

**POLITICAL ECONOMY:
AND CAPITALISM**

By the same Author

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Some Essays in Economic
Tradition

By MAURICE DOBB, M.A.

LECTURER IN ECONOMICS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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P R E F A C E

AN attempt to explore the whole territory of economics with so fragile a vehicle as eight slender essays might well be held sufficient evidence of a diffuseness doomed to be superficial. If these essays made any such pretension, there would, I think, be no answer to the charge. But while their apparent range is wide, they make no claim to do more than survey certain aspects of their field, and they advisedly ignore large areas which many may judge to be more deserving of study. The selection of themes has not, however, been a random one. It has been guided by the opinion that Political Economy and the controversies which beset it have meaning as answers to certain questions of an essentially practical kind—questions concerning the nature and behaviour of the economic system which we know as capitalism; and that this type of question is crucial both to any full understanding of the development of economic thought and to the relation between economic thought and practice. In the later career of a theory there is a common tendency for original questions of this kind to become submerged and forgotten, so that essential meaning is lost or obscured. It is the belief that economic thought, if it is to have realistic worth, must be freed of many notions to-day encumbering its roots which gives to these essays such unity as they can claim to have, and explains their preoccupation so largely with interpretation and criticism.

The book is necessarily addressed, in the main, to those who have some acquaintance with economic literature and with economic discussion. At the same time, care has been taken to avoid the technical preoccupations of professional economists, so far as the theme has allowed,

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and to make the discussion accessible to the wider circle of those who have a lively sense of the intimate relation between economic thought and practice in the world to-day and have little time for what is merely "light-bearing" without being "fruit-bearing". If some of what is written here may bear the character of thinking aloud rather than of finished thought, the thought has at least not been hasty but has extended over several years. In this process of groping I have incurred a debt to Mr. Dennis Robertson and Mr. Piero Sraffa, who have read some, and to Mr. W. E. Armstrong, Professor Erich Roll and Mr. H. D. Dickinson, who have read all or the greater part of these essays at various stages in their growth, and whose criticism has banished a number of confusions which might otherwise have remained. Mr. Clemens Dutt, Mr. A. G. D. Watson and Mr. George Barnard have also given me valuable advice and correction on a number of special points. But none of these must be blamed for errors which remain, or for any of the opinions which are expressed.

M. H. D.

CAMBRIDGE,
July 1937.

In the revised edition I have made some substantial alteration to the second half of Chapter IV, in order to elaborate certain aspects of Marx's theory of crises which in the earlier edition I had tended to ignore, and also some alterations, to meet the requirements of maturer thought, in the last dozen pages of Chapter VI. Elsewhere, although only too conscious of mistakes and deficiencies, I have confined myself to a few very minor changes.

May 1940.

M. H. D.

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