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**FIGHTING IDENTITIES:
RACE, RELIGION AND ETHNO-NATIONALISM**

Edited by LEO PANITCH and COLIN LEYS

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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Peter Gowan The American Campaign for Global Sovereignty	1
Aziz Al-Azmeh Postmodern Obscurantism and ‘the Muslim Question’	28
Avishai Ehrlich Palestine, Global Politics and Israeli Judaism	51
Susan L. Woodward The Political Economy of Ethno-Nationalism in Yugoslavia	73
Georgi Derlugian How Soviet Bureaucracy Produced Nationalism, and what came of it in Azerbaijan	93
Pratyush Chandra Linguistic-Communal Politics and Class Conflict in India	114
Mahmood Mamdani Making Sense of Political Violence in Post-colonial Africa	132
Hugh Roberts The Left and the Algerian Catastrophe	152
Stephen Castles The International Politics of Forced Migration	172

Hans-Georg Betz Xenophobia, Identity Politics and Exclusionary Populism in Western Europe	193
Jörg Flecker The European Right and Working Life: From ordinary miseries to political disasters	211
Huw Beynon & Lou Kushnick Cool Britannia or Cruel Britannia? Racism and New Labour	229
Bill Fletcher Jr. & Fernando Gapsin The Politics of Labour and Race in the USA	245
Amory Starr Is the North American Anti-Globalization Movement Racist? Critical reflections	265
Stephanie Ross Is This What Democracy Looks Like? The politics of the anti-globalization movement in North America	281
Sergio Baierle The Porto Alegre Thermidor? Brazil's 'Participatory Budget' at the crossroads	305
Nancy Leys Stepan Science and Race: Before and after the Human Genome Project	329
John S. Saul Identifying Class, Classifying Difference	347

PREFACE

We decided to devote this, the 39th volume of the *Socialist Register*, to the theme of ‘fighting identities’ in mid-2000, a year before September 11, 2001. The volume is thus not about terrorism, or the ‘war on terrorism’, but it is about the conflicts and contradictions of which the attacks on New York and Washington DC were epiphanic. It is surely clear that the dangerous possibilities that flow from those terrible events can only be averted if the underlying relationships that gave rise to them are first fore-grounded and understood.

The ‘fighting identities’ we are concerned with reflect two closely linked global realities. One is the dual role of the American state as both the manager of a world capitalist order (a role it alone can play) and as the embodiment of the American national interest – and an all too often chauvinist identity. The other reality is the way particularist and exclusivist identities are so often a response to something universal, i.e. the pain felt by victims of oppression and exploitation everywhere. Even reactionary fundamentalist identities may be seen as distorted and perverse responses of this kind, in the vacuum created by the defeat of rational and progressive alternatives.

It is for these reasons that the volume begins with an essay on ‘the American campaign for global sovereignty’ by Peter Gowan, based on his 2001 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture. Deutscher himself contributed the lead essay to the first volume of the Register in 1964, and given what we have just said about the nature of today’s ‘fighting identities’, it is worth recalling that in his essay, which was on Mao’s Chinese revolution, Deutscher argued that ‘ever since the middle of the nineteenth century... China had been seething with anti-imperialism and agrarian revolt; but the movements and secret societies involved in the risings and revolts were all traditional in character and based on ancient religious cults’.

We chose to focus on race, religion, ethnicity and nationalism because they are still at the centre of so many major conflicts at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Our initial aim was to highlight the centrality of race, but like all identities when they are used in political mobilizations, race is almost always

linked to others, and especially to religion, ethnicity and nationalism. Unlike the extensive recent literature that discusses the articulation of such identities in the abstract, however, the essays in this volume seek to take race, religion, ethnicity and nationalism seriously by setting them in their widely varying historical and geographical contexts, from the Indian subcontinent to the Middle East, Africa, the former communist countries and, finally, the 'West' – where, in the context of the forced migration of economic and political refugees from these regions, xenophobia fuels right-wing 'identity politics' in Europe, and in the USA overlaps with, and complicates, the unresolved issues of race and racism in working-class politics.

In every case three key themes emerge: a) racial, religious and national identities are anything but epiphenomenal; b) there are historical reasons why these identities have such purchase on the lives of so many people – and for several centuries now these reasons have been more or less closely bound up with the evolution of capitalism; and c) it is therefore necessary to articulate the struggle against capitalism with these 'actually existing' identities.

Intellectuals have a particular responsibility to try to get this right. Race, in particular, has always been implicated in the discourse of the natural sciences. There is a long history of claims that race is genetically imprinted, and these claims have again been at issue in recent research into the human genome: hence the inclusion of a critical review of 'science and race' by Nancy Stepan. The social sciences and humanities have also long been preoccupied with the identities focused on in this volume; in the last decade, in fact, academe has been rife with claims for the primacy of 'identity politics', claims closely associated with a 'post-modern' repudiation of the 'grand narrative' of history as class struggle, which allegedly prioritized the male, western working class as the agent of history, at the expense of the interests of women, people of colour, oppressed nationalities, etc. The need today is, by contrast, to take political identities seriously: not seeing them as 'natural', but also not consigning their significance to mere 'difference', disconnected from any historical and materialist analysis. In the wide-ranging essay that concludes this volume John Saul argues that we must support the legitimate aspirations and demands associated with these identities, and that class needs to be integrated with them in ways that will change the terms of class struggle – based on an awareness of the evolving shape of the global capitalist order, and the strategies needed to challenge it.

Are contemporary left politics equal to this task? Our choice of a cover photograph of Zapatista women represents perhaps the most famous contemporary example of a progressive 'fighting identity', an indigenous group which has represented its struggle as being conducted in the name of all oppressed identities, and which has particularly inspired the worldwide anti-globalization movement. Two of the essays included in the volume, however, ask whether that movement, which was the subject of two much-discussed essays by Naomi Klein and André Drainville in *Socialist Register 2002*, has overcome the problem of unifying multiple identities in a single struggle. Amory Starr questions the

charge that the North American anti-globalization movement is itself racist, while Stephanie Ross critiques the undemocratic character of a politics that strings together, but does not unify or make accountable, a plurality of diverse oppositional identities. And a third essay focuses on a political practice which anti-globalization activists particularly admire, and which has clearly opened up participation in local government to a wide range of popular interests and identities – the Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre, one of the defining features of the new kind of class politics championed by the Brazilian Workers Party. Sergio Baierle's timely analysis argues that the Participatory Budget now faces a 'Thermidor', and highlights a series of critical problems that will have to be overcome if the principles of the Participatory Budget are to survive and be carried forward into other spheres of government. The prospects for this depend on the kind of sober probing of left strategy and practice that Baierle undertakes, and which most activists who attended the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre in January 2002 have still to do. We are always in greatest danger when the left's theory and practice is divorced from careful, self-critical strategic thinking.

Among our contributors, Peter Gowan is Professor of International Relations at London Metropolitan University. Aziz Al-Azmeh teaches Islamic and Middle East Studies at the American University of Beirut; and Avishai Ehrlich teaches political sociology at Tel Aviv University and at Tel Aviv-Jaffa Academic College. Susan Woodward is Professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center, City University of New York; and Georgi Derluguian teaches sociology at Northwestern University. Pratyush Chandra is a labour activist in New Delhi; and Mahmood Mamdani is Herbert Lehman Professor of Government and Director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, and President of the Council for the Development of Social Research in Dakar. Hugh Roberts is a Senior Research Fellow of the Development Studies Institute at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and currently Visiting Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science, American University in Cairo. Stephen Castles is Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford; and Hans-Georg Betz is Associate Professor of Political Science at York University, Toronto. Jörg Flecker is scientific director of FORBA, the working life research centre at Vienna, where he also teaches sociology. Huw Beynon is Director of the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University; and Lou Kushnick is Director of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive at the University of Manchester. Bill Fletcher, Jr. is Executive Director of the Trans-Africa Forum in Washington DC, and Fernando Gapasin is President of a local union in Los Angeles and teaches at the Cesar E. Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Chicana/o Studies at UCLA. Amory Starr teaches sociology at Colorado State University; and Stephanie Ross, who has been teaching labour studies at McMaster University, is completing a doctorate at York University, Toronto. Sérgio Baierle is a member of the board of directors of Cidade (Centro de Assessoria e Estudos Urbanos), a Brazilian NGO, an analyst at the Central Bank of Brazil, and teaches history at the Department of

Education of Porto Alegre. Nancy Stepan teaches the history of science and medicine at Columbia University; and John Saul teaches political science at York University, Toronto.

We want to thank all our contributors, while reminding readers that neither they nor the editors necessarily agree with everything in the volume – our usual caveat. We also want to thank Marina Biasutti for her help with the translation of Sergio Baierle's essay, PA Photos for the cover photograph, Louis Mackay for the cover design, and Jan de Jong and the Foundation for Middle East Peace for permission to reproduce the map on page 69. We are especially indebted to Martijn Konings, the Register's editorial assistant at York University, and to Tony Zurbrugg and Adrian Howe at the Merlin Press in London, for their skilled and dedicated work in the production of this volume.

L.P C.L.

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