

# ON KARL MARX'S EVOLUTIONARY CREDENTIALS AND THE MARX–MILL INTELLECTUAL RELATIONSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

*The view of Karl Marx as “revolutionary” endorsing violent overturn of the capitalist system is standard textbook fare filtering through to popular and professional opinion. John Stuart Mill specialists frequently contrast their subject with Marx in this regard. The perspective on Marx as “revolutionary” is unconvincing, for Marx was no less “evolutionary” than Mill, his version of evolution reflecting concern that reformist measures to correct perceived injustices in the capitalist-exchange system might assure its permanence, and extending to the stage following a proletarian political takeover which might itself occur by way of democratic voting enabled by extensions of the franchise accorded by the capitalist state itself. Our demonstration prefaces a speculative evaluation of Mill’s stance regarding Marx – “speculative” since Mill apparently never read Capital. In particular, Mill would doubtless have welcomed Marx’s position, for to differentiate him from the continental “revolutionaries” makes excellent sense considering his principle that when it comes to prediction all depends on ruling circumstances coupled with his evolutionism including allowance after a proletarian takeover of a residual capitalist sector, income inequality, and*

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*compensation of expropriated property owners. By the same token he would have found unpalatable Marx's vision for a more distant communism of a central-controlled system.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The term “revolution” suggests violent overturn, and the view of Karl Marx as “revolutionary” is not only standard textbook fare filtering through to popular opinion, but also often found in authoritative professional accounts, as by Isaiah Berlin who unconditionally asserted that Marx “was, all his life, a convinced and uncompromising believer in a violent working class revolution” (Berlin, 1978, p. 189). Some formulations do not specify that violence is intended by the attribution to Marx, but such a reading is invited. Thus, according to a recent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*:

[w]ith the rise of totalitarian fascism in the 1930s, the Frankfurt School lost confidence in the ability of workers to mount a revolution against monopoly capitalism and the states sustaining it, as Marx predicted they would. It regarded workers as paralyzed by conformist tendencies and unable to discern the source of their grievances in the capitalist system. (Freeman, 2017, p. 63)

Of particular interest is a reference by Eric Hobsbawm to “the actual revolution, in the sense of the (presumably violent) transfer of power [...] [which] would in turn initiate a lengthy process of post-revolutionary transition” (Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 65). Commentators on John Stuart Mill frequently contrast their subject and Marx, Robson for example affirming that Mill “objects strenuously to the idea of violent revolution” (Robson, 1968, p. 276). In the course of the same comparative exercise Duncan writes that “Mill was generally critical of revolutionary action, believing that in England at least all necessary changes could come peacefully through meeting practical grievances as they arose” (Duncan, 1973, p. 292), and according to Rosen “[i]f Marx elevated revolutionary socialism to the status of a science, Mill dismissed it precisely because it was not capable of experimental trials. [...] Mill [opposed] the revolutionary form of socialism” (Rosen, 2013, p. 192). Persky “sees much of Mill in Marx,” adding “but, of course, Mill was committed to avoiding a highly centralized economy and to working through reform, not revolution” (Persky, 2016, p. xix); or again, “[w]here Marx saw revolution and planning, Mill saw reform and co-operation” and outlined a “coherent evolutionary path for radical reform” (pp. 166, 184). I shall undertake a speculative exercise regarding Mill’s own probable reception of the Marxian themes in the light of this firmly-implanted insistence on a Marx–Mill dichotomy.

Needless to say, the secondary literature yields conflicting opinions, including a focus on Marx’s evolutionism. Thus Joseph Schumpeter refers to “the grand vision of an imminent evolution of the economic process – that, working somehow

through accumulation, somehow destroys the economy as well as the society of competitive capitalism and somehow produces an untenable social situation that will somehow give birth to another type of social organization," which he finds "constitutes Marx's claim to greatness as an economic analyst" (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 441). Yet when discussing Darwin, Schumpeter makes no mention of Marx's own description of *Capital* as demonstrating "in the social context the same gradual process of evolution that Darwin demonstrated in natural history" (see below, p. 77). Stedman Jones attributes a methodological parallel with "Darwinism" but specifically to Engels (Stedman Jones, 2016, pp. 563–564, 566–567).<sup>1</sup>

Returning now to the main issue – evolution or revolution – Bober makes the valid point that we are obliged to turn "to direct evidence in Marx's utterances," since "the dialectic cannot inform us whether the future social synthesis will be achieved by a revolutionary cataclysm or by a peaceful transition" (Bober, 1965 [1927], p. 262). A grave deficiency indeed. In any event, he finds that "up to the early 1850's it seems that Marx and Engels put great stress on violence, almost giving the impression of relishing it; while from the 1860s on they begin to allow that at least in certain countries, a peaceful method, the ballot, may be both available and preferable." I shall have this reading in mind as my argument proceeds.

The perspective on Marx as "revolutionary" in the violent sense is unconvincing and I shall review the evidence for this conclusion.<sup>2</sup> The repeated use of "somehow" by Schumpeter in singing the praises of Marx as "evolutionist" certainly suggests the need to tighten up this side of the argument. I shall maintain that while Marx was no less "evolutionary" than Mill, his version of evolution, insofar as it relates to prominent features of advanced capitalism, implies a powerful *laissez-faire* bias in two senses: a concern lest reformist measures to correct perceived injustices in the going system assure its permanence halting the allegedly necessitarian process of transmutation in its tracks; and a warning against *premature* action to transform systems. Much of this is well known and ought to have sufficed to render inappropriate the designation of Marx himself as a "revolutionary" – "conservative" would be a far more accurate designation. Less well known, and strongly reinforcing his *laissez-faire* reasoning, is Marx's sophisticated appreciation of the operation of the free-market pricing system. This I shall demonstrate.

I then carry the story further, with an eye to Marx's evolutionism beyond developments within advanced capitalism. There is the *proletarian takeover* which might, for Marx, occur by way of democratic voting enabled by extensions of the franchise accorded by the capitalist state in response to pressures generated by capitalist development. Here I take issue with Hobsbawm who attributes this allegedly "revisionist" abandoning of "the old insurrectionary perspectives" to Engels alone, and late in the day, in his 1895 "Introduction" to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France* (Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 67).<sup>3</sup>

And there is *the stage following a proletarian political takeover*, which includes allowance for a residual capitalist sector in the first post-capitalist stage, for income inequality, and even for compensation of expropriated property owners. Here I elaborate Hobsbawm's recognition (noted above) of the proletarian

revolution as initiating a transition period of “uncertain and doubtless variable length, while capitalist society is gradually transformed into communist society” (Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 57). To my mind, these three themes in conjunction render the evolutionist perspective overwhelming.

I do not doubt that Marx himself must ultimately be held responsible for being misunderstood as positing a “cataclysmic vision of the overthrow of capitalism by an uprising of the proletariat” (Schapiro, 1949, p. 304). After all, there is the famously dramatic affirmation in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” (MECW 6: 519), and in *Capital* itself: “Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one” (1867; MECW 35: 739). My contention is that in neither case does Marx follow through with respect to a violent transition from advanced capitalism. The choice of subtitle – *A Critique of Political Economy* – and the theme of non-wage income as “exploitation” were certainly intended as weapons for the proletariat, but not necessarily to the end of achieving an institutional “revolution” by violent means. I do not, however, argue that Marx excluded the possibility of violent revolution under any circumstances, but rather that he dismissed such an outcome in Britain and the United States; and I certainly do not propose a reevaluation of his ideal – the replacement of the capitalist-exchange system by a central-controlled economy dispensing entirely with the price mechanism, for Marx of course, abhorred labor’s “dependency” upon capital and all this implied for its behavioral and moral development, and in addition, perceived an enormous siphoning-off of wealth to middle men under capitalist arrangement. These objections he sought to undermine by his *A Critique of Political Economy*. But both he shared with Mill; and in fact it is Mill, much to Marx’s displeasure, who has temporal priority in representing the source of profits not from the outward appearance created by prices but from the circumstance that labor works for a longer time than is necessary to reproduce its own subsistence (Hollander, 2015, p. 456). Considering the extensive common ground, it is imperative to stress that their *long-term visions* – their ideals – differed entirely, since Mill placed his hope in reform of the private-property system by state interventions in the first instance, and thereafter – here his evolutionism is most apparent – in the transmutation of the (reformed) system into cooperation, perhaps arrived at by way of profit-sharing arrangements, with allowance also made for a *dénouement* involving both a cooperative and a capitalist sector, with the return to labor in the former establishing a sort of “just wage” applicable in the latter.

In what follows I first elaborate my three-fold Marxian evolutionary theme, relating to progress within advanced capitalism, the Communist takeover, and the first stage of communism (the second section).<sup>4</sup> An account then follows of the full extent of Marx’s *laissez-faire* “conservatism,” including not only fear of reformist measures by the capitalist state but the less-familiar technical arguments for non-intervention based on the operation of the price mechanism (the third section). Now reform implied that the evolutionary process might not take the path of undermining capitalism but, to the contrary, might guarantee capitalism’s survival;

and as I go on to show (the fourth section), Marx came to recognize the positive impact of contemporary factory reform and, more generally, even saw some potential for real-wage increase, tendencies which – together with national character and even nationalism – might account for a growing suspicion that the working classes in Britain would be unwilling to implement a “proletarian” program *even when in a position to do so* as a result of universal (male) suffrage accorded by the capitalist state – that the evolutionary transition to communism might be brought to a premature halt. I shall summarize the main argument of this chapter in terms of a speculative evaluation of John Stuart Mill’s perspective on Marx.

## THE EVOLUTIONARY THEME ELABORATED

### *Evolutionary Processes within Capitalism.*

As I have intimated, Marx represented *Capital* as “demonstrat[ing] that present society, economically considered, is pregnant with a new, higher form [...] showing in the social context the same gradual process of evolution that Darwin demonstrated in natural history” (to Engels, December 7, 1867; MECW 42: 494), and he cautioned in his “Preface” that:

even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement – and it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic laws of motion of modern society – it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. (MECW 35: 9)

The evolutionary theme is nicely outlined in the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–1863*:

Just as one should not think of sudden changes and sharply delineated periods in considering the succession of the different geological formations, so also in the case of the creation of the different economic formations of society. (MECW 33: 442)<sup>5</sup>

The principle is applied to the dissolution of capitalism:

This is an essentially different conception from that of the bourgeois political economists, themselves imprisoned in capitalist preconceptions, who are admittedly able to see how production is carried on *within* the capital-relation, but not how this *relation* is itself produced, and how at the same time the material conditions for its dissolution are produced within it, thereby removing its *historical justification as a necessary form* of economic development, of the production of social wealth. (MECW 34: 466)

I turn now to the specific processes envisaged as at play within capitalism setting the stage for a transition to communism. Observations in *Capital 3*, composed probably in the 1860s, relate to the joint-stock company – “the ultimate development of capitalist production” (MECW 37: 434) – as a transitional form from private to social organization:

The capital, which in itself rests on a social mode of production and presupposes a social concentration of means of production and labour power, is here directly endowed with the form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) as distinct from private capital, and its undertakings assume the form of social undertakings as distinct from private undertakings.

It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of the capitalist mode of production itself.

An earlier comment refers to “[s]hare capital as the most perfected form (turning into communism) together with all its contradictions” (Marx to Engels, April 2, 1858; MECW 40: 298).

The part played by credit is much emphasized in *Capital 3* and also with respect to the growth of cooperatives; and the formulation is one of the best I know of Marx’s evolutionary orientation confirming his own designation of *Capital* as “Darwinian”:

The cooperative factories of the labourers themselves represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organization all the shortcomings of the prevailing system. But the antithesis between capital and labour is overcome within them, if at first only by way of making the associated labourers into their own capitalists, i.e., by enabling them to use the means of production for the employment of their own labour. They show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one, when the development of the material forces of production and of the corresponding forms of social production have reached a particular state. Without the factory system arising out of the capitalist mode of production there could have been no cooperative factories. Nor could these have developed without the credit system arising out of the same mode of production. The credit system is not only the principle basis for the gradual transformation of capitalist private enterprises into capitalist stock companies, but equally offers the means for the gradual extension of cooperative enterprises on a more or less national scale. The capitalist stock companies, as much as the cooperative factories, should be considered as transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one, with the only distinction that the antagonism is resolved negatively in the one and positively in the other. (MECW 37: 438)

Cooperatives alone, be it noted, were clearly regarded by Marx as insufficient to assure a smooth transition from capitalism but only as contributing to that outcome. Marx also refers to the growth of monopoly which “requires state interference” (p. 436), a theme expanded by Engels with an eye to prospective nationalization of industry by the capitalist state (*Anti-Dühring* (1894 [1878]); MECW 25: 264–265).

Apart from the foregoing applications of the principle of Historical Materialism are tendencies emanating from capitalist development relating to *proletarian character* itself:

Modern industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of to-day, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the individual social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers. (MECW 35: 490–491)

The circumstance that modern industry forces the predominance of technical and vocational training is one significant feature:

one step already spontaneously taken towards effecting this revolution is the establishment of technical and agricultural schools, and of ‘*écoles d’enseignement professionnel*’, in which the children of the workingmen receive some little instruction in technology and in the practical handling of the various implements of labour. (p. 491)

At least by implication the proletariat would become increasingly competent to undertake the tasks required of it in any post-capitalist arrangement however that might be achieved.<sup>6</sup>

I should briefly note here the so-called Russian option sometimes attributed to Marx entailing a transition to communism based upon the peasant commune (the *obshchina*), rather than upon capitalist development. If taken seriously, this alternative would undermine the entire perception of communism *requiring* a preliminary stage of advanced capitalism, in line with the celebrated principle stated in the “Preface” to *Capital* whereby the “natural laws of capitalist production” entail “tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results,” such that “[t]he country which is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (MECW 35: 9).<sup>7</sup>

### *The Acquisition of Proletarian Control*

By a Communist Revolution Marx referred specifically to the acquisition and maintenance of *political* power by the proletariat. Thus he avers in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) that “[b]etween the capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other,” corresponding to which there “is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*” (MECW 24: 95). The term “revolution,” it may seem, might legitimately be retained since there is no conflict with those evolutionary processes occurring *within* capitalism; on the contrary, the communist takeover occurs only when the time is ripe. But the following considerations relating to the character of the so-called “revolution” itself require attention.<sup>8</sup>

Recall that the *Communist Manifesto* closes with a declaration that the Communists “openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” (above, p. 76). But this is misleading — unless what is intended is “forcible overthrow” *after* having achieved power by legal means — since from the 1840s Marx and also Engels had recognized the potential of constitutional reform enhancing proletarian political power. In the *Principles of Communism*, upon which the *Communist Manifesto* was based, Engels had recognized the possibility of achieving political control by constitutional means (MECW 6: 350), while the *Communist Manifesto* itself (1) describes the impact of modern industrial development on the proletariat, whose quantitative expansion and coherence are reflected in unionization extending increasingly to the national level, and the establishment of a workers’ party; (2) expresses hostility toward a variety of “critical-utopian” socialists of the day for “violently oppos[ing] all political action on the part of the working class”; and (3) supports constitutional reform measures proposed by the Chartists in England, the Agrarian Reformers in America, and the Social Democrats in France (MECW 6: 493, 517–518). Support for the Chartists is found in *The Poverty of Philosophy* 1847, MECW 6: 210), and particularly significant as a sort of retrospective evaluation after the failed revolutionary attempts of 1848 is a paper entitled “The Chartists” of 1852 which perceives universal suffrage as synonymous with proletarian political power: “the carrying of Universal Suffrage

in England would [...] be a far more socialistic measure than anything which has been honoured with that name on the Continent. *Its inevitable result, here, is the political supremacy of the working class*" (MECW 11: 335–336; Marx's emphasis). Needless to say, the achievement of universal suffrage should be seen as part of the evolutionary process, the capitalist state being obliged to offer such a concession from fear of its own creation – the proletariat.

Recognition dating back to the 1840s of the possibility of a peaceful transition to the proletarian dictatorship throws into question Bober's focus on the early 1860s as marking a distinct shift away from "violence" as *sine qua non* (above, p. 75). Stedman Jones implicitly sides with Bober when he refers to Marx's "belittlement" in the 1840s and early 1850s (as in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*) "of the significance of manhood suffrage and the democratic republic," his "hostility towards political democracy and universal suffrage," his "refusal to think of universal suffrage as anything other than a pathological symptom," and his "suspicion about demands for manhood suffrage. [...]" (Stedman Jones, 2016, pp. 307, 337, 342, 550). What then comes of the potentiality of constitutional reform measures that I have cited from the *Communist Manifesto* with respect to Britain, America, and France and from "The Chartists" of 1852 referring specifically to Britain? Are they to be simply dismissed? I suggest that the apparent contrast reflects Marx's opposition to universal suffrage as a strictly liberal principle of "one man one vote," but approval provided the "inevitable result" would indeed be "the political supremacy of the working class," namely a communist dictatorship. As I shall presently confirm, neither Marx nor Engels would have countenanced a democratic system that allowed the replacement of a proletarian majority or, worse still, a situation where so-called proletarians opted for bourgeois policies (see below, pp. 88–89).<sup>9</sup>

When we move forward to the violent events in France of 1870 we find Marx in *The Civil War in France* (1871) – anonymously-published as the *Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association* – criticizing the Commune for inadequate ruthlessness, complaining for example that reprisals had at one stage been merely an "empty threat" (MECW 22: 327). And if we left the matter there we might perhaps better understand Marx's reputation as the "Red Terrorist Doctor." But the matter is not so simple. Allowance must surely be made for the vicious conduct of the opposing Government forces working hand in hand with the Prussians which, to my mind, largely justifies Marx's reading of the Communards as acting defensively. As for matters of principle, Marx goes on to admit candidly that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and yield it for its own purposes" (p. 328). The evolutionary processes at play could not be bypassed:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They had no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historical processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. (p. 335)

On various occasions in the early 1870s Marx distinguishes between countries with respect to violent revolution, as Bober and others correctly note. All depended on the ruling circumstances. An interview accorded *The World* newspaper – only a few weeks after composition of *The Civil War in France* – conveys the point in question: “In England [...] [i]nsurrection would be madness where peaceful agitation would more swiftly and surely do the work” (MECW 22: 602; emphasis added). This perspective on the English case is represented by Stedman Jones as a “revised position” (Stedman Jones, 2016, p. 551), whereas I have documented earlier indications of the same orientation. As for France, Marx opines in the interview that “a hundred laws of repression and a mortal antagonism between classes seem to necessitate the violent solution of social war,” contrasting with *The Civil War in France*, but one notes that Marx expresses himself tentatively. At the 1872 Hague Congress of the International, he expressly allows the possibility of a peaceful transition to communism in the English, American, and possibly Dutch cases, but considers inevitable resort to “force” in “most” Continental states without specific mention of France:

We know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries must be taken into account; and we do not deny the existence of countries, like England and America, and if I knew your institutions better I might add Holland, where the workers may achieve their aims by peaceful means. That being true we must also admit that in most countries on the Continent it is force which must be the lever of our revolution; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers. (MECW 23: 255)

Needless to say, to allow that in most Continental countries “force [...] must be the lever of our revolution” conflicts radically with the evolutionary principle laid down in the “Preface” to *Capital* whereby “the country which is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (cited above, p. 79).

A word is in order here regarding a circular letter of September 1879 sent to leaders of the Social Democratic Party by Engels, and also signed by Marx, lambasting as “too moderate” a trio of Zürich journalists, including Eduard Bernstein, proposing a new Party newspaper which would be opposed to “political radicalism” and would “adopt a line that is socialist in principle” (MECW 45: 401). By calling for “an influx of supporters from the ranks of the educated and propertied classes” especially as Reichstag members (p. 403), the trio also apparently denied the merits of “a workers” party whereas the *Communist Manifesto* only tolerated entry of people from the ruling class subject to their commitment to the “militant proletariat” (p. 407). And they culpably applauded the Party for “showing that it does not wish to pursue the path of forcible, bloody revolution, but rather [...] to tread the path of legality, i.e. of reform” (p. 404). But we must be cautious. Engels and Marx were *not* by all this engaging in a call to arms and revolution. For they admitted that Social Democratic voters “have sense enough not to break their heads against a wall and attempt a ‘bloody revolution’ with the odds of one to ten,” but insisted only that all options should be left open, and that Social Democrats not “deny themselves all chance of exploiting some violent upheaval abroad, a sudden wave of

revolutionary fervour engendered thereby.” A mild alternative is also proposed when responding to the Zürich trio’s declaration that while they had no wish “to relinquish our party and our programme [...] we shall have enough to do for years to come if we concentrate our whole strength, our entire energies, on the attainment of certain immediate objectives which must in any case be won before there can be any thought of realizing more ambitious aspirations” (cited p. 405), which is of course Bernstein’s trademark philosophy (Bernstein, 1993 [1899]). As an alternative, the Engels–Marx letter merely proposed participation in “polemic,” that is in “resolute political opposition [...] laying stress on ambitious goals which are calculated to frighten off the bourgeoisie,” and “attainable anyway in our own generation,” rather than have the party “devote all its strength and energies to those petty-bourgeois stop-gap reforms which provide new props for the old social order and which might, perhaps, transform the ultimate catastrophe into a gradual, piecemeal and, as far as possible, peaceable process of dissolution” (p. 406). One notes that there is no positive rejection here of “petty-bourgeois stop-gap reforms,” only the importance of supplementing such steps by “polemic” to assure against the dangers posed by reform.<sup>10</sup>

### *The First Stage of Communism*

A third consideration is the extension of the evolutionary dimension beyond the acquisition of proletarian control of the State. Needless to say, the State itself – necessarily a repressive set of institutions as the term “dictatorship” implies – is a capitalist residue which, Marx affirmed in *The Civil War in France*, would ultimately have to be destroyed (see Berlin, 1978, p. 257), or – as Engels never tired of insisting – would die out naturally in the course of time (Hollander, 2011, pp. 323–324). But beyond this general consideration, there are several more specific instances of capitalist residue.

First, in an initial phase, after acquisition of proletarian control, a capitalist sector is to be retained and this is for an unspecified period. As expressed in the *Communist Manifesto*, while the immediate end of the revolution was to seize the state, the proletariat “centralis[ing] all instruments of production” as well as credit, and the means of communication and transport, “in the hands of the State,” nevertheless “the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, *by degrees*, all capital from the bourgeoisie” (MECW 6: 504–505; emphasis added). The same caution is implied by the function here that accorded the revolutionary dictatorship in *extending* “factories and instruments of production owned by the State.” A gradual dismantling of the private-property system is a conspicuous feature of Engels’s *Principles of Communism* (1847; MECW 6: 349–350; see Hollander, 2011, p. 324). It would, of course, entail fine judgment to specify the rate at which the capitalist sectors might be safely dismantled by the communist régime, with reliance implicitly placed on the ability of the new administration not to compromise the performance by what remained of the traditional sectors in creating or maintaining the capacity required to assure the successful implementation of a communist program.<sup>11</sup>

Second, there is an affirmation by Engels that his own and Marx's support for "cooperatives" applied only to a transitional arrangement (Hollander, 2011, pp. 149–150, 166) which implies that even *competing* cooperatives would have been acceptable, along with a capitalist sector in the initial stage of communism, since *centrally-controlled* cooperation was part of the permanent "common" plan as Marx insisted (*Civil War in France*; MECW 22: 335).

Third, the initial stage of communism would entail wage *inequality* reflecting differential physical and mental abilities, Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) vividly explaining that:

we are dealing here with a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. (MECW 24: 85–86)

Only in some "utopian" phase of communism would the principle "From each according to his abilities to each according to his needs" apply; by contrast, his labor-certificate scheme, a prime feature of his proposed centrally-organized system, recognized natural differentials between individuals with regard to "talent": "But one man is superior to another physically or mentally and so supplies more labour in the same time, or can work for a longer time; and labour, to serve as a measure, must be defined by its duration or intensity. [...] *It is, therefore, a right of inequality*" (pp. 86–87). Striking indeed is the fact that Marx's position has a precise counterpart in Mill's declaration that "it is an abuse of the principle of equality to demand that no individual be permitted to be better off than the rest, when his being so makes none of the others worse off than they otherwise would be" (*Principles of Political Economy*; Mill, 1965, vol. 3, p. 980); and in his argument against schemes entailing wage equality notwithstanding differential talent: "The nominal equality of labour would be so great a real inequality that justice would revolt against its being enforced" (p. 977).<sup>12</sup> Of the common Mill–Marx position Friedrich Hayek had no inkling when in *Constitution of Liberty* he insisted that:

from the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. (Hayek, 2011 [1960], pp. 149–150)

Finally, there is the matter of compensation for expropriated property. Joseph Persky refers specifically to J. S. Mill's advocating compensation rather than confiscation in his land-reform program, implying that such a recommendation would be completely foreign to Marx (Persky, 2016, pp. 182–183), whereas I find that in discussing expropriation of big landed proprietors once "our Party is in possession of political power," Engels later recalled in "*The Peasant Question in France and Germany*" (1894) that "[w]e by no means consider compensation as impermissible in any event; Marx told me (and how many times!) that in his opinion we would get off cheapest if we could buy out the whole lot of them" and "[w]hether this expropriation is to be compensated for or not will to a great extent depend not upon us but the

circumstances under which we obtain power” (MECW 27: 500). I see no evident reason why the same allowance cannot be applied to residual capitalist industrial ventures.

### **MARX AS *Laissez-faire* CONSERVATIVE: THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

Marx’s evolutionary perspective implies, in and of itself, that reformist interventionism threatens the developmental process and thus the transition from capitalism to communism. The *Communist Manifesto* refers to “Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism” alluding to “a part of the bourgeoisie [which] is desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society” (MECW 6: 513). In a variation of the theme appearing in *The Class Struggles in France 1848–50 (1850)* Marx opposed reformist measures designed to “forcibly stem the growth of capital,” that is to prevent the evolution of the system (MECW 10: 126). As Mises put the matter, Marx regarded reform measures as “not progressive, but reactionary” (Mises, 1980 [1950], p. 29). But we need not turn to Mises, since Engels himself admitted “a conservative side” to the evolutionary process, recognizing “that definite stages of cognition and society are justified for their time and circumstances” (1888 [1886]; *Ludwig Feuerbach*; MECW 26: 360). In these terms, Engels in 1850 had condemned the Ten Hours Bill as “reactionary” (MECW 10: 271–276; 288–300). Marx famously revised his view when it came to factory legislation in particular, a matter I shall touch on in the forthcoming paragraphs.

But the case for regarding Marx as *laissez-faire* economist extends beyond a fear of reform and improving living standards. By way of introduction I take note of J. S. Mill’s protest against the likes of reactionaries such as Robert Lowe who, rather than:

endeavouring to discern what principles are applicable to a particular case, by analyzing its circumstances, believe themselves to be provided with a set of catch-words, which they mistake for principles – free-trade, freedom of contract, competition, demand and supply, the wages fund, individual interest, desire of wealth, & c – which supersede analysis, and are applicable to every other sort of cases without the trouble of thought. (Mill, 1967 [1870], p. 671)

There is too Mill’s rich contribution to the market-failure phenomenon – consumer ignorance, indiscriminate benefit, free riding – and to the extended role of state intervention necessitated by “progress” – control of pollution, overcrowding, and the like. And there is his case for intervention to enhance distributive justice, on the grounds that the labor market *as it operated in his day* yielded a morally defective outcome unless corrected for an unjust distribution of property, and the assurance by state intervention in education of enhanced equality of opportunity. Only with these corrections and – it must be particularly emphasized because so little appreciated in the literature – assuming *full-employment* in the aggregate labor market (Hollander, 2015, p. 209) would the emerging wage structure approach an “equitable,” and not merely a “practicable,” solution. I say “approach” having in mind that even this outcome falls

short of the cooperative ideal which was hopefully to provide a solution to labor's "dependency" on capital.

As for Marx, *laissez-faire* reasoning is reinforced by his sophisticated appreciation of the operation of the free-market pricing system, a matter not sufficiently appreciated by commentators (such as Rothbard, 1995, pp. xii, 530) who take for granted that he must necessarily have favoured interventionism. In fact, Marx silently allied himself with contemporary conservative opponents of reformist state intervention and also to some degree with Friedrich Hayek in our own day by which I intend the latter's formulations of high principle rather than his various interventionist allowances in practice. Consider first an application by Marx of price-theoretical principles to income-redistribution proposals, as by James Mill, entailing State confiscation of rent. The point in question for Marx is that confiscation would require in practise land-valuation indexes ("cadastres"), whereas these could not be taken as settled once and for all because of continuous disturbances in technical and market conditions. As for technology:

rent could not be the invariable index of the degree of fertility of the land, since every moment the modern application of chemistry is changing the nature of the soil and the geological knowledge is just now in our days beginning to revolutionize all the old estimates of relative fertility. (*The Poverty of Philosophy* 1847; MECW 6: 203)

There were, for example, instances when "rent proper is wiped out by the competition of new and more fertile soils" or when hitherto scarce improvements lose their value on becoming "universal owing to the development of agronomy" (p. 205). But beyond this, and even in the absence of changing technology:

fertility is not so natural a quality as might be thought [but] is closely bound up with the social relations of the time. A piece of land may be very fertile for corn growing, and yet the market price may induce the cultivators to turn it into an artificial pastureland and thus render it infertile. (p. 204).

The State in brief lacked the changeable detailed knowledge required for the proposed reform, a more "Austrian" conclusion than which it would be difficult to imagine. By contrast, J. S. Mill's Irish land reforms proposed the fixing of rents by state commissioners requiring a sort of "cadastres" of the sort Marx so much deprecated.

I turn next to Marx's objection to egalitarian reforms on grounds of Historical Materialism, the principle that the pattern of distribution is the *necessary* outcome of the "mode of production" rendering irrelevant "unfairness" or distributive justice (Hollander, 2004, p. 26; 2008, p. 106, 403, 390–396). In these terms Marx objected to the option of reform *within* capitalist arrangement to correct gross distributional defects as proposed by the 1875 Gotha Program: is not "present-day distribution" [...] the only "fair" distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production? (1875; MECW 24: 84). And he denied Adolphe Wagner's attribution to him in 1879 of the view that profit was "a deduction from, or robbery of, the worker" (MECW 24: 535). More specifically, by ignoring the economic role of income inequality, a redistributive program implied the undermining of productive capacity and the very ability to produce

a surplus – which incidentally was the standard eighteenth-century response of those arguing against equality. So far was this argument carried that in manuscript notes of 1879 Marx protested that he was falsely represented as maintaining that profit was “a deduction from, or robbery of, the worker,” whereas in fact the capitalist is a necessary functionary of capitalist production [who] enforces the production of surplus value, thus first helping to create what is to be deducted from the laborer (Hollander, 2008, pp. 386–387). Already in *Poverty of Philosophy* Marx had insisted against Proudhon upon the necessity in a private-property society of “classes which profited and classes which decayed” – the latter implying the immiseration of labor – as a condition for “the development of productive forces” and the generation of surplus (1847; MECW 6: 158–159). The celebrated proposal in the *Communist Manifesto* for a “heavy progressive or graduated income tax” (MECW 6: 505), be it noted, relates to the weakening of remnants of capitalism *after* the communist takeover and is not part of a reformist redistributive program pertaining to the existing system.

### ASPECTS OF MARX’S “REVISIONISM” AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROLETARIAN PROGRAM

Consider next Marx’s affirmation in his “Inaugural Address of the Working Men’s International Association” (1864) that the expansion of the British cooperative movement 1848–1864 was “excellent in principle, and [...] useful in practice” (MECW 20: 11–12). This perhaps intimates potential for improvement in labor’s condition, but is qualified since cooperation, “kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen,” was unable “to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, [or] *even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries*” (p. 12; emphasis added). To have positive effects of this order, “co-operative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions, and consequently, to be fostered by national means,” whereas this extension would *never be countenanced* by “the lords of land and the lords of capital [who] will always use their political privileges for the defense and perpetuation of their economical monopolies” (emphasis added). “*Never be countenanced*”? Yet Marx himself in the same “Inaugural Address” had *retracted* this sort of argument in relation to reactionary hostility toward *factory legislation* referring to the “immense physical, moral, and intellectual benefits hence accruing to the factory operatives [which] are now acknowledged on all sides” and which proved the fallacy of middle-class predictions “that any legal restriction of the hours of labour must sound the death knell of British industry” – as if that had not been his own earlier contention; it was in fact, he now writes, “the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class had succumbed to the political economy of the working class,” namely “the blind rule of the supply and demand laws” to “social production controlled by social foresight” (pp. 10–11). *Capital* itself refers to the “physical and moral regeneration” of the factory workers, reformist legislation perceived as a feature of the *evolutionary* process entailing an

increasingly powerful working class generated by the capitalist developmental process itself (MECW 35: 300, 412). Bear in mind also Marx's inclusion in the "Preface" to *Capital* of social welfare legislation as one of his "tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results" (MECW 35: 9–10). That the "factory magnates," especially after 1860, were becoming increasingly "reconciled to the inevitable" because of modern industrial development (p. 300) provides a new twist to the evolutionary processes at play in advanced capitalism, and promises to undermine Marx's "conservatism" in a major way.

A related index of Marx's "revisionism" is provided by a remarkable pronouncement in the posthumous third volume of *Capital* regarding technological unemployment implying that the capitalist state would, under some conditions, take measures to check the rate of innovation for fear of the proletarian response:

a development of productive forces which would diminish the absolute number of labourers, i.e., enable the entire nation to accomplish its total production in a shorter time span, would cause a revolution, because it would put the bulk of the population out of the running. (1894; MECW 37: 262)

We recall too Marx's presumption that the state would intervene to control monopoly (above, p. 78).

Let us look now at the notion of "absolute immization" of labor inducing proletarian dissatisfaction and enthusiasm for institutional change. In a Report to the General Council of the International of June 1865 Marx declared that unions could not reverse "the general tendency of capitalist production [...] not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages"; at best, the working class are capable of "retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction" ("Value, Price and Profit"; MECW 20: 148–149). In "Instructions" drawn up in August 1866 for the delegates of the General Council of the International, he emphasized primarily their role as a political training ground, acting "as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour," and only secondarily as counter-acting capitalists' bargaining advantage by restricting competition between individual laborers (p. 191). And shortly thereafter Marx found that little had been accomplished regarding improved standards by purely *national* working-class organizations – unions as well as cooperatives: "The working classes remain poor amid the increase of wealth, wretched amid the increase of luxury. Their material privation dwarfs their moral as well as their physical stature" (*The World*, July 3, 1871; MECW 22: 602). Indeed, the principle whereby "[t]he country which is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future" (above, pp. 79, 81) is applied in *Capital* to predict ultimately falling wages in the United States: "Capitalist production advances there with giant strides, even though the lowering of wages and the dependence of the wage worker are yet far from being brought down to the normal European level" (MECW 35: 760). Nonetheless, in the 1871 interview Marx allowed at least the *potential* for real-wage improvement as a result of international cooperation: "Formerly, when a strike took place in one country, it was defeated by the importation of workmen from another. The International has nearly stopped all that" (MECW 22: 602). Furthermore, Marx might have allowed better prospects in the British case were it

not for the special feature of Irish immigration (correspondence, April 9, 1870; MECW 43: 474–475). As for improvements in welfare more generally Marx in the 1879 letter did not oppose “stop-gap” reforms (above, p. 82), and in 1880 he approved French reforms extending to Monday holidays, minimum wages, non-discriminatory pay between the sexes, and employer contributions to insurance (“Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers’ Party”; MECW 24: 340–341). As with British factory legislation, Marx’s non-interventionist “conservatism” seems to be weakening.

The dilemma created for Marx of course is that improved conditions of work and pay threaten to compromise labor’s readiness to adopt a truly “proletarian” stance, the 1879 letter intimating this concern by referring to stop-gap reform as providing “new props for the old social order” (above, p. 82). Recourse might always be made to the standard repost that any improvement is a *secondary* matter so long as the wages system itself remained untouched — “Even [...] the most rapid possible growth of capital, however much it may improve the material existence of the worker, does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie, the interests of the capitalist” (*Wage Labour and Capital* 1849, reissued 1891; MECW 9: 220–221). But this assurance does not efface Marx’s expressed doubts regarding contemporary proletarian “class consciousness” which could only be aggravated by improvement in labor’s wellbeing. We encounter his concerns in discussion with Engels regarding the American Civil War when he complained of:

the sheeplike attitude of the working men in Lancashire. [...] Of late, England has made more of an ass of itself than any other country, the working men by their servile Christian nature, the bourgeois and aristocrats by the enthusiasm they have shown for slavery in its most direct form. (November 17, 1862; MECW 41: 430)<sup>13</sup>

The following year, again to Engels, Marx refers to “what seems to be a bourgeois contagion” affecting English workers (April 9, 1863, p. 468).

Class consciousness was also undermined by working-class *nationalism* manifested in hostility toward the Irish which encouraged the worker to feel at one with the aristocrats and capitalists against a common enemy (Marx to Kugelmann, November 29, 1869; MECW 43: 390). And we have encountered Marx’s disappointment with the “servile Christian nature” attributed to working men which introduces the role of national character. His concern is expressed particularly clearly in his Report to the General Council of the International of June 1865 complaining that while a well-trained, self-conscious, militant proletariat was essential to assure the pressures required for the demise of capitalism, British unions were not filling the bill:

They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system. (MECW 20: 149)

Indeed, at the London conference of the International (September 1871) Marx represented trade unions as “an aristocratic minority” (MECW 22: 614).<sup>14</sup>

To be especially noted is the fact that several of the expressions of concern are found after the passage of Disraeli's 1867 Reform Act which doubled the (adult male) electorate. The implications are grave if we recall the affirmation in "The Chartists" of 1852 that the "inevitable result" of Universal Suffrage would be "the political supremacy of the working class" — *the Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat* no less (above, p. 79). *This was no longer taken for granted.* Marx's expressed concerns with proletarian class consciousness implied that a working-class parliamentary majority might be unwilling to implement a communist program, or even that a working-class electorate might choose to replace the Proletarian Party at the polls, *bringing to a dead halt the entire evolutionary process relied upon to assure the transition to communism.* A paper of 1878 introduces a further limitation created by *public opinion*, namely that a proletarian Parliamentary majority in Britain and America "could, by lawful means, rid themselves of such laws and institutions as impeded their development, though they could only do so insofar as society had reached a sufficiently mature development" ("Parliamentary Debate on the Anti-Socialist Law"; MECW 24: 248). All of this seems to have passed Duncan by, for he ascribes recognition of the unwillingness of the proletariat to confirm to Marx's expectations of them specifically to Bernstein, writing of Bernstein as "alter[ing] the inherited Marxist categories to accord with what seems to him to be existing facts" (Duncan, 1973, p. 304).

Engels confirms the seriousness of the matter. The economic prosperity in the 1850s and the collapse of the Chartist movement suggested to him that "the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois" (October 7, 1858; MECW 40: 344), indeed, that "the English proletariat has declared himself in full agreement with the dominancy of the bourgeoisie" (April 8, 1863; MECW 41: 465). And some 15 years after the Reform Act Engels lamented labor's failure, as evidenced by trade union policy, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the enfranchisement of "the greater portion of the organized working class" to advance measures designed to undermine the "wage system" itself (1881; "Trades Unions"; MECW 24: 386–387). The prospect for the mutation of capitalism is a grim one indeed.

### SPECULATIONS REGARDING MILL'S PERCEPTION OF "MARX"

Mill was apparently unaware of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital* or any other of Marx's formal writings, though his correspondence shows him to have been familiar with individuals, organizations and publications associated with Marx and Engels (Feuer, 1949; Robson, 1968, p. 276; Schapiro, 1949). As Robson pointed out, "[a]bout Marx Mill undoubtedly knew little," Marx being "little known in England up to the time of Mill's death" (p. 275). And indeed nowhere does Mill refer explicitly to *Capital*, the first English translation of *Capital* appearing in 1886. But how might Mill have reacted to the view of Marx that has emerged from my demonstration? This speculative exercise will serve to summarize the main outcome.

I commence by noting that in one of his early essays predating any of the writings of Marx (or Engels) Mill himself posits an observed tendency toward capital agglomeration:

The fall of profits, consequent upon the vast increase of population and capital, is rapidly extinguishing the class of small dealers and small producers, from the impossibility of living on their diminished profits, and is throwing business of all kinds more and more into the hands of large capitalists. (“Civilization”; 1977 [1836], p. 136)

Subsequently, however, as in the *System of Logic*, he questions the legitimacy of basing historical predictions on “empirical laws” including increasing inequality under capitalism, for these were of value only “within certain (and generally rather narrow) limits” (1974 [1843], p. 791). In his *Chapters on Socialism*, Mill applies the objection to secularly falling real wages, and also to an increasing tendency toward monopoly, predictions he attributed to socialist critics of contemporary society such as Louis Blanc and Considérant (1967 [1879], pp. 728–730). To the extent that these alleged tendencies are reflected in the “necessitarian logic” of Marx’s evolutionary structure, Mill would have objected. But he would have reacted favorably to Marx’s allowance for prospective real-wage advance due to international working-class cooperation (above, p. 87), and implicit concern that the working classes might refuse to take advantage of the ability to activate a transition to communism, for these doubts effectively undermine, or at the very least blur, the “necessitarian” dimension to historical prediction. Recall that Marx himself is reported as admitting, when distinguishing British from Continental experience regarding the acquisition of proletarian power, that all depends on circumstances – whether by force or by constitutional means; and even allows the intrusion of nationalism and national character when evaluating a perceived weakening of class consciousness on the part of the proletariat.

What I have said of Mill’s likely approval of Marx’s allowance for possible real-wage advance due to international working-class cooperation is in fact more than speculation. Mill’s own “progressive optimism” – a term coined by Persky (2016, p. xi) – extended to the potential for labor’s independency from capital as reflected in his satisfaction with contemporary instances of working-class cooperation characterizing the First International founded in 1864, and similar estimates in *England and Ireland* (1868) of contemporary advances in European democracy (Hollander, 2015, pp. 141, 404). In *Thornton on Labour and Its Claims*, Mill refers to: “a commencement of International Congresses of working people, to prevent the efforts made in one country from being frustrated for want of a common understanding with other countries,” that is to prevent international competition between national working classes (1967 [1869], p. 664).

Now Mill’s primary concern was the “reckless extremities” and “subversion” engaged in by the “revolutionary Continentals” in France, Germany, and Switzerland, who neglected the likely consequences of their proposals regarding the abolition of private property and transition to a collectivist system but with little idea of the alternative to be established (*Chapters on Socialism* 1967 [1879], pp. 708–709). The worst were the “revolutionary Socialists,” collectivists who

proposed “to substitute the new rule for the old at a single stroke,” Mill cautioned that “to force unprepared populations into Communist societies, even if a political revolution gave the power to make such an attempt, would end in disappointment” (pp. 737, 746). This reflects a distinction drawn earlier between the English representatives at the Hague meetings of the International Working Men’s Association – leaders of the labor movement some of whom were known personally to him – from the Continentals (correspondence of March 4, 1872; Mill, 1972, pp. 1874–1875). The former alone – including George Odger and W. R. Cremer (Feuer, 1949, pp. 299) – focused properly “on practical improvements in workers’ welfare, appreciated the obstacles [to be overcome], and felt little hatred towards the classes whose domination they sought to end.” Contrasting with this “reasonable” position was that of the French, Belgians, Germans, and Swiss, who:

under the apparent direction of some Russian theorists, imagine that all that was required was sweeping expropriation, and the undermining of existing governments wholly unconcerned with what would replace the going institutions.

That Mill had no patience even with the terminology of “revolution” emerges in a further letter of October 4, 1872 to the International Working Men’s Association of Nottingham, warning that while a “very salutary intercourse” had lately developed “between portions of the English & French working classes,” it would prove disastrous “if it causes the advanced politicians of this country to abandon one of the best characteristics of the English mind & replace it by one of the worst of the French” (Mill, 1972, pp. 1911–1912).

Had Mill been familiar with *The Civil War in France* of 1871, and somehow realized that the anonymously-written document was by Marx and read it without due allowance for the dire and exceptional circumstances surrounding the Commune, and had he neglected the moral drawn from the defeat that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and yield it for its own purposes” (above, p. 80), he would doubtless have included Marx among the irresponsible Continental supporters of violent revolution. Again, had Mill noticed that Marx was Corresponding Secretary of the International for Germany and Russia at the time of the Hague Congress, he might have come to the same conclusion. But considering the allowance made by Marx for a peaceful acquisition of proletarian power in the leading industrial nations it would have been an erroneous conclusion. My point is that Mill would surely have welcomed Marx’s *actual* position if only he had been familiar with it. For to differentiate Marx from the “revolutionary” Continentals makes excellent sense considering his adherence to the principle – the Millian principle – that when it comes to prediction all depends on the precise circumstances of the case, and also considering his evolutionism including (as we have shown) the maintenance in the first, and only relevant, stage of communism of (1) a residual capitalist sector, (2) competing cooperatives, (3) “luck inequality,” and (4) even compensation for expropriated property.

Notwithstanding what I imagine would have been his favorable reception of Marx – understood in my fashion – there still remain conspicuous differences

between the two. In particular, there is the seeming paradox of Marx's vision of a central-controlled system dispensing with prices coupled with his effective support for the reactionary *laissez-faire* conservatives of his own day. Both perspectives would have deeply troubled Mill. We are also reminded by Professor Persky of common ground between Mill's "voluntary cooperation" and the voluntarism put forward by anarchist groupings within the International Working Men's Association, and of Marx's objection to the latter as "hopelessly utopian" (Persky, 2016, p. 168), for it is not competing cooperatives that Marx had in mind in *The Civil War in France* when contemplating the communist future but cooperation under central control (1871; MECW 22: 335).

As for "the improvement of mankind," Mill expressed in his 1852 "Preface" to the *Principles*, with French experience of cooperative associations in mind, some hope for "the tendency of the social transformation, of which these associations are the initial step" (1965 [1848], p. xciii). But this does not take us far, and later formulations suggest continued concern for labor's "reliability" in the English case – bringing to mind the concerns of Marx and Engels regarding the achievement of *their* ideal. Thus Mill maintained in correspondence of 1858 that conservative or "aristocratic" attitudes affected "all ranks and classes" undermining the proposition in *Utilitarianism* whereby "social inequalities which have ceased to be considered expedient, assume the character not of simple inexpediency, but of injustice" (1969 [1861], p. 258). The letter in question expresses a deeply pessimistic evaluation of prospects for the eradication of "the old order":

The English, of all ranks and classes, are at bottom, in all their feelings, aristocrats. They have some conception of liberty, & set some value on it, but the very idea of equality is strange & offensive to them. [...] They keep what sympathy they have for those whom they look upon as imitators of English institutions – Continental Whigs who desire to introduce constitutional forms & some securities against personal oppression – leaving in other respects the old order of things with all its inequalities & social injustices and any people who are not willing to content themselves with this, are thought unfit for liberty. (April 15, 1858; Mill, 1972, p. 553)

Mill nonetheless felt able to affirm a decade later in his 1869 review of Thornton that "it is a strong indication of a better spirit among them, that the operatives and artisans throughout the country form the main strength of the demand, rapidly becoming irresistible, for universal and compulsory education" (1967 [1869], p. 665). The trade union movement was, in addition, becoming increasingly conscious of its moral obligation to forward the eradication of "inequalities and social injustices" – this, even assuming capitalist organization which is precisely the prospect *feared* by Marx and Engels.

Regarding constitutional matters, Mill sought to *restrain* any working-class majority from misusing its newly accorded voting power in the 1860s (Hollander, 2015, pp. 374–384); and he supported the general principle of universal suffrage subject to a variety of safeguards including protection of minorities and assurances against class ascendancy, the working class not excepted. Again, this is the reverse concern of that expressed by Marx and Engels.

There are remaining differences also regarding the population problem. Mill in the end was caught in the middle ground between Malthus – who neglected

the free-riding problem, discerning in unqualified self-interest the solution to excessive population growth, and this notwithstanding his recognition of the poverty trap – and Louis Blanc who found the solution in communism and communism alone. Mill, while allowing a potential advantage to communism with respect to population control, had of course an abiding horror of centralized systems – Marx's ideal. Furthermore, a final evaluation of desirable systems was not yet at hand since population control in a society as then constituted might, through the operation of public opinion – supplemented in recalcitrant cases by legal and other measures – resolve the problem of excessive growth, especially if women were granted equal citizenship rights (1965 [1848], pp. 372–3). Marx for his part regarded Irish experience as disproving orthodox theory relating to demographics for notwithstanding actual population decline real wages had failed to improve as a result of technological change (*Capital*; MECW 35: 695–696).

### CONCLUDING NOTES

Joseph Persky in his recent study of Mill asks why Mill's envisagement of "progress" based on the development of institutions enhancing the status of the working class, primarily worker cooperatives, leave modern radicals – Rawls is a prime instance – cold? The answer offered is because Mill considered that the historical role of the system of industrial capital remained as yet unfulfilled, "that private property in the form of industrial capital still had a historic role to play" (Persky, 2016, p. 71). I find this reasoning compelling, but would add that Mill, as emerges from his posthumously-published *Chapters on Socialism*, felt unable to decide with the available evidence before him regarding character and opinion what should be the *ideal* mix of cooperation and private enterprise and degree of social control. Since his concern was to avoid *prematurely* undermining the property institution, it is scarcely surprising if modern radicals do not see him as a heroic figure. Now whereas the ideal for Marx turned on central planning and the abolition of markets, his evolutionist methodology (we have shown) allowed for a capitalist sector even after a Communist Dictatorship is in control, raising the question how modern radicals will react if my case is found to hold water. In any event, the Marx–Mill insistence on *caution* when considering transitional problems – which, incidentally, I can show to be wholly consistent with the positions of both Adam Smith and David Ricardo – could not be more pertinent to modern concerns. Awareness of this tradition might have served as a red flag for our professional advisors and their clients who so recently rushed to dismantle control systems with inevitably disastrous outcomes. And I am inclined to say to enthusiastic cliff-edge Brexiteers: "you have been warned!"

Recall in conclusion the remarks regarding the Frankfurt School of the 1930s cited at the beginning of this chapter:

that "[w]ith the rise of totalitarian fascism in the 1930s, the Frankfurt School lost confidence in the ability of workers to mount a revolution against monopoly capitalism and the states

sustaining it, as Marx predicted they would. It regarded workers as paralyzed by conformist tendencies and unable to discern the source of their grievances in the capitalist system.

The kingpin of a transition from capitalism to communism – whether violent or peaceable – is certainly the conduct of the proletariat, but we have shown that Marx himself, half a century before the “the rise of fascism,” feared that the British proletariat might be seduced by bourgeois ideology, wholly undermining the evolutionary processes generated by capitalist development, thwarting in effect the logic of historical materialism.<sup>15</sup> His expressions of doubt sometimes occur in private correspondence and would not therefore have been common knowledge, but by no means all of them, as in his Report to the General Council of the International of June 1865 and at the London Conference of the International in September 1871 (above, p. 88).<sup>16</sup> English working-class nationalism and the general state of public opinion were two of the complicating issues, as we have seen. But beyond this there was a far broader concern relating to the threats to international working-class cooperation created by nationalist sentiment on the Continent. For Marx warned in his address “Working Men and the War” of July 23, 1870, to the General Council of the International regarding the Franco-Prussian War: “If the German working class allow the present war to lose its strictly defensive character and to degenerate into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will prove alike disastrous” (MECW 1986 [1870]: 6).<sup>17</sup> He judged that “the principles of the International are [...] too widely spread and too firmly rooted among the German working class to apprehend such a sad consummation,” but the *possibility* of a “sad consummation” as a result of extremist nationalism is clearly recognized or else there would have been no need for the warning. Marx’s worst fears were tragically to materialize, the term “sad consummation” scarcely capturing the blood-bath that was to transpire.

## NOTES

1. For a discussion of Engels on this and related matters, see [Hollander, 2011](#), pp. 328–336.

2. Some might wish to call a policy “reformist” if it tries only to improve the basic system, reserving “revolutionary” for a policy designed to change the system fundamentally. But all then becomes a matter of degree and on that definition one might properly designate Mill as “revolutionary” since his reform proposals amounted to a design far removed from contemporary capitalism.

3. Hobsbawm refers to “the irrelevance as well as the absurdity about whether Marx at any point ceased to a revolutionary and became a gradualist” ([Hobsbawm, 2011](#), p. 62). He does not say the same with respect to Engels. On Engels, see further [Hollander, 2011](#), p. 19.

4. The transition from the first to the final stage of communism raises special issues that must be left for another occasion.

5. Marx commends Richard Jones as the first since Sir James Steuart to convey “a sense of the *historical* differences in modes of production” (MECW 33: 320); for showing “how different stages in the development of the productive power of social labour correspond to [...] different production relations” (p. 321); and for going some way at least in defining the characteristics of the capitalist mode of production, and conspicuously for denying that capitalist relations are “eternal,” insofar as (in Jones’s terms) “a state of

things may hereafter exist [...] under which the labourers and the owners of accumulated stock may be identical" (p. 345). For Jones "states quite explicitly that capital and the capitalist mode of production are [...] a transitional phase in the development of social production [...] by no means the end result" of the evolutionary process, pointing in fact to "higher relations in which the antagonism on which [bourgeois production relations] are based is resolved," and opening up the prospect "of a new society, a new economic formation of society, to which the bourgeois mode of production is only the transition" (pp. 345–346). He showed, furthermore, "how the (economical) relations and consequently the social, moral and political state of nations changes with the *change* in the material powers of production" (p. 353).

6. A counter-tendency however reduces the work required of *machine-minders* to one and the same level (MECW 35: 422–423).

7. For an elaboration of Marx's opinion that there could be no transition to communist organization based directly on the rural commune, see [Hollander, 2011](#), pp. 368–370.

8. For a valuable account of the issues involved, see [Bober, 1965\[1927\]](#) especially pp. 262–268.

9. Marx's stated "goal of democratic revolution" during the Continental upheavals of 1848 intended, Stedman Jones points out, referred to a "bourgeois" rather than a proletarian revolution and was a "formal" matter only, for what Marx "meant by democracy, in that context, was a re-enactment of the activities of the invisible republic, the Convention, and the Committee of Public safety in 1793" ([Stedman Jones, 2016](#), pp. 292, 294).

10. It is unclear whether by "dissolution" is intended the collapse of capitalism, or its transmutation into something other than communism.

11. This raises the issue of the productivity of the traditional compared with joint-stock arrangement especially with regard to innovation. Here we should take note of Marx's recognition – even while composing *Capital* – of complex decision-making by the *owner-entrepreneur* regarding innovation in the face of uncertainty ([Hollander, 2008](#), pp. 438–443; 2013, pp. 278–292). Briefly stated, once Marx perceived that the traditional "functioning" capitalist was being superseded by new corporate forms of business organization, he felt able to give him a send-off which recognized the pervasiveness of uncertainty in the application of new technologies. Indeed, since Marx was already aware of the industrial transformation at a very early stage, writing in 1858 of "[s]hare capital as the most perfected form (turning into communism)" ([Hollander, 2008](#), p. 5), his original project was constructed on an axiomatic foundation reflecting an empirical reality in the course of disintegration.

12. Persky observes that Mill "saw no speedy transition to the institutions required by luck egalitarianism" – the term used to describe the correction, on grounds of justice, of pay differentials reflecting fortuitous differences in ability, both mental and physical ([Persky, 2016](#), p. 206). On this reading, Millian distributive justice *ideally* required the elimination of such differentials. Now this might be said of Marx but only with respect to some distant and indistinct utopian stage of communism.

13. Yet earlier that same year Marx had praised the "heroic and noble" English working class for its self-sacrifice in refusing to support the South (to Lassalle, April 28 1862; MECW 41: 357–358.)

14. Reviewing [Sperber, 2013](#) for *The Guardian*, Tristram Hunt refers to his account of Marx's "rather revisionist support for the gradualism of the English trade union movement" ([Hunt, 2013](#)). This scarcely conveys Marx's position.

15. For a serious discussion of the threat posed by nationalism (and religion) to the principle that "the fundamental process in history is the material one of the growth of human productive power," see [Cohen, 1983](#), especially pp. 228, 239–241).

16. And there is Engels's lament of 1881 in print that labor was failing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the enfranchisement of "the greater portion of the organized working class" to advance measures designed to undermine the "wage system" itself ([Cohen, 1983](#), p. 20).

17. Mill expressed his warm approval of the Address to the Council: “There was not one word in it that ought not to be there; it could not have been done with fewer words” (Mill, 1991, p. 220).

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