

PREFACE

Neoliberal globalisation, a predominant theme of the Socialist Register over the past 15 years, is brought into focus in this volume in relation to its impact on the most important area of human life: health. All the elements of public health, from a balanced diet to decent housing, job security and job satisfaction are crucial in determining how well and how long people live. This is partly a matter of giving the human body what it needs to reach its full physical potential, but also a matter of preventing disease and, to a lesser extent, a matter of curing illnesses. The turn that capitalism has taken in recent decades has, in both these respects, been replete with morbid symptoms – the title of this volume, the Register’s 46th, on health under capitalism.

A vast amount has been written about health, but very little from a systematically critical standpoint. The path-breaking work in the political economy of health begun in the 1970s by pioneers such as Lesley Doyal, Vicente Navarro and Julian Tudor Hart has been too little followed up by others, at least in the English-speaking world. This is all the more remarkable, given the size and scope of the global health industry and its growing centrality as arena of capital accumulation. Our goal in preparing this volume was to help develop the historical materialist analysis of health under capitalism, focusing on the economic, social and political determinants of health in the neoliberal era; and on health *care* as an object of struggle, between commercial forces that seek to make it into a commodity and popular forces trying to make (or keep) it a public service and to reduce the current gross inequalities of access. It is crucial for the Left today to address, in particular, the marketisation of public health services, and the way the pharmaceutical, insurance, medical technology and healthcare corporations push to make health care everywhere into a field of capital accumulation and expand the consumption of medical commodities – services as well as goods. Many of the morbid symptoms flow directly from this, including the corporate control of medical research and training, the misuse of scientific data for commercial gain, the generation and mistreatment of an epidemic of mental illness, and the newest frontier of capitalist accumulation – the

turning of genes into commodities.

In most societies today health and health care are rarely out of the news: the spectre of new epidemics, or the return of old ones; the food industry's production of both obesity and hunger; the emergence of 'superbugs'; lapses in hospital care; breakthroughs in medical research or surgical techniques; new 'wonder drugs'; and, of course, ever-present hand-wringing about 'runaway' healthcare costs. It is in the rich capitalist countries that resources exist for increasingly sophisticated and costly biomedical research and medical technology; and as the range of medical knowledge increases, so does the range of possible medical interventions, and with this, the demand for still more resources for research and treatment. Most of these countries also have healthcare systems funded by general taxes or social insurance which at least in principle treat everyone alike, without reference to ability to pay. This involves a transfer of income from rich to poor (who have worse health) and makes public hospitals and clinics some of the few places in these class-based societies where there is relatively little class distinction – no separate 'business' and 'economy' cabins. But this also helps explain why there is capitalist and state support in these countries for the drive by the global private healthcare industry to get access to the rich pools of public revenue out of which public health systems are funded. They energetically promote the call for costs to be contained, and for the services to be handed over to private providers who will cut costs through the efficiencies allegedly produced by competition. No analysis of the relationship between health care and capitalism can avoid a heavy focus on the affluent 'north', where the interplay of these forces has so far been heavily concentrated, but the dynamics of this are played out world-wide, with profound effects, as many of the essays in this volume clearly demonstrate.

The current global economic crisis brings into sharp relief the morbid symptoms associated with health and health care under capitalism today. The crisis was born in the USA, and it is not coincidental that the issue of healthcare reform has moved to the top of the political agenda there, alongside the American state's attempts to cope with the crisis. It was in the US that a market-based healthcare system persisted throughout the post-war era, while other states – reflecting a different balance of class forces – moved away from it. What has always been at stake here is a profound class issue. The UAW's Walter Reuther once explained why General Motors refused to support the campaign for a national health insurance scheme which would have lifted the burden of healthcare costs from the company: 'There's something more important to them than their own self-interest'. That 'something' was collective capitalist class discipline; it reflected the common interests of

employers in keeping workers dependent on them for health care through company-based insurance, and the larger project American capitalists shared in spreading market relations to every facet of life, if possible in every part of the world. With the increasing achievement of this in the neoliberal era we have seen the effective Americanisation of other healthcare systems, not only through the relentless penetration of public health care by corporate capital, but also through state-led marketisation. In the poorer capitalist countries of the world, with the most notable exception of Cuba, this has combined with the exacerbation of global inequality to ensure that the ‘Health for All’ goal adopted in the UN’s 1978 Alma Ata Declaration soon became a dead letter.

Any serious political economy of health under capitalism must be centred on the fundamental contradiction involved: health and health care are use values *par excellence*, of limited interest to capital unless it can convert them into exchange values; where publicly-funded health services were secured, the productivity of a healthy workforce was always a key element in capital’s acquiescence. Where publicly-funded health care becomes seen as a problem for accumulation, the use values of health and health care must be obscured and distorted. Much public discussion of and official policy towards health and health care today has this aim. The basic requirement for a valid political economy of health and health care is to subject all such discourse and policy to critical scrutiny. But that is by no means enough. What is essential, especially for building effective forces of opposition capable of organising on this terrain, is to make the fundamental contradiction of health under capitalism the pivotal issue of a revitalised socialist strategy.

One of the most rewarding aspects of editing this volume was the range of new contacts we made with experts in the field, and their enthusiasm for what they, like us, saw as an important project. We are especially grateful to Roddy Loepky for his help in planning the volume. We are also grateful to all the other contributors; though we must add, as always, that neither they nor we necessarily agree with everything in the volume. Again as usual, we are indebted to Alan Zuege and Adrian Howe for their editorial work, to Louis McKay for his arresting cover design, and to our publisher Tony Zurbrugg for his encouragement and support.

With this volume, two important transitions occur in the editing and publishing of the Register. After 12 years as co-editor, Colin Leys is stepping down to join Alfredo Saad Filho as an associate editor; Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber are joining Leo Panitch as co-editors. This represents a first step in handing on the direction of the Register, as it approaches its 50th year of publication, to a younger generation. The commitment to the future of

the Register extends beyond the change in editors to some turnover within the editorial collective. With are deeply grateful to Huw Beynon, Varda Burstyn, David Coates, Terry Eagleton, Steve Jefferys and Ellen Meiksins Wood for the many invaluable contributions they have made to the Register over the years, and are confident that the Register will continue to be able to rely on their help when needed, including, we hope, as authors of future essays. We are delighted that Bashir Abu-Manneh, Johanna Brenner, David Harvey, Christoph Hermann, Nancy Holmstrom, Martijn Konings and Charles Post have agreed to join the editorial collective, and look forward to productive collaboration with them.

The second transition, also reflecting a generational shift, is that this volume is the first to be published on-line simultaneously with the print edition, while at the same time all 45 previous volumes will be made similarly available on our new website, www.socialistregister.com. This has involved a major commitment of time and resources on the part of many people. We are especially indebted for this to Rea Davakos, Gabriela Mircea and Colin Prince at the Scholarly Communication Unit, University of Toronto Libraries, as well as to our own 'e-team' of Alan Zuege, Frederick Peters, Lana Goldberg, James Parisot and Jason Sykes at the Department of Political Science, York University. The groundwork has been laid; the next step is to ensure that all Register readers subscribe, and persuade their libraries and friends to subscribe.

When we assumed the editorship of the Register we were also taking over from a previous generation, and it is with a special sense of the remarkable socialist commitment of that earlier generation that we must sadly note here the death of John Saville, who founded the Register with Ralph Miliband in 1964. One of things that spurred us on in our co-editorship was how we could possibly face John if the *Register* were to go under on our watch. The 1989 volume of the *Register* was the last John was directly involved in editing. It was entitled 'Revolution Today: Aspirations and Realities', and its Preface's articulation of the concern to raise 'a host of issues' regarding the 'problems and dilemmas' which the quest for 'a cooperative, egalitarian, democratic and classless society' had encountered in the 20th century and how they might be overcome in the future, effectively expressed what the Register had been about since its inception. When John decided, after the completion of that volume, to step down after 25 years as co-editor, this was noted in the Preface to the 1990 volume as 'a real wrench' since 'his steadiness, lucidity and good sense have been of immense value through the years'.

The theme of the 1990 *Register* was 'The Retreat of the Intellectuals',

but John was not retreating. On the contrary, the 1990 volume included his trenchant critique of *Marxism Today* for its role in the retreat of the intellectuals from class politics to what would become known as the Third Way. For the 1991 *Register*, John wrote a personal appraisal of the 20th century Communist experience, including of his own decision to join the Party in 1934, which he put in terms that ought to have considerable resonance today: ‘For young intellectuals with any generosity of spirit there were additional factors beyond the poverty of so many of their own people, and the brutalities of fascism. Bourgeois society was under increasing criticism for its callousness, greed and cultural emptiness’. And for the 1994 *Register*, John produced an essay, occasioned by Edward Thompson’s death the previous year, on the stand the two of them took in 1956, including by founding the *New Reasoner*, the forerunner of the *Socialist Register*. The statement that John and Edward issued in response to their suspension from the Communist Party in November 1956 was an appendix to that essay. What they wrote there also speaks to the contemporary condition of the Left: ‘The times call above all for a new movement of ideas, reaching out beyond party barriers and bringing socialists together on the basis of principle rather than of opportunism’.

We will always be very grateful for the extremely helpful role John played during the transition years to our co-editorship of the *Register* after Ralph Miliband’s death. We especially recall sitting with John in brilliant sunshine overlooking the pond at Hampstead Heath in the summer of 1997, and expressing our by no means false modesty about our capacity to come near matching what Ralph and John had accomplished with the *Register*. We can still hear John saying, with his unique ability to combine comradely sternness with personal warmth: ‘Just get on with it, mates’.

We also have to note the passing of Victor Kiernan, who with John Saville, E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm was a member of the famous British Communist Party’s Historians’ Group. Having lived in India, and written extensively about Indian history and culture and the struggle for Independence, he strongly identified with the anti-imperialist cause. He contributed frequently to the *Register* during its first decade on the theme of imperialism, and these essays formed the basis of his important book, *Marxism and Imperialism*.

We are very sad to note here as well the deaths in 2009 of Giovanni Arrighi and Peter Gowan, brilliant representatives of a younger generation of socialist intellectuals. One of Arrighi’s first publications was his 1969 *Register* essay with John Saul on ‘Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa’. His extremely wide-ranging contributions to political economy and historical

sociology over the subsequent decades included his most famous book, *The Long Twentieth Century*. His interest in the evolution of the world proletariat was a constant in his work, and we were especially pleased to be able to commission his essay with Beverly Silver on ‘Workers North and South’ as one of the centerpieces of the 2001 Register on *Working Classes: Global Realities*.

The Left has also suffered a major loss with the death at 63 of Peter Gowan. Through the 1970s and early 1980s he played a key role as an activist-intellectual by editing (under the pseudonym of Oliver Macdonald) *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, the best source by far for evidence of strikes and other forms of protests in the authoritarian Communist regimes. He not only went on to analyze (including in his 1998 Register essay) the continuing class struggles in Eastern Europe amidst ‘shock therapy’ after the fall of Communism, but was one of the first to see clearly that globalisation was not an inexorable process taking place behind the backs of states, but rather was the product of a determined state strategy. This was the central theme of his celebrated book, *The Global Gamble: Washington’s Faustian Bid for World Dominance*, and it was developed further in his Register essays in the 2000 and 2003 volumes. With his engagingly provocative style of speaking, he was much sought after for conference appearances wherever the Left gathered to take intellectual stock, and he became a mainstay at the annual Left Forums in New York each spring and at the Historical Materialism conferences in London each autumn.

In taking leave of these comrades, we found comfort in two lines from a poem by the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, translated into English by Victor Kiernan:

Last night your faded memory filled my heart...
Like peace somehow coming to one in sickness.

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July 2009