

SOCIALIST REGISTER 1991

COMMUNIST REGIMES: THE AFTERMATH

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PREFACE

This twenty-seventh volume of the *Socialist Register* is primarily devoted to the daunting questions posed for socialists by the transformations which the USSR and the former Communist regimes of Eastern Europe are going through. The editors of and contributors to the *Socialist Register* over the past quarter century have fostered no illusions regarding the dictatorial nature of these regimes, and have presented over the years many analyses of their limits and contradictions. The emergence of "glasnost" in the USSR since **1985** followed by the dramatic democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in **1989-90** were events of great historic importance, and they appeared to offer some promise for positive developments in international relations as well as for democratic socialist prospects. Today, we must ask what already remains of such promise as we witness the prospects for democratic socialism marginalized by capitalist and chauvinist forces and sentiments in Eastern Europe and the USSR, not to mention the growing economic and military ruthlessness of an unchecked global capitalism lustily proclaiming its "new world order". The Left must reassess the whole Communist experience, and draw appropriate lessons, in light of the collapse of authoritarian communism; it must do so, however, also mindful of the costs and consequences of an authoritarian capitalism rushing in to pick up the pieces.

The essays in this volume attempt to understand the aftermath of Communist regimes in terms of its global as well as local political, economic and ideological implications, including the implications it has for the meaning and prospects of democratic socialism. While they also analyze the long-term, internal and external, causes of the crisis of the authoritarian communism, their primary focus is on providing detailed accounts of current developments, above all in relation to investigating the contradictory nature of the simultaneous processes of "democratization" and "marketization", and the complex old and new social forces, ideas and struggles involved. Regardless of whether our contributors see the Communist regimes as having represented the distortion and ultimate failure of a particular

kind of socialism, or as never having amounted to any kind of socialism at all due to their divorce between socialism and democracy, the conclusions they draw regarding what is happening in the aftermath of Communist regimes still point to democratic socialism as the only humane alternative. The most daunting questions this volume raises, therefore, are those concerned with how to go about making viable the vision and prospect of democratic socialism at the end of the twentieth century.

We are extremely pleased to count among our contributors a number who are closely associated with the struggle for democratic socialism in some of the very countries which are the focus of this volume. Alexander Buzgalin and Andrei Kalganov of Moscow were the founders of the Marxist Platform in the Communist Party two years ago; in the past year Buzgalin has been elected as a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and Kalganov has been elected as a member of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. Tadeusz Kowalik, an historian of socialist economic thought in the Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, was an adviser to Solidarity in its founding years; he is associated today with the self-management wing of Solidarity, in opposition to the policies of the current Polish government. Peter Bihari, a lecturer at the Budapest University of Economics in Budapest, became editor two years ago of the theoretical journal of the Hungarian Socialist Party, and has contributed to the development of a new circle of young socialist economists in Hungary. For his part, Carlos Vilas, a frequent contributor to the *Socialist Register* in recent years, worked in Nicaragua between 1980 and the beginning of 1990 as a consultant to various government agencies and international organizations. He is now a Fellow at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in the Humanities, UNAM, Mexico.

Among our other contributors, John Saville was one of the founders of the *Socialist Register* in 1964 and for twenty-five years one of its co-editors. Sam Gindin is Research Director and Assistant to the President of the Canadian Autoworkers Union. David Mandel teaches political science at the Universitt du Qutbec a Montrtal; and Justin Schwartz is in the Department of Philosophy at Ohio State University in Columbus. Patrick Flaherty, since completing his Ph.D. in Government at Harvard University, has been an independent scholar living in Woburn, Mass. Both Robert Cox and Ernest Mandel teach political economy, the former in the Department of Political Science at York University in Toronto, and the latter at the Free University in Brussels. Daniel Singer is an independent writer living in Paris who is European Editor of *The Nation*. Susan Woodward is currently a Visiting Fellow at The Brookings Institution

in Washington, D.C.; and Michael Lebowitz teaches in the Department of Economics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

We are very grateful to all our contributors, although we must, as always, point out that neither they nor the editors necessarily agree with everything that appears in the volume. Special thanks are due to Mike Gonzales, Hugh Jenkins and Eszter Pásztor for their translations of the articles by Vilas, Buzgalin and Kolganov, and Bihari respectively. We also appreciate the advice and support we have had from Susan Lowes of Monthly Review Press. Finally, as had been the case with every volume of the *Socialist Register*, Martin Eve of Merlin Press deserves much of the credit for his great help with all aspects of production. We are most grateful for his consistent encouragement and support.

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L.P.
R.M.