

# WHY NOT CAPITALISM

## SOCIALIST REGISTER 1 9 9 5

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	vii
Ralph Miliband, Socialist Intellectual, 1924-1994 Leo Panitch	1
<b>A</b> Chronology of the New Left and Its Successors, Or: Who's Old-Fashioned Now? Ellen Meiksins Wood	22
Saying No to Capitalism at the Millenium George Ross	50
Once More Moving On: Social Movements, Political Representation and the Left Hilary Wainwright	75
Globalizing Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics Frances Fox Piven	102
Europe In Search of a Future Daniel Singer	117
The Yeltsin Regime K. S. Karol	129
The State in the Third World William Graf	140

The 'Underclass' and the US Welfare State Linda Gordon	163
'Class War conservatism': Housing Policy, Homelessness and the 'Underclass' Joan Smith	188
Capitalist Democracy Revisited John Schwartzmantel	207
Parliamentary Socialism Revisited John Saville	225
Harold <b>Laski's</b> Socialism Ralph <b>Miliband</b>	239
How it All Began: A Footnote to History Marion Kozak	264
Ralph Miliband, A Select Bibliography in English	286

## PREFACE

Ralph Miliband, the founder of the *The Socialist Register* with John Saville in 1964, and its co-editor for the subsequent three decades, died on May 21, 1994. His death, after falling ill upon his return to London from the New York Socialist Scholars Conference in April, was unexpected. Despite a close brush with death after a heart by-pass operation three years before, he had resumed his activities with characteristic strength of will and stamina, and celebrated the completion of a new book, *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, at a festive 70th birthday party in January, 1994. He had been looking forward to a special launch that was being prepared for the publication in June of the thirtieth annual volume of the *Socialist Register*, for which he had written the introductory essay. It was entirely characteristic of him that the final words of his survey of the direction, policy and output of *Register* since its first appearance should have been: 'All in all, I think the publication deserves the mention 'has done well, could do better'; and over the next thirty years it will.'

This thirty-first issue of *The Socialist Register* has been prepared, with the help of John Saville and Ellen Meiksins Wood as special co-editors, with the recognition that we can best honour Ralph's memory by beginning to fulfil that promise. The theme of this year's volume, *Why Not Capitalism*, is taken from the title Ralph originally had intended for his last book, reflecting his concern that the centrality of an anti-capitalist politics for the Left, of a political project fundamentally oriented to transcending the capitalist order, not be displaced. 'Why Not Capitalism' is intended to signal the importance, today more than ever, that the Left develop its capacities to understand and explain the dynamics, contradictions and depredations of contemporary capitalism in its many manifestations around the globe; while, at the same time, undertaking searching reexaminations of the Left's own histories **and** current practices to the end of reawakening socialist commitment, vision and potential. In this way we may yet be able to challenge the appalling capitalist 'new times' we live in.

It is in this spirit that the opening essay discusses Ralph Miliband's

legacy as a socialist intellectual and the contribution he made through his teaching and political writings. This is followed by Ellen Meiksins Wood's essay probing the grounds for the differences between the 'first generation' of the New Left and its successors, and identifying how the former's legacy is more genuinely oppositional and emancipatory as well as more current and relevant than recent intellectual and political fashions. George Ross then traces how the Left's capacity to 'say no to capitalism' has altered in the context of changing historical and material conditions, and analyses in this context the crisis of Left politics and the opportunities it presents. Hilary Wainwright, inspired by Miliband's 'Moving On' essay in the 1976 Register on the British Left's failure to establish an effective political formation in the 20 years after 1956, revisits the problem today, and, drawing on the experiences with the new social movements over the past two decades, identifies the **conjunctural** conditions now favourable to 'moving on' in creative new strategic and organizational directions. Frances Fox Piven analyses how a globalizing capitalism generates fractious racial, ethnic, religious and gender conflicts, and shows how the class war in America is conducted today through the 'familiar formations of identity politics'. Daniel Singer follows with a survey of disturbing European trends which sharply poses the question of whether the future of Europe is inevitably 'American': and he argues that even a defence of past reforms now requires a radical break with the traditionally moderate tactics and policies of the 'respectful Left'.

K. S. Karol's essay contributes to the theme of 'why not capitalism' by painting a starkly revealing picture of the new bourgeois class made up of nomenklatura and gangsters represented by the **Yelstin** regime in Russia. And William Graf, in an argument consistent with essays on globalization in *The Socialist Register 1994*, shows how third world states, despite formal 'democratization', are being restructured to play the role of aligning domestic with global markets through 'law and order' enforcements of 'recommodification' practices. The increased use of the concept of the 'underclass' in the core capitalist countries brings to mind the extent to which the conditions and the status of the people so designated are increasingly treated in ways analogous to 'third world' populations. Linda Gordon offers a pathbreaking account of the history of the concept of the 'underclass', and the evolving political practices associated with it in the United States; while Joan Smith uncovers, through an examination of the housing policy of Conservative governments in Britain, the link between the rising problem of homelessness and the New Right's employment of the notion of the 'underclass'.

We turn, in the final four essays, to a direct focus on Ralph **Miliband** and his work. John Schwartzmantel's reexamination of the concept of 'capitalist democracy' testifies to the acuity of Miliband's understanding of

## PREFACE

the limited nature of democracy in the contemporary world. The tribute John Saville then pays to Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism* provides us with a unique perspective of the political and intellectual conditions which **Miliband** confronted in the 1950s, and the major role his first book played in the revival of socialist ideas through the 1960s and 1970s; it also draws out Miliband's enduring relevance to understanding the evolution of the Labour Party from Gaitskell to Blair. We follow this by publishing here for the first time Ralph Miliband's own tribute to his teacher, Harold **Laski**, an essay originally commissioned in the 1950s for a Fabian Society pamphlet; this essay not only clearly reveals **Laski's** influence on Miliband's thought, but it also has a great deal to say of considerable relevance for contemporary problems and debates, not least about the role of socialist intellectuals. We conclude the volume with Marion **Kozak's** remarkable 'aide **memoire**' on the birth of *The Socialist Register* itself; drawing on her personal experience as well as Ralph Miliband's papers, her essay provides a highly revealing and insightful perspective on the history of the British New Left and Ralph Miliband's place within it.

Among our contributors, Ellen Meiksins Wood teaches political science at York University in Toronto; and George Ross teaches sociology at Brandeis University in Boston. Hilary Wainwright is political editor of *Red Pepper* and research associate at the International Centre for Labour Studies at Manchester University. Frances Fox Piven teaches political science at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York. Daniel Singer is the European Correspondent for *The Nation*, and K. S. Karol writes on Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union for *Nouvel Observateur*; both live in Paris. William Graf teaches political science at Guelph University, Ontario; and Linda Gordon teaches history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Joan Smith is Reader in the School of Social Sciences, Staffordshire University; and John Schwartzmantel teaches political science at **Leeds** University. John Saville, co-founder and for many years co-editor of *The Socialist Register* with Ralph Miliband, is Emeritus Professor of Economic and Social History at Hull University. Marion Kozak was until recently Director of the Day Care Trust and is active with other **NGOs** in London.

I am very grateful to all the contributors, and want to offer additional thanks to Marion Kozak for preparing the selected bibliography of Ralph Miliband's writings which we publish at the end of the volume, as well as to David Macey for his translation of K. S. Karol's essay. At Merlin Press, Julie Millard was once again most helpful, and Martin Eve's encouragement, advice and unfailing support during this sad and **difficult** year has been particularly invaluable.

I am most appreciative to John Saville and Ellen Meiksins Wood for agreeing to join me as special co-editors for this volume, and for their

active part in its planning and realization. Since this has necessarily been a transition year to a new editorial structure for the Register, I am also deeply indebted to them, as well as to Martin Eve of Merlin Press and Susan **Loves** of Monthly Review Press, for helping to think through, and see through, this transition. Planning for the **1996** volume is already well underway in the context of this new editorial structure, with two active groups of contributing editors centred at Manchester and Toronto.

The sadness that already attended the preparation of this year's volume was added to by the news of Joe Slovo's death in early **1995**. Joe Slovo was a friend of Ralph Miliband's, and a contributor to the Register. In an important article in the **1973 *Socialist Register*** on 'Problems of Armed Struggle', Joe Slovo wrote: 'Every political action in South Africa will not necessarily be an armed action. But every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up to the conquest of power . . .' His contribution to the victory of the anti-apartheid struggle was immense and we join with the countless others in South Africa and around the world who mourn his death.

The ***Socialist Register*** will live on, dedicated to trying to build on a rich legacy so as to enhance the quality of the Left's understanding and analysis and its commitment to strategic renewal and advance. We would like to encourage all our readers to 'register with the Register' by sending their names and addresses to Merlin Press in London or Monthly Review Press in New York.

L. P.

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