

THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1998

THE SOCIALIST REGISTER

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THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO NOW

**S O C I A L I S T
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PREFACE

For the thirty-fourth volume of *The Socialist Register*, published in February **1998**, not to have focussed on the *Communist Manifesto*, published in February **1848**, would have been hard to justify. The fact that this 150th anniversary falls within less than a decade of the collapse of Communism with a capital 'C', and of the parties associated with it, in no way diminishes the appeal and necessity of a cooperative, democratic and egalitarian social order. This is what might be called communism with a small 'c', and it poses and will always pose a threat to capitalism. For this reason it is a privilege as well as a pleasure to be able to celebrate 'the single most influential text written in the nineteenth century' (as Peter Osborne, in his essay in this volume, rightly calls it). Our theme, in other words, is anything but antiquarian. We are interested in the *Manifesto* now, to see both why it was such a uniquely influential text, and what light it can still throw on our situation today

The *Manifesto* was a radically new kind of political document, breaking entirely new ground rhetorically as well as analytically, and in its conception of the relation between theory and practice; but it was also a product of much more than the genius of one man (or two, counting Engels). Its subsequent fame and influence have tended to obscure the fact that it was very much the product of a political movement, at the time far from strong or even popular. Seeing how it tried to respond to the problems faced by the activists of the Communist League – 'de-reifying' the *Manifesto*, as Rob Beamish puts it in his evocative discussion of how it came to be written – brings out its contemporary relevance in a new way.

Marx and his fellow activists had been living through a period of reaction, as we are; the defiant language of the *Manifesto* bears no

relation to the actual strength of the social forces they sought to mobilise and represent. What it does testify to is their determination not to be intimidated by the strength of the forces ranged against them, their capacity to look beyond that strength to the contradictions undermining it, and – above all – their acceptance of responsibility for trying to **bring** about change. As Boris **Kagarlitsky** remarks, in a striking essay cited in our own contribution to this volume: 'People have either to organise themselves to carry out joint actions or to reconcile themselves to their fates'. No document has ever made this clearer than the Manifesto. Re-reading it today, in the context so vividly brought to life in the essays by Bernard Moss and Paul Thomas published here, is to be reminded forcibly of this truth.

As for the light that the Manifesto throws on contemporary problems, two things stand out most strikingly from the other essays in this volume. One is how much of the global expansion of capitalism, now reaching something of a climax, is not merely foreshadowed, but analysed with phenomenal precision in the Manifesto. So far from Marx being a 'dead dog' (as he himself in his postscript to *Capital* complained people were making **Hegel** out to be) he is very much alive and biting. Not to avow oneself a pupil of Marx, in the same sense that he avowed himself 'the pupil' of **Hegel** – i.e. to distance oneself clearly from the condescensions of 'post-Marxism'- would be petty and absurd. (For the same reason, we too have even 'here and there coquetted with the mode of expression peculiar to him', as he said he did with **Hegel** – for which we hope to be forgiven). On the other hand, what also stands out is how, even where the Manifesto was wrong, or left problems unresolved, or where contemporary problems fall outside its scope, its **way** of approaching problems has stood the test of time, as is demonstrated in the powerful essays published here by David Harvey, Sam **Gindin**, John Bellamy Foster, Peter **Gowan**, Sheila Cohen and Kim Moody.

Last but not least, the Manifesto still retains its power to inspire in a different way, as is demonstrated by Sheila Rowbotham's remarkable 'letter from a socialist feminist'- a lively, yet also profound and even moving critique of the Manifesto's failure to do justice to the goals or the achievements of the socialist feminists of its time. Marx, one hopes, would have endorsed this criticism were he living today, rather than drowning the critic in a torrent of counter-argument as the author of the letter fears.

Readers will note that Colin Leys has joined Leo **Panitch** as co-editor, thus reestablishing the Register's tradition of co-editorship

interrupted by Ralph Miliband's untimely death. Our Manchester and Toronto editorial collectives remain as active and important as ever, for which the co-editors are very **grateful**, as we also are to our corresponding editors in Athens, Berlin, Boston and Hong Kong, who are now joined by Patrick Bond in Johannesburg and Barbara Epstein in San Francisco. A further welcome sign of the continued international standing of the Socialist Register is the publication in New Delhi of a separate Indian edition by **J.P. Bagchi**; and a new publication in Greek, consisting of a selection of articles from the 1996 and 1997 volumes of the Register, is due to appear in Athens in 1998.

Readers will notice, and we hope also endorse, a change in the format and font size of this year's Socialist Register, which we think makes it more attractive and easier to read, and for which we owe our publisher, Martin Eve, grateful thanks. A change in our future plans should also be mentioned here. We are bringing forward the publication date of future volumes of the Socialist Register. The present volume is the last that will appear at the beginning of the year whose date it carries. Subsequent volumes will appear in the autumn of the preceding year, beginning with the 1999 volume which will be published in autumn 1998 on the central theme of 'globalisation and democracy': it will include important essays by, among others, Atilio Boron, David Coates, Joachim Hirsch, Birgit Mahnkopf and Konstantinos Tsoukalas. Various considerations have led to this change, chief among them being the disadvantages that arise when for one reason or another publication of a volume is held up so that it does not reach bookshops until well into the year.

The change coincides with new arrangements that we are also putting in place to make it easier, and as far as possible usual, for people to subscribe regularly to the Register. Readers can obtain information on how to do so by writing to the publishers whose addresses are printed elsewhere in this volume, or **by** joining our electronic mail discussion forum, socialist-register@yorku.ca or visiting the Socialist Register **website**.

This year's contributors are located as follows. Sheila Rowbotham is at the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester and David Harvey is Professor of Geography at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Sam **Gandin** is Assistant to the President of the Canadian Automobile Workers (CAW) in Toronto; Sheila Cohen is associated with Trade Union Forum in London, and Kim Moody is director of Labour Notes, a Detroit-based independent labour magazine. Peter **Gowan** is Principal Lecturer in European Politics at the University of

North London and Bernard Moss is associated with the Institute for European Studies in London. John **Bellamy** Foster is in the Department of Sociology at the University of Oregon; and Peter Osborne is at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Middlesex University in London. Paul Thomas teaches political science at the University of California, Berkeley; and Rob Beamish teaches the sociology of sport at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

In conclusion we would like to thank all our contributors for the effort they put into their essays for this volume, and Paul Cammack for originally suggesting the theme. As usual we should remind our readers that neither our contributors nor the editors necessarily agree with everything that appears in the volume. Special thanks are also due to Alan Zuege for his editorial help; to Dave Timms for his initiatives on promotion; and finally to Martin Eve, both for the exceptional professional expertise he always brings to the production of the Register, and for his insistence on the value of including the Manifesto itself in this volume.

January 1998

L.P.
C.L.