

The Social Thought of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx An Analytical Approach

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Abstract: 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 Mills Political activity on behalf of the English Proletariat but Marx was not a liberal in any sense of that much abused word. Neither semantics nor dialectics can make him an intellectual relative of Mill, no matter how distant. Marx Poured mordant ridicule on liberalism, specially on its great English representative, Mill. The Problem of unifying the ideas of Mill and Marx is most important. In this study, I tried to show the evidence which indicates that Mill was some what informed concerning Marxian socialism, that he knew of philosophy and leading exponents. Moreover Mill and Marx become acutely aware of a sudden change of intellectual climate. It is the change from tolerant, democratic liberalism to intolerant, authoritarian communism.

Key words: Jhon stuart mill, social thought, karl Marx, analytical approach

INTRODUCTION

Marxs treatment of John Stuart Mill is one of the great puzzles of the history of social thought. Marxism as a system of thought took definite shape with the publication of the Communist Manifesto. Moreover Marx was a fellow Londoner of Mill for over twenty years. 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^[1].

Mill was familiar with the different schools of socialist thought and action which struggled for dominance in the International Workingmens 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 workingmens association were written by Karl Marx^[2] Mill had read the proceedings of the International workingmens 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 Marxs theory of Proletarian dictatorship, but Marx does not draw clear plans for the workings of the socialist state which is to replace the capitalist order^[3].

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 Working mens Association by Edward S. Beesly, of the University of London. The author noted that Marx had largely Provided him with his material^[4].

Mills influence on English workingmen was regarded as important enough to warrant a series of polemical articles written by common wealths 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 mans refutation of some points of political economy, endorsed and advocated by John Stuart Mill, Esq., M.P. Eccarius articles developed in detail Marxs criticism of Mills economic theory. Marx regarded Mill as the best representative of those who drier to harmonize the classical political economy with the demands of the rising working class; he respected Mills political activity on behalf of the English proletariat and therefor said it would be very wrong to classify him with the herd of vulgar economic apologists. Marx felt however, that Mills 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^[5]. Mill used his influence with the leaders of the English working class to combat any appeal for revolutionary action. Mills language was you need to be convinced first that a revolution is necessary and next that you are able to carry it out^[6]. And to Mills mind it was clear that within

the frame work of the English constitutional system there

was no justified basis for revolutionary violence. The important question arises whether Mills 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,^[7]. Marxs use of revolution here did not imply the employment of violence to achieve social change. 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^[8].

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 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 ones 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 ones 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 Marxs economic writings. It is fair to conclude that he knew of Marxism as a leading school of thought within the international workingmens Association and that he used his influence with English labour leaders to combat the influence of Marxian modes of thought and expression^[9]. Yet in all his writings Mill makes no mention of Marx, neither does he refer in any way to the tenets of Marxism. 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.

Marx was not a liberal in any sense of that much abused word^[5]. Neither semantics nor dialectics can make him an intellectual relative of Mill. Mill was the most conspicuous representative of shallow syncretism^[10]. Any one who passes from the pages of Mill to those of Marx becomes acutely aware of a sudden change of intellectual climate. It is the change from tolerant, democratic liberalism to intolerant, authoritarian communism. It is the usual contention of Marxist writers that bourgeois economists look upon the capitalist mode of production as eternal. It is rather a strange negligence that these writers do not mention Mills views on the subject. This neglect dates back to the time of Marx. Marx speaks about economists who like Ricardo, regard the capitalist mode of production as absolute^[11], but falls to mention Mill as an exception. Nevertheless, as the master bibliophile, he must have been aware of the changes in Mills thinking about socialism changes which finally led Mill to a kind of evolutionary socialism.

There are different views on Mills ideas about socialism also among modern non-Marxist economists. For example, Professor Robbins tends to under emphasize the changes in Mills thinking on socialism and finds some alleged inconsistencies in Mills views^[12]. Mill had a different opinion himself. Prof. Robbins overlooks the distinction made by Mill between socialism and communism. In a communist society, as understood by Mill, the produces is divided and the labour is apportioned, as far as possible, equally^[10]. Whereas socialism retains more or less the incentives to labour derived from private pecuniary interest^[12]. Prof. Robbins displays Mill arguments against communism as if they would also be valid against socialism. Here Mill promised that after criticising the communist and socialist writers, he would present his own views on the possibilities of socialism.^[13] His death prevented this according to historical materialism, ideas are the reflection of the conditions of material life in a society. Ideas being the

super structure and capitalism having entered its declining phase by the middle of the nineteenth century. According to Marx post Ricardian economics necessarily becomes an apology for capitalism. Furthermore, as a contributing factor, the strategy and tactics of the communist parties may be mentioned which call for war against ideas potentially competing with communist ideology. Yet all the possible interpretations do not change the conclusion: there are striking similarities between the ideas presented by Mill and Marx and its is not inappropriate to speak about Mills influence on the formation of the Marxian theory.

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