within capitalist society. Only progress in this context will enable the development of the conditions to promote the importance of a more offensive strategy against the domination of capital. But the influence of this approach will be undermined if there is no effective revolutionary party able to advocate this type of perspective. This is why the aspect of the generation of the importance of this defensive approach is connected to the development of an increasingly effective and influential revolutionary party. Therefore, the splits between what are presently rival parties can only undermine the generation of the influence of this strategy of class struggle. This is why the various groups should at least form an alliance in order to promote the role of this defensive perspective. They should develop the arguments that would attempt to convince the workers of the necessity of greater levels of organisation in order to act to try and maintain the importance of defensive tasks such as the attempt to uphold the role of what remains of the welfare state. Only success in regard to this objective would create the conditions that would enable more offensive forms of class struggle to become effective. It has been failures in relation to these defensive tasks that has enabled capital to go onto the offensive in order to undermine the importance of the remaining gains of labour. This is why a defensive strategy is not a self-limiting and moderate approach but is instead based on an understanding of the tasks posed by the present balance of class forces. Only success in relation to these defensive issues will begin to change the balance of class forces in favour of the workers. This is why defensive tasks is not an expression of self-limitation in relation to the role of the class struggle but instead an expression of how to change the balance of class forces into a situation more advantageous to labour.

But presently the possibility to develop the influence of this type of perspective is undermined by the sectarian divisions of the various revolutionary groups. This is why we would advocate that they form an alliance in order to promote this defensive policy. The unity of the groups in these terms would mean that it was possible to develop support for what was an agreed policy for the advancement of the interests of the workers in the class struggle. There would be no necessity for the groups to discuss their differences of an historical character such as concerning the history of the Fourth International. Instead, they could unite in support of a minimum programme in order to try to create progress for the workers in relation to attempting to achieve success in relation to the immediate tasks of the class struggle. What could unite these different groups would be a minimum programme for the development of effective forms of struggle of the workers in opposition to austerity and the attempt of the ruling parties to undermine the remaining aspects of the welfare state. However, the aspect of unity of the Marxist organisations would obviously generate increasing sympathy for the development of more long-term relationships. The possibilities would become increasingly apparent that the creation of a single revolutionary party was no longer an unrealistic objective. With these changes the aspect of the development of a uniform programme of a united party would seem to have become a realistic possibility. It would require the most enthusiastic supporters of unity to outline the criteria that would enhance the realisation of this type of common organisation. But these developments are unlikely to occur if the issues posed by the class struggle do not motivate the elaboration of increasingly common perspectives of mass action. If the various left wing political groups put their own defined interests above the necessity to unite the workers in relation to a perspective of struggle, then it will be very difficult to develop the potential of a programme of mass action. This is why the situation of rivalry between the left-wing parties is actually undermining the potential to generate forms of popular struggle. Therefore, the aspect of united agreement is the actual expression of an important part of how to encourage the development of mass struggle. In these terms a credible programme of defensive struggle can be elaborated and promoted. These policies will no longer be the expression of the aims of one group and so seemingly a justification of their interests but instead will become a common perspective for the development of mass struggle against austerity. It also can be suggested that the workers are more likely to respond sympathetically to the advocacy of a programme of struggle that has been agreed by a collection of political organisations. They will know that this programme does not represent the sectarian interests of a particular organisation but is instead the expression of a genuine aspiration of how to develop opposition to austerity. In this context the action programme is more likely to be sympathetically welcomed by the workers. The result is that this perspective could become a popular expression of opposition to the capitalist system.

But it could also be suggested that despite the development of mass support for this programme of defensive action that it the prospect of success is not inevitable. It is quite possible that defeat could occur, and the workers are not able to oppose the consolidation of the approach of economic austerity. But such a development does not mean that the aspect of mass struggle has been futile. Instead, the workers will understand that it is necessary to develop more effective forms of opposition to austerity. There will be some demoralisation caused by the defeats but also a recognition of the importance to develop more effective forms of mass struggle if the difficult possibility of victory is to be achieved. The point is that there is ultimately no alternative to the regeneration of forms of mass action if the possibility of success in the opposition to austerity is to be realised. In this context it will be the important role of the revolutionary parties to try to convince demoralised workers of the necessity to continue to attempt to develop forms of mass action that will be able to oppose the attempt to consolidate the implementation of the approach of austerity. Hence the revolutionary groups have an important role in upholding the credibility of programmes of mass action against the implementation of austerity.

But there is an important issue that has not yet been tackled. The various bourgeois political parties have been able to utilise the political system of general elections in an effective manner in order to provide popular legitimacy for their policies and in this manner impose the approach of austerity in what seems to be a democratic vindication of this policy. In this situation the various left-wing parties are unable to develop electoral support for their standpoint and so are unable to establish what seems to be a democratic vindication of their opposition to the attempt to oppose the imposition of austerity. Therefore, it seems that the very policies that have an anti-working-class character seem to have the political justification of being vindicated by the role of democratic elections. This situation has led to many social democratic parties reluctantly accepting the imposition of austerity because of this apparent expression of the popular will of the people. But this situation should not discourage the trade unions and socialist organisations from acting to oppose the attempt to impose austerity onto society. Instead, they should aim to initially develop the ability of generating forms of opposition to austerity such as strikes and occupation of workplaces. An important aspect of this activity will be to develop increasing popular support for this action despite the apparent lack of the prospect of obtaining an electoral majority for this standpoint. The ultimate objective of this mass action will be to undermine the credibility of the policy of austerity and to instead attempt to create the political conditions for the realisation of an alternative approach based on the possibility of an economic boom and the improvement of the material conditions of the people. In other words, the effectiveness of the militant activity of the workers will be to indicate to the political establishment that the politics of austerity has become problematical and that instead an economic boom would have become a feasible alternative in order to realise political stability. In terms of the realisation of the effectiveness of militant mass actions the workers would be attempting to change the economic policies of the establishment and in this manner creating a situation that was more favourable to their interests. This possibility of success in the class struggle indicates that it would be pessimistic and dogmatic to claim that the policies of the establishment cannot be changed by the role of popular mass actions. Instead, what is called for is the development of a strategy of activity by the workers with the aim of ending the policy of austerity. It would be pessimistic and dogmatic to claim that this perspective is not realistic and so cannot be realised. Instead, only the outcome of the intensification of class struggle will indicate what has to become the basis of the tactics of the workers. If defeat occurs, then the aim should not be to capitulate but to instead attempt to develop new tactics that could achieve the objective of ending austerity in more effective terms. The point is that capital is always susceptible to being undermined by the development of militant activity by the workers. Ultimately this understanding would imply the necessity of a general strike in order to oppose the policies of capital in the most effective manner. But if this action was to occur the opportunist influence of the trade union leaders would have to be undermined and instead the rank and file would be able to realise their aspirations in an effective manner. Thus, the democratic re-organisation of the trade unions would seem to be an important aspect of the possibility to realise the militant potential of these associations of the workers. In this context the expression of the influence of the aims of the workers would have to become effective in order to achieve the development of organisations that were more receptive to these popular aspirations. However, if the domination of the trade union bureaucracy was maintained then the possibility to realise increasing effective militant type organisations would be undermined. This situation means that the various revolutionary parties have to increase their influence in order to obtain the support of the workers for the realisation of the process of the democratic transformation of the character of the trade unions. Without this development it is not likely that the workers will act spontaneously to enhance the realisation of a more militant character to the trade unions. In other words, progress in the class struggle, even in relation to defensive tasks, requires the increased influence of the role of revolutionary parties.

But the problem is the lack of credibility and popularity of the various Marxist organisations. They are generally small parties with a traditional ideology and perspectives that is often not related to the latest developments in the political situation. This adverse situation means that the workers tend to be influenced by either reformist ideology or the increasing popularity of a populist and nationalist perspective. Consequently, the challenges of this apparently adverse situation requires that the left- wing groups should develop an approach that is based on attempting to end this domination of reactionary forms of perspectives that emphasise the importance of nation rather than class. But instead of addressing these challenges the various left groups tend to promote various forms of an activist programme that avoids trying to tackle the importance of the influence of populist ideology within the working class. It is assumed that the mass mobilisation of the workers on the basis of demands to develop the class struggle will automatically resolve these ideological issues. But what is not understood is that the very difficulties involved in trying to promote forms of mass action is connected to the increasing importance of the role of populist nationalism. In this manner the workers become mobilised in a reactionary manner in terms of support of an illusory perspective of a united national interest. Indeed, some of the left-wing parties respond to this situation in an opportunist manner by justifying a policy of rejection of the role of the European Economic community. (EEC) But this opportunism does not end the marginalisation of these parties and instead all that occurs is the development of the political crisis of these organisations. What ultimately is indicated is that the effective disorientation of these parties means that it becomes increasingly difficult to promote the aims of Marxism as having a principled character that opposes the influence of bourgeois ideology in effective terms. In other words, a genuine revolutionary programme would have to begin with the understanding that it is based on opposition to reactionary influences within the working class. An important aspect of the programme is that it is an expression of rejection of all forms of ideological aspects that undermine the development of the class consciousness of the workers. But the opportunist stance adopted with regards to opposition to the EEC is an indication that populist nationalism is considered to be compatible with a principled revolutionary approach. The fact that the EEC has aspects of genuine reforms is ignored in terms of these concessions to a nationalist standpoint. This means that a nationalist conception of class interest is adopted in order to justify this populist approach, and this suggests that the very principles of internationalism are being compromised in order to support this opportunist stance. But this opportunism is not successful because workers prefer to accept a more consistent expression of what is a genuine form of populist nationalism in terms of the role of the contemporary conservative party. This means that if this populism is to be principally opposed there is no alternative to the promotion of an internationalism which emphasises the importance of international class struggle if the aim of socialism is to be realised. The point being made is that a Marxist party has no alternative than to accept it could be unpopular by upholding an intransigent internationalist programme and perspective. Only in this manner can it oppose the influence of populism within the working class in a principled manner and so outline in explicit terms the aspects of the Marxist alternative. This approach may not be successful in the short-term but what is established is the fact that Marxism attempts to change the prevailing reactionary attitudes within the working class in order to uphold the principled character of the revolutionary approach. This form of ideological struggle can only be constructive because as a result of this intransigence the possibility to transform the views of the workers is being developed in principled terms. There may not be any immediate results but in the long term the Marxists are trying to oppose the influence of bourgeois ideology in an intransigent manner so that they can facilitate the possible development of class consciousness.

However, the possibility of success in this context is connected to the issue of the possibility to ensure the continued importance of the role of the welfare state despite the implementation of an austerity programme by various governments. If the revolutionary groups can develop support for this approach by also opposing the influence of reactionary populist nationalism it may be possible to develop forms of militant action in order to defend what still remains of the welfare state. In Britain this issue is increasingly about upholding the importance of the National Health Service, but it would also be concerned with extending the public sector and suggesting that the various nationalised enterprises should be operated in terms of the principles of workers management. If these aims, could even be partially realised, it could mean the increased realisation of the aims of socialism within a capitalist economy. But obviously if this approach is to be even partially realised it would require the development of militant action by the workers. In this context it may be appropriate to raise the demand for a collection of twenty-four hours general strikes in order to defend the aims of the development of the welfare state and also in favour of an expansion of the public sector. Ultimately the aim would be for an all-out general strike in order to oppose austerity and to establish a policy based on economic expansion and the increased role of a public sector. But this possibility would mean that the various revolutionary groups would have to unite in support of this perspective. It would be necessary to develop effective forms of propaganda that was based on the objectives of expansionism. The essential point is that the understanding that an alternative to the present situation of the domination of capital is both possible and credible. In order that a democratic type of economy is established it would be necessary to outline the reasons for this development in terms of an end to the autocratic domination of the relations of production by capital. Therefore, the very importance of defensive tasks such as opposing austerity would be ultimately connected to the attempt to establish different and genuinely progressive relations of production. But the emphasis should be on the necessity to oppose austerity because if people do not recognise the importance of this objective, they are unlikely to also become supporters of the necessity to establish a new and different type of economic and social system. What is being indicated is that the success of the ruling class in imposing austerity means that the very progressive alternatives become discredited and so are considered not to be feasible or realistic. Therefore, if it is possible to develop popular opposition to austerity the issue of progressive alternatives becomes increasingly feasible and a necessary possibility. Thus, a successful struggle against austerity will generate increasing optimism and enthusiasm about the possibility of a different type of society. But if the people are defeated in this immediate objective then it will seem that both austerity and capitalism are an inherent aspect of society that cannot be either challenged or altered. Thus, it is necessary to develop forms of militant activity by the trade unions that is based on the immediate objective of aspiring to end the policy of austerity. If various bourgeois governments could be effectively forced to end the approach of austerity this would represent an immense victory for the workers and trade unions that would then increase confidence in favour of more ambitious objectives. But the immediate task is to end the continuation of an approach that is based on the expression of the economics of depression and a decline in the level of government expenditure. It will be claimed that this approach is not realistic and that bourgeois governments will not respond to the influence of the trade unions. But the point is that the very effectiveness of militant actions could bring about a situation that bourgeois governments did not want, but they have to accept the importance of the mass activity of the people. In other words, the militancy of the workers would have changed the balance of power within society. Hence the political conditions would have been created that make the possibility of genuine political change more favourable. But the possibility to achieve this situation means that the workers initially have to develop effective forms of militant action against austerity. But such a development is presently undermined by the common assumption that austerity is an inevitable aspect of the situation. Hence the Marxist groups have to develop more effective propaganda to try and oppose the influence of this view. Only success in this context will generate the possibility of the renewal of mass struggle.

In other words, an important ideological problem is the apparent feasibility of the view that the imposition of austerity is an unavoidable and necessary expression of the serious character of the problems of the current economic situation. This standpoint suggests that there is no alternative that is practical and feasible given the necessity to introduce measures to attempt to tackle the present inability to generate consistent economic growth. In this context it is being suggested that it is in the interests of the workers to practice moderation and to accept the policies being developed by the major political parties to tackle the serious problems generated by the apparent stagnation of the world economy. The working-class movement has been put on the ideological defensive by these types of arguments because of the failure to develop an alternative type of political economy that would suggest the necessity of expansion rather than accommodation to a situation of decline and austerity. There has not been the development of a perspective of growth based on the increased influence of the workers in the organisation of the economy, and instead the parties of social democracy have accepted the apparent imperatives established by austerity. But this situation means that there seems to be no alternative than to accept the role in government of parties that support the present economic system. In this context there is not an attempt to indicate that the importance of the welfare state is an alternative to the attempt to promote austerity. The various Marxist parties have not promoted a policy of reform and instead in an abstract manner have argued in favour of socialism in timeless and dogmatic terms. What is not understood is that the development of a worker’s government would create the political conditions for a reform programme to become the basis to generate the conditions for this process of movement towards socialism. In contrast the social democratic parties have no other aims than to attempt to administer capitalism in a more effective manner than the various bourgeois parties. This situation means that the perspective of reformist type change becoming the basis of advance towards socialism seems to lack credibility. It seems necessary to transform the character of the reformist parties in order to make this approach more feasible. But the problem is that the right-wing domination of the social democratic parties seems to be entrenched. In this situation there seems to be no alternative to the realisation of the task of developing a credible revolutionary party that can lead a struggle for socialist change. Unfortunately, there has not been a contemporary example of this type of development. The various Marxist parties have stayed small and unpopular. But in this situation the Marxist groups have not united in order to make the creation of an effective organisation possible. In other words, this sectarianism has apparently undermined any prospect of the development of a popular mass party. This means that in a situation of the inability to solve the problems connected with the creation of a credible revolutionary organisation what results is an uncontested domination of the capitalist system. Furthermore, in this context it also becomes more difficult to generate sustained and effective forms of mass struggle either for reforms or more radical measures. It seems that despite serious economic problems that the domination of the capitalist system is not being disputed. Hence it would seem that in these unfavourable circumstances it would be difficult to advocate a plausible programme of revolutionary change. So, the question arises about how we attempt to outline a plausible perspective of the transformation of society? What we have established Is that there is no inevitable dynamic of inexorable change and instead it is quite possible that the domination of capitalism will continue in almost permanent terms unless it is challenged by the development of an effective form of popular opposition. But it is this aspect that seems to be very difficult, if not impossible. The fact that the majority of people seem to be convinced about the dominant superiority of the present system would seem to be a very unfavourable situation for the development of a popular and effective revolutionary party. Yet despite these adverse circumstances we have to try and outline a credible programme of social change.

However, this issue of what constitutes a credible programme would have to outline the importance of the ideological domination of the ruling class which is generally able to convince people of the necessity of the continuation of the capitalist system. This means that the promotion of a feasible perspective of social change would have to develop reasons why the domination of capitalism should be opposed and replaced with the only genuine alternative of socialism. It should be suggested that a system that is based on the aspect of the exploitation of labour by capital should be replaced with an economic system of genuine participatory democracy in which the workers are able to define the objectives of the process of production and are not subject to the alienating imperatives of capital. But it will be suggested that this type of approach has not been convincing in the past and that the defenders of capitalism have been able to outline apparently convincing arguments that the economic efficiency of the system has been able to realise material benefits for the members of society. Nevertheless, Marxists can reply to this viewpoint and suggest that the protracted imposition of austerity means that the interests of the present economic system are in contradiction with the material interests of the majority of the people. In order to establish a situation in which the aspirations of the producers can be genuinely realised requires a process of the transformation of the character of the relations of production. This means that even the attempt to defend the material interests of the people has to be connected to the ultimate objective of the establishment of workers management of production. Only with the successful realisation of this perspective will it become possible to undermine the attempts of capital to intensify the aspect of the exploitation of the producers within the relations of production. It will be suggested that the workers are not interested in ending the domination of capital, but instead limit their aspirations to obtaining wage increases. But the point is that this situation is because of the lack of influence of a perspective of the realisation of the democratic role of the producers. However, if the workers can be successful in realising the creation of a genuinely progressive reformist government that will act to end austerity and instead increase government expenditure on the re-creation of the welfare state, then this very development could result in the growing confidence of the workers to aspire to realise democratic management of the economy. In other words, the very objective of economic democracy is connected to the establishment of a principled type of reformist government. The problem in the past is that the workers have not been able to organise to attempt to put pressure on reformist governments to act in an increasingly radical manner. Instead, the various reformist administrations have been content to administer the capitalist system in a moderate manner that has not challenged the domination of capital. But if the workers had the aim to challenge this situation in terms of the promotion of a perspective of economic democracy then this type of situation could be transformed. However, this possibility is not likely to occur if the Marxist parties do not develop increased levels of popular influence. What is needed is for the programme of workers management, as outlined by Marxist groups, to become important. In this context the very ending of austerity has a positive aspect in terms of the connection of this development to workers management. This prospect will also be advanced if workers take militant action in order to express the aim of the democratic organisation of the economy by the producers. But it also has to be suggested that if this development does not occur then the confirmation of the domination of capitalism under even a left-wing reformist government will be realised. In this manner the reformist government will become the contemporary form of the manifestation of the interests of capital. Such a situation would enable the policy of austerity to be consolidated and confirmed. The balance of class forces would be against the interests of the workers and so would mean the reformist government rejected the only progressive approach of ending austerity and advancing the role of the democracy of the producers within the economy. In this manner it would seem that the possibility to change the balance of class forces based on an alliance of a left reformist government and the workers had failed.

Some Marxists would suggest that the very difficulties of the perspective outlined above indicate the necessity to re-affirm the approach of a genuine process of popular revolutionary change. There is no alternative to the perspective of an attempt to realise the transformation of society by the workers under the leadership of an authentic revolutionary party. But the problem with this perspective is that it has been apparently very difficult to establish the credibility of this approach in terms of actual political developments. The various Trotskyist parties have not been able to become popular and successful. This does not mean that the perspective they advocate is inherently not feasible, but instead it may be necessary to promote its realisation in more complex terms. But the role of a revolutionary party is crucial in relation to the task of upholding and advancing the importance of a credible perspective of change. If the Marxist groups fail to advance this conception of the transformation of capitalism into socialism, there will be no other political party that will be willing to promote a perspective of the transformation of capitalist society. Hence despite the apparent secondary significance of the Marxist groups they continue to have an important role in the promotion of a programme of social change. Hence the ideological task of the Marxist parties has a strategic importance because this aspect is the expression of the attempt to establish the necessity and feasibility of a process of the radical transformation of society. The possibility to develop the influence of the Marxist groups in this manner will increase the potential to establish popular support for a programme of change. In this context the issue of the leadership of the mass struggles by the revolutionary parties is not the primary aspect. Instead, what is important is the extent of the influence of the programmes of action that they promote. This means the advance of the objective of the ending of austerity and the realisation of an approach of economic expansion and the defence of the role of the welfare state. If the Marxist groups can be successful in relation to the promotion of these objectives within the working class, the result will be an advance of class consciousness and an increase willingness to strive to achieve these aims. In other words, the leading and dominant role of the revolutionary parties is not the primary issue, and instead the issue of the effective influence of its perspective of change is what is important. However, an important criticism of this standpoint would suggest that the development of the leading role of the Marxist party is connected to the issue of support for its policy for the transformation of society. This point may have had validity in the past, but increasingly in the present situation these aspects are no longer necessarily connected. Instead, what is important is the issue as to whether the programme of action of the Marxist party is increasingly considered as feasible and principled by the workers. In this context it could be suggested that developing opposition to austerity has the potential to generate popular mass support. However, the Marxist party will still have an important role in suggesting that this task should acquire increasingly political dimension of an offensive type of struggle and so will not be content with defensive limitations. In other words, the ultimate aim is to bring about the overthrow of the bourgeois governments that administer economic and political forms of austerity and instead to create a reformist government that is more receptive to the aim of realising the interests of the people. The various reformist political parties will be reluctant to support this type of militant strategy and so it is the task of the Marxists to develop the popular expression of this approach. In this manner the Marxist groups will be an important aspect of the development of the mass struggle even if they are not the ultimate beneficiaries of this situation. What is of major importance is to try to develop the confidence of the workers to attempt to realise their interests in terms of conscious militant actions with specific objectives. In this context the formation of reformist governments with progressive aims will be a major victory in the class struggle.

However, it could be suggested that these types of governments will not introduce these types of reforms. The history of reformist administrations has generally led to the failure to establish a regime based on the consistent introduction of progressive measures. But the point is that the working class in these situations has not been able to establish the accountability of these governments to the organisations of the labour movement. Consequently, we would suggest the necessity to establish a genuine process of accountability of these reformist governments to the organisations of the workers like the trade unions. The establishment of a genuine process of interaction between government and the working class would facilitate the possibility that measures are introduced that express the interests of the people. Primarily this means an end to austerity and the introduction of measures like a shorter working week and developments that advance the possibility to establish workers management of the economy. It will be suggested that the history of reformist governments has not led to the introduction of these types of policy. But this is because these administrations have been generally motivated by the aim of upholding capitalism rather than advancing a policy for the progressive reform of society. The point is that only when the reformist governments become more motivated by the interests of the people and not that of capitalism will it become possible and credible to promote the aim of progressive change. Hence if right wing domination of reformist parties is not ended then these developments will not occur. In this context it will be necessary to promote an alternative perspective for change. But whatever eventuality it will be vital to develop the influence of a Marxist party. If it proves difficult or even impossible to achieve left wing reformist government’s, there will be no alternative to the necessity to promote a policy of change based on the leadership of the Marxist organisation. This will mean that the perspective of workers management of the economy will have to be advanced in terms of the development of a process of interaction of revolutionary party and the working class. Such a perspective will have the difficulty in that it is based on a rejection of the importance of bourgeois democracy. Hence militant struggle will not seem to have the justification that is expressed by the exercise of parliamentary democracy. But the possibility of the continued right-wing degeneration of the social democratic parties may mean that there is no alternative to the attempt to develop the leadership of the Marxist party in the class struggle. The problem is that the Marxist parties are small and so the establishing of their popular influence may be a difficult process. But it may be necessary for Marxists to adapt to what are unfavourable political circumstances. The rest of this article will attempt to relate to this difficult situation.

It is important to suggest that the various Marxist groups in this situation should unite in terms of the advocacy of a perspective of change. This approach would have the ultimate aim of the achievement of workers management of the economy. But if this objective is to establish realistic importance it will be necessary to outline a programme of activity that will facilitate the realisation of this objective. In this context the Marxists should measures of democratisation of the trade unions so that they become more responsive to the aspirations of the members. This development will involve regular annual elections to the leadership positions and should mean genuine competition between different contenders for the various posts. The salaries of the officials should be no higher than the average wage of a skilled worker in the given industries of the unions. Members should be able to organise elections to the union posts if they decide the union officials no longer represent their interests. Support of 40% of the members should be sufficient in order to call for new elections. The policies of the union should be decided by the annual conference and these should respect the wishes of the local meetings. Marxists in the unions should primarily attempt to obtain support for the policy of workers management of the economy. But they should also outline policies that attempt to defend the wages and conditions of the members. The Marxists should outline a programme for the development of the activity of the unions in order to oppose the policy of austerity. In other words the objectives of the Marxists is to make the unions more effective as defence organisations of the interests of the workers. Only success in these terms will it become possible to be more ambitious and so be able to outline the importance of the aim of workers management of the economy in credible terms.

In other words, victories obtained by the trade unions in terms of the role of militant activity will enable a more favourable balance of class forces to be established that will facilitate the possibility to make progress in the opposition to capital. But this means that the approach of accommodation to the capitalist system expressed by the opportunist role of the trade unions leadership has to be ended and instead a perspective of rejection of the interests of the capitalist system has to become the approach of the organisations of the workers. However, this development will not become possible without an increased influence of Marxism in the unions and the undermining of the influence of the standpoint of class collaboration. In other words, the role of the unions as defence organisations of the workers has to become transformed into becoming the expression of more ambitious and offensive aims. In this manner the unions become the most important opposition to the imperatives of capital and as a result are transformed into a possible agency of social change. But this means that the traditional role of the unions as an expression of compromise with the interests of capital has to be ended, and instead they become the major organisational aspect of the development of the potential for changing the character of society. Such a perspective would seem to be unrealistic given the apparent moderate and cautious role of the unions in the situation of austerity and the effective offensive of capital against the interests of labour. But the point is that if this type of change does not occur then the unions will become reduced to a passive acceptance of the imposition of the aims of the interests of capital. Indeed, it could be argued that this type of development has already started to occur in the last forty years. The point is that in a situation of the crisis of profitability of the capitalist system it is necessary to undermine the importance of the organisations of the workers like the trade unions. Hence the unions are increasingly being undermined by the offensive of capital and so are reduced to becoming the tame instruments of the interests of the present economic system. Only the attempt to develop effective forms of militant action can express the possibility to end the reduction of the role of the trade unions to becoming the appendage of the imperatives of capital. The role of Marxists in this situation is to try to understand the challenges of the class struggle and to promote a strategy to develop the activity of the unions in this situation. Ultimately this means the development of a general strike in order to end the imposition of austerity in the economy and to instead attempt to put pressure on bourgeois governments to accept the necessity of expansion and the aim of full employment. The unions would also strive to increase wages and to promote the increased influence of the workers in the organisation of the economy. In other words, the present accommodation of the unions with the economic policies of the government would be ended and instead a militant stance would be adopted. It is necessary that the Marxists promote this type of perspective and so attempt to generate the ideological and political conditions for the development of mass struggles. In other words, an important objective is to try and end the present accommodation of the unions with the economic policies of conservative type governments and instead the aim is to create the ideological conditions for the renewal of militant action. The important point is that the interests of the workers are being undermined by an effective acceptance of austerity economics. In this situation the development of militancy will begin the process of opposing the effective offensive of capital against labour. If there is success in this defensive struggle it will inspire the workers to become more ambitious in regard to their objectives. But defeat will mean the consolidation of the domination of capital over labour. However, the possibility of defeat should not discourage the attempt to develop militant struggles. This is because a passive working class will only result in the intensification of the process of exploitation of the workers. Only the development of mass struggles can change the situation in favour of the workers and so create a balance of class forces that is in their interests. Thus, the major slogan of the Marxists should be: struggle rather than capitulate to the interests of capital. Only the development of mass action can begin to change the situation in favour of labour.

But the problem is that there is presently the influence of a defeatist approach within the trade unions. It is not considered a favourable situation to the development of militant activity, and so the result of this pessimism is an acceptance of the imposition of the aims off capital within the economy. But it has to be questioned whether there is a genuine situation that favours the interests of capital in the context of a long-term problem of trying to develop the profitability of the system. The lack of influence of Marxism means that the ideological view that there is no alternative to capitalism has become very important. This situation undermines the development of militant forms of opposition to the system. Furthermore, the Marxist groups are not influential, and this aspect has contributed to the development of scepticism about the effectiveness of mass action. It seems that capitalism cannot be challenged given the important problems involved in developing a mass movement of opposition. But even under these apparent conditions of unchallenged domination the capitalist system has not been able to resolve issues that lead to serious economic problems. The point is that in historical terms the capitalist system is a declining system, and the necessity of an alternative is indicated by these aspects. Therefore, the alternative is between the continuing decline of capitalism or the realisation of the progressive alternative of socialism. This choice means that the only constructive possibilities of mass struggle is connected to the adoption of the aim of socialism. It is not adequate to accommodate to the logic of capital and to limit objectives to what is acceptable under the present system. But this understanding is not popular given the lack of influence of Marxist groups. Hence it is necessary to develop the importance of Marxism if the political conditions are to be created to develop the importance of a revolutionary consciousness within the working class. A programme of social change will only be adopted in a popular manner if the present marginalisation of Marxism is ended. But this also means the forces of Marxism have to achieve greater unity in order to promote an action programme of class struggle. There are no longer any valid reasons why the various groups cannot at least unite in terms of the advocacy of this programme for mass action. Differences about the class character of the Soviet Union have become irrelevant when compared to the importance of the promotion of a programme of the development of international class struggle. The very offensive of capital against labour indicates the tasks of the class struggle and in this manner the objective of opposition to austerity becomes an important necessary development. There is no reason why the different Marxist groups cannot agree to promote an obvious defensive strategy of developing mass struggle against austerity. The importance of the challenges of the present situation are obviously more significant than what someone wrote or advocated about the Soviet Union eighty years ago. In other words, the splits of the past still undermine the development of an agreed programme of action for the international class struggle. This sectarianism means that the creation of a united perspective is not developed and instead the dogma of the traditions of the past still undermine the ability to respond to the challenges of the present. In this context it is necessary for individual groups to try and take the initiative and so promote the role of a possible credible programme of action against the approach of austerity. It is to be hoped that this inspiring example would then generate the possibility that the other Marxist groups would support this programme of action. If this development occurred, it would immensely advance the possibility to develop the influence of this militant strategy. In this context there would be a united voice in favour of an action programme of struggle against austerity. The result of this situation it that the possibility to achieve the support of the workers for this militant perspective would be immensely advanced. There would be an influential voice being raised in support of a credible programme of mass action. This development does not mean that the support of the workers for this militant approach would become guaranteed. But at least the possibility that this perspective could become increasingly popular would have been advanced. In this situation the workers would become receptive to support what was a common perspective of a united front of the Marxist groups. Obviously, this would not guarantee success in the class struggle, but the conditions for victory would have been advanced considerably.

However, even if we assume that unity could be realised in terms of an advocacy of a united action programme of the Marxist groups this development would still not guarantee that mass struggle would occur against the offensive of capital against labour. Instead, this aspect is dependent on the willingness of the workers to act to oppose the attempt to impose a policy of economic austerity. The recent economic and political developments have tended to favour the interests of capital because of the general development of the weakening of the importance of the trade unions. Thus, it is necessary to advocate the revival of the effectiveness of the trade unions as organisations of mass struggle. Furthermore, the majority of the workers are no longer members of the trade unions and so there is the necessity to organise to try and increase the membership of these organisations. The ultimate aim is to re-develop the effectiveness of the trade unions to be able to act in militant terms to uphold the interests of the workers within the relations of production. This possibility is connected to the democratisation of the trade unions so that they become more receptive to expressing the interests of the members. But it is also necessary to recognise the importance of the various single-issue campaigns that have developed over the past forty years, such as the ecological activism. It is necessary to achieve the practical unity of the trade unions with these single -issue campaigns in order to strive to realise a different and more progressive type of economy. The immediate aim will be to try to develop forms of mass pressure that could influence bourgeois governments to end austerity and instead accept some of the demands of the mass movements. But ultimately the objective will be to create the political conditions for the election of reformist type governments that will be more receptive to the aims of the mass movements. However, there is a problem that the unorganised sector of the working class has been influenced by reactionary views and has voted for bourgeois governments because of their advocacy of populist and nationalist politics. This means that it should be a task to increase the membership of the trade unions within this unorganised sector of the working class so that the influence of more progressive politics is developed within this group of workers that were inclined to support reactionary forms of populism. Ultimately the aim of increased membership of the trade unions is to encourage the development of militant action in order to oppose the offensive of capital and to develop the political conditions for the election of more left-wing governments. But if the reformist parties are still defeated in elections it will be the tasks of the trade unions and Marxists to continue to encourage the militant action of the workers in order to uphold their interests against the offensive of capital. The point is that success in the class struggle can create a balance of class forces in favour of labour and against the attempt to consolidate the domination of the capitalist system. This will mean that the workers will try to develop their influence in the process of the organisation of the economy, and in this manner facilitate the possibility of the transformation of the character of the system in terms of the increased role of economic democracy. But if this development results in defeats in the class struggle it will be necessary to develop a defensive strategy in order to try and maintain the gains of labour. It will be suggested that this perspective has become antiquated because the workers increasingly accept the domination of capital. This point is not necessarily invalid, but this is the very reason why Marxists should attempt to indicate the necessity to develop the class struggle in more effective terms. The revival of the role of the trade unions is a crucial aspect for this perspective of militant struggle to become possible. If this development does not occur, then the generally unorganised workers are likely to be defeated by the aspect of the offensive of capital against labour. The point is that the forces of capital are likely to consider the inability of the workers to organise effectively in the present situation as a reason for the development of an attempt to undermine the influence of the producers in the economy. This aspect could result in defeats for the workers in the class struggle and so make the attempt to increase the influence of the producers in the economy a more difficult possibility.

But let us assume that the mass struggles of the workers were able to achieve victories against the forces of capital, this development would be utilised in order to achieve a more favourable political situation. An immediate aim would be the attempt to create the conditions for the election of a reformist government. If this approach was successful it would then be necessary to try and ensure that this administration was responsive to the workers and so acted in terms of their interests, and in this manner changed the balance of class forces in favour of the producers. It could be argued that this perspective is dogmatic because the history of reformist governments is that they have generally acted in terms of the interests of capital. But this has occurred because the workers generally lacked the level of class consciousness and aspect of organisation that could have created the conditions for the realisation of an administration that was consistently responsive to the aspirations of labour. Hence it is necessary to develop the influence of the Marxist groups that would facilitate the possibility for the workers to support an action programme of radical change. It has been the lack of importance of the Marxist organisations which has ensured that the workers have not attempted to influence reformist governments in radical terms. But a progressive perspective can be reduced to the primary aspects of the promotion of full employment and the increased influence of labour in the organisation of the economy. These aspects will be connected to the revival of the welfare state and the nationalisation under workers control of major public sectors. If this type of approach was promoted and realised it would mean a favourable transformation of the balance of class forces in favour of the interests of labour. The economic and political conditions would be created for a possible process of transition to a genuine socialist economy. However, if the reformist government refused to implement this programme in even minimal terms, it would be necessary for the labour movement to develop an action programme of militant action in order to try and change government policy. But this would not be a favourable situation because the aspect of opposition between the reformist government and the labour movement could generate the increased influence of bourgeois ideology. The result of this situation would be the re-election of a capitalist administration. Therefore, what would be the most favourable situation is one in which the labour movement was able to establish genuine influence with regards to the policy of the reformist government. In this manner the balance of class forces could be transformed in terms of the interests of the workers. It has to be accepted that this development has generally not been realised and instead the reformist government has adapted to the interests of capital. But this situation was because of the still low level of consciousness of the workers. However, if a Marxist party could establish an effective influence within the working class this could result in a genuine progress of class consciousness. In this context the workers would be able to apply effective pressure on the reformist government to act in progressive terms. The result could be that the process of reforms acquired a radical character and so could facilitate the possibility of the socialist transformation of society. It could be suggested that this perspective is the most favourable for the realisation of socialism and so should be advocated. But it could be unsuccessful because the reactionary character of reformism is not transformed in progressive terms. In this context reformism remains a problem in relation to the task of transition to socialism. This means that the objective of socialism can only be realised under the primary leadership role of the revolutionary party. However, the difficult issue in this context is the problem of the lack of credibility of the various Marxist parties which remain small and unpopular. But if the reformist parties remain defined by a consistent adaptation to bourgeois ideology there will be no alternative to the necessity to try and outline an orthodox conception of the importance of a classic conception of the revolutionary process in terms of the leadership of the Marxist party.

This perspective has to be outlined in terms of the objective to develop workers management of the economy. The Marxist party will become credible and effective in terms of the increased influence of the objective of workers management of the economy. The importance of this perspective could transform the character of the class struggle. In other words, the actions of the workers would no longer be primarily defined by immediate and defensive issues and instead would become motivated by the very task of the objective of the transformation of the character of the economy and society. It could be suggested that this development has only rarely occurred and instead the workers are generally motivated by the importance of defending gains within the limits of the capitalist system. But the very recent offensive of capital against labour has indicated the connection of the defence of gains to the attempt to increase the influence of the workers within the relations of production. In this context there is no alternative to the perspective of establishing workers management of the economy if the very attempt to undermine the offensive of capital against labour is to be successful. In other words, limited defensive struggle to maintain the situation of the workers is no longer generally effective. Instead, it is necessary to adopt new tactics that can possibly result in success in the circumstances of austerity and the offensive of capital against labour. The problems for the workers are caused by the increasing economic power of capital over labour within the relations of production. This means the workers have to collectively act to oppose this development by increasing their influence within the economy by becoming able to develop in a more effective manner the possibility to establish control over the character of the relations of production. Such a possibility would not result in an end to capitalism, but it would mean that the workers are establishing increasing aspects of the creation of an influence over the activity of the economy. It could be argued that the continued election of bourgeois governments would undermine the ability of the workers to consolidate the aspect of popular control over economic activity. This is why the situation would be most effectively transformed with the election of genuinely radical reformist governments. But the militant action of the workers can result in important economic changes even in the most unfavourable political circumstances. However, without the influence of the revolutionary party it is most likely that the workers would generally accept the continued domination of capital. This means the very importance of the role of a revolutionary party is a significant aspect of the programme of change. Without this development the objectives of capital remain uncontested and therefore not ideologically challenged. Hence the revolutionary party upholds a perspective of workers management of the economy which indicates that there is a progressive and feasible alternative to the continued domination of capital. The increased influence of this perspective can generate the development of a radical form of class consciousness which is based on the rejection of the imperatives of capital. But if this development does not occur it is more possible to maintain the ideological ascendency of capital and to therefore undermine the expression of discontent with the system. This means that increased popular support for workers management indicates that opposition to capitalism is developing and that the very issue of an alternative to capitalism is becoming credible. In this context it is a major ideological task of the defenders of capital to oppose the aim of workers management of the economy and to suggest that the only feasible economic system is one in which labour is subordinated to the requirement of capital accumulation. The success of this standpoint means that it is possible to maintain important levels of support for the capitalist system. But it also has to be suggested that many of the supporters of socialism have failed to defend the perspective of workers management in convincing terms. Indeed, they have often considered this objective to be unimportant. The result of these theoretical limitations means that the possibility to develop a plausible conception of the validity of capitalism is enhanced. In other words, the defenders of capitalism do not outline a positive conception of the superiority of this system, but instead emphasise that it is superior to the socialist alternative. Thus, the ideological task of promoting capitalism is often explained by rejection of the apparent lack of feasibility of socialism. In this context the reluctance of Marxists to outline what is meant by socialism can only facilitate the ability of supporters of capitalism to be able to outline what is means to be a superior system.

Ultimately the issue of what is socialism has to be the culminating aspect of a programme of revolutionary change. It is not satisfactory and convincing to merely outline a perspective of the development of mass struggle. Instead, the issue of what is the content of socialism has to be connected to the logic of the popular process of the development of opposition to capitalism. If capitalism is based on the exploitation of labour in the process of production, the concept of an emancipatory alternative is concerned with ending this aspect of the economic system. This development would mean that labour is able to organise production in accordance with its interests and so has control over the role of a surplus that is created by its economic activity. But there is a problem because the revolutionary state apparatus established by the process of revolutionary change has the potential to become an independent power that is able to establish domination over the relations of production. In this manner the state could acquire the economic and political power to re-establish the importance of a situation of the exploitation of the producers. Hence it is necessary to develop genuine workers management in the organisation of the character of the economy. However, the problem is that this development has never been consistently established in history. This means that the creation of a socialist economy would be an unprecedented development. The very uniqueness of this development would mean that there would be serious challenges that could result in failure and the re-establishment of an exploitative type of economy. Therefore, the revolutionary party has to retain its principled character and be able to consistently promote the development of the ability of the workers to create a socialist mode of production. The dominant importance of the party should not become the justification of the creation of a situation of privilege that would enable it to acquire the ability to extract a surplus from the producers. This means the party should consistently promote the values of solidarity and so refuse to utilise its influence in order to become a new exploitative ruling class. In other words, the government of the revolutionary party should not justify the development of new forms of domination and subordination within the relations of production. The problem is that the regime in transition to socialism still requires the role of a revolutionary government which could utilise this situation in order to establish domination over society. Thus, the principles and practices of democratic accountability are vital if the regime is to act in accordance with genuine socialist principles. This means that regular and authentic elections have to be held in order to try and ensure that the revolutionary government acts in accordance with genuine principles of socialism. There is no reason why an alternative socialist party with different aims should not be elected if the government fails to act in a principled manner. The role of a credible socialist government will be to develop the principles and aspects of workers management of the economy. This means that any plan of production is connected to the possibility of being changed if it becomes considered to be problematical in any aspect by the workers. There has to be a balance created between the role of effective government and the accountability of this administration to the views of the people. Ultimately this would mean the role of elections and the possibility to replace any government that could be considered to becoming bureaucratic and elitist. In this manner the concept of the revolutionary party of the workers would be conditional and not absolute. Only a consistent and principled application of the principles of revolutionary socialism would justify the continued ascendency of a given party within the political system. Also, in the interests of political freedom people would be able to vote for parties that supported the restoration of capitalism. But if a revolutionary government was responsible and effective it is to be hoped that this development would not occur. The major aim of a socialist government would be to facilitate the ability of the people to be able to organise and administer the economy and society in general. If this objective was consistently realised the role of government would be essentially supportive to the popular economic activity of the people. If this government did not become bureaucratic there is no reason why people would become discontented and so aspire to restore capitalism. But the ultimate problem is that a genuine socialist society has never been established and so mistakes may be made in relation to the attempt to successfully develop this type of social formation.

Ultimately the major problem is the relation of party and class. The leadership role of the party should not become the justification to develop a privileged domination within society. But the very aspect of political power creates the possibility for this situation to occur. This means that a balance has to be created between the necessary exercise of political power and the continued accountability of the revolutionary government to the people. If the system functions in an effective democratic manner, then this balance can be created and sustained. But it is necessary to ensure the continued role of discussion about the policy of the government. There has to be the importance of articles and analysis of the actions of the political administration. In other words, whilst the revolutionary government has to have the ability to act in terms of its initiative and principles in terms of introducing legislation this very process should be subject to the aspect of accountability to the aspirations of the people. There should be organised committees that would allow the people to make critical comments about the proposed legislation and to enable the possibility of rejection of the measures being advocated. In other words, it is necessary to try and undermine the potential for the realisation of an absolutist type of government. Instead, there has to be a situation of effective scrutiny of the measures being advanced. This aspect should be achievable because the party is based on the principles of socialism and the understanding of the necessity to obtain democratic approval for the policies being proposed. In these terms the measures being advocated are considered by organisations of the people which determine whether they support the proposed policies. But ultimately it is to be expected that a revolutionary government would not act in an autocratic manner, and instead would express the principles of the attempt to create a democratic socialist society.

However, these are possible issues of a future situation. The immediate issue is to develop the level of support for a revolutionary party. This prospect does not seem to be successful given the present small size of the Marxist organisations. They do not seem to be credible given their lack of popularity, but they generally insist on advocating a programme of transitional demands which would connect the role of the class struggle to the increasing influence of an approach that is based on developing opposition to capitalism. But the problem with this approach is that the Marxist parties lack the credibility that would develop the possibility to establish the influence of this approach. Indeed, the possibility to develop even limited forms of militant class struggle has been undermined by the prolonged imposition of austerity and this has led to a situation of an adverse balance of class forces. It seems that the working class is apparently fated to be a subordinated class that is unable to overcome the aspect of domination by capital. But this would be a premature and pessimistic conclusion. An important problem has been that the present leadership of the trade unions have promoted a policy of acceptance of the domination of capital. Therefore, we have to begin by trying to develop an effective challenge to this standpoint. This alternative approach would be summarised by the slogan: ‘act to end austerity’. The demand would be made that the trade union leaders begin to seriously consider the necessity of accepting the importance of militant actions with the objective of undermining the imposition of austerity. An alternative policy based on expansion of the economy, full employment, and the revival of the welfare state, should be realised by the various governments. In the present situation of a health crisis, the demand should be made for work or full pay. The problem has become that the trade union leadership has accepted subordination of the role of the trade unions, and so do not advocate measures to challenge this situation. This means the workers have become demoralised and have apparently accepted the development of an adverse balance of class forces. However, the Marxist groups are small and seem to lack the influence that would make a programme of action credible and feasible. It seems that in this situation the domination of the ruling class has become omnipotent. However, the very challenges of the present situation indicate the importance of a programme of mass action.

But the most important problem of the present situation is the failure to achieve the popular influence of this type of perspective. Instead, the lack of guidance of the workers in the context of an offensive of capital against labour only contributes to the prospect of development of defeats in the class struggle. In this situation the Marxist groups tend to promote programmes that seem to have little relationship to the actual developments in the situation. There is the assumption of an imminent possibility of struggle rather than tackling the problem of the effective success of the offensive of capital against labour. The point is that a credible programme has to begin with a realistic understanding of the present situation rather than project an essentially illusory perspective onto reality. In other words, the ruling class and its parties are on the offensive and the workers are disorganised and on the defensive. Therefore, it is necessary to begin with a programme to facilitate the generation of defensive struggle. In other words, the attempt to even maintain the present situation of the workers would represent a victory under current circumstances, and in that manner begin to develop the confidence for the possibility of struggle. This means that the role of transitional demands that represent the connection of immediate objectives with the socialist aim are not yet relevant. Instead, it would be progress to begin to facilitate the possibility of mass action in defence of immediate interests. Revolutionary Marxists should advocate that the trade union leaders become willing to contemplate the necessity of this type of approach. In other words, if the trade unions became effective defence organisations of the workers this would mean an important development that would create the possibility for more ambitious and offensive aims. The point is that the passive leadership of the trade unions by the officials has only resulted in defeats for the workers. It is necessary that a genuinely effective defensive stance being adopted that would mean progress in the development of the militant strength of the trade unions. But this means the importance of the role of the rank-and-file membership has to be developed by a process of the democratisation of the character of the unions. The problem is that the union leaders may effectively oppose this development. In this context the unions may remain limited defensive organisations that are unable to act against the offensive of capital against labour. In this situation the forces of revolutionary Marxism lack the influence to be able to advocate in effective terms the adoption of a more militant stance by the unions. Hence it seems that there is no alternative than to accept the domination of capital over labour as an apparent inevitability in this situation of the adverse character of the class struggle. But the very influence of this pessimistic stance means that the workers accept the domination of capital as something that cannot be challenged. Therefore, the immediate task of Marxists is to advocate a convincing perspective for the development of defensive class struggle. This approach would not be unambitious and moderate but would instead express what was necessary in order to begin the process of the generation of mass actions. But the problem is that the various Marxist groups do not seem to be able to develop a perspective based on the actual balance of class forces and instead outline abstract programmes of action that are not related to the present situation. In this manner various forms of dogmatism are being justified rather than a programme of action related to the importance of the current balance of class forces. The point is that the expression of the interests of capital has led to the sustained imposition of austerity since the development of the increasing crisis of the system since the 1980’s. This means that effectively the workers have been on the defensive since that period. Therefore, the balance of class forces favours capital as a result of these developments. What is required is the advocacy of a credible defensive programme of action. But the Marxist groups fail to outline this type of perspective because of their inability to understand the character of the present economic and political situation. However, this justification of dogmatism means that people do not support the various programmes of action which seem to be unrealistic. This means the influence of Marxism actually decreases rather than increases in the present situation. It seems very difficult to achieve progress in the present circumstances.

Unfortunately, it would seem that this problematical situation cannot be resolved in constructive terms because of the apparent acceptance of a dogmatic understanding of the character of the balance of class forces. It seems to be preferable to promote illusions about the favourable possibilities for developing class struggle rather than accept in realistic terms the importance of the aspects of the difficulties of the present situation. But this very justification of dogmatism means that the politics of the Marxist groups do not seem to be convincing and so they are unable to become more popular because of these limitations. However, the acceptance of a dogmatic perspective is the very reason why the Marxist parties are unable to recognise the problems created by this standpoint, and so the effective crisis of the various groups becomes prolonged and profound. It would seem that there is no alternative than to accept the limitations of this situation. But even if a few people outline an analysis of the crisis of the Marxist groups then this will possibly establish an increased interest in the necessity to develop a more convincing perspective of change. The important point is that the adherence to a dogmatic and unrealistic programme of action has not led to the increasing popularity of the Marxist groups. Instead, it becomes apparent that what is necessary is to adopt a more credible programme of change. This approach will be based on an attempt to understand the balance of class forces in their actual aspects rather than impose an unrealistic understanding on the actual situation. Such a more feasible perspective will be connected to the recognition of the present marginalisation of the various Marxist groups and the difficulties involved in attempting to overcome this problem. This process would mean that the continued adherence to the transitional programme of action has to be considered to have dogmatic aspects that are not connected to the importance of the actual balance of class forces. In contemporary terms the major issue is that of opposing the imposition of austerity in an effective manner. To bring about a change of economic and political policy in terms of the role of mass struggle would be an important victory of the workers. But instead of this development the workers are on the defensive and lack a credible programme of action for struggle. In this context the major objective would be for the development of opposition to austerity. Various aims should be supported and promoted that would be connected to this objective. The point is that only success in this context would enable more ambitious action to become possible that would enable a challenge to the domination of capital to become credible. However, such a development is not likely if the influence of Marxist groups remains ineffective. Thus, it is the very issue of whether the programmes for the immediate defence of the interests of the workers against austerity are credible which will be an issue in relation to the possibility to develop the increased influence of the Marxist groups. But, even in these terms there is no inevitable success of the Marxist parties. They may still remain marginal despite having credible programmes for revolutionary change. However, the advocacy of a feasible perspective for the transformation of society can only facilitate the development of support for left wing parties. The immediate objective is to advocate a defensive programme that if successful can achieve advances in the development of struggle for socialism.

Unfortunately, the Marxist parties do not seem credible because of the sectarian divisions between them. This is why we would advocate alliances between them on the basis of the promotion of a programme of class struggle. There is no guarantee that these developments would result in success, but we would suggest that the conditions would have become more favourable for the possibilities of victories of mass movements that would then create more advantageous circumstances for transition to socialism. The important immediate problem is that there seems to be no credible basis to develop a process of mass opposition to austerity. If this issue could begin to be tackled it would at least create more ambitious possibilities for the connection of defensive struggles with the more audacious objective of the aim to transform the character of society. In other words, the most important development in the short term is the necessity to create effective forms of defensive mass struggle against the imposition of austerity. But this possibility is undermined by the regressive effects of the differences between what are rival parties. This means that there is no uniform and effective expression of the objective of the necessity to develop opposition to austerity. Indeed, some of the Marxist groups do not recognise the importance of this objective. Such a situation only contributes to the development of an ideological confusion that undermines the ability of the Marxist groups to advocate a convincing perspective of struggle. The result of this confusion is the development of a dogmatic approach that has little relationship to the challenges of the economic and political situation. Therefore, the groups tend to underestimate the aspects of durability of capitalism and instead suggest in dogmatic terms that if their various action programmes were adopted by the workers then change would become a short-term possibility. But the problem is that these perspectives have little relationship to the actual unfavourable balance of class forces and the problems involved in the possibility to develop revolutionary class struggle. In other words, the starting point of these programmes should be about the complexities involved in the attempt to create a popular and effective revolutionary party that has influence within the working class. But instead, these issues are glossed over, and it is assumed that the particular action programmes being promoted will almost inevitably acquire influence within the working class. However, this programmatic activism completely underestimates the increasing importance of the reactionary standpoint of populist nationalism and the related willingness of sections of the workers to vote for pro capitalist parties with this type of approach. In this situation the various reformist parties are increasingly on the defensive and unable to promote a credible alternative view and so it seems that the defenders of capitalism are ideologically hegemonic by adopting this populist standpoint. Hence in an opportunist and demagogic manner it seems possible for the supporters of the present economic system to elaborate a political perspective that socialists do not seem to be able to oppose in convincing terms. The ultimate result of this situation is to marginalise the advocates of socialism by this influence of demagogic arguments for the defence of capitalism. Only if a convincing alternative approach is developed and promoted will this populist ideological hegemony begin to be challenged. But the problem is that the political limitations of the reformist parties and the Marxist groups means that they are not able to outline a credible and potentially popular perspective. They cannot even outline a programme of action in order to generate mass action against austerity. Instead, they tend to adopt perspectives based on how they would like the situation to be rather than attempt to understand the challenges of the adverse balance of class forces. The point is that in order to be politically realistic we have to begin with the importance of the victories of capital against labour. But instead, the Marxist groups try to ignore these issues in order to promote an optimistic perspective of change. However, this aspect of superficial optimism is the very problem of these programmes of action. Instead, we have to understand that the forces of labour are on the defensive and so the immediate tasks of the class struggle have this character. Without the successful realisation of defensive aims, it is not feasible to contemplate more ambitious objectives. Only in this manner will it be possible to consider that the retreat of the workers because of the offensive of capital has ended. Indeed, it could be argued that this is the most important aspect of the class struggle because what is of vital significance is the possibility to develop the very capacity of the workers to act in an effective manner in order to express their interests. If this aspect becomes realised, then it is possible to advocate more ambitious demands. But the problem has been that the various Marxist groups have not outlined programmes of action based on the importance of the actual balance of class forces. This has meant the perspectives being justified are abstract and not connected to the actual situation of the effective influence of the workers within the given balance of class forces. Therefore, programmes are adopted that are based on the subjective aspirations of the given revolutionary groups rather than a realistic appraisal of the importance of the aspects of the economic and political situation. The ultimate result of this subjectivism is to promote subjectively defined programmes that have little connection to the character of the actual economic and political situation.

Primarily the programmes ignore the importance of the issue of the influence of bourgeois ideology. Instead, it is assumed that the workers are constantly receptive to becoming adherents of the revolutionary programme. The necessity of political struggle in order to develop the increasing influence of the perspectives of Marxism is underestimated. This means that the assumption is being made that the situation is inherently favourable to the possibility to acquire popular support for the programme. The difficulties in relation to this task are generally not discussed. But the very recent success of the capitalist class in the class struggle over the period of the last forty years indicates the extent of the problems involved in developing an effective and popular influence for revolutionary Marxism. An important task is to outline what could be a credible programme for defensive action in the class struggle. Only the influence of this approach would enable more ambitious aims to become both credible and feasible. Thus, the issue of a credible programme of revolutionary change has to begin by addressing the challenges of the present situation. Only if this type of programme is able to promote the possibility of success in relation to defensive tasks will it become possible to advocate the more ambitious demands as outlined in this article. But if the working class remains in a defeated situation it will not be able to develop the capacity to become a more confident agency of revolutionary change. In other words, the problem is an unfavourable balance of class forces that favours the interests of capital. This situation has been prolonged and does not seem to be capable of being changed in the short-term. The workers seem to be demoralised and not able to engage in effective forms of militant action in order to try and create a situation that would express a more favourable balance of class forces. Indeed, it seems that the capitalist system is very durable, and its defenders suggest that the system has effectively acquired a permanent character. In this context the advocates of revolutionary Marxism are not able to outline a conception of revolutionary change that is convincing and indeed they tend to ignore trying to address these issues about the durability of capitalism. This effective crisis of Marxism means that the various perspectives of revolutionary change are problematical and do not seem to be related to the practical challenges expressed by the apparent strength of capitalism. It seems that the very domination of capitalism cannot be contested. But this conclusion would be pessimistic and one-sided. The point is that the forces of labour can never be genuinely content with a situation in which they are exploited by capital. In other words, the inequalities of capitalism means that the class struggle cannot be ended, and so the problems that generate discontent are not resolved. Therefore, this situation means that the necessity to develop a credible programme of change does not become outmoded. Instead, it is important to elaborate a revolutionary programme which is able to explain the difficulties involved in developing successful class struggle. Most past programmes have underestimated the complexities involved in the attempt to overcome the domination of capitalism. But a new programme would aim to understand the problems involved in the possibility of the development of successful class struggle. In this manner both triumphalism and pessimism would be rejected and instead a realistic appraisal of the difficulties involved in the attempt to change society would be indicated and evaluated. This analysis would be connected to a programme for the development of mass action which would still be needed if successful revolutionary change is to be realised. However, we can still assume that the objective of establishing workers management of the economy would retain its importance. But what also is very significant is how the aspect of ideological hegemony is to be realised and the ideological domination of the capitalist class is undermined and ended. Therefore, a new programme of change would express the combination of the ideas of Trotsky and Gramsci. What we have outlined above is not meant to represent a new definitive programme of change but instead a contribution towards the development of a more convincing and credible understanding of how to address the challenges of the class struggle and in that manner establish a more convincing revolutionary perspective.