

787 Edinburgh St.
San Francisco, CA 94112
JAN 15, 1992

Monthly Review Associates

Dear Folks,

Once again I am renewing my Associates membership. (See enclosed check.) But I feel I must express some serious criticisms about many of the articles in Monthly Review, about many of the books published by MR Press, and about the general political position of the whole MR operation. I will only mention two points, but they are fundamental.

First, it seems to me that as long as capitalism exists, its many evils will continue to exist--war (including eventual nuclear war), environmental destruction, vicious exploitation, national oppression, racism, and the like. These evils are ultimately incompatible with the survival of humanity. While capitalism still exists, (genuine) Marxism must also continue to exist, and if necessary, be constantly reborn, since Marxism is the only doctrine that is completely opposed to capitalism and determined to get rid of it. This is not something that should be hidden from the people, but brought vigorously to their attention at every opportunity.

Moreover, as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao always insisted, genuine Marxism is a theory of social revolution, not simply a theory of perpetual resistance (however intense) against capitalist evils.

Thus what is needed is not another vaguely Marxist-influenced, radical-liberal type of magazine, but a frankly revolutionary Marxist magazine. Unfortunately, MR is ambiguous (at best) about the need for social revolution, and never has any articles discussing how to promote and build a revolution (or a revolutionary party) either in the U.S. or around the world.

Of course sometimes MR has an article about a "Third World" country which mentions revolutionary activity there, such as the recent disgraceful item by Hobart Spalding, "Peru on the Brink" (Jan. 1992). Instead of explaining why the Peruvian people have no choice but to make revolution, this liberal article wrings its hands about all the revolutionary violence. It accepts as true many of the lies the Peruvian and U.S. bourgeoisies propagate about "Sendero Luminoso" (the Communist Party of Peru). (I'm not saying that no criticism of the CPP or other revolutionaries should be allowed. But such criticism should itself always be from a revolutionary Marxist standpoint--that is, from the standpoint of the real, ultimate interests of the people.) The article portrays the poor, helpless Peruvian people as stuck between two horrible choices, the worst of which is--if anything--revolution. This is the sort of article that should be left to The Nation, or The Progressive, since they make no pretense about being Marxist.

Second, the founders and developers of Marxism always insisted that socialism is not an end in itself, but a transition to communism, and that many aspects of capitalism continue during the transition period. Marx, it is true, spoke in terms of the first stage of socialism and the second stage; but Lenin clarified the terminology, and today it is misleading and wrong to speak of the ultimate goal, the "second stage of socialism", as "socialism". Especially when liberals of all stripes have so confused the people (and even left-intellectuals) about what real socialism is.

Socialism is not a "regulated" capitalism, with either a few or a lot of industries "nationalized" (or for that matter all of the industries nationalized as in the now-defunct U.S.S.R.). Genuine Marxists have always recognized the essential difference between state capitalism (even that of "one big corporation"), and socialism.

The distinction is a matter of which class rules, and whether or not the remaining capitalist relations of production are being progressively dismantled. There can be no real socialism if the working class does not rule, and if capitalism is not being continuously, and definitely taken apart. To allow the liberal idea of "socialism" to be put forward under that name is unacceptable in a Marxist magazine.

* * *

I know that MR has never really been a revolutionary Marxist publication, but at times it has at least allowed a strand of that sort of thinking in its pages. (Perhaps you don't even consider yourself a Marxist magazine; if so, I wish you would make that clear.) But lately, the thin revolutionary Marxist strand has almost completely disappeared. Paul Sweezy was quoted in The Nation as saying that since the Soviet collapse Mao looks better than ever. But you don't see that point of view in MR. (Why not??)

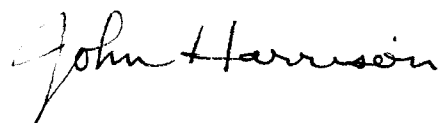
The Maoist view since the 1960s has been that the Soviet Union was not a genuine socialist country, and was doomed to experience severe capitalist economic crises. This was pooh-poohed by many writers in MR, who kept talking about "actually existing socialism", and other nonsense. When Mao proved correct, why wasn't this forcefully pointed out in MR? Why hasn't the Maoist analysis been at least examined seriously? When the Soviet Union was exposed for what it really was, a bourgeois dictatorship, why was there so much confusion and despair in the pages of MR? We expected that sort of thing in the old Communist Parties around the world which haven't had a progressive thought in half a century or more. But why did MR meekly follow along in their pathetic whimpering self-doubts, instead of summing it all up from a revolutionary Marxist perspective?

In the past couple years, MR has really missed an important opportunity to qualitatively advance the Marxist understanding of its readership. It's very sad.

The best part of MR over the years has been the Marxist analysis of the U.S. economy, especially by the editors. I fully expect to see more of that good stuff in the future (not that I agree with everything even in this area). This critique of the capitalist economy keeps me subscribing to the magazine, and (so far) supporting it as an Associates member.

But I really wish the Marxist content of MR extended to Marxist politics as well. If you ever decide to move a bit in that direction, it will be necessary to stop printing articles and books by liberals!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Harrison". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

MONTHLY REVIEW FOUNDATION

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MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS
MONTHLY REVIEW

John Harrison
787 Edinburgh St.
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Dear John Harrison,

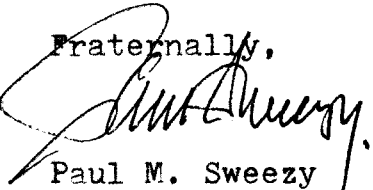
Thanks for renewing your ~~Associates~~ membership in spite of your reservations about Monthly Review and all its works.

We fully agree with your second and third paragraphs, but we don't draw all the same conclusions. The editors of MR have always considered themselves to be Marxists, but we don't think that means we should preach Marxism all the time or publish only material written by people we judge to be Marxists. Most of the people in this country (workers and intellectuals included) are very far from being Marxists or even understanding what Marxism is. Unhappiness with the society they live in is widespread, and in fact many hate it. But they think of it as part of the natural order of things which has to be accepted as one accepts the solar system, and the culture - the educational system and the media - does everything possible to reinforce this view. This is the situation we face, and unfortunately no one has yet devised an effective way of countering it. You seem to believe that hammering away at the necessity of social revolution ~~and~~ and discussing ways to "promote and build a revolution (or a revolutionary party)" are the way to go. Harry and I have been around and active since the 30s, and we've been through a lot of that (even as participants), with less than nothing to show for it. We may perhaps be pardoned for doubting that is likely to be more effective in these declining years of the 20th century than it has been in the past.

Our task, as we see it now, is an educational one, to get people to think critically about the society and world they live in - in Marx's (1843) words to provide "the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncritical in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results nor the conflict with the powers that be."

We welcome criticisms and suggestions, particularly if they relate to doing the educational job more effectively.

Fraternally,


Paul M. Sweezy

