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We all stand on other people's shoulders, and so many of us are indebted to Paul Sweezy for our own development. His death in February of this year reminded me how much I had learned from him. Ironically, though, my first publication in Marxian economics was a critique of Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* in *Studies on the Left* (1966). I had read all 3 volumes of *Capital* —at least once - and felt that was sufficient to criticise my elders for their errors in deviating from Marx.

Subsequently, I came to know Paul Sweezy well. I visited him at the *Monthly Review* offices when I came to New York, and I often saw him (and Harry Magdoff) at the annual Socialism in the World conferences in Cavtat, Yugoslavia. We also corresponded over the years, and his death led me to look over letters I had saved and which I want to share.

Although I remembered how encouraging and supportive he was (as in our direct meetings), I was surprised to see how critical he was of what I was doing. (I clearly blocked all that out). I also was surprised to be reminded of his emphasis on the importance of engaging in debate. On 17 August 1982, after commenting favourably on an article I had published in *SPE*, he wrote:

Finally, if an old man may presume to give advice to a young one, let me recommend (1) that you stop quoting Marx every second sentence, (2) that you develop your own style and formulations more freely, and (3) that you engage your contemporaries in more vigorous critical polemics. They badly need it.

The need to challenge bad Marxism and to be more effective was a theme which runs through our correspondence--- whatever the particular issue that we were discussing. In the course of some correspondence, he asked on 12 June 1977 why I was spending so much time on this question of the falling rate of profit (FROP):

Not only is it, taken by itself, an egregious case of mechanistic theorizing; even worse, it fosters that kind of thinking everywhere else. You are right of course that the class struggle has to be restored to its rightful central position, but one has to guard against the notion that when one has said 'class struggle' one has also solved, rather than posed, the important questions.

Once again, what was needed was theoretical struggle: 'I'd like to see you get more into the business of attacking the traditional FROPists, ridiculing the "forces of production" theories, laying low the sectarians, forcing all and sundry false Marxists to come out and do battle. You're on the right track, but are you being as effective as you ought to be?'

It was never a matter, though, of polemics for themselves. The point was always linked to Paul's commitment to revolutionary change:

Most theory nowadays should be highly polemical, attacking and destroying false Marxism and restoring Marxism to its proper role, not as a body of formal theories, but as the only way to interpret history and hence as the only reliable guide to revolutionary action.

Nor was it a proposal that we simply go off and attack anyone who deviates in any way. One of our earliest subjects of discussion revolved around my criticism of the Neo-Ricardians (or Sraffians). Paul worried that I was too harsh with them. We have to decide how to relate to them, he commented on 17 July 1974. 'Are they friends or enemies (actual or potential), and does our way of perceiving them and dealing with them have any bearing on the problem?' While he clearly saw this school of thought (and Maurice Dobb) as wrong, Paul knew who the real enemy is. On 30 December 1973, he wrote about the Neo-Ricardians:

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<sup>1</sup> These comments draw upon a presentation made at the tribute to Paul M. Sweezy at the conference, 'Karl Marx and the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', in Havana, 4-8 May 2004.

The trouble with them is--- and the point of view from which we should (sympathetically) criticize them ---that in this day and age it makes no sense to dream of an effective critique of capitalism which is not Marxist. Those, like Dobb for example, who imagine that Sraffism is really a sort of variant of Marxism are on the wrong track. Our job is (1) to try to steer them onto the right track, and (2) to keep the young from following them on to the wrong one. In other words effectively to establish Marxism as what it is, the definitive (although of course not in the sense of being incapable of indefinite further development) critique of capitalism with its necessary link to a revolutionary political position.

I can't say that I followed Paul's advice enough. (I still quote Marx a lot.) But, I definitely learned much from him. In looking back over our correspondence, I was reminded of the story of the young man who decided his father knew nothing and then 10 years later was shocked to discover how much his father had learned in the intervening years. I especially realised this in an essay reviewing his work that I wrote at the end of the 1980s; in that essay I commented that Paul 'addressed the important questions of our time; and no one could say (as he has about neoclassical economists) that he has concerned himself with "smaller and decreasingly significant questions" with the result that there is "a truly stupefying gap between the questions posed and the techniques employed to answer them".'<sup>2</sup>

I ended my essay citing Paul's Forward to Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital*: "The sad, horrible, heart-breaking way the vast majority of my fellow countrymen and women, as well as their counterparts in most of the rest of the world, are obliged to spend their working lives is seared into my consciousness in an excruciating and unforgettable manner." And, I concluded, "To help put an end to such a situation remains the goal of Paul Sweezy at the age of 78. That, indeed, is the lesson that he draws from his general theory of stagnation: it "teaches us that what we need is not the reform of monopoly capitalism but its replacement by a system that organizes economic activity not for the greater glory of capital but to meet the needs of people to live decent, secure, and to the extent possible, creative lives".'

Looking over those letters reminds me in particular that what moved Paul was his desire for revolutionary change.

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<sup>2</sup> "Paul M. Sweezy" in Maxine Berg, ed., *Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Philip Allan, 1990).