

RRPE

THE REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS

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Dear Alan et al.

I am writing on behalf of the Editorial Board of the *RRPE* in response to your letter concerning Ajit Sinha's review of *Reclaiming Marx's Capital*. The Board is in full agreement that nothing in the review warrants a retraction.

The point at issue is Sinha's interpretation of Andrew Kliman's rhetoric. Your letter refers to the COPE *Code of Conduct*. The only clause of the code which has a bearing on this matter reads as follows: "Whenever it is recognized that a significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distorted report has been published, it must be corrected promptly and with due prominence." Sinha's review expresses strong and generally unflattering opinions on what he understands Kiman's argument to be. But questions of interpretation are different from questions of fact, and one job of a reviewer is to say what he thinks an author is arguing. Kliman did in fact write—and presumably wished to persuade his readers—that "*The very existence of the TSSI* [has a consequence that] the allegations of inconsistency are unproved...." The inference that Sinha drew from this remark may or may not be what Kliman meant, but it is not obviously a "significant inaccuracy" or a "willful falsehood"; no doubt Sinha would contend that it is a plausible reading. Readers ought to be allowed to decide for themselves.

Anyone who puts before the public an argument on a topic as contentious as the labor theory of value or the transformation problem must expect that some readers will disagree with the argument, and that a few of them might criticize it in extremely harsh terms. This is what has happened in the case at hand. We do not believe that the bounds of civil discourse were transgressed, even if there is room to debate how near the review comes to pushing up against them. Our policy is to give our reviewers considerable latitude to say what they think. Readers always have the option to consult Kliman's book to determine whether the criticisms leveled against it by Sinha have merit.

Moreover, as your letter notes, Sinha's critical assessment was published alongside Rick Wolff's glowing appraisal of Kliman's book. *Reclaiming Marx's Capital* received twice as much attention as we typically devote to any book, and about half of that attention was unambiguously positive—circumstances which might be expected to stimulate reader interest in the book. We therefore do not see that there are any substantive grounds for complaint about the treatment the book received in the *RRPE*. If Andrew Kliman believes that the review is distortive, the appropriate response would be for him to clarify his views when next he writes about the topics covered in the book. Pressing the Editorial Board collectively to disavow the considered opinion of one of our book reviewers strikes us as an attempt to stifle free debate.

Finally, you raise the issue of a conflict of interest. You do not say in what the conflict consists, though you mention that Sinha was once a member of the Editorial Board. Precisely how that constitutes a conflict of interest is unclear. The implication appears to be that his review got special treatment and was accepted for publication without being held to the usual standards. This is a serious accusation which disparages the integrity of the entire Board—two dozen people; yet you offer not a shred of evidence, other than your opinion that the review is inaccurate and unfair. Sinha's review passed through the same review process as do all book reviews, and indeed underwent two rounds of significant revision from the first to the final draft.

Yours, Hazel Dayton Gunn, Managing Editor, *RRPE*, for the Editorial Board