The preface to the first volume of the *Socialist Register* in 1964, in announcing ‘a series of annual volumes of socialist analysis and discussion’, expressed the belief that ‘the possibility of fruitful discussions is now greater than for a long time past. It is now better realized among socialists that dogmatic reiteration cannot, any more than crass empiricism, provide answers to the problems of the present.’ It is in the same spirit that we have conceived this volume, the *Register*’s fiftieth. Our decision to focus on the theme of class not only reflects an abiding concern of the *Register* since the beginning, but also the fact that the spread and deepening of capitalist social relations around the globe has been increasingly marked by growing social inequality. And as the global economic crisis that capitalism has spawned in the early twenty-first century has been deployed to extend the class struggle from above so determinedly waged in the neoliberal era, so have the many resistances that have arisen been explicitly cast in terms of class struggles from below.

In the *Register*’s first volume, its founding editors Ralph Miliband and John Saville acknowledged it was not easy to identify strategies that might, within the existing balance of class forces, advance working-class organization and political reforms ‘in socialist directions’. They nevertheless immediately added: ‘But a beginning, or rather a new beginning, must be made somewhere; and the time to begin is surely now’. Almost four decades later, the 2001 volume, *Working Classes, Global Realities*, marked the new millennium with a critical survey of the global working class and the prospects for revitalization – another new beginning – of the socialist movement. As the preface put it: ‘The global proletariat is not vanishing but expanding at a rate that has doubled its numbers since 1975. It is not the absence of proletarian numbers that is the defining feature of the age so much as the unprecedented combination of old and new proletariats in face of global capital’.

This is increasingly recognized today. And this calls for a return to class analysis, especially to the kind of *relational* class analysis that Andre Gorz advanced in his landmark essay on ‘Reform and Revolution’ in the 1968
Register: ‘... the power to initiate a policy of reforms is not conquered in Parliament, but by the previous demonstration of a capacity to mobilize the working classes against current policies; and this capacity can only be durable and fruitful if the forces of opposition can not only effectively challenge current policies, but also resolve the ensuing crisis; not only attack these policies, but also define other policies which correspond to the new balance of forces: or rather – since a relation of forces is never a static thing – to the new dynamic of struggle that this new relation of forces makes possible’.

This now requires a sharpened conceptual apparatus to apprehend the changing composition of both capitalist and working classes in recent decades. The major shifts in capitalism’s financial, industrial and occupational profile, as the last quarter century has unleashed a profound restructuring of accumulation both technologically and geographically, has entailed a major restructuring of capitalist classes themselves while at the same time bringing about the unprecedented combination of old and new proletariats in the interstices of global capital. The deep crisis since 2008 has accelerated all of these changes.

In the light of this, a key question that needs to be posed by class analysis concerns how the restructuring of capitalist classes is changing the shape of political rule. And the changing structure and composition of the working classes requires probing what are their divergent and collective interests. On the presumption that socialism cannot happen unless working classes make it happen, how do socialists make the link between the working class today and strategies for developing the class as a transformative agency? In other words, what is the real working class that socialists have to work with in the twenty-first century?

The immensity of these questions is such that they will command the attention of both the fiftieth and fifty-first volumes of the Register. The 2015 Register will attempt to assess further the organizational foundations of the ruling classes today, in both their corporate forms and their national and regional settings. And it will also investigate further the changing face and prospects of working-class organization and politics. The geographical range will be extended to include China and India, as the central places in Asia where both capitalist and working classes are being remade. The volume will also feature contributions on the potential for a breakthrough in working-class organization and politics in the capitalist heartland of the USA, and will continue to explore the transformations taking place within working-class families. The restructuring of the sphere of reproduction, with its important implications for migration and gender relations, is as vital as the restructuring of the labour process for understanding contemporary working-class lives.
and politics.

The essays for these two volumes on class analysis emerge out of a workshop held in Toronto in February 2013. There are a number of people to thank for providing support in facilitating the meetings – Frederick Peters, Eric Newstadt, Steve Maher, Jared Gampel and Khashayar Hooshiyar. We are grateful to our contributors for their participation, for the stimulating dialogue and debate that ensued, and for the attentiveness they paid to the comments we supplied on their drafts. The workshop encouraged a variety of approaches to the issues at hand, and we hope that our readers will appreciate the differences and tensions across the essays, which we believe is an absolute requirement for advancing socialist theory and strategy today. We want to thank Alan Zuege for his insights on theoretical and strategic issues related to planning both the volumes on class analysis, as well as Adam Hilton for his outstanding editorial assistance. We are also grateful to Louis Mackay for presenting us with an especially evocative cover. Finally, with this fiftieth volume, we want to extend the greatest appreciation to Tony Zurbrugg and Adrian Howe at Merlin Press for the long-standing and unfailing support given to the Register over the years, including this one.

Our co-editor Vivek Chibber has decided that with the completion of the Register’s fiftieth volume he would prefer to return to the position of associate editor, where he will continue to play an active supporting role. As we embark on the next fifty years, we also look forward to our continuing collaboration with the Register’s editorial collective, to which we are very pleased to welcome Madeleine Davis and Ray Kiely as new members.

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