

## REVIEWS

Helen McCabe, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist*

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### GRADUALISM’S PROPHET

The relationship between socialism and liberalism is magnetic—sometimes pulling close, at others repelling, in a force field that marks not just the histories of political thought and partisan conflict but the personal trajectories of key protagonists of each. Proximity has not always rendered the relationship less fraught. Yet attempts to transcend the differences have never ceased. Visions of ‘market socialism’ are as old as industrial capitalism itself, as if the ‘dis-embedding’ of markets were a simultaneous spur to imagining how they could be reintegrated, in the new world to which factory production and wage-dependent labour gave rise. This was the moment of the ‘crude conditions of capitalistic production’ and ‘the crude theories’ that went with them described by Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, when Owen took over New Lanark (1800), Saint-Simon published *Lettres de Genève* (1803) and Fourier’s *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales* (1808) appeared, eventually launching phalanxes toward the plains of Iowa, intentional communities to Indiana and the Great Lakes.

More recently, a resurgence of the left on the lower flanks of the Democratic Party since 2015 has fired new interest in amalgams of liberalism and socialism. Different thinkers have been canvassed as possible guides, from Polanyi and Keynes to Rawls and Piketty, to say nothing of Marx. What these discussions have often lacked, however, are historical moorings—to help clarify not just the conditions that have drawn socialists and liberals together, but the fault lines along which such instances of

cooperation have fallen apart. John Stuart Mill is at once foundational to this dichotomy, as author of *On Liberty* (1859), perhaps the most canonical text of classical liberalism, yet also most disruptive of it, having classed himself in his *Autobiography* ‘under the general designation of Socialist’, for whom the great social problem of the future was how to unite individual liberty of action with ‘common ownership in the raw materials of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour.’ Were Mill’s forays into socialist territory a short-lived aberration, perhaps under what Hayek, Mises and Lionel Robbins saw as the baleful influence of feminist theorist Harriet Taylor? Or does Mill’s trajectory reveal a larger pattern in the unstable relationship between liberalism and socialism, with shifting currents in each pulling towards the magnetic poles of the other—individual or collective, public or private, market or plan, reform or revolution?

With *John Stuart Mill, Socialist*, Helen McCabe aims to show that Mill was neither deluded nor inconsistent. She sets out to trace the development of his world outlook as ‘a coherent—and, as it transpires, socialist—whole’. In part this reflects her own process of discovery in the course of a project that began as an undergraduate thesis at Oxford. ‘When I first heard that Mill called himself a socialist, I was bewildered’, she writes, of a topic encouraged to doctoral-dissertation stage in 2010 by scholars of liberal and utopian thought including Michael Freedman, Alan Ryan and David Leopold. Mill after all figures as a giant of nineteenth-century liberalism on every modern-political theory course. Yet ‘Mill had no more serious differences with contemporary socialists than they had with one another’, McCabe insists. At the same time, her book has another, bolder ambition: not only to show that Mill was a socialist, but to argue that his ‘organic, peaceful, piecemeal, incremental’ strategy for achieving socialism is the one we need today. McCabe, who teaches political theory at Nottingham, proceeds thematically, setting out Mill’s criticisms of *laissez-faire* capitalism, his evaluation of the socialisms of his era and the core normative principles that guided his ideas of social reform, before sketching out the lineaments of his socialist utopia, as he himself failed to do. But she begins, unavoidably, with Mill’s hyper-intellectualized and politicized upbringing, under the shadow of aristocratic rule and working-class revolt in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars.

Mill’s father, James, was from a modest Scottish family, born in 1773 in a village near the northeast coast, halfway between Dundee and Aberdeen; the father was a shoemaker, the mother gentry fallen on hard times, who nevertheless insisted on his education. In 1802 James set off for London with the patronage of a Scottish MP, Sir John Stuart, in whose honour he would in 1806 name his first-born son. But the young family’s position on the fringes of the capital’s literary life remained precarious until James met the wealthy

and well-connected Jeremy Bentham, twenty-five years his senior. Bentham adopted him as a publicist for utilitarianism and moved the Mill family into the house next door to his own in Queen Square Place, a smart street in Westminster, frequented too by the dashing David Ricardo, immensely rich financier, economist and radical MP. Here James Mill wrote his influential *History of British India* (1817), with its condemnation of ‘Hindoo deceit and perfidy’, as well as *Elements of Political Economy* (1821), *Essays on Government* (1823) and other works, while rising through the ranks of the East India Company and, in the course of their famous perambulatory lectures, educating his intellectually precocious son in the principles of political economy as per Smith, Ricardo, Bentham and Malthus. The young John Stuart Mill was thus raised as the prodigy of a prodigy, in a hothouse atmosphere that also welcomed Owenites, Saint-Simonians and French liberal thinkers under the capacious roof of utilitarianism, where theoretical economics and social philosophy were married to campaigns for free trade, constitutional reform and family planning. At the age of seventeen, he too was inducted into a life-long career in colonial policy at East India House.

McCabe rightly stresses the importance of French radical traditions for Mill’s later development. A teenage year in Paris and Montpellier in 1820 left a lasting enthusiasm for French liberal thought. As Mill recovered from what he would call the ‘crisis in my mental history’ that he underwent aged twenty, in the winter of 1826, he turned to thinkers who put greater emphasis on ‘fraternity’, ‘fellow feeling’, social harmony and cohesion than the utilitarians were accustomed to do, as also to more panoramic, historicizing accounts of social development. If this included the ‘speculative’ Toryism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, most importantly for McCabe it meant that Mill took to his heart the positivism of Saint-Simon and his progeny, above all Auguste Comte: their progressive view of history, shifting between ‘organic’ and ‘critical’ ages, allowed Mill to imagine political institutions, property relations and *mores* beyond the reforms envisioned by the Benthamites. McCabe argues that Mill’s youthful crisis opened the ‘space’ for his views to develop towards socialism, even if he wouldn’t define himself in those terms until the 1840s (indeed, his 1830s essays in *The Examiner* and the *Westminster Review*, or reports on French politics for the *Morning Chronicle*, express in pure form the bourgeois-radical views of Queen Square). Instead, another crisis intervened.

In 1830, the 24-year-old Mill met the 22-year-old Harriet Taylor—already the author of a book on William Caxton and the history of printing; married, with four children—when invited to a dinner party of like-thinking radicals at her house. ‘Pale she, and passionate and sad-looking’, noted Thomas Carlyle, a friend-enemy of Mill’s, whom he described as a ‘slender, rather tall and elegant youth’, enthusiastic yet lucid, modest and gifted with

a remarkable precision of utterance. After avowals of love, painful partings and escapades in Paris, she came to an arrangement with her husband and moved with the children to Keston Heath, southeast of the capital, where Mill would visit at weekends. They married in 1851, after her husband's death; but Taylor herself died in 1858. Mill credited her not only with playing a vital role in shaping and editing his mature works, *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and *On Liberty* (1859), but with pushing him to 'move forward more boldly' in a political sense.

McCabe doesn't dwell on the relationship, however, but moves swiftly on to her thematic chapters. Here it is the image of Mill as prototypical *laissez-faire* liberal that is most dramatically altered by her re-examination of his writing through a socialist lens. His *Principles of Political Economy* may have declared government non-interference in the economy the 'general rule', but he made 'large exceptions' to it—for primary education, factory acts, practical monopolies in water, gas, roads, railways, canals, as well as poor relief, scientific research, learned endowments and so on. Mill consistently criticized the existing capitalist order—'a society founded on private property and individual competition'—on grounds of its inefficiency and waste, its inequality and injustice, its restrictions on freedom. Attempts to defend private property on grounds of justice must inevitably fail, he wrote; the distinction between rich and poor, so slightly connected with merit or demerit, was obviously unjust.

Mill plainly disliked the social ethos that *laissez-faire* bred; there are no encomia in his work to the industrial age, no hymns to technology. Doubting 'if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being', he looked forward to the advent of the 'stationary state' feared by Smith and Ricardo—the moment when economic growth slows to a standstill as it runs up against the limits of population and soil fertility, and returns on investment fall to zero. The 'trampling, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life' was not to be desired. Workers, meanwhile, were dependent on the will of others, with little or no choice of occupation or freedom of movement. The question was whether socialism would be consistent with

that multiform development of human nature, the manifold unlikenesses, that diversity of tastes and talents and variety of intellectual points of view, which not only form a great part of the interest of human life but, by bringing intellects into stimulating collision, and by presenting to each innumerable notions that he would not have conceived himself, are the mainspring of mental and moral progression.

*Principles of Political Economy* could happily aver that, under Saint-Simonianism, 'society would wear as diversified a face as it does now'. Who

then were the socialists that made the greatest impression on Mill? McCabe briefly sketches them: in addition to Robert Owen and the Saint-Simonians, there were the Fourierists, the Icarianism of Étienne Cabet, the national workshops championed by Louis Blanc, another friend. The schemes of which Mill approved all involved decentralized cooperatives of no more than a few thousand people. ‘Mill was only ever in favour of small-scale, evolutionary, co-operative schemes’, McCabe approvingly notes. In this context, ‘communist’ meant co-ops based on equal shares, while ‘socialist’ ones might allow differential rewards. Mill’s *Chapters on Socialism*, left unfinished upon his death in 1873, was adamantly opposed to socialism at the level of the national state, let alone to the revolutionary overturning of the existing order, threatened by the three-month insurrection of the Paris Commune.

Mill’s brand of socialism, McCabe argues, was of a piece with his normative principles, of which she notes six: progress, security, liberty, equality, fraternity—and utility, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which served as a justification for all ends. Norms here take the place of any societal blueprint or specified institutions. Whether or not socialism was actually attainable, its goals could serve as what Mill called a ‘North Star’. Nevertheless, borrowing from across his work, McCabe assembles the components of a Millian utopia: a mix of state and cooperative ownership of the means of production and provision of goods and services; cooperatives are democratically organized, distribution determined by jointly acknowledged principles of justice; meaningful equality between the sexes; inequalities of wealth eradicated by severe inheritance tax; difference is celebrated in a ‘religion of humanity’ to promote the common good; political decision-making acknowledges the rights of experts to a weightier say; society is transformed by a gradual, organic process into one in which as much progress, security, liberty, equality, fraternity and happiness as possible can be achieved.

Against the free-market liberals, McCabe argues that Mill’s socialism was an organic product of his commitment to the six principles, lying at the very heart of his political philosophy. The general designation of ‘socialist’ is correct. Her trump card, however, is reserved for those who would argue that Taylor was responsible for the more avowedly socialist additions to the 1852 third edition of *Principles of Political Economy*, but that Mill had returned to his liberal senses when he published *On Liberty* the year after her death, even while describing it as ‘our joint production’. A more accurate understanding, McCabe writes, is that Mill and Taylor were *both* socialists—and they *both* wrote *On Liberty*. This is the real challenge, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* suggests, conditioned as we are to see *On Liberty*—with its famous defence of freedom of speech and action against ‘the customs of society’, limited only by a minimalist reading of the harm principle—as a foundational text of

liberalism, and to see liberalism and socialism not merely as distinct ideologies but as opposites. Yet Mill's and Taylor's socialism denied the need to choose *either* liberty or equality, as it denied the idea that socialism must go hand-in-hand with oppression or lack of individuality:

Mill's (and Taylor's) socialism encourages us to imagine a society in which not just personal liberties but all human interactions, from the economic through the political to the intimate, are reconstituted so as to fully allow for the free development of everyone's individuality.

This is an admirable conclusion and McCabe's warm identification with the liberatory charge of her subjects' politics brings a winning élan to her final chapter. If she is not the first to write on Mill's socialism, it is still the case that this gets far less attention than his feminism (as the American scholar Wendy Sarvasy pointed out in 1985). If McCabe restricts herself to a handful of Mill's works—*The Subjection of Women* (1869) is a notable absence—and letters, she scans them very thoroughly and quotes almost too copiously, reiterating the same lines again and again. *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* is, however, an almost exclusively textual account. McCabe bases her case for the consistency of Mill's views on the re-appearance of well-worn phrases. Entirely absent is the broader context of these tumultuous times, or any periodization of them. Missing, too, is the role of actual politics in Britain and Europe, which concerned Mill through all the phases of his development: from the 1820s as an editor and radical leader seeking to replace the Whigs as a true opposition to the aristocratic Tories in parliament, up to his election to that body as a Liberal for Westminster in 1865. Even his early mental crisis was at least in part political and intellectual, coming at the time of his 'shock' at views he encountered at the London Debating Society in 1825, after the pitiless counter-revolutionary repression of the previous decades. Mill's ideas about socialism shifted along with this quotidian involvement. Without this coarser-grained sense of politics it is hard to situate him with respect to the socialist movements of his day.

Mill was formed in what Hobsbawm called the Age of Revolution, where even in England some radical currents—Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, for instance—looked to an alliance with the emergent working class to strengthen the hand of reform against entrenched aristocratic rule. But the young Mill always insisted on the leading role of his own class, with its expertise. He kept a distance from the Chartists, warning them not to aim at any 'predominance' in national political life. It is to his and Taylor's credit that they moved left in response to the defeats of 1849, in stark contrast to Tocqueville's role in bayonetting the Roman Republic. But the 'socialism' they proclaimed in the 1850s was that of the pre-industrial era. When an independent workers' movement began to stir in Europe in the 1860s, Mill was wary of it.

As the author of a critique of political economy, Marx was almost certainly unknown to Mill; both living in London, their paths did not cross. But on the terrain of politics, the two men did meet, so to speak—clashing repeatedly, if indirectly, over the direction of the International Workingmen's Association, founded in 1864. Mill read several of the IWMA's publications, perhaps including the inaugural address written by Marx, and knew several of its leaders, including the cobbler George Odger, whom he backed as a Liberal parliamentary candidate in 1868; the carpenter W. R. Cremer, who went on to accept a Liberal peerage in 1907; and Harriet Law, the first female member of the IWMA's General Council. He also aimed to influence it, as part of a wider push to convince 'respectable' elements of the working class to pursue change within the ancient constitution and the Liberal Party.

This refrain grew louder the more that workers looked like escaping even momentarily from the gravitational pull of the ruling order. In 1866, Mill implored workers not to demonstrate for manhood suffrage in Hyde Park, in defiance of the government, since to do so was tantamount to revolution. When the Second Reform Act passed in 1867, he reassured his readers that the weekly wage-earners thus enfranchised were 'not likely to rush headlong into the reckless extremities of some of the foreign Socialists'—he singled out the International—of abolishing private property in land or assailing 'usury'. When Odger and other members of the IWMA set up the Land and Labour League in 1869 to campaign for nationalization, with its own newspaper, *The Republican*, Mill responded by creating a rival Land Tenure Reform Association. While he condemned the brutal retribution meted out to the *communards* by the party of order in France in the summer of 1871, his alarm at the rapid spread of 'revolutionary socialism' coloured all his subsequent pronouncements on the subject. Asked by a Danish correspondent in 1872 for his views on the International, Mill replied that its English leaders were 'reasonable men', but this was not true of the Belgian, German and even some Swiss and French delegates, who wanted to 'expropriate everyone'.

*Chapters on Socialism* was categorical about the dangers of a revolutionary *fuite en avant*. Not only would it wreck the 'possibilities for improvement' that remained under the present system but, since the majority of the population lacked the requisite moral and intellectual qualities, the new order could have no solid basis, and the ensuing chaos would force it to beat a retreat. If McCabe is wrong to suggest that he opposed violent revolutions on principle—his support for Italian, Hungarian, Polish, not to mention French insurgents in 1830 and 1848, contradicts it—his views changed as 'revolution' took on new social elements and objectives that went beyond realization of the liberties of 1789. This accounts not just for his more sombre and critical tone in *Chapters*, but the added layers of ambiguity as to the

timing of any transition. Since socialism required ‘an entire renovation of the social fabric’, it was flatly ‘not available as a present resource’. As his opposition to revolutionary socialism grew more pronounced, so did the appeal of the utopians, as if reflected in an upside-down mirror. The great appeal of Fourier’s system was that it ‘requires less from common humanity than any other known system of Socialism’; another attraction was its ‘eminently pacific’ character.

McCabe insists that Mill was not a utopian socialist, in the pejorative sense that Marx and Engels gave the term, since he did not write ‘recipes for the cookshops of the future’. But what Engels mocked was not the tendency to sketch ‘fantastic pictures’, so much as the belief that a better world could come about without a political struggle led by workers themselves. In this sense, the ‘critical utopian’ label of the *Manifesto* fits pretty well. For Mill, the cooperative principle would indeed move ‘by force of example’, since only ‘the élite of mankind’ was presently fit for socialism. An important feature of Mill’s imagined cooperatives was their role as schools of manners, where workers and non-workers would gain experience of self-sacrifice on behalf of the common good, habits of independence and reason based on collective decision-making, while *unlearning* selfish reflexes, blind obedience to managers, masters, capitalists. This provided *Principles of Political Economy* with its theory of transition. The shift would be so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. Capitalists would grow weary, retire from the race, and end up as rentiers of an emergent socialist society—finding it advantageous to lend capital at a falling rate of interest to associations, after the latter had attracted the most talented labourers, and at last, perhaps, even to exchange their capital for terminable annuities.

*John Stuart Mill, Socialist* offers no critical reflection on these attitudes, but they hardly bear out her argument that his socialism remains ‘remarkably modern’. Mill himself provided some lethal criticisms of cooperatives in 1825 when, as a 19-year-old, he and his fellow Young Utilitarians faced off against the followers of Robert Owen in a series of public debates. Cooperatism would be unfeasible unless private property as a whole was outlawed, he argued—a contention underscored by the sorry fate of actually existing cooperatives ever since, which struggle to survive amid the prevailing conditions of capitalist competition, while denying themselves the cut-throat weapons wielded by their rivals. McCabe ignores the obvious objection that cooperatives have nowhere looked like achieving the mass needed to outcompete capitalists, then or since; they are more likely to be dragged down to its level. The British cooperative movement is a case in point: it survived into the 21st century as a chain of dingy supermarkets with a savings bank attached, until the 2008 financial crisis revealed that its supervisors had been gambling with the funds, resulting in a £1.5 billion



hole in the accounts; the upshot was the exit of a chairman, amid scandals of sex and drugs, with US hedge funds circling for the kill. No socialism worthy of the name can afford to ignore the economy's commanding heights.

If McCabe fails to probe Mill's and Taylor's economic prescriptions, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* does not even register the regressive character of the said 'socialism' on the key questions of democracy and empire. McCabe treats Mill's resolutely elitist views on democracy with remarkable equanimity; yet they were, if anything, reinforced by his turn to socialism, which quickened his sense of the dangers of 'pure' democracy, already expressed in his 1835 essay on Tocqueville in the *London Review*. Freedom could easily be trampled in a rush to equality, and a working-class majority could tyrannize the rest of society, unless guided in a gradual education towards a representative and limited democracy. Weighted voting to privilege the elite was essential, for as socialists 'we dreaded *more* the ignorance and especially the selfishness and brutality of the mass', Mill frankly explained in the *Autobiography*. Indeed it is striking that on the two occasions when he calls himself a socialist in that work, he immediately mentions the limits of democracy. (In *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (1977), the Canadian political scientist C. B. Macpherson pointed to tensions on both sides of this model: the desire to include workers in political participation is tempered by fear of class legislation should they do so on an equal basis with the propertied or cultivated; and genuine moral outrage at industrial working conditions is a spur to a socialism that would preserve the competitive markets and private property at the root of that dehumanizing system.)

If the political implications of this hostility to popular democracy go unremarked in *John Stuart Mill, Socialist*, nowhere is the missing historical context more glaring than when it comes to the world beyond Europe. The British Empire is not merely absent from these pages: it is so studiously avoided that sections of the book seem haunted by it. The Indian Subcontinent is mentioned once, in an endnote. There we learn that Mill's 'support of colonial rule, though rightly hard to swallow by modern audiences, is not in contradistinction to his socialism, nor does it undermine it'—without further comment, as if the issue this raises is one of logical consistency, rather than world-imperial tutelage. (McCabe's reference is prompted by *On Liberty's* refusal of equal treatment to what she calls 'people from non-modern countries'; no whiff of Mill's own use of the terms 'uncivilized' and 'barbaric'.) Of Mill's 35 years at the East India Company, where he drafted some 1,700 dispatches—negotiating between the need to incorporate Indian upper-caste elites into the system of colonial rule, and to quell the radical dissatisfaction of the dispossessed—we learn nothing. The armed uprising of 1857–59 against British rule, which finally saw the East India Company shut down and Mill out of a job, gets no mention.

In a book that asks what sort of society Mill saw beyond contemporary capitalism, the omission of the free-trade empire that he thought sustained it comes at a conceptual as well as a political price. If Mill represents a broader 'liberal turn to empire', how was his turn to socialism related to it? In at least three important ways. The first deals with rule over Crown dependencies. Qualifying the sonorous strophes of *On Liberty*, he insisted that 'despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement.' In 'backward states of society', rulers were justified in using 'any expedients' that will attain a good end. To guide savages from 'the rule of will' to the rule of law, and to rev the engines of accumulation that would otherwise remain forever stalled, the 'sort of government fittest for them is one which possesses force, but seldom uses it', Mill wrote in the final chapter of *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). Tellingly, this involved 'a parental despotism or aristocracy, resembling the St. Simonian form of Socialism'—but here, a despotism over native peoples.

Second, the political economy of the home country is intrinsically related to imperial expansion, and to white-settler colonialism in particular. The largest of all 'large exceptions to *laissez-faire*' in *Principles of Political Economy* is the entry on colonization. Here Mill argued that Britain had developed to a point where it produced more capital than could be profitably invested at home. The solution to the twin problems of surplus population and surplus capital was 'systematic' state-sponsored colonization. 'There needs be no hesitation in affirming', he added with gusto, that 'colonization, in the present state of the world, is the best affair of business, in which the capital of an old and wealthy country can engage.' These arguments in favour of strengthening the bonds of empire raise fundamental questions about the socialist future they open or foreclose. Foreign investment and emigration were meant to prolong the life of capitalism at home, not cut it short, or skip to some other stage in colonies where it had yet to take root. Mill may have looked forward to the stationary state, but his equanimity about growthlessness depended on a deferral: if it arrived too soon, before sufficient technological progress had been made, and population had been voluntarily restrained through the efforts of an educated working class, it could turn out to be the disaster the old school of political economy had feared.

Third, it is striking how far Mill's writings in the 1860s anticipated the main debates on 'social imperialism', based on the theory of surplus capital, spanning liberal and socialist analyses between the Second Boer War and the July Crisis of 1914: from Hobson's indictment of finance as the taproot of imperialism all the way to the liberal imperialists and Fabians of the Rainbow Circle and Coefficient Club, who linked social reform to imperial efficiency. For Lenin outside Britain, imperialism had sown seeds

of reformism and chauvinism within the Second International itself. That empire could solve the 'social question' crops up repeatedly in Mill's later writings: a 'great safety valve' he called it in a letter to the American scholar Charles Eliot Norton in October 1868. Reform in Ireland and India was not meant to usher in common ownership, but a reputation for good government among its subjects that would make the imperial union with Britain permanent. In fact, Mill hoped his proposals to rejig landlord-tenant relations in *England and Ireland* (1868) would not just defuse Irish demands for national independence, which he condemned, but for land nationalizations from the Land and Labour League. Mill left it to later generations to argue out the relations between liberalism, empire and the future development of socialism, albeit in a world in which his basic assumptions about them had been called into question—by an inter-imperial war he did not anticipate, that issued in a form of state socialism he had always opposed.

Schumpeter, looking back on Mill from the other side of these global conflicts, drew out some of the features of his thought and personality in a sensitive portrait—seeing not only a prefiguration of the evolutionary socialism of Bernstein, but the surprising contradictions and fragilities of the lost Victorian world that had once celebrated Mill's textbook of political economy. 'Nothing can be more revealing of the character of bourgeois civilization—more indicative, that is, of its genuine freedom and also of its political weakness—than that the book to which the bourgeoisie accorded such a reception carried a socialist message and was written by a man palpably out of sympathy with the scheme of values of the industrial bourgeoisie.'

Reading Mill from the margins of mainstream political economy, Marx reacted with irritation, scorn—and uncharacteristic hesitation. One reason may have been the indirect struggle that Marx saw himself as waging within the International: to steer the labour movement away from liberalism and towards a scientific socialism. The very ambiguity of Mill's position with respect to these two poles was a standing challenge to Marx. Intellectually, it called into question his periodization of classical political economy, sketched in the second German edition of *Kapital* (1873): if the bourgeois conquest of power in Britain and France in the 1830s had 'sounded the death knell of scientific bourgeois economics', what to make of Mill, who Marx admitted was no vulgar apologist for the ruling class? Mill was instead one of those who, still claiming 'some scientific standing', tried after 1848 'to harmonize the political economy of capital with the claims, no longer to be ignored, of the proletariat.' Marx may not have been very impressed with the results: his 'fat, pedantic magnum opus', *Principles of Political Economy*, was a work of shallow syncretism that tried to 'reconcile the irreconcilable', in itself a declaration of bankruptcy by 'bourgeois' economics. But what if this will to reconcile the irreconcilable was precisely the appeal?

Marx's position in the International up to this point—fighting proxy battles against a current influenced by Mill which saw a path forward for the labour movement as adjutant of the Liberals—suggests he was well aware of the seductive power of this idea, especially in Britain. At times he attacked it head on, using his 1864 Inaugural Address to argue that, for all the value of its 'great social experiments', cooperative labour would never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to 'perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries'. At others he muted his criticisms, or tried to sway those he deemed 'connected with' or 'believers' in Mill—bourgeois radicals and positivists like Frederic Harrison and Edward Beesly. At still others, Marx saw the value in gaining Mill's backing: sent a copy of his first Address to the General Council on the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the minutes record that Mill had been 'highly pleased' with it. The dividing line came with the fallout from that conflict, in the breach caused by the rise of the Paris Commune.

Marx's public support for the Commune, and the lessons he drew from it in *The Civil War in France*, put an end to his efforts to reconcile disparate strands of the socialist movement: Odger, Lucraft, Mottershead and other members of the General Council quit in opposition to this line, and the founding of a Federal Council further weakened it; in 1872 fireworks irrupted at the first meeting of the International since the uprising in Paris at the Hague, where Marx and Engels made the case that workers must now form independent socialist parties to overturn the old state institutions. Liberals were not equipped to be the leading political agents of socialism, whether they set their compasses by the North Star or some other celestial object. Denial that any conflict existed between liberals and socialists was sentimentality, and in itself risked diverting or delaying 'the giant proletarian movement of our days'. At the same time, Marx never posited socialism as the antithesis of liberalism. In *The Civil War in France*, as in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, it was a tendency of the latter to metamorphose in moments of crisis—turning to monarch, nation, church; in short, to conserve reaction—that made it so dangerous for workers to rely on.

McCabe justifies the absence of any sustained comparison to Marx by noting how 'much more to socialism' there is than 'revolutionary socialism', and that Mill should not be found wanting for deviating from it. But the issues this juxtaposition raises for Millian socialism matter on its own terms. Between her description of Mill's socialism as 'organic, peaceful, piecemeal, incremental' and Mill's rather grander goal, of uniting 'the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership in the raw materials of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour', there is a gap. How we get there from here is still the question.