Rereading *Capital*

Also by Ben Fine

Marx's *Capital*

Rereading *Capital*

BEN FINE and
LAURENCE HARRIS

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1979 978-0-333-23139-5

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First published 1979 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Associated companies in Delhi Dublin
Hong Kong Johannesburg Lagos Melbourne
New York Singapore and Tokyo

Typeset in Great Britain by
VANTAGE PHOTOSetting CO. LTD
SOUTHAMPTON AND LONDON

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Fine, Ben

Rereading 'Capital'.

1. Marx, Karl. Kapital, Das

I. Title II. Harris, Laurence

335.4 HB501.M37

ISBN 978-0-333-23140-1 ISBN 978-1-349-86131-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-86131-6

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Preface

This book concerns Marx's theory of the capitalist economy and, in particular, its applicability to the study of current economic events. Although the subjects about which we have written include many which appear to be highly abstract they are all ultimately relevant to the analysis of concrete events. Indeed, our collaboration on the study of value theory, laws of tendency and related concepts grew out of our collaboration on the analysis of the economic events which filled the newspapers every day; we found that if we were to go beyond Keynesian and other orthodox analyses it was necessary to consider the foundations of Marxist analysis. This study took place while both authors were engaged in the activities of the Conference of Socialist Economists, and since there already existed within the CSE a significant body of work concerned with the foundations of Marxist economics our work necessarily starts out with that as its raw material. Accordingly this book has a dual character as a critical survey of and a contribution to the continuing debate.

We consider that as a contribution to the development of Marxist economics this book is particularly important in emphasising that in order to analyse concrete events the theory of the capitalist mode of production must be developed through several levels of abstraction until it is ultimately able to grasp the complexities of the concrete. Marx's own theory of the capitalist mode in *Capital* and elsewhere is at the highest level of abstraction, but in our view it is the indispensable basis for the development of less abstract analyses. Two aspects of this development are particularly noted in this book; the first is the necessity to theorise the *periodisa-*

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tion of capitalism into stages (for otherwise it is impossible to consider either the specific aspects of modern capitalism or the history of capitalist societies); the second is the necessity to theorise the existence of *national states*, for at *Capital's* level of abstraction the national state is not a developed concept.

No book on Marxist theory can be easy to read, but we have made every effort to write in an accessible style. Our intention is that the book should be of interest to and comprehensible to anyone, whether economist or not, who has made a study of *Capital* and reached the level of understanding at which textbooks such as Ben Fine's *Marx's Capital* (Macmillan) or Paul Sweezy's *Theory of Capitalist Development* (Monthly Review Press) are aimed.

All material in this book is new rather than being reprints of material that has appeared elsewhere. Nevertheless, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 owe much to the fact that we were able to develop our ideas at an earlier stage and enter into a discussion of them by publishing them in the *Socialist Register* 1976 and 1977. We are therefore most grateful to the editors, Ralph Miliband and John Saville, for publishing and encouraging us to write 'Controversial Issues in Marxist Economic Theory' and 'Surveying the Foundations'.

We are very heavily indebted to Gillian Robinson for typing the manuscript with great speed and remarkably good cheer. Several colleagues have given us assistance and advice and we have also benefited from discussions with our students at Birkbeck. We thank them all for their help without listing them. We must, however, acknowledge with gratitude the fact that Judith Shapiro brought to our attention the point made in Chapter 3 about the Fundamentalists' erroneous interpretation of Marx on Smith. We also wish to thank the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College, Oxford, for the facilities and hospitality given to Ben Fine in 1977 when he was on sabbatical leave and working on this book.

The Index was compiled by Wing Commander Roger F. Pemberton, M.C., T.D., to whom we extend our thanks.

February 1978

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