

RUTHLESS CRITICISM OF ALL THAT WSTS

**S O C I A L I S T
R E G I S T E R
1 9 9 7**

Edited by LEO PANITCH

**MERLIN PRESS LONDON
HUMANITIES PRESS NEW JERSEY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	1
A World Market of Opportunities? Capitalist Obstacles and Left Economic Policy Gregory Albo	5
Financial Crises on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century Elmar Altvater	48
Green Imperialism: Pollution, Penitence, Profits Larry Pratt & Wendy Montgomery	75
China's Communist Capitalism: The Real World of Market Socialism Gerard Greenfield & Apo Leong	96
Taking Stock of a Century of Socialism George Ross	123
The Marginality of the American Left: The Legacy of the 1960s Barbara Epstein	138
Clinton's Liberalism: No Model for the Left Doug Henwood	159
The Ideology of 'Family and Community': New Labour Abandons the Welfare State Joan Smith	176

The Decline of Spanish Social Democracy 1982-1996 Vicente Navarro	197
Cardoso's Political Project in Brazil: The Limits of Social Democracy Paul Cammack	223
The State as Charade: Political Mobilisation in Today's India Ananya Mukherjee-Reed	244
Marxism, Film and Theory: From the Barricades to Postmodernism Scott Forsyth	265
Cyborg Fictions: The Cultural Logic of Posthumanism Scott McCracken	288
Restoring the Real: Rethinking Social Constructivist Theories of Science Meera Nanda	302
Post Colonial Theory and the 'Post-' Condition Aijaz Ahmed	353

PREFACE

But if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to *ruthless criticism of all that exists*, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just a little afraid of conflict with the powers that be. . .

This year's volume, the thirty-third, of *The Socialist Register* takes as its theme the phrase that Marx emphasized in the above quotation from a letter to his friend Arnold Ruge in 1843. The ideas expressed therein appear to us to be as relevant to socialists today as when they were first published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1844. (We rely on the translation offered in the *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, New York, International Publishers 1975, p. 142.) Perhaps they are even more relevant. We live in an era when capitalism stands astride the whole globe, the power of its ruling classes and the waste and inequality of its markets unregulated and unchallenged. Yet we also live in an era when, for the first **time** in well over a century, there are no significant political projects which articulate and campaign for a socialist alternative to capitalism. There is popular resistance, people continue to fight back, they hold on to values that assert our humanity in the face of global commodification. But one of the main contributions socialists can still make today, is to not shrink from a ruthless criticism of the limits of this resistance in so far as it is not socialist, even not yet fundamentally anti-capitalist; nor should we desist from criticising those socialists who still blithely imagine that every popular resistance has it in its genes to become socialist.

In the wake of the historic failure of Communism and the no less historic transformation of Social Democracy into a barely recognisable shadow of the ideas and movements that spawned it, and in the wake of the inability of the New Left to transform those parties or generate alternative socialist political formations of significant size and permanence, the very notion of a socialist future beyond capitalism has been pushed off the agenda. This is almost as much the case intellectually as it is politically. It has been hard for socialists to come to terms with the idea that

constructing the futuro is not their affair, in the sense of socialism not being something already present (that is, actually being constructed in Russia, or China, or Mozambique, or Nicaragua) or at least something imminent, a project we might actively embark on in our lifetimes. Socialists have often mixed up their own mortality with a timetable for, if not the realization of socialism, then at least the 'final conflict' with capitalism and the regimes of the old order. In this respect, the weight that was placed by some on electoral victories and welfare statist reforms as having laid the foundations for the construction of the future proved as delusionary as the weight placed on insurrection and vanguardism by others. Recognising these delusions has driven many erstwhile socialists into a stoic realism which not only accomodates itself to capitalism as a system but in the process ignores or covers over its immoralities, exploitations and contradictions. After all, what is the point of raising these, if constructing the future is not our affair?

If we can divest ourselves of the hubris of tying our own mortality to the construction of the future, however, the point becomes quite clear. The point is to continue to play a role in ensuring that, as the Communist Manifesto put it: '... man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.' We need, more than ever, to draw on socialist values and analysis to undertake a ruthless criticism of what exists today, so the ground may be cleared to rebuild socialist projects tomorrow. The greatest tragedy of the failure of socialism in this century would be the loss of these values and this analysis at the very time when popular resistance from Korea to Canada refuses to go away, in spite of capitalism's greatest cultural, political and spatial reach. Ruthless criticism is, therefore, not a matter of striking a pose as mere 'critics'. On the contrary, it is to insist on the need for the most searching analysis, groping for understanding—critique in the proper sense—without fear of being thrown off by the charge that such analysis is invalid without an immediate answer to 'there is no alternative.' What we know now, more clearly than ever, is that what is on offer, by either neoliberalism or social democracy today, does not provide solutions to contemporary capitalism's problems and injustices, let alone acceptable alternatives in terms of socialist goals and values.

Last year's volume posed the sober question of 'Are There Alternatives?', rather than blithely asserting that there are alternatives, precisely because we are aware that genuine alternatives cannot be constructed out of thin air. A large part of our purpose in that volume was to show that what is presented by way of alternatives to neoliberalism in the present conjuncture are nothing of the sort precisely because they are captured within the very contradictions and dynamics that gave rise to **neo-**liberalism. We extend that orientation in this volume. The essays in this

volume undertake sober analysis and **ruthless** criticism of the dynamics, depredations and contradictions of today's global capitalism; of the abject accomodation to it by ertswihle Communists, Social Democrats and Liberals; of the failed socialist and 'new left' movements over the past century; and, not least, of the defeatist and confused '**post-**' intellectuals of our time, who would leave us with no analytic capacity, let alone with no commitment, with which to contribute today to the eventual relaunching of socialist politics.

Among our contributors, Gregory Albo teaches political science at York University, Toronto. **Elmar** Altvater is Professor of Political Science at the Free University of Berlin. Larry Pratt teaches political science at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Canada and Wendy Montgomery is a graduate of that University. Gerard Greenfield is Research Co-ordinator of the Asia Monitor Resource Centre in Hong Kong and Apo **Leong** is the Director of that Centre. George Ross is the Morris **Hillquit** Professor in Labor and Social Thought at Brandeis University, Boston. Barbara Epstein teaches in the Department of History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and Doug **Henwood** is the Editor of the Left Business Observer, New York. Joan Smith is Reader in the School of Social Sciences, Staffordshire University; and Paul Cammack teaches in the Department of Government, Manchester University. Vicente **Navarro** is Professor of Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore and of Political and Social Sciences at the Universitat Pompeu **Fabra**, Barcelona. Ananya Mukherjee-Reed teaches in the Department of Political Science at York University, Toronto; and Scott Forsyth is in the Film and Video Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at that University. Scott **McCracken** teaches in the Department of English at the University of Salford in Salford, England; and **Meera** Nanda is in the Department of Science and Technology Studies at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. **Aijaz Ahmad** is Professorial Fellow at the Centre of Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Dehli.

I want to express my appreciation to all the contributors for the effort they put into their essays for this volume. Thanks are also due to Nicholas C. F. Hubble of the Institute for German Studies at the University of Birmingham for the translation of **Elmar** Altvater's essay. This is the second volume of The Socialist Register to be produced with the help of the editorial collectives in Manchester and Toronto, and I want to express my gratitude to Greg Albo, Paul Cammack, Sam **Gindin**, Judy **Hellman**, John Saul, Reg Whitaker, Ellen Wood and, above all, to David Coates for the active role they played in making this volume possible. Nor would this volume have been possible without the commitment and help of my research assistant at York University, Alan Zuege, for which I am very grateful. As I also am to Julie Millard and Martin Eve at Merlin Press, who

have, as always, have been unfailing in the support and energy they put into *The Socialist Register*.

It is our long-standing tradition to remind the readers that neither our contributors nor the editors necessarily agree with everything that appears in the volume. On this occasion I should also like to point out that the essay, 'How It All Began: A Footnote To History' by Marion Kozak in the 1995 *Socialist Register* requires some correction and qualification as regards comments made about Walter Greendale. This staunch industrial militant and committed socialist from Hull, England who became lay chairman (president) of the TGWU, and one of that union's representatives on the TUC General Council, was mistakenly referred to as 'Greenald', and did not attend the *New Reasoner and Universities and Left Review* Industrial Conference in Leeds in November 1958; nor was he ever a member of the Communist Party. This last was not stated in the essay, but might possibly be inferred from the context. Our apologies.

February 1997

L.P.