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## DISCUSSION

### JOHN STUART MILL AND MARXIAN SOCIALISM

BY LEWIS S. FEUER

Professor J. Salwyn Schapiro in his noteworthy article on J. S. Mill states: "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Mill knew nothing of Marx or of Marxism. Never at any time did he visualize a class struggle between 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat,' resulting in a revolutionary reconstitution of the social order."<sup>1</sup>

To students of political theory today, the problem of unifying the ideas of Mill and Marx is most important. It would be wise therefore not to allow any misapprehension concerning their historic relations to arise. In this note, I shall present the evidence which indicates that Mill was somewhat informed concerning Marxian socialism, that he knew of its philosophy and leading exponents. We shall see, furthermore, that his rejection of revolutionary political action on the part of the working class was founded on an antipathy to the language of revolution as well as an opposition to violent methods. The semantical definition of "revolution" in Mill's language differs from that used by Marx, and Mill felt that in the English political setting its use led to misunderstandings.

Mill was familiar with the different schools of socialist thought and action which struggled for dominance in the International Workingmen's Association. Marx and his follower, Eccarius, served as representatives of the German workers on the General Council of the Association. The famous Inaugural Address, Preamble, and Provisional Rules of the International Workingmen's Association were written by Marx.<sup>2</sup> Mill's opinion of the various socialist groups in the International is stated in a letter to Georg Brandes:

Vous me demandez mon opinion sur l'Internationale. Je crois que cette Association renferme une foule très diverse de représentants de toutes les écoles socialistes, tant modérées que violentes. Les membres anglais dont je connais personnellement plusieurs des chefs, me paraissent en général des hommes raisonnables visant surtout aux améliorations pratiques dans le sort des travailleurs, capables d'apprécier les obstacles, et peu haineux envers les classes dont ils veulent faire cesser la domination. Mais j'avoue que dans les débats de leur Congrès je n'ai guère trouvé quelque bon sens que chez les délégués anglais. C'est que mes compatriotes ont

<sup>1</sup> J. Salwyn Schapiro, "J. S. Mill, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism," this Journal, IV (1943), 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of Marx and Engels, transl. by Dona Torr* (London, 1936), 162.

l'habitude d'attendre des améliorations plutôt de l'initiative individuelle et de l'association privée que de l'intervention directe de l'Etat. L'habitude contraire qui prévaut dans le Continent fait croire aux réformateurs qu'ils n'ont qu'à mettre la main sur les rênes du gouvernement pour arriver promptement à leur but; et non seulement les socialistes français qui sont même peut-être plus modérés que beaucoup d'autres, mais plus encore ceux de la Belgique, de l'Allemagne et même de la Suisse, sous la direction apparente de quelques théoriciens russes, pensent qu'il n'y qu'à exproprier tout le monde, et abattre tous les gouvernements existants, sans s'inquiéter, quant à présent, de ce qu'il faudrait mettre à leur place. Je ne les calomnie pas, je ne fais que répéter ce que j'ai lu dans leur journaux.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear then from this letter that Mill had read the proceedings of the International Workingmen's Association, and that he had a general knowledge of the standpoint which Marx, as the leading German delegate, had put forward. Mill is evidently criticizing Marx's theory of proletarian dictatorship. His criticisms are the ones now commonplace among political theorists—first, that Marx places too much reliance on state intervention, and secondly, that Marx does not draw clear plans for the workings of the socialist state which is to replace the capitalist order. There is some confusion, however, in Mill's thinking as to the relation between the ideas of Marx and Bakunin. The reference to the apparent direction of Russian theoreticians indicates that Mill had not clearly distinguished Bakunin's anarchist ideology from Marx's socialism.<sup>4</sup>

The journals of the International, which Mill says he read, were *The Miners' and Workmen's Advocate* and the *Beehive*. The first was appointed official organ of the International Workingmen's Association at its first conference at London in September, 1865. It was the recognized spokesman for the British and Welsh coal-miners. The *Advocate* reprinted the whole of the Address which Marx had written for the International, and it carried announcements and reports of the General Council. Engels was among its contributors. A group of persons closely connected with the General Council acquired the ownership of the Journal in 1865. It was then renamed *The Workmen's Advocate*. Eccarius, through Marx's influence, became its editor in 1866, and Marx served on its editorial committee. The paper's scope was widened, and its name was now changed to *Commonwealth*.<sup>5</sup> Odger later became editor-in-chief.

*Beehive* was the official weekly organ of the London Trades Council. It was published by George Potter, a building trade union leader, and gave

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, edited by Hugh S. R. Elliot, II (London, 1910), 334-335.

<sup>4</sup> This confusion of Marx's ideas with Bakunin's was not uncommon among the middle class section of the International. G. M. Stekloff, *History of the First International*, transl. by Eden and Cedar Paul, (London, 1928), 141.

<sup>5</sup> G. M. Stekloff, *loc. cit.*, 384-385.

publicity to the activities of the International. Marx occasionally contributed articles to its columns. The paper, however, was bought by a Liberal manufacturer in 1869, and the General Council subsequently severed relation with it.<sup>6</sup>

The work of the International had meanwhile aroused considerable interest in the English press generally. The *London Times* commissioned Eccarius himself as special correspondent at the Lausanne Congress in 1867. Three years later the *Fortnightly Review* published an authoritative article *The International Workingmen's Association* by Edward S. Beesly, of the University of London. The author noted that Marx had largely provided him with his material.<sup>7</sup>

Mill's influence on English workingmen was regarded as important enough to warrant a series of polemical articles written by *Commonwealth's* editor, Eccarius. Marx helped Eccarius considerably with these articles which were published in *Commonwealth* from Nov. 10, 1866 to the end of March, 1867, under the title "A Working Man's Refutation of Some Points of Political Economy, endorsed and advocated by John Stuart Mill, Esq., M. P." Eccarius' articles developed in detail Marx's criticism of Mill's economic theory.

Marx regarded Mill as the best representative of those who tried to harmonize the classical political economy with the demands of the rising working class. He respected Mill's political activity in behalf of the English proletariat, and therefore said it would be very wrong to classify him with "the herd of vulgar economic apologists." Marx felt, however, that Mill's later ideas and actions could not be reconciled with the traditional economic dogmas to which he still held. Mill, he therefore said, was trying "to reconcile irreconcilables."<sup>8</sup>

Who were the English leaders of the International whom Mill knew, as he says, personally? The men in question were George Odger and W. R. Cremer. Odger was for ten years (1862-72) secretary of the London Trades Council.<sup>9</sup> He was one of the founders of the International, and in 1866 served as President of its General Council. Odger gradually became estranged from his Internationalist co-workers. In 1868, he sought a Liberal candidacy for Parliament, and in 1871 he resigned from the General Council because of disagreement with Marx's sympathetic Address of the General Council on the Paris Commune. Whereas Marx criticized Odger

<sup>6</sup> Stekloff, *ibid.*, 396.

<sup>7</sup> *The Fortnightly Review*, VIII (London, 1870), 529.

<sup>8</sup> *Capital*, I (tr. Moore and Aveling, Chicago, 1909), 19-20, 669.

<sup>9</sup> *Correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, op. cit.*, 166-167, 276-277. For the biography of Odger, cf., Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, (London, 1920), 238. G. D. H. Cole, *British Working Class Politics 1832-1914*, (London, 1941), 56.

as one of the "intriguers" who sought an excuse for joining with the "bourgeois Liberals," Mill volunteered his support for Odger's parliamentary effort, and attested his high regard for Odger as a distinguished member of the working class.<sup>10</sup>

Cremer was the first secretary of the General Council of the International. His political work began in 1860 when he helped found the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. When it concluded, he was Sir Randall Cremer, and his pacifist activities had won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1903. Cremer was active in enlisting the International's support of the campaign for the extension of the suffrage to the working class.<sup>11</sup> This work brought Cremer into association with Mill. In 1867, however, Mill withdrew his support from the Reform League because its speakers at one meeting had advocated revolutionary violence to achieve their objective. Mill's letter of withdrawal to Cremer states the grounds for his rejection of violence in political action:

I should think them utterly and fatally wrong in the course they adopted, of directly instigating the mass of reformers to seek the attainment of their object by physical violence. One of the leading speakers proclaimed superiority of physical force as constituting right, and as justifying the people in "riding down the ministers of the law"; . . . I do not impute to the meeting the monstrous doctrine of these two speakers. But unless misreported, the general tone was that of a direct appeal to revolutionary expedients. Now, it is my deep conviction that there are only two things which justify an attempt at revolution. One is personal oppression and tyranny and consequent personal suffering of such an intensity, that to put an immediate stop to it is worth almost any amount of present evil and future danger. The other is when either the system of government does not permit the redress of grievances to be sought by peaceable and legal means, or when these means have been perseveringly exerted to the utmost for a long series of years, and their inefficacy has been demonstrated by experiment. No one will say that any of these justifications for revolution exist in the present case.<sup>12</sup>

Mill used his influence with the leaders of the English working class to

<sup>10</sup> *The Letters of John Stuart Mill, op. cit.*, II, 147, 152, 268. A letter of congratulation from Mill to Odger on the latter's independent candidacy for Parliament is reprinted in Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *loc. cit.*, 288. Odger defended Mill's candidacy at an electoral meeting in a working class constituency. *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, (New York, 1924), 199. F. W. Soutter, "Memories of George Odger," *The Nineteenth Century, XCIV*, (London, 1923), 898-907.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Evans, *Sir Randall Cremer: His Life and Work*, (London, 1909), 31-39.

<sup>12</sup> *Letters of John Stuart Mill, op. cit.*, II, 78. Both Cremer and Odger served on the Council of the National Reform League. The London Trades Council had taken a leading part in the agitation for the Reform Bill brought in by the Liberal Government. Cf. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *op. cit.*, 248.

combat any appeal for revolutionary action. Once, Bain tells us, Mill remonstrated "with the leaders of the London working men, who were proposing to meet in Hyde Park in defiance of the Government. His language was: 'You need to be convinced first that a revolution is necessary, and next that you are able to carry it out.'"<sup>13</sup> And to Mill's mind it was clear that within the framework of the English constitutional system there was no justified basis for revolutionary violence.

The important question arises whether Mill's rejection of the revolutionary philosophy as enunciated by the International was not founded on a misconception of the meaning Marx and his followers gave to the word "revolution." Marx, as the result of his life-long study of English economic history, had come to the conclusion that "at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means."<sup>14</sup> Marx's use of "revolution" here did not imply the employment of violence to achieve social change. Was there then a "semantical" misunderstanding which made Mill so critical of the International's philosophy? Did Mill regard "revolution" as unqualifiedly connoting the use of violence?

The answer to this question is found in a letter which Mill sent to the Secretary of the Nottingham Branch of the International Workingmen's Association. The latter had sent Mill copies of their program and a pamphlet entitled "The Law of the Revolution." Mill replies to the Secretary:

In the principles of the Association as set forth in the programme I find much that I warmly approve, and little, if anything, from which I positively dissent; . . .

A remark, however, is suggested to me by some part of the phraseology both of the programme and of the pamphlet, which I should think it wrong to withhold. What advantage is there in designating the doctrines of the Association by such a title as "the principles of the political and social Revolution"? "The Revolution" as a name for any sort of principles or opinions, is not English. A Revolution is a change of government effected by force, whether it be by a popular revolt or by a military usurpation. And as "the man" in English always means some particular man, so "the Revolution" means some particular revolution, such as the French Revolution, or the English Revolution of 1688.

The meaning intended to be conveyed by "the principles of the Revolution" can only be guessed at from a knowledge of French, in which language it seems to mean the political ideal of any person of democratic opinions who happens to be using it. I cannot think that it is good to adopt this mode of speech from the French. It proceeds from an infirmity

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Bain, *Autobiography*, (London, 1904), 89.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Engels, Preface to the First English Translation, in Karl Marx, *Capital*, I (Chicago, 1909), 32.

of the French mind, which has been one main cause of the miscarriage of the French nation in its pursuit of liberty and of progress; that of being led away by phrases, and treating abstractions as if they were realities which have a will and exert active power. . . . There is no real thing called "the Revolution," nor any "principles of the Revolution." There are maxims which your Association, in my opinion, rightly consider to be essential to just government. . . . The more clearly and unambiguously these, and nothing but these, are stated, the better people will understand one another, and the more distinctly they will see what they are disputing about, and what they are concerned to prove. When instead of this men range themselves under banners as friends and enemies of "the Revolution," the only important question which is just and useful is kept out of sight.<sup>15</sup>

Mill thus uses the word "revolution" to signify "a change of government effected by force." Marx and the International, on the other hand, use "revolution" to denote a basic change in socio-economic relations. Mill dislikes the form of speech which reifies "Revolution." He regards such phraseology as a blend of emotive and metaphysical usage which does not help the rational consideration of social problems. He believes that political and economic questions are solved with a maximum agreement among men if they are dealt with in a factual, empirical spirit. He regards the language of revolution as a political metaphysics which hinders the application of scientific method to political realities. Marx, on the other hand, was constructing a political language which would intensify the independent action of the working class. His use of words like "revolution" was emotively bound to alienate members of the middle class but was also at the same time an instrument for increasing the class solidarity of the working class. The sense of an historic mission of the proletariat was heightened by the vocabulary of revolution. The differences between the political language of Mill and of Marx thus reflected differences in their respective policies. One avoided terms which emotively promoted the class struggle. The latter preferred such language. Political language, it is to be observed, has a dual function. It aims both to describe political realities and to win men to political actions. Divergences in political language often derive directly from the disagreements in policy. In the last analysis, we may add, one's linguistic choices are controlled by a recognition or rejection of the primary role of class struggle in history. In this sense, the choice of emotive terms is a corollary of one's analysis of the configuration of social forces. From this standpoint, the linguistic disagreement between Mill and Marx is finally founded on a conflict in sociological theory.

Mill was not familiar with Marx's economic writings. Mill did not un-

<sup>15</sup> *Letters of John Stuart Mill, op cit.*, II, 347-348.

derstand German, and the first English and French translations of the first volume of *Capital* were not published until after Mill's death.<sup>16</sup> It is fair to conclude, however, that he knew of Marxism as a leading school of thought within the International Workingmen's Association, and that he used his influence with English labor leaders to combat the influence of Marxian modes of thought and expression.

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<sup>16</sup> Leslie Stephen states that Mill "learned German." Cf. *The English Utilitarians* (London, 1900), III, 28. But Mill told Brandes that "I do not understand the German language, and have never read a line of German literature in the original." Cf. Georg Brandes, *Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century* (transl. by Rasmus B. Anderson, New York, 1923), 194. Mill's letter to Brandes indicates no knowledge of Marx's earlier works such as the *Misère de la Philosophie*.

## COMMENT

BY J. SALWYN SCHAPIRO

Marxism as a system of thought took definite shape with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859), and Volume I of *Das Kapital* (1867). All these writings appeared during the life time of Mill. Moreover, Marx was a fellow-Londoner of Mill for over twenty years. Yet in all his writings, as far as I know, Mill makes no mention of Marx, neither does he refer in any way to the tenets of Marxism. That Mill could not read German explains why he did not read the books mentioned above, but it does not explain why he completely ignored them. The *Communist Manifesto* was, I feel certain, translated into French, a language that Mill knew perfectly, yet he makes no reference to this famous document.

The quotations from Mill's correspondence, cited by Dr. Feuer, do show that Mill followed the debates of the International Workingmen's Association. What interested him in these debates was the contrast between the *bon sens* of the English delegates and those from the Continent, who, under the leadership of the *théoriciens russes*, desired à *exproprier tout le monde*. Neither in his letter to Brandes nor in the other quotation cited by Dr. Feuer is there any evidence that Mill had any notion of what is now called Marxism. In Mill's day socialism was associated with the theories of the French Utopians and with the Louis Blanc experiments in 1848.

There is another matter on which I find myself in disagreement with Dr. Feuer. I refer to his view of Marx's use of the word "revolution." Marx used the word, writes Dr. Feuer, "to denote a basic change in socio-economic relations," not to denote the employment of violence to achieve