'There never was a time when so great a drama was being played out in one generation': John Stuart Mill and the French Revolution of 1848

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In this article, I want to argue that the events of 1848 in France both mark an important change in John Stuart Mill's political philosophy and emphasise an important continuity. Joseph Persky has recently shown how Mill was consistently radical[1], and the revolutions of 1848 serve both to highlight this continued radicalism, and to reveal the changing content of that radical programme. Mill always had a strong interest in French politics, and a long-standing commitment to the call for 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!'. He was a youthful enthusiast for the French Revolution (day-dreaming about being a Girondist in an English Convention[2]); an excited witness to the events of 1830; and a passionate defender of the 'authors' of the revolution of February 1848. This reveals both his consistency, and also the change his political philosophy underwent in the years – in particular – between 1831 and 1848, for when he wrote that the revolution of February 1848 embodied 'all of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which is capable of being realised now, and…prepare[s] the way for all which can be realised hereafter'[3], he was endorsing, not the politics of the Girondin, or the Orléanists, but what he terms 'legitimate socialism'.[4]

The events of 1848 expanded Mill's knowledge and understanding of socialist ideas – that is, of what socialism might mean – developing, in particular, his appreciation for a kind of socialism which came from working people themselves; could only be implemented by them and with their support; and which was possible within existing capitalist structures, rather than necessitating either their complete re-structuring (as Saint-Simonism would involve), or isolating the socialist community from the rest of the world (as in other, earlier, forms of 'utopian socialism' based on separatist intentional communities, e.g. the Rappites, the Icarians and the Owenites). It also changed his mind considerably about the extent to which Socialism was 'available as a present resource', and not just 'valuable as an ideal, and even as a prophecy of ultimate possibilities'.[5] Working people worked hard, and sacrificed a great deal, to establish workable socialist schemes in the National Workshops and other producer-cooperative experiments. They proved socialism was not only an 'ideal'; or only something being dreamed about by middle-class theorists, but impossible to put into practice (as the Saint-Simonian, Icarian and Owenite projects might have lead one to fear); but a real possibility for sustainable, meaningful reform. Thus, 1848 added something to Mill's ideas of what the 'ideal' might look like, but more importantly it made him more hopeful for how much reform was actually achievable, here and now, through a combination

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[1] Joseph Persky, *The Political Economy of Progress* (Oxford, 2016).
[2] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, *Collected Works* I (Toronto, 1981), p.67.
[3] Mill, Letter 531, *CW* XIII (Toronto, 1963), p.739.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Mill, *Chapters on Socialism CW* V (Toronto, 1967), pp.749-50. For more on Mill's view of 'available' social reforms, and socialism, see McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star:The Role of the 'Ideal' in John Stuart Mill's View of 'Utopian' Schemes and the Possibilities of Social Transformation', *Utilitas* (published online, April 2018).

of good leadership and good citizenship. 1848 was, for him, as much a moral as a political revolution, and it heralded the possibility of a European transformation.

In this article, I flesh out this argument, mainly through consideration of Mill's account of the impact of the events of 1848 in the *Autobiography*, some of which are evidenced in the changes made to his *Principles of Political Economy* during this period; and through examination of a relatively little-studied text, Mill's *Vindication of the French Revolution of 1848*, which repays the study few Mill scholars have expended on it. I begin by examining Mill's attitude to events as they unfolded, evidenced in his contemporary letters and newspaper writings. Consideration of this period in Mill's thought casts interesting light on the development of his socialist ideas; of his view of 'good government'; and of the ideas on law, custom, reform, progress, and political economy which underpin both. It reveals the deep-rooted nature of his commitment to 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity', and hence why he said of the February Revolution '[t]here never was a time when so great a drama was being played out in one generation'.[6]

1. Mill's View of the State of Politics in Britain and France in 1847.

I begin this consideration the year before 1848, so we can see the mood in which the February Revolution found Mill. British Politics was dominated by Chartist agitation for political reform (including granting universal suffrage), and by the Irish Potato Famine, and questions of what Britain should try to do about it (as well as with questions of who was to blame). Mill was increasingly frustrated by the responses to both by erstwhile 'radical' and 'Reformist' politicians, many of whom he had worked hard to help get elected in 1832, and who had been his comrades in the political struggle which led to the Great Reform Act.[7]

In January of 1847, Mill was already at work on his *Principles* (which he started in 1845).[8] This included some consideration of Saint-Simonian and Owenite criticisms of private property, and their alternative ways of organising property relations, but appear so to conclude that though the negative element of socialism produces some critiques which should be take seriously, the 'positive' parts, though not entirely infeasible, are not the only alternative available to contemporary conditions.[9] Rather than adopting these schemes, we should look to reform existing property relations, including through profit-sharing.[10]

By March the manuscript of *Principles* was finished in its first draft, and – even though it may at that point have lacked the radical ideas about the 'probable futurity of the labouring classes' which the final manuscript and 1848 edition contained[11] – Mill admits he was tempted to write the book 'inasmuch as it would enable me to bring in, or rather to bring out, a great number of opinions on incidental matters, moral and social, for which one has not often so good an opportunity…and I

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[6] Mill, Letter 523, to Henry S. Chapman, *CW* XIII (Toronto, 1963), p.732.

[7] See Mill, 'The Condition of Ireland', *CW* XXIV (Toronto, 1986), pp.879-882, 885-916, 919-922, 927-945, 949-952, 955-1020 and 1024-1035; 'Poulett Scrope on the Poor Laws', *CW* XXIV, pp.923-954; Mill, 'The Irish Debates in the House of Commons', *CW* XIV, pp.1058-1062; 'The Proposed Irish Poor Law', *CW* XXIV, pp.1066-1073; 'The General Fast', *CW* XXIV, pp.1073-1075; 'Emigration from Ireland', *CW* XXIV, pp.1075-1078; Letter 497, to Alexander Bain, *CW* XIII (Toronto, 1963), p.707; Letter 499, pp.708-710; Letter 500, to Bain, pp.710-711; Letter 504, to Auguste Comte, pp.716-719.

[8] Mill, Letter 497, to Alexander Bain, *CW* XII, p.707, and Letter 499, to Henry S. Chapman, *CW* XII, p.709.

[9] Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, *CW* II and III (Toronto, 1965), pp.975-987.

[10] *Ibid*., and pp.1006-1014.

[11] In the *Autobiography*, Mill notes that the manuscript as he first conceived it initially lacked this section, and that it was added at Harriet Taylor's suggestion: it is not clear how far along in the process of writing the final complete draft of the manuscript this addition was made. Mill, *Autobiography*, p.255.

fully expect to offend and scandalise ten times as many people as I shall please'.[12] This, he says, was always his intention once he had 'any standing…among publicists', and he sees himself as 'useful[ly] invest[ing]' the 'capital of that sort' he got via 'the *Logic*'.[13] That is, even before the February Revolution, Mill saw himself as something of an apostate from his former Benthamite radical beliefs (with which he was still associated in the popular mind, and probably also the minds of most of his friends), and saw *Principles* as a vehicle for announcing some of these changes to the world in a way which might persuade others that his new beliefs were more correct than his old (and their current) ones.[14]

Indeed, Mill's increasingly disappointment with the political state of affairs, and the slow progress of reform in Britain, was making his ideas increasingly radical. In April 1847, he wrote a scathing assessment of the English aristocracy. Like his father, he had once hoped that the reforms of 1832 would put aristocrats on their mettle: 'that when their political monopoly was taken away they would be induced to exert themselves in order to keep ahead of their competitors'.[15] But every year, he felt, showed that faith had been misplaced.[16] In running scared of Chartists and socialists, Mill says, the English aristocracy has tried to revive a paternalistic view of its role in politics, something he was very much opposed to (as also evidenced in his slightly earlier *Claims of Labour*).[17] Mill abandoned the belief in the necessity of 'a leisured class, in the ordinary sense of the term, is an essential constituent of the best form of society'.[18] Instead, '[w]hat does seem essential to me is that society at large should not be overworked, nor over-anxious about the means of subsistence', and he sees the only hope for this in 'the grand source of improvement, repression of population, combined with laws or customs of inheritance which shall favour the diffusion of property instead of its accumulation in masses'.[19]

This position obviously has much in common with Mill's earlier Benthamism – support of population control, and reform to inheritance law such that diffusion of property was favoured over concentration in fewer and fewer hands (e.g. by state 'resumption' of Church endowments[20], eradicating primogeniture, and placing limits on inheritance[21]). We see Mill still endorsing part of this in his repeated defences of diffusion of property-ownership (and particularly of property that is inherited) in France under the Loi de Nivôse.[22] As noted above, Mill's radicalism is continuous: but it also underwent important changes in content.

The important change already apparent in this brief line to Austin is a newfound emphasis on freeing 'society at large' from 'overwork', and from being 'over-anxious about the means of subsistence'. The solution to this problem has many parts, of which population control and 'diffusion of property' remain central. But in addition, we see Mill, at this time, looking to profit-sharing in *Claims* and *Principles*, which both helps increase productivity (and production) through harnessing the interests of workers to those of their employers, and leads to better remuneration

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[12] Mill, Letter 499, p.708.
[13] *Ibid*., p.709.
[14] An account written at the time, which chimes with Mill's recollection of the timing of his change in opinions towards something less 'Democratic' (i.e. Benthamite-radical), and more 'Socialist'. Mill, *Autobiography*, p.239.
[15] Mill, Letter 501, to John Austin, *CW* XII, p.712.
[16] *Ibid*., p.713.
[17] Mill, Letter 504, to Auguste Comte, *CW* XIII, pp.716-717 (my translation); Mill, *Claims of Labour*, *CW* IV (Toronto, 1967), pp.363-389.
[18] *Ibid*., p.713.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Mill, *Corporation and Church Property*, *CW* IV (Toronto, 1967), pp.193-222.
[21] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.239.
[22] See, for instance, Mill, 'The Quarterly Review on French Agriculture', *CW* XXIV (Toronto, 1986), pp.1033-1058.

of workers and fairer conditions.[23] We also see, in Mill's writing on the 'stationary state', Mill expressing the hope that (so long as population is strictly controlled), a 'state' of zero growth might provide the chance for everyone to achieve a lessening of work and an increase in leisure and cultivation, as well as for the proper protection of 'wild' nature.[24] Mill expresses hope that 'the industrial arts' will be used not only to increase wealth, but to 'produce their legitimate effect…of abridging labour' and 'lighten[ing] the day's toil of…human being[s]'.[25] Instead of producing fortunes for a very few, and comfort for a (small) middle class, Mill looks forward to a time when 'the conquests made from the powers of nature by the intellect and energy of scientific discoverers' will 'become the common property of the species, and the means if improving and elevating the universal lot'.[26]

Mill's idea of a world in which people are not overworked, nor over-anxious about the means of subsistence; where the benefits of technology and scientific discovery for labour-saving and improving civilisation, leisure and 'The Art of Life' are shared equally by everyone; and where there is proper protection of nature may not look very radical to modern eyes – and yet, of course, we still do not live in a world in which it is true. Similarly, Mill's solutions may not seem very radical – and yet, his position on inheritance is more radical than in many countries in the world today, never mind the infrequency of examples of profit-sharing.[27] The comparison with today aside, we can see in Mill's letters and writings from 1847 that he was dissatisfied by British politics, and by the reforms he had once championed as a Benthamite radical closely involved in the events of 1830-1832 in Britain (and aligned with the reform movement in France of 1830-1831).

Mill's correspondent, Austin, was then living in France, and Mill says it is perhaps therefore unsurprising that 'you should be much impressed with the unfavourable side of a country that has passed through a series of revolutions'.[28] He acknowledges that '[t]he inordinate impulse given to vulgar ambition…& the general spirit of adventureship' in the aftermath of 1830 'are…disgusting enough', but puts much of it down to the example of the success of Napoleon, and 'to the habitual over-governing by which power & importance are too exclusively concentrated upon the Government & its functionaries'.[29] (These are criticisms of Louis Philippe's government Mill also makes later, and to which I will return below.) While the July Monarchy still looked secure, Mill wrote that having had a series of revolutions is beneficial to France – it has allowed for the 'general break up of old associations' of ideas.[30]

Here we see two important things at work. One is Mill's theory of historical change, which he adopted from Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians.[31] Mill adopted their idea of history 'moving' between 'organic' and 'critical' periods. In 'organic' periods, there is a universally-believed and sufficient ideology which explains and justifies all existing institutions in such a way that they

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[23] Mill, *Claims*, pp.363-389 and *Principles*, pp.1006-1014.
[24] Mill, *Principles*, pp.752-757.
[25] *Ibid*., p.756.
[26] *Ibid*., p.757.
[27] Though several large firms do pay their staff, at least in part, in shares, and most workers' pensions are invested in stocks and shares, I do not think this meets Mill's criteria for profit-sharing: so much else, apart from individual effort in increasing output and productivity, and the amount of profit made by the company, affects share-price (and workers know this), that payment of all but very high-level executive officers in shares seems more like 'truck' than profit-sharing.
[28] Mill, Letter 501, p.712.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Who were, when he first learned of it, the same thing, in that Comte was identifying as a Saint-Simonian. Mill, *Autobiography*, p.173.

seem 'natural' and 'right', and hardly anyone (perhaps no one) questions them. Mill's examples (taken from his French inspirers) are Pre-Socratic Greece, and Europe in the Middle Ages.[32] In critical ages, this ideology suddenly becomes insufficient, and the institutions it explained and supported (and which in turn, generated and supported it) suddenly seem tyrannical, out-dated, and false.[33] Revolutions are symptomatic of critical ages – they are moments whereby old institutions, and old ideas, are physically shaken off and destroyed. One could not have a revolution in an organic age. The history of revolutions in France, then, is a sign that it is undergoing a 'critical age' – which is, for Mill, important, because he sees what he calls 'feudalism' as an 'organic age' which Europe still needs to throw off, which can only be done via a critical age (eventually resulting in a new organic age).

Secondly, we see Mill's associationist psychology at work in his explanations of politics and (lack of) political action. Mill (following David Hartley and James Mill) believed that all our 'ideas', from primary sensations through words to complex beliefs and opinions, came to us from 'outside' (i.e., none were innate). We learn through an unconscious repeated 'association' of one idea with another, or others – of a citrus smell; thick, waxy skin; and yellow with 'lemon', for instance – until in conjuring one idea to the mind, we irresistibly experience all of them. That is, when I think 'lemon', I think of 'citrus smell', 'thick, waxy skin', and 'yellow' all at once, probably also with a combination of other, more personal, memories of specific lemons (real or in artistic impressions) or times I smelled, saw, felt, or tasted lemons (real or artistic). Moreover, when thinking of 'yellow', I am likely to also think, in the same instance, of 'lemon', and possibly 'citrus smell', as well as a thousand and one other instances of 'yellow' – so many, in fact, that I am probably not always conscious of how many of my ideas are 'associated' with that word.

This is a simple example, and Mill's idea about the English and their institutions is more complex, but the root is the same. The English have for so long associated certain institutions such as 'the Church of England', 'the aristocracy', 'land', 'nobility', 'Parliament', 'the Queen', 'property', 'inheritance', and 'primogeniture' with each other, and with words like 'natural', 'legitimate', 'legal', 'right', 'just', 'law', 'order', 'duty' and 'obligation' that they all go together in their minds and seem to be all the same thing. In France – though perhaps equally, if not more, strong in 1789 – these associations have been broken up so many times, and re-formed, that their solidity and therefore their power is not so entrenched. Thus, Mill thinks, the chance of change is greater than in England, where these ideas have been associated with each other basically without change since at least 1690, and perhaps even earlier if – like Burke – one sees The Glorious Revolution as merely re-establishing existing tradition rather than making a significant break with the past.

Therefore, Mill says:

> In England, on the contrary I often think that a violent revolution is very much needed, in order to give that general shake-up to the torpid mind of the nation which the French Revolution gave to Continental Europe. England has never had any general break-up of old associations & hence the extreme difficulty of getting any ideas into its stupid head.[34]

Mill also goes further than *just* to praise the fact of this break up of associations through revolution. For the break-up of old associations could have negative results as well as positive ones. (A break-

[32] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.173; Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, *CW* XXII (Toronto, 1986), pp.227-235, 238-246, 251-258, 278-283, 289-295, 304-307and 312-317.
[33] Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, *CW* XXII (Toronto, 1986), pp.227-235, 238-246, 251-258, 278-283, 289-295, 304-307and 312-317.
[34] Mill, Letter 501, p.712.

up of all the associated beliefs which maintain the rule of law, for instance, could leads to general lawlessness, rather than to new, better, laws.) He praises France also for the *outcome* of this break-up of old associations: 'After all', he asks, 'what country in Europe can be compared with France in the adaptation of its social state to the benefit of the great mass of its people, freed as they are from any tyranny which comes home to the greater number, with justice easily accessible'?[35] He further asks, 'would this have been the case without the great changes in the state of property which…could hardly have been produced by anything less than a Revolution'?[36]

Thus, we see even in 1847, Mill's admiration for France (though he does not think it perfect) as a moral and political leader and example in Europe, and also seeing revolution as beneficial – perhaps even necessary – for positive reform in a way which one might not usually expect. Moreover, we see him identifying this positive change with a change in 'the state of property', and an orientation of politics towards 'the benefit of the great mass of…[the] people'. Of course, these are also Benthamite, Utilitarian aspirations, but Mill was moving in a more radical direction regarding what this 'great change in the state of property' might entail, even *before* learning more about a form of socialism which was 'available as a present resource'[37] during the events of 1848 (more on which below, in Section 4).

As noted, Mill was deeply disappointed with politics in Britain – and particularly with the Westminster politicians' (and pubic opinion's) response to events in Ireland. Appearing to 'return' to feudal, paternalist notions of government whereby the rich do things for the good of the poor, feeling that is their responsibility, Mill saw poor as policy. (I say 'appearing to 'return" because Mill did not believe the paternalist ideal had ever, really, existed under feudalism, nor that it was really possible to fully establish paternalism in the modern world.[38]) He believed it would have bad outcomes in sapping the moral, productive and political abilities of the poor (making them reliant on the rich, and exercising no self-control or self-discipline, particularly when it came to family sizes) if the poor bought into the idea, and also deferring actual sustainable improvement, which could only come about from authentic, organic action and self-organisation within the working classes themselves. (This is one reason Mill supported some proponents of Chartism at this period, as being a worker-led movement for positive reform.) He was not wholly sanguine about politics in France, but he certainly felt politics in Britain was in a much worse state.[39] He supported French regulations on property, and what he saw as a generally progressive spirit of French politics, which looked to the common good, protected individual rights, and encouraged people with 'the strongest inducements[,] to personal prudence & forethought'.[40] There was much, in this, that Britain might learn from France, and this seems to be how Mill looked to France: it does not seem he expected much *further* revolution there, whereas he greatly feared political violence and even disaster in Britain following what he saw as poor policy, which could never be made feasible, in Ireland.

In short, 1847 saw Mill exasperated by British politics, and greatly disappointed in the old champions of reform – so much so, he expressed himself desirous of a revolution in Britain to shake up its 'torpid' mind. His politics was still recognisably radical, and committed to principles which chimed with his earlier Benthamism and enthusiasm for France – liberty, equality, fraternity, diffusion of property, the rule of law, equal justice for all. But the policies he was now beginning

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[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Mill, *Chapters*, p.750.
[38] Mill, *Claims of Labour*, pp.363-389; Mill, *Principles*, pp.758-769 and 1006-1014.
[39] As we also see from his newspaper writings at the time cited above.
[40] Mill, Letter 501, p.714.

to endorse he recognised as 'heretical' and possibly 'offensive' to his old friends. He had already publicly declared for profit-sharing, but his *Autobiography* hints he was thinking more seriously about even more radical changes to property relations. It was in this frame of mind that 22nd February 1848 found him.

2. Mill's Attitude to the Events of 1848 as they Unfolded.

Having considering Mill's view of politics in Britain and France in 1847, in this section, I explore Mill's attitude to the events of 1848 as they happened. We can piece this together from shorter works, including letters and newspaper articles, which Mill wrote at the time. They show a Mill who was initially excited by the possibilities of revolution in France for the moral and political regeneration of Europe, and anxious to defend the revolutionaries from the calumny of the British press, seeing in the events in France hope for a radical transformation of the whole of Europe.

2.1 Mill's Immediate Reaction to the February Revolution.

Only a few days after the February revolution (on 29th February, 1848, to be exact) Mill wrote to Henry S. Chapman, full of news and excitement about 'the extraordinary events of the last week in Paris, a second "three days"[41] ending in the proclamation of a French Republic'.[42] Mill says, 'I am hardly yet out of breath from reading and thinking about it. Nothing can possibly exceed the importance of it to the world or the immensity of the interest which are at stake on its success'.[43] Indeed, so disorientated had his excitement made him, Mill writes, 'I scarcely know at what end to begin in commentating on it'.[44]

Mill put the success of the republicans down to '*at last*…ha[ving] the good sense to raise the standard not of a republic but of something in which the middle classes could join, viz., electoral reform', and he criticises the 'madness of Louis Philippe and Guizot in forbidding, at the last moment, the reform banquet at Paris', which 'stirred up the people'.[45] He mourns the loss of Armand Carrel, fearing that without someone of his ilk 'the futurity of France and of Europe is most doubtful'.[46] Here, as elsewhere, we get a sense of how much Mill felt France 'led' Europe, politically and morally. Indeed, he says:

> If France succeeds in establishing a republic and reasonable republican government, all the rest of Europe, except England and Russia, will be republicanised in ten years, and England itself probably before we die. There never was a time when so great a drama was being played out in one generation.[47]

Interestingly, Mill identifies two dangers facing the nascent republic: firstly, a war, particularly if there is a rising in Lombardy.[48] Secondly, 'Communism' which 'has now for the first time a deep root, and has spread widely in France' so much so that 'a large part of the effective republican strength is more or less imbued with it'.[49] (It is important to note that Mill pretty much consistently differentiated between 'communism' and 'socialism', though sometimes treating them under the same head: that is, 'communists' are always, for Mill, a kind of socialist, but not all socialists are

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[41] A reference to the July 1830 revolution, sometimes referred to as 'Trois Glorieuses'.
[42] Mill, Letter 523, p.731.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*, pp.731-32.
[47] *Ibid.*, p.732.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*

communists.[50]) 'The Provisional Government', Mill writes, 'is obliged to coquet with this, and to virtually promise work and good wages to the whole labouring class: how are they to keep their promise, and what will be the consequences of not keeping it?'.[51] He predicts 'a schism' in the National Assembly, when elected, 'between the bourgeois and the operatives – a Gironde and a Montagne, though probably without any guillotine. What an anxious time it will be'.[52]

I noted above that, as a teenager, Mill identified with the Girondins. In this letter, then, we may still see Mill identifying with the 'republicans', but not the 'Communists'. (A feeling echoed in his slightly earlier review of Eugène Sue's *Martin l'Enfant trouvé*, where he praises Sue's critique of French politics, but suggests 'further reflection will probably reduce' his 'very decided tendency towards Communism' 'within just bounds'.[53]) Yet it is not obvious that Mill would be more on the side of 'the bourgeois' than 'the operatives', given his strong criticisms of the bourgeoisie in both France and England.

Both John and Sarah Austin were in Paris during the February Revolution, and evidently kept Mill abreast of events, and their concerns regarding them. Mill writes to Sarah Austin in early March, reassuring her that the Provisional Government could do little else than attempt 'to prevent a precipitate flight of foreigners *en masse*' in order to prevent spread of panic outside, and disorder within, Paris.[54] Mill speaks excitedly of 'the admirable conduct of the people & of the new authorities', and says 'the most striking thing in these memorable events is the evidence afforded of the complete change of times – The instantaneous & unanimous acquiescence of all France in a republic'.[55] He expresses 'the strongest confidence' that the new government will cope with 'the new & difficult questions…[it] will have to solve – especially those relating to labour and wages'.[56] There may be some 'experimental legislation, some of it not very prudent, but', he says, 'there cannot be a better place to try such experiments in than France'.[57] 'I suppose that regulation of industry in behalf of the labourers must go through its various phases of abortive experiment, just as regulation of industry in behalf of the capitalist has done, before it is abandoned, or its proper limits ascertained'.[58]

In a following letter, also defending the Revolution, Mill says '[t]he monetary crisis in London last October produced quite as much suffering to individuals as has arisen' from the February Revolution, 'an event which has broken the fetters of all Europe'.[59] He is evidently pleased about the repercussions of the revolution in Hungary and, though he accepts that the 'future prospects' may well contain 'unfavourable chances', he rejects the idea that these 'preponderate'.[60] '[M]y hopes rise instead of sinking as the state of things in France unfolds itself'.[61]

Less than a month after the revolution, Mill wrote his first public comment on it in 'The Provisional Government in France' (18 March, 1848). This is a defence of the Provisional Government against attacks in *The Spectator*, and a plea that it extend to this government the 'forbearance in judging and

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[50] Mill, *Principles*, pp.202-203.
[51] Mill, Letter 523, p.732.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Mill (and Harriet Taylor), 'Eugene Sue', *CW* XXV (Toronto, 1986), pp.1089-1091.
[54] Mill, Letter 524, to Sarah Austin, *CW* XIII, p.733.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] Mill, Letter 525, to Sarah Austin, p.734.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*

liberality in interpreting the[ir] conduct' which that newspaper had professed to recommend.[62] Mill warns that too much criticism of the Provisional Government only serves 'to encourage those who, wishing the Republican Government to fail, look out for every pretext to prophesy its failure'.[63] He considers 'the general colouring' of their account of actions by the Provisional Government, and the views of Lamartine, to be giving ammunition to anti-Republicans.[64] Interestingly, even at this early stage of events, Mill characterises as 'entirely mistaken' what he calls 'the admirable experiment which "a leading journal," and it may be added a leading railway company, have organised for associating the labourers employed by them in the profits of the undertaking'.[65] This is a reference to an experiment by *La Presse* (and the Great Northern Railway, in Britain) to adopt a profit-sharing scheme along the lines recommended by Edme Jean Leclaire, about whom Mill wrote much in *Principles* from the first edition, and in an earlier newspaper piece (in 1845).[66] This the *Spectator* had characterised as 'community of property', an idea which Mill rejects, along with the idea that it 'subject[s] the men…to the vicissitudes of profit and loss', carefully explaining the detail of Leclaire's scheme.[67]

The editor rejected Mill's defence of the Provisional Government as having not done anything not 'provisional' in, for instance, alienating Crown lands, abolishing titles, and repealing labour laws which did 'not press so urgently as not to brook a month's delay'.[68] Leaving aside the dispute about whether these were things within the purview of a 'provisional' government (or should have been left to a new, 'permanent' one), we can see Mill's approval of these reforms in his support for the Provisional Government – reforms which, of course, chime with his radicalism as detailed in the sections above. That is, Mill may have seen them as within the purview of a 'provisional' government, because he thought they were the right kind of responses to the radical claims and impulses which had caused the revolution; as being good, progressive policies, symptomatic of the right kind of politics, in their own right; and as being steps in the right direction towards maintaining a sustainable republic once there was a new National Assembly.

Mill was evidently keeping a close eye on events in Paris, including through reading French journals, as he penned an angry reply to George Sand's letter to *Voix des Femmes* (published in *La Réforme*, 6 April 1848) in which Sand distanced herself from the idea that she should be candidate in the National Assembly.[69] Mill expresses himself as a 'long-time admirer of George Sand', but he strongly disagrees with her professed reasons for thinking herself unsuitable for the role of Assembly-Member (i.e. her sex).[70]

After *Principles* was published (in April 1848), Mill wrote to Armand Marrast, sending him a copy as in it he 'discuss[es] some of the major social issues which the republican government and the

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[62] Mill, 'The Provisional Government in France', *CW* XXV, p.1091.
[63] *Ibid*., p.1092.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Mill, *Principles*, pp.770-775 and pp.1011-1013 (1848 and 1849 version); Mill, *Claims*, pp.382-383 (footnote). Mill bases at least some of his knowledge on a pamphlet from 1842.
[67] For more on Mill and Leclaire (and Leclaire's system, and its links to Fourierism), see McCabe, 'John Stuart Mill and Fourierism: 'Association', 'Friendly Rivalry' and Distributive Justice', *Global Intellectual History* 4/1 (2018), pp.35-61.
[68] Mill, 'Provisional Government', footnote 7.
[69] Mill, 'George Sand', *CW* XXV, p.1094.
[70] *Ibid*., pp.1094-1095.

National Assembly will have to deal with'.[71] Mill recognises Marrast might be too busy to read it, but says 'I have another purpose in writing to you…the profound sympathy I feel…for the work of social regeneration which is now going on in France'.[72] He characterises the 'noble initiative taken by France' as 'the affair of the entire human race'.[73] Mill expresses a desire 'not to confine myself to a sterile admiration' but instead a wish 'to bring to this great work my contingent of ideas and all my intelligence that can be useful, at least until my own country, so backward in many respects, compared to yours, needs it'.[74] Mill offered to write articles (in 'quite bearable' French) for free on England for *The National* as a way of aiding, intellectually, the revolution.[75] Here we see Mill not only praising to revolution, but trying to do whatever he could (however odd such an offer may seem!) to help its success.[76]

Also in May 1848, writing on agitation for Irish independence (perhaps supported and succoured by newly-Republican France), Mill alludes to 'the working men and women now in conference with Louis Blanc at the [Palais de] Luxembourg on the "organisation of labour"'.[77] Mill feels these workers are closer to overcoming the difficulties of threatened anarchism arising from working-class unrest than any leading politicians in Britain, whose panic over a Chartist demonstration Mill ridicules.[78] These working people, Mill says, 'at least know what the problem is'.[79] He adds that, 'however crude and wild their present notions are', the French at least 'place their hopes in attaining a rational and peaceful solution', whereas the English leaders 'place theirs in nothing but in crushing it down, and preventing it from being mooted at all'.[80] France, Mill insists, instead 'of rushing headlong into anarchy' is 'in reality affording a proof, and a most precious and salutary one, [of] how utterly repugnant all approach to anarchy is to the present state of the European mind'.[81] As proof of this, Mill claims:

> For six weeks after the revolution there was no police, no organised force, the city guard was annihilated, the troops banished, the Government had no means of making itself obeyed but by argument and persuasion; nothing apparently stood between Paris and anarchy; yet nothing worse is known to have happened than a few forced illuminations in honour of trees of liberty; and even of common offences, it is said that a smaller number were committed than in ordinary times. Most remarkable is it, that so far from being an anarchical spirit, the spirit which is now abroad is one which demands *too much* government: it is wholly a spirit of association, of organisation; even the most extreme anti-property doctrines take the form of Communism, of Fourierism, of some scheme not for emancipating human life from external restraint, but for subjecting it to much more

[71] Mill, Letter 526, to Armand Marrast, *CW* XIII, p.735. My translation. The French reads 'Je vois ai adressé un exemplair d'un traité d'économie politique que je viens de publier, et dans lequel je discute quelques unes des grandes questions sociales don't le gouvernement républicain et l'assemblée nationale auront à s'occuper'.

[72] *Ibid.* My translation. The French reads, 'Ja'i encore un autre but en vous écrivant. Je ne veux pas m'étendre en phrases générales sur la sympathies profonde que j'éprouve et dois éprouver pour l'oeuvre de régénération sociale qui so poursuit maintenant en France'.

[73] *Ibid.* My translation. The French reads, 'la noble initative prise par la France, cequi se débat aujourd'hui sur son terrain est l/affaire du genre humain tout entier'.

[74] *Ibid.* My translation. The French reads, 'mon contingent d'idées et tout ce que j'ai d'utile dans l'intelligence, du moins, jusqu'a ce que mon propre pays, si arriéré à beaucoup dégards comparé au votre, en ait besoin'.

[75] *Ibid.* My translation.

[76] Mill also sent a copy of *Principles* to Eugène Sue to prove that economists were not all as wicked as the villain of *Martin the Foundling*. Mill, Letter 527, to Eugène Sue, *CW* XIII, p.736.

[77] Mill, *England and Ireland*, *CW* XXV, p.1100.

[78] *Ibid.*, pp.1099-1100.

[79] *Ibid.*, p.1100.

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*

> restraint than it has heretofore been subject to, or ever ought to be; and the apostles of these doctrines rely avowedly on moral force and on bringing the rest of mankind to their opinion by experiment and discussion.[82]

This is interesting on four counts. Firstly, we already see Mill viewing February 1848 as peaceful, bloodless, regulated, justified, measured, and lawful – views which he continued to express (as the section on his *Vindication* below will show[83]). Secondly, we see Mill's relatively detailed knowledge of what was happening in France – the meetings at the Luxembourg, the events immediately succeeding the revolution etc., and thus his close interest in events in France. Thirdly, we see him drawing a distinction between those discussions, Communism, and Fourierism (which he had not discussed in earlier editions of *Principles*, and which he only seems to have started reading seriously in February 1849). Lastly, we see him characterising this spirit of 'association' as moving the people involved in the revolution. They are not anarchists, they are not 'lawless' or opposed to laws and institutions, but they want better rules, better laws – and they also want to live under rules determined by, consented to, and enforced upon themselves by themselves. This becomes an important element of Mill's hopes for the future of the working classes in later editions of *Principles*, and part of why he sees socialist 'association' as being just and justified[84] – it also chimes in contrast to his depiction of at least some sections of 'the poor' in England and Ireland, who are losing their sense of, and ability to enforce, self-discipline because of the paternalist activities of the rich. Mill sees, then, the events of February 1848 as wholly positive, and of France (and particularly the working people of Paris, and the political leaders of the Provisional Government) as being a moral example to the rest of Europe (and particularly to Britain).

2.2 Mill's Writing on France after the June Days.

In July 1848, Mill was still using France as a positive example to British reformers. He cites the National Assembly in order to try to assuage some concerns regarding extending the franchise in Britain, in particular that giving 'the poor' the vote would only lead to class-determined politics, and the oppression by 'the poor' of 'the rich'.[85] 'After a revolution made by workmen, not twenty members in an assembly of nine hundred are working men', Mill notes.[86] The Assembly is not particularly more welcoming to 'opinions…of an anti-property character' than the British Parliament.[87]

To those, however, who would take this as a sign either than reform is therefore unnecessary, or that France has not gained much by the extension of the suffrage, Mill retorts that France's is 'a gain beyond all price, the effects of which may not show themselves in a day, or in a year, but are calculated to spread over and elevate the future'.[88] 'This gain does not consist in turning the propertied classes out of the government and transferring it to the unpropertied, but in compelling the propertied classes to carry it on in a manner which they shall be capable of justifying to the unpropertied'.[89] This is a strong theme in Mill's writing: that the laws of property are made by men, not nature, and if private property really *is* the best arrangement for everyone, those with property

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[82] *Ibid.*
[83] And see also McCabe, "All of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity", forthcoming.
[84] Mill, *Principles*, pp.793-794.
[85] Mill, *On Reform*, *CW* XXV, pp.1104-1105.
[86] *Ibid.*, p.1105.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Ibid.*

have to make that case to those without it – they can't any longer pretend that it is 'natural', or something they do not need to justify.[90]

A universal suffrage, Mill argues, ensures that government is exercised in the interest of *everyone*.[91] The majority's interest (which in most cases also means the working-classes' interests) must be taken seriously into account, and where the government sees the best policy as at least apparently going against those interests, it must justify its actions 'by reasons drawn from the interests of those same classes, and appealing to their understandings'.[92] One positive effect of this would be that '[t]he discussions of parliament and of the press would be, what they ought to be, a continued course of political instruction for the working classes'.[93] And on this point, Mill also praises '[o]ne of the first measures of the democratic government of France has been a bill to bestow gratuitous education, at the expense of the state, upon the whole rising generation of the French people', for '[w]here the poorest have votes, the richest can no longer be indifferent to the state of their mental cultivation'.[94] Under universal suffrage '[t]o educate the whole community up to the highest point attainable is not then a matter of choice but of fortunate necessity'.[95] This is not only, in itself, a positive, but it also means we may get to the best possible outcome in the battle between ideas of property and ideas from the propertyless, in a fair and open debate in which both sides are equally well-informed, well-able to argue, and well-educated.[96] (A sentiment, of course, which chimes with Mill's famous defence of free speech in *On Liberty*.[97]) So the French National Assembly is not only producing good effects for France (in terms of increasing education, and ensuring good government): it is also doing an epistemological service to the whole of the world in getting us closer to the truth about expedient, workable, justified and/or effective property relations.[98]

Here, then, we see Mill signalling that France is a good example to Britain: her politicians are much better at their job than Britain's, and her politics much more conducive to the common good. This is even more marked in the opening of the leader Mill wrote in August 1848 (for *The Daily News*), which opens:

> From the day when the people of Paris expelled the ruler who had been called the monarch of the middle classes, and proclaimed a democratic republic, it has been evidence that the fate of political and social improvement in Europe, for many years to come, was to be decided in France. If the revolution, after its first difficulties are over, issues in a government which at once preserves order and accelerates progress – makes the laws obeyed, and labours actively to improve them – then in England, and in all Europe, faith in improvement, and determination to effect it, will become more general, and the watchword of improvement will once more be, as it was of old, the emancipation of the oppressed classes. If, on the other hand, the French people allow their republican institutions to be filched from them by artifice, or yield them up under the ascendency of some popular chief, or under the panic caused by insurrection, or compromise them by an indefinite succession of

[90] Mill, *Principles*, pp.199-200 and *Chapters on Socialism*, pp.707-711. See also Mill's view on the importance of being able to justify how you have voted, or otherwise exercised a public trust, to those affected but without power.
[91] Mill, *On Reform*, p.1105.
[92] *Ibid.*
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] *Ibid.*, p.1006.
[97] Mill, *On Liberty*, *CW* XVIII (Toronto, 1977), pp.228-259.
[98] For more on the epistemological element of Mill's argument in *Liberty*, see Daniel Halliday and Helen McCabe, 'John Stuart Mill on Free Speech' in *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Epistemology* (London, 2018).

> disorders, repressed only by a succession of illegal violences on the part of the government, the tendency in this and other countries to the extension of political rights or the redress of social injustices, may be for a long time suspended. The tide will set in a retrograde direction, and a timid conservative instinct will probably take the place of even that moderate taste for improvement which did exist in a certain portion of the influential classes of this country before February last.[99]

It is interesting that Mill's piece 'On Reform' was written after the June Days, but does not mention them in any way – they are evidently much in his mind in this piece on 'French Affairs'. He evidently felt that the June Days had played into the Anti-Reformists hands in Britain, already willing to 'slander' and engage in 'exaggeration or misrepresentation' without 'even preserv[ing] a decent consistency with the facts'.[100]

Mill describes as 'calumny' and 'cock and bull stories' much that has been said regarding 'the imputed atrocities of the late unsuccessful insurgents'.[101] He is anxious to defend the 'insurgents' against claims of 'cruelty or ferocity', use of 'murderous missiles', 'barbarity', and other 'absolute fictions' which case them in a bad, indeed dangerous and murderous, light. He is also anxious to defend 'the victors in the late contest' against similar accusations of extrajudicial executions. Mill asserts, 'The mildness and moderation of the sincerely republican party are as conspicuous in the present head of the government [Louis Eugène Cavaignac] and his cabinet as in the provisional government and executive commission who preceded him'.[102]

Mill warns British readers against this attempt at 'discrediting reform' by 'blackening France'.[103]

> The enemies of popular institutions have lost their most potent weapon, fear of the unknown. Democracy, in the popular signification of the term, exists as a fact, among our nearest neighbours. There, under our eyes, is universal suffrage…a sovereign assembly…no aristocracy as a clog on its movements; and the motto of this government is Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Here, then, is an actual trial of the experiment; with what success depends on circumstances of which no one is yet in a condition to judge; but if the result should be a social system, which…does sincerely…aim at guiding its practice by the spirit of its motto, surely it cannot have other than a beneficial influence?[104]

Similarly, in a letter from September 1848, Mill says '[i]t is wretched to see the cause of *legitimate* Socialism thrown so far back by the spirit of reaction against that most unhappy outbreak at Paris in June'.[105] From the context of Mill's writings mentioned above, we might think this is the 'reaction', in particular, of the British Press. But Mill also had in mind what he saw as the wrong-headed 'reaction' of the French Government, as his 'The French Law Against the Press' (from August 1848) shows (even though he had defenced Cavaignac's initial putting-down of the June Days insurgency).

In private correspondence, Mill still affirmed that 'it makes one better pleased with Humanity in its present state than I ever hoped to be, to see that there are, at least in France, so many men in

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[99] Mill, *French Affairs*, *CW* XXV, p.1110.
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*, p.1111.
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] *Ibid.*, p.1112.
[104] *Ibid.*
[105] Mill, Letter 532, to John Pringle Nichol, *CW* XIII, p.739.

conspicuous station who have sincerely every noble feeling and purpose with respect to mankind'.[106] He adds:

> I believe that the principle members of the Provisional Government, and many of the party who adhere to them, most purely and disinterestedly desired (and still seek to realise) all of "liberty, equality and fraternity", which is capable of being realised now, and to prepare the way of all which can be realised hereafter. I feel an entireness of sympathy with them which I never expected to have with any political party.[107]

But the liberal (and partly socialist) Provisional Government had been replaced with a new (more 'moderate' and conservative) National Assembly by this time, and of their good intentions Mill was less sanguine. On 11 August, the National Assembly had almost unanimously promulgated Bull 60, No.621, severely limiting the freedom of the press. On 19 August Mill wrote a denunciation of this policy in *The Spectator* as 'one of the most monstrous outrages on the idea of freedom of discussion ever committed by the legislature of a country pretending to be free'.[108] 'It is the very law of Louis Philippe – the September law, once so indignantly denounced'.[109] Mill says 'the list of subjects' of which criticism is interdicted by the new law 'includes all the great political and social questions of the age'.[110] What, he asks, is left worth discussing, if these are banned?[111] Mill despairs that even a 'reforming party' committed, apparently, to 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' does not permit discussion about inequality, suffrage, property or rights.[112]

He acknowledges that 'allowances [are] to be made for men lately engaged in a desperate and at one time doubtful contest against a determined attempt at insurrection' (i.e. the June Days), and that 'the decree is avowedly a temporary measure'.[113] But he distrusts that any more permanent legislation will be any better.[114] He acknowledges that 'A government cannot be blamed for defending itself against insurrection'.[115] However:

> [I]t deserves the severest blame if to prevent insurrection it prevents the promulgation of opinion. If it does so, it actually justifies insurrection in those to whom it denies the use of peaceful means to make their opinions prevail. Hitherto the French Government has been altogether in the right against all attempts to overthrow it. But by what fight can the Assembly nor reprobate any future attempt, either by Monarchists or Socialists, to rise in arms against the Government? It denies them free discussion. It says they shall not be suffered to bring their opinions to the touchstone of the public reason and conscience. It refuses them the chance which every sincere opinion can justly claim, of triumphing in a fair field. It fights them with weapons which can as easily be used to put down the most valuable truth as the most pernicious error. It tells them that they must prevail y violence before they shall be allowed to contend by argument. Who can blame persons who are deeply convinced of the truth and importance of their opinions, for asserting them by force, when that is the

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106 *Ibid.*
107 *Ibid.*
108 Mill, 'French Law Against the Press', *CW* XXV, p.1116.
109 *Ibid.*
110 *Ibid.*
111 *Ibid.*
112 *Ibid.*, p.1117.
113 *Ibid.*
114 *Ibid.*
115 *Ibid.*, p.1118.

> only means left them of obtaining even a hearing? When their mouths are gagged, can they be reproached for using their arms?[116]

The warning, of course, is not just to the French Assembly, but – and perhaps primarily – to the British Government, which was busily enforcing similar laws already on the English statute-book in the face of Chartist and Socialist unrest.

Still, this article serves to emphasise how willing Mill was to see questions of property as important elements of public debate, and as things which perhaps ought to be changed. That Mill was already convinced the 'laissez-faire' economics he had been brought up to champion, combined with Benthamite thinking about inheritance and diffusion of property was no longer 'the *dernier mot*' in social and political reform[117], has been shown above, and is very clear in even his earliest version of *Principles*, even if he was not convinced by all socialist arguments regarding 'regulation of labour'. But he was becoming more sympathetic towards some of these ideas than he had been at the start of the Revolution, as his September letter also shows.

On the one hand, Mill seems to characterise as 'socialism' at this point views which 'call…for an entire renovation of social institutions and doctrines' – with which call, he says 'I am entirely at one'.[118] This, of course, says nothing of the *content* of the criticisms of current institutions leading to a need for their 'entire renovation', nor anything about the form in which that 'renovation' ought to happen – which we might think is necessary before really seeing something as 'socialist'. Still, Mill evidently links radical reform of property relations to the socialism with which he is 'at one' – later in the same letter he praises Lamartine's *Histoire des Girondins* and 'his whole conception of the great socialist questions…and especially of the question of Property'.[119] He evidently identified the goal of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!' with 'socialism', and the goals of at least the Provisional Government with 'legitimate socialism', as noted above. Though this might seem to link Mill much more firmly to bourgeois liberalism, actually the aim of liberty, equality and fraternity are very socialist goals – liberalism, after all, generally tends to have only a rights-based, legalist approach to both liberty and equality (which Mill went beyond in considerations of interpersonal relationships and economic inequality) and to ignore 'fraternity' altogether.

He adds:

> I also sympathise very strongly with such socialists as Louis [Blanc], who seems to be sincere, enthusiastic, straightforward, and with a great foundation of good sense and feeling, though precipitate and raw in his practical views. He has been abominably treated about the insurrectionary movements, of which I believe him to be as innocent as you or me. Our newspaper writers…ought to be flogged at a cart's tail for their disgusting misrepresentations and calumnies of such men….and I would very willingly help apply the cat to any one of them.

Mill went on to become good friends with Blanc during Blanc's exile in England. The quote is interesting for at least three reasons. Firstly, it reveals that Mill was warming in his position towards at least *one* 'Communist' (as he characterises Blanc[120]), despite retaining concerns regarding the over-regulation inherent in communism (worries noted above, which are also evident in

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[116] *Ibid*., pp.1117-1118.
[117] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.175.
[118] Mill, Letter 531, p.739.
[119] *Ibid*., pp.739-740.
[120] Mill, *Principles*, p.203. For more on Mill and Blanc, see McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.

Principles[121]). His support for Blanc also, in particular, signals his support for the kind of producer-cooperatives Blanc was busily engaged in helping set up, as well as his sympathy for Blanc's efforts in taking working people's concerns seriously and trying to come to a workable solution to the problem of unemployment, and the idea of a 'right to work'. Interesting, from around this time, Mill begins to endorse, in print, Blancian principles of distribution justice as 'a higher standard of justice' than either equal shares or linking remuneration to output (though one 'adapted to a much higher moral condition of human nature' than he saw in the world at present).[122]

Secondly, it reveals – like an earlier line in the letter – Mill's disambiguation between 'ideal' ideas, and what is possible *now*. Blanc has good ideals, but the 'rawness' of his practical views means he is trying to achieve things which can't yet be realised.[123] Thirdly, it reveals Mill's anger at the misrepresentation of events in France, and particularly actions of (socialist) members of the Provisional Government, rooted in his faith that France was leading the way in Europe, and her example might inspire similar reform in Britain.

This letter, and others from the same period, also shows that Mill was seriously contemplating radical and serious 'renovation' of social institutions including government, property, religion (he discusses Comte's *'culte d'humanité'* in a section of the letter not quoted here[124]), and the family[125]. And from his *Autobiography* we know that in these speculations about radical reform and improvement, he saw himself as 'under the general designation of Socialist'[126], a position he avowed in contemporary letters, for instance writing of the American reviewer of *Principles*:

> He gives a totally false idea of the book and of its author when he makes me a participant in the derision with which he speaks of Socialists of all kinds and degree. I have expressed temperately and argumentatively my objections to the particular plans proposed by Socialists for dispensing with private property; but on many other important points I agree with them, and on none do I feel towards them anything but respect, thinking, on the contrary, that they are the greatest element of improvement in the present state of mankind. If the chapter in which I mention them had been written after instead of before the late revolutions on the Continent I should have entered more fully into my opinions on Socialism and have done it more justice.[127]

I will treat in more detail in Section 4 below the impact of 1848 on Mill's socialism in particular.

2.3 Mill and the Events of 1848.

I have treated with Mill's reactions to the events of 1848 as they occurred (and also the frame of mind in which they found him) in some detail here, in part because so many of these texts are little-known even to Mill scholars (something I state without prejudice – they are hardly the most weighty or well-known of his *oeuvre*!) and so many are only available in English. But in the main this has been done to show the effect the events of 1848 had on Mill: they found him in a frustrated frame

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[121] Mill, *Principles*, pp.203-209.
[122] *Ibid*., p.210.
[123] For more on this, see McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.
[124] Mill, Letter 531, pp.738-39.
[125] See, for instance, Mill, Letter 527, pp.736-737.
[126] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.239.
[127] Mill, Letter 532, *CW* XIII, pp.740-741.

of mind, inspiring great hopes and unusual loyalty to a party (particularly as Mill had determined to eschew party loyalties since his 'partisan' youth as a radical Benthamite[128]).

This was specifically the 'party' of the Provisional Government, which Mill continued to revere; his hopes for the future in France, and therefore Europe, waned during the rule of the increasingly conservative National Assembly, and were finally crushed by Napoleon III.

As noted at the start of this section, Mill had been enthusiastic, in different stages of his life, for the two earlier French Revolutions (1789 and 1830). This was because of a continuing radicalism, which longed for strides to be taken in human progress through meaningful reform. But the content of that hoped-for reform changed over time – from support for the liberalism of the Girondin and the Orléanists, to what he describes as the 'legitimate socialism' of the Provisional Government – all, however, encapsulated by the motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!". He saw 1848 as *the* great event of his generation, in which the future of France, of Europe, and hence of the world, hung in the balance. It opened his eyes to greater possibilities of social, political and economic reform, cementing his sense of himself as a 'socialist', even if he did not agree with all of the contemporary socialist (and particularly communist) ideas about completely eradicating private property. Indeed, his interest in the socialist ideas of 1848 led him to greater knowledge about producer cooperation (from Blanc) and Fourierism (mainly through Victor Considerant), and thus forms of socialism which did *not* involve the entire eradication of private property – forms Mill writes about with increasing length in subsequent editions of *Principles*. Although Mill's ideas had been changing during the 1840s, 1848 in France was a catalyst for Mill's progressive radicalism transforming into a form of socialism, as well as providing an empirical experiment in the feasibility of some of these socialist ideas for 'all of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" which is capable of being realised now, and…prepare[s] the way for all which can be realised hereafter'.[129]

3. Mill's *Vindication of the French Revolution of February 1848*

Many now see the February revolution as ending with the suppression of the June Days insurrection, and the consolidation of power by the 'Party of Order', ending in the December election of Napoleon III as President. Mill did not write on France again in public until April 1849, by which time the 'cause of *legitimate* socialism' had very definitely been 'thrown back' – though Mill seems to have kept some hopes alive of success for radical reform until 'the success of an unprincipled usurper in December 1851 put an end, as it seemed, to all present hope for freedom or social improvement in France and the Continent'.[130] It is in this spirit that we find him embarking up his most-lengthy work on the French Revolution.

Mill's *Vindication* is ostensibly a review of Lord Brougham's 'pamphlet' entitled *Letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne, KG, Lord President of the Council, on the late Revolution in France*, but as he says himself, this pamphlet is only standing as a figurehead for a more amorphous, anonymous mass of vitriol being poured over the events, and authors, of the February Revolution.[131] Mill's piece was originally published as the lead article in *The Westminster Review* in April 1849, but he had written it by at least 6 February[132]. It was published as an off-print entitled *Defence of the French Revolution of February, 1848,*

[128] For more on this, and his reasons why, see McCabe, 'John Stuart Mill's Philosophy of Persuasive', *Informal Logic*, 34/1 (2014), pp.38-61.
[129] Mill, Letter 531, *CW* XIII (Toronto, 1963), p.739.
[130] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.245.
[131] Mill, *Vindication*, p.319.
[132] Mill, Letter 4, to William E. Hickson, *CW* XIV (Toronto, 1972), p.7.

in Reply to Lord Brougham and Others From the 'Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review' for April, 1849 later in the same year. Mill also republished it in his *Dissertations and Discussions* (first published, 1859) which is primarily a collection of earlier works anonymously published (as was the convention) in the *Westminster* and *Edinburgh* reviews.[133] This is a sign that he took what he said there seriously, and as something he wanted both to put his name to, and to disseminate more widely, even several years after the events. His *Vindication* echoes many of the points Mill made at the time of the events on which he is now reflecting. This, and the fact that he re-published it, is further proof of the authenticity and importance of those attitudes to a government and party he considered to embody 'the cause of *legitimate* socialism', and with which he whole-heartedly identified himself.

Mill starts his *Vindication* with a 'vindication' of the 'unselfish[ness]' of the individual politicians involved in the events of February 1848.[134] These, he says, were men:

> 'who did not, like the common run of those who fancy themselves sincere, aim at doing a little for their opinions and much for themselves, but, with a disinterred zeal, strove to make their tenure of power produce as much good as their countrymen were capable of receiving, and more than their countrymen had yet learnt to desire'.[135]

This raises three interesting points. Firstly, it gives us some insight to how Mill field the main actors in the events of February 1848, and hints at the general line taken in the whole of the *Vindication*, and in other works including private correspondence, emphasising the disinterestedness, the almost anti-revolutionary attitude of men he consistently portrays as acting in self-defence in the face of great provocation and antagonism by the July Monarchy. Secondly, it emphasises the truth of the insight offered by Persky (noted above), that Mill saw social improvement as progressive, and – more importantly – also questions of social expediency as progressive: the 'unselfish politicians' try to achieve not *all* that is good, not some ideal set of institutions, but 'as much good as their countrymen were capable of receiving'. This links with the aforementioned way Mill also summed up his view of February 1848 – that it might achieve 'all of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which is capable of being realised now'[136]. Lastly, it shows the role Mill thought governments, social institutions, and social elites with the power to influence public opinion, sentiment and education, could take in progressing society towards improvement: these men 'strove to make their tenure of power produce… more [good] than their countrymen had yet learnt to desire'. That is, they tried to do more good than people were yet demanding, but these were reforms they could 'learn' to realise were 'good', and – therefore – one presumes, demand for themselves, or at least agree with. As in his other judgement, that is, they not only strove to achieve what good was currently possible, but to 'prepare the way for all which can be realised hereafter'[137].

Mill negatively contrasts this with the character and actions of Lord Brougham who, he notes, though often 'on the people's side', but was not often 'much in advance of them, or fought any up-hill battle on their behalf', 'seldom…join[ing] any cause until its first difficulties were over, and it had been brought near to the point of success, by labourers of deeper earnestness…more willing to content themselves without indiscriminate applause'.[138]

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[133] See Editor's Note to Mill, *Vindication*, p.318.
[134] *Ibid*., p.320.
[135] *Ibid*.
[136] Mill, Letter 531, p.739.
[137] *Ibid*.
[138] Mill, *Vindication*, p.320.

Against Brougham, Mill then emphasises the reputation and political experience of all the leaders he has in mind: Jacques Charles Dupont de l'Eure; Dominique François Arago; Isaac Adolphe Crémieux; Louis Antoine Garnier-Pagès; alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine; Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin; Alexander Pierre Thomas Amable Marie de Saint-Georges; Louis Blanc; Ferdinand Flocon; Armand Marrast; and Alexandre ("Albert") Martin.[139] Further, he emphasises that there was a long chain of causes which led to the effect of the February Revolution. It was not, as Brougham states, 'the sudden work of a moment – a change prepared by no preceding plan – prompted by no felt inconvenience – announced by no complaint…without ground, without pretext, without one circumstance to justify or even to account for it, except…a proneness to violence'.[140] The July Monarchy did not 'fall down of itself'. And rather than show, as Brougham argues, that the February Revolution proves 'foundations are of no use', that 'it is natural for buildings to fall without a cause', and that "'All sense of security in any existing government" is gone', it shows instead that 'there must have been something faulty in its [i.e. the July Monarchy's] foundations'.[141] Indeed, Mill argues that:

> everybody, whether acquainted with the facts or not, is able to see that a government which, after seventeen years of almost absolute power over a great country, can be overthrown in a day – which, during that long period, a period too of peace and prosperity, undisturbed by any public calamity, has so entirely failed of creating anywhere a wish for its preservation…unless it was so much in advance of the public intelligence as to be out of the reach of appreciation by it, was so greatly in arrear of it as to deserve to fall.[142]

Again, here we see defence of the characters of the revolutionaries; and this repeated sense that institutions are 'fit' or 'unfit' for their period, something which is independent of their objective 'rightness' or 'wrongness', combined with a belief that institutions should be *as advanced* as it is possible to feasibly make them given the condition 'of the public intelligence'. In addition, we see Mill's critical stance towards the July Monarchy – a monarchy which he himself, seventeen years before, had greeted with great enthusiasm. Mill not only admired and supported the events of July 1830, but travelled to France to witness them for himself, giving rise to what one hopes is the true story of Mill rousing the Paris Opera House in a rendition of *La Marseillaise* when Charles X appeared there, leading to his swift retreat. Even as the Monarchy was about to fall, as we have seen above, Mill still thought France more progressive and in a better state than Britain. But, like many of those who supported Louis Philippe in 1830, he diagnosed a series of problems with his subsequent government, to which – following Mill – I now turn. These are interesting not only for seeing how Mill viewed Louis Philippe's government, but for – more importantly – the insight they give into what Mill himself viewed as 'good' government.

3.1 Mill's Critique of the July Monarchy.

Mill picks out the two most important problems of the July Monarchy in *Vindication*. Firstly, 'it was a government wholly without the spirit of improvement'.[143] Secondly, it was a government which sought to rule by, and instilled in its people certain vices associated with, a bad, self-interested, materialistic ethos.

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[139] *Ibid*., p.321, footnotes.
[140] *Ibid*., p.322, citing Brougham *Letter,* pp.14 and 5.
[141] *Ibid.*
[142] *Ibid*., p.323.
[143] *Ibid*., p324.

Turning to the first problem, Mill says the July Monarchy made 'obstinate resistance to all and every organic reform, even the most moderate', 'originat[ing] scarcely any' reforms itself, 'and successfully resist[ing] all which were proposed by others'.[144] True, it gave France 'two of the most important legislative gifts she ever received – the law of Primary Instruction and that of Vicinal (or local) Roads. But its love of improvement, never strong, had long given place to a conservatism of the worst sort'.[145] France called itself free, but was 'completely sold to the support of all abuses': the July Monarchy 'rested on a coalition of all the sinister interests in France', and Louis Philippe 'had made the terror of the bourgeois at the idea of a new revolution, his sole instrument of government, except personal corruption'.[146] Those who had been elected by the extremely limited suffrage had had all their 'sinister interests' pandered to in order to keep them as one anti-democratic mass. Mill draws the following moral:

> No government can now expect to be permanent, unless it guarantees progress as well as order: nor can it continue really to secure order, unless it promotes progress. It can go on, as yet, with only a little of the spirit of improvement. While reformers have even a remote hope of effecting their objects through the existing system, they are generally willing to bear with it. But when there is no hope at all: when the institutions themselves seem to oppose an unyielding barrier to the progress of improvement, the advancing ride heaps itself up behind them till it bears them down.[147]

Again, this serves to emphasise Mill's commitment to progress. This is two-fold: firstly, a pragmatic idea we also see in *Principles*: people, as a matter of fact, are demanding progress, and will not suffer a lack of any meaningful reform for long, taking matters in their own hands if necessary. With political institutions, this means campaigning for reform, and possibly revolution. In economics, it has meant the foundation of workers' cooperatives, as people despair of capitalists changing capitalism themselves.[148] Secondly, there is a normative element here: progress is positive, and people are pushing for a move towards institutions, social practices, and relations which are objectively better than what we currently have, or have had before. It also foreshadows Mill's defence of the Revolutionaries, which is normative and not just pragmatic: in the face of not only opposition but repression, and especially with the forces of progress and right on their side, the leaders of the Revolution were justified in violent insurrection.[149] (In the light of his view of actions by the National Assembly, and also the British government, this passage may also, in part, be intended as a warning.)

Mill's second indictment of the reign – and character – of Louis Philippe is intriguing, and also echoes both earlier critiques of the Saint-Simonians, and critiques of contemporary society to be found in *Principles*. Mill says this 'characteristic of the government of…the King':

> wrought almost exclusively through the meaner and more selfish impulses of mankind. Its sole instrument of government consisted in a direct appeal to men's immediate personal interests or interested fears. It never appealed to, or endeavoured to put on its side, any noble, elevated, or generous principle of action. It repressed and discouraged all such, as being dangerous to it. In the same manner in which Napoleon cultivated

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144 *Ibid.*
145 *Ibid.*
146 *Ibid.*, pp.324 and 323.
147 *Ibid.*, p.325.
148 Mill, *Principles*, p.762-769.
149 For more on this, see McCabe, "'All of "liberty, equality and fraternity", which is capable of being realised': John Stuart Mill on 'legitimate socialism' and the 1848 revolutions in Paris", *Revue Philosophique do la France et de l'Etranger* (forthcoming).

> the love of military distinction as his one means of action upon the multitude, so did Louis Philippe strive to immerse all France in the *culte des intérêts matériels*, in the worship of the cash-box and of the ledger.[150]

Mill finds two faults with this. Firstly, it was poor politics: 'it is not, or it has not hitherto been, in the character of Frenchmen to be content with being thus governed'.[151] Instead, '[s]ome idea of grandeur, at least some feeling of national self-importance, must be associated with that which they will voluntarily follow and obey'.[152] Secondly, it was normatively troubling. As noted above, 'Louis Philippe's government recommended itself to the middle classes, was that revolutions and riots are bad for trade'.[153] Mill says, '[t]hey are so, but that is a very small part of the considerations which ought to determine our estimation of them'.[154] The approach led to mass corruption.[155] But it is not just this practical bad outcome which appears to trouble Mill: there is something normatively problematic, too.

Here, it might be worth considering Mill's idea of an 'Art of Life', which he wrote about in *A System of Logic* earlier in the same decade. For Mill, and 'art' is what defines 'the end itself'. 'Every art has one first principle, or general major premise…that which enunciates the object aimed at, and affirms it to be a desirable object'.[156] Mill gives a handful of examples: for building, that it is desirable to have buildings; for architecture, that it is desirable those buildings be beautiful or imposing; for hygiene, that preservation of health is desirable; for medicine, that cure of disease is a fitting and desirable end.[157] These refer not to matters of fact (which are the domain of science), but 'enjoin or recommend that something should be'.[158] Together, all these 'general premises…form…a body of doctrine, which is properly called the Art of Life, in its three departments, Morality, Prudence or Policy, and Aesthetics; the Right, the Expedient; and the Beautiful or Noble, in human conduct and works'.[159] He adds, '[t]o this art…all other arts are subordinate'[160].

Later he writes that these are the 'first principles of Conduct'.[161] For Mill, as a utilitarian, happiness is the ultimate 'end'. This does not mean, Mill is anxious to assert, 'that the promotion of happiness should be itself the end of all actions, or even of all rules of action'.[162] Instead, '[i]t is the justification, and ought to be the controller, of all ends, but is not itself the sole end'.[163] In particular, Mill says:

> I fully admit that…the cultivation of an ideal of nobleness of will and conduct, should be to individual human beings an end, to which the specific pursuit either of their own happiness, or of that of others (except so far as included in that idea) should, in any case of conflict, give way. But I hold that the very question, what constitutes this elevation of character, is itself to be decided by reference to happiness as the standard. The character itself should be, to the individual, a paramount end, simply

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150 Mill, *Vindication*, p.325.
151 *Ibid.*
152 *Ibid.*
153 *Ibid.*
154 *Ibid.*
155 *Ibid.*, pp.325-326.
156 Mill, *A System of Logic*, *CW* VI and VII (Toronto, 1974), p.949.
157 *Ibid.*
158 *Ibid.*
159 *Ibid.*
160 *Ibid.*
161 *Ibid.*, p.951.
162 *Ibid.*, p.952.
163 *Ibid.*

> because the existence of this ideal nobleness character, or of a near approach to it, in any abundance, would go further than all things else towards making human life happy, both in the comparatively humble sense, of pleasure and freedom from pain, and in the higher meaning, of rendering life, not what it now is almost universally, puerile and insignificant – but such as human beings with highly developed faculties can care to have.[164]

That is, a core 'end' of life is 'Aesthetics' or 'the Beautiful and Noble'. And it is important for general happiness that people cultivate and develop 'noble' characters. Thus, not only is it important to *French people's* lives, on Mill's account, that there is something 'noble' in politics and the motivations offered (and acted upon) for political action, but it is important, normatively speaking, for *all* people's lives that there are opportunities for developing 'noble' characters, one key element of which is having not only their self-interest appealed to, but encouragement to develop the capacity to be motivated by more generous, 'noble' concerns. This is particularly something which can occur via politics, as Mill's comments on the February 1848 Revolution in *Principles* shows, as does his discussion of the possibilities of social transformation in the *Autobiography* (also speaking of around this period in the development of his political views)[165].

We see this in Mill's praise of the leaders of the February Revolution, cited above: Mill emphasises, as noted, that they were 'unselfish politicians'; that they weren't trying to promote their own party, but the good of the people; that they acted in a 'disinterested' fashion rather than being motivated by 'sinister interests'.[166] We see it also in his praise of both the government and the working people of France just after the February Revolution:

> [T]here is a capacity of exertion and self-denial in the masses of mankind, which is never known but on the rare occasions on which it is appealed to in the name of some great idea of elevated sentiment. Such an appeal was made by the French Revolution of 1848. For the first time it then seemed to the intelligent and generous of the working classes of a great nation, that they had obtained a government who sincerely desired the freedom and dignity of the many, and who did not look upon it as their natural and legitimate state to be instruments of production, worked for the benefit of the possessors of capital. Under this encouragement, the ideas sown by Socialist writers, of an emancipation of labour to be effected by means of association, throve and fructified; and many working people came to the resolution, not only that they would work for one another, instead of working for a master tradesman or manufacturer, but that they would free themselves, at whatever cost of labour or privation, from the necessity of paying, out of the produce of their industry, a heavy tribute for the use of capital; that they would extinguish this tax, not by robbing the capitalists of what they or their predecessors had acquired by labour and preserved by economy, but by honestly acquiring capital for themselves.[167]

He praises their efforts in the 'arduous task' of building capital from 'the few tools belonging to the founders, and the small sums which could be collected from their savings, or which were lent to them by other workpeople as poor as themselves'.[168] He notes that some had loans 'made to them by the republican government', but adds that this was no guarantee of success.[169] Indeed,

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[164] *Ibid.*
[165] Mill, *Autobiography*, pp.239-241.
[166] Mill, *Vindication*, p.320.
[167] Mill, *Principles*, pp.775-776.
[168] *Ibid.*, p.776.
[169] *Ibid.*

'[t]he most striking instances of prosperity', he says, 'are in the case of those who have had nothing to rely on but their own slender means and the small loans of fellow-workmen, who lived on bread and water while they devoted the whole surplus of their gains to the formation of a capital'.[170]

Of course, we might think that these worker cooperatives were basically motivated by self-interest – that is, the self-interest of workers, rather than the self-interest of capitalists. But Mill emphasises that working in an 'association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves'[171] is already a useful education in overcoming simply self-interest and has wider implications than just improving the lot in life of particular co-operators. In a much later speech, to the 'Great Co-operative Soiree in London' in 1864, Mill says, 'the value' of such cooperative societies is not just in sharing best practice, and bringing together like-minded people, but 'also to be a moral organ, to keep before the eyes of co-operators true principles'.[172] 'What does this mean?' Mill asks rhetorically – and the answer is not a 'contrivance by which a small number of persons…can eat or drink that which is wholesome, and eat and drink it at the lowest price'[173], for 'this is a small thing, and cooperation is a great thing'.[174] That is, to merely be motivated by self-interest is not to really be a co-operator:

> It is not cooperation between a few persons to join for the purpose of making a profit from cheap purchases, by which one, two, or more might benefit. Cooperation is where the whole of the produce is divided. We want, not to benefit a few, but to elevate the whole working class.[175]

Thus, the process and goal of cooperation, even when each cooperative only involves a few people, is a vital part of what Mill says is needed to make a socialist social transformation 'either possible or desirable':

> 'a…change in character must take place both in the uncultivated herd who now compose the labouring masses, and in the immense majority of their employers. Both these classes must learn to practice by labour and combine for generous, or at all events for public and social purposes, and not, as hitherto, solely for narrowly interested ones'.[176]

This is one of the things that cooperation can help achieve – it involves what Mill elsewhere calls the 'elite of mankind'[177] in the 'labouring masses' leading the way in teaching each other, and their fellow workers, how to 'labour and combine for generous, or…public and social purposes' – that is, for the future benefit of the entirety of the working classes, not the 'narrowly interested' purpose of improving their own self-interest.

So, to go back to the start of this thread of my argument: one of the core problems with the July Monarchy was that it sought to govern only through appeal to the 'narrow' interests of the bourgeoisie, and individual bourgeois. This was bad politics for France (empirically speaking), as French people (Mill thought) needed something more inspiring and 'noble' to accept, or at least wholeheartedly support, their government. It was also bad politics empirically speaking because the conservatism which this attitude sought to uphold and foster, was foolish: every government,

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[170] *Ibid.*
[171] Mill, *Principles*, p.775.
[172] Mill, *Cooperation*, *CW* XVIII (Toronto, 1988), pp.5-6.
[173] Mill was mainly speaking to consumer co-operators, rather than producer co-operators.
[174] Mill, *Cooperation*, p.6.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.239.
[177] Mill, *Chapters on Socialism*, *CW* (Toronto, 1967), p.748.

to be secure, Mill thought, has to be at least a little bit progressive: reformists will not overthrow a government they think they can win concessions from, but they will begin to violently resist it when they think it obstinate and unmoveable. Moreover, this was bad politics normatively speaking, again for two reasons. Firstly, because governments ought to be progressive: progress is an important, normatively-speaking. It means, for Mill, improvement, and a greater maximisation of happiness for the greatest number. Secondly, nobility of character is an important normatively speaking. It is a key element of the Art of Life, and it is something which politics can call out of people, and foster in them via institutions, the attitude and rhetoric of government, and the kind of public ethos which they help create. In contrast to the government of Louis Philippe, these are all things which – in Mill's view – the republican government of 1848 did.

Mill also criticised Louis Philippe and his 'demoralising' government not just for the fact that they did not appeal to or call out the 'nobler' sentiments of the French people, but for the content of the ideas they *did* appeal to – what Mill refers to as the '*culte des intérêts matériels*'.[178] That is, it was not only 'self-interest' to which they appealed, but a certain kind of 'material' interest, as opposed from something more 'spiritual' or 'aesthetic'. This was a criticism Mill had levelled at Saint-Simonism, with its emphasis on the benefits of increased production way back in the 1830s.[179] It is also something he talks at some length about in this chapter on the 'Stationary State' in *Principles*, where in particular he says:

> I am inclined to believe' such a state 'would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress…[T]he best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back, by the efforts of others to push themselves forward.[180]

Mill acknowledges that the pursuit of wealth might be better than mere mental stagnation 'until the better minds succeed in educating the others into better things'.[181] But there clearly *are* 'better things', and Mill says:

> I know not why it should be matter of congratulation that persons who are already richer than anyone needs to be, should have doubled their means of consuming things which give little or no pleasure except as representative of wealth; or that numbers of individuals should pass over, every year, from the middle class into a richer class, or from the class of the occupied rich to that of the unoccupied.[182]

This chimes precisely with his critique of the 'cult' of material interests fostered by Louis Philippe. And his following comment, '[i]t is only in the backward countries of the world that increased production is still an important object: in those most advanced, what is economically needed is a better distribution' chimes with his endorsement of the policies of the republican government and its socialist supporters. If a more equitable distribution of property was achieved, we might see:

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[178] Mill, *Vindication*, pp.325-6.
[179] Mill, *Fontana and Prati's Saint-Simonism in London*, *CW* XXIII (Toronto, 1986), p.675.
[180] Mill, *Principles*, p.754.
[181] *Ibid.*
[182] *Ibid.*

> a well-paid and affluent body of labourer; no enormous fortunes…but a much larger body of persons than at present, not only exempt from the coarser toils, but with sufficient leisure, both physical and mental, from mechanical details, to cultivate freely the graces of life, and afford examples of them to the classes less favourably circumstanced for their growth.[183]

That is, we might see the development of more of the elements of the 'Art of Life' and of Mill's the multi-faceted dimensions of human personality which Mill thought would maximise happiness in a stationary state, once the impetus was not to focus on mere production of increased wealth, or gathering of more and more wealth into one's own hands to 'rise' up the class system. Thus, this critique of Louis Philippe for focusing on 'material interests' links back to the critique that he did not inspire people to something 'better' discussed above. But it is interesting that this critique of pursuing purely material interests features in a number of Mill's texts from 1848/1849, though having its roots much further back in his thought.

Of course, all these critiques are critiquing something slightly different: the cult of material interests; competition between people; a willingness to let others suffer so long as we benefit materially by that suffering; judgement of the worth of a life by how many material things are consumed or owned; an inability to be motivated (or a lack of opportunity to be motivated) by any finer, more 'generous' feelings… And yet, they are all similar, and to overcome them would need a radical transformation of social relationships as well as social institutions (though the two are linked, as both affect the other) in the name of both equality and fraternity. This is an element of Mill's thought which is often overlooked, even when his desire for political and economic reform is taken seriously. But it is very much in evidence in his writing on the February Revolution.

Mill's critique of the July Monarchy, then, is that it was a morally-bankrupt regime, doing harm to the social, and even private, morality of the people over whom it ruled. This shows not only Mill's specific critique of Louis Philippe's ministry, but also tells us something important regarding Mill's view of 'good' government. It also links to his argument for the moral justification of the February Revolution, to which I now turn.

3.2 Mill's Justification of the February Revolution.

As noted above, Mill had spent much of 1848 justifying the February Revolution, in both private correspondence and in print. Several of the same points reappear in *Vindication*, which justifies the February Revolution in two ways. Firstly, he portrays the revolutionary act itself as legitimate. Secondly, and linked to his opening defence of the 'selfless' politicians who formed the Provisional Government, he defends the individual actions of that government in what he sees as tremendously difficult circumstances.

Mill categorises the February revolution as 'the legitimate consequence of a just popular indignation'.[184] He favourably quotes Louis Antoine Garnier-Pagès' 'apostrophe' of 24 October 1848:

> Did not every one, in the first days, agree that the Revolution which had been accomplished was moral, still more than political? Did not every one agree that this great renovation had been preceded by a real and terrible

[183] *Ibid*., p.755.
[184] Mill, *Vindication*, p.328.

> reaction against corruption, and emanated from all that was honest and honourable in the hearts of the French nation?[185]

That is, Mill sees the Revolution as a legitimate response to the corruption which had gone before: and he thinks the revolution was as much 'moral' as political. Of course, this sheds some light on Mill's view of revolution, as sometimes being legitimate.[186] But it also tells us something specific about his view of 1848.

Mill explains that the July Monarchy imprisoned 'many well-known chiefs' of republican agitation for reform, and had closed off most legitimate forms of peaceful popular protest, leaving people only with 'reform dinners'.[187] And these, he notes, 'as soon as they began to produce an effect, the government forbade'.[188] 'It was,' he says, 'when this last resource was denied, that popular indignation burst forth, and the monarchy was destroyed'.[189]

Mill paints the revolution, therefore, as a predictable yet spontaneous and justified response to government mismanagement and oppression. He is very keen to defend its leaders from the charge of being plotters: instead, the picture he paints (accurately or not) is of men who, faced with overwhelming events, stepped up and became 'directors of the movement, because they alone…had not to improvise a political creed, but already possessed one'.[190] Interestingly, Mill not only justifies the Republicans in February in these terms, but also 'the socialist leaders' during the June Days. He writes: 'The Revolution [of February]…was unpremeditated, spontaneous; the republican leaders had no more to do with effecting it, than the socialist leaders had with the insurrection of June last'.[191]

Mill also seeks to legitimise the *actions* of the Provisional Government (as he had at the time, as noted above). He emphasises how the Provisional Government were 'nominal dictators, without either soldiers or police whom they could call to their assistance…They were absolute rulers, with no means of enforcing obedience' except through consent, which – he argues – they achieved for over two months in Paris, 'daily persuad[ing]…an armed populace…to forego its demands, at the peril of their lives if it persisted in them.[192]

Mill also seeks to defend this 'armed populace' from what he sees as unmerited attack from Brougham, 'one of the most unworthy points' of whose 'pamphlet, is the abusive tone and language into which he breaks out, every time he has occasion to speak of the working classes', being apparently constitutionally unable to 'admit that any praise can be due to a people who make barricades, and turn out a government'.[193] Rather than '[r]abble', 'dregs of the populace' or 'armed ruffians', Mill describes 'the artisans of Paris' as 'the most intelligent and best-conducted labouring class, take it for all in all, to be found on the earth's surface'.[194]

Interestingly, after defending the Provisional Government as 'selfless' and *not* party men, Mill then defends them for trying to institute republican government, even though 'the apathetic majority'

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[185] Mill's own translation of Garnier-Pagès' speech in the National Assembley, cited *Le Moniteur Universel*, 25 October 1848, p.2966, *Vindication*, p.328.
[186] For more on this, see McCabe, "'All of liberty, equality and fraternity'", forthcoming.
[187] Mill, *Vindication*, p.330.
[188] *Ibid.*
[189] *Ibid.*
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] *Ibid.*
[192] *Ibid.*, pp.333-4.
[193] *Ibid.*, p.334.
[194] *Ibid.*

in the country had not yet 'come together and spontaneously determine[d] whether they would have what these, the leaders, thought the best institutions, or what they regarded as the worst'.[195] If 'the noblest spirits and most enlightened minds in the country' had 'employ[ed] an opportunity such as scarcely occurs once in a thousand years in simply waiting on the whims and prejudices of the many', thereby 'leav[ing] all to the decision of those who either had only mean and selfish objects, or had not yet acquired any opinions', Mill argues, 'they would have deserved to be stigmatised in history as the veriest cravens who ever marred by irresolution the opening prospects of a people'.[196] This said, he also reminds his audience that '[t]he democratic principles of these men forbade them to impose despotically, even if they had the power, their political opinions upon an unwilling majority: and compelled them to refer all their acts to the ultimate ratification of a freely and fairly elected representative assembly'.[197] However, he sees it as the duty of 'the better and wiser few' not to passively wait to see what the majority to decide, but to 'guide', and 'to spare no pains' in 'bringing the majority to them'.[198] Thus, Mill describes the 'great task' of the Provisional Government as being 'to republicanise the public mind; to strive by all means, apart from coercion or deception, that the coming election should produce an assembly of sincere republicans', and to do what it could to give the new republic good laws such an assembly might hesitate to abrogate, should (as was likely) a non-republican government be elected in actuality.[199]

This is a complex defence, and in part it is directed as specific attacks by Brougham and others on the organisation of, and literature surrounding, the elections following the revolution. But it reveals something interesting in Mill's more general view of government, and legislatures, and the role of elites, electors, and elected representatives. That is, Mill sees a complex relationship in functioning democracies between 'enlightened' leaders and the general population, whereby leaders ought both to guide and also to fairly represent the people. He is vehement in insisting the Provisional Government did not overstep the mark in this regard, and that it conducted the elections in a freer and fairer way than any previous government.[200]

This chimes with what Mill wrote at the time, but also goes somewhat further. During 1848, Mill defended the Provisional Government as responding to events in a justifiable, and measured, way; and as not stepping beyond the bounds of their reasonable powers as a provisional government. He also, of course, praised their specific actions, but he never went so far as to specifically praise their attempts to 'republicanise' the people – perhaps this was more in Mill's mind following the election of Napoleon III, and he could already sense the Provisional Government had not done enough in this direction (even though Napoleon III did not 'usurp' his Presidential powers until 1851).

3.3. *Vindication*, Revolution, Economics and Law.

In *Vindication* Mill also defends the Provisional Government's foreign policy, arguing that, though '[t]o assist a people struggling for liberty is contrary to the law of nations', '[s]o be it'[201]. What, after all, Mill asks 'is the law of nations? Something, which to call a law at all, is a misapplication of terms. The law of nations is simply the custom of nations'.[202] Are they, Mill asks rhetorically, 'in an age of progress…to be subject to no improvement? Are they alone to continue fixed, while all around

[195] *Ibid.*
[196] *Ibid.*
[197] *Ibid.*
[198] *Ibid.*
[199] *Ibid.*
[200] *Ibid.*, p.338.
[201] *Ibid.*, p.345.
[202] *Ibid.*

them is changeable?'.[203] Circumstances have changed in Europe so much that 'the European nations…in no great lapse of time…will be scarcely recognisable', are, then, their relations to remain unchanged?[204] 'What is called the law of nations is as open to alteration, as properly and even necessarily subject to it when circumstances change or opinions alter, as any other thing of human institution'.[205]

The implications of *Vindication* for understanding Mill's general position on non-intervention and international relations has been explored already by Georgios Varouxakis[206]. Here I want to emphasise something rather different: Mill's attitude to 'law'. It should come as no surprise to see that Mill both challenges the status of international law as 'law' (given his Benthamite heritage), and thinks political laws are not 'fixed and immutable', but subject to change. But it is important to recall what was mentioned above – Mill's adoption of a Saint-Simonian theory of historical change – and his adoption, too, of their view, which follows from this view of history, of 'the very limited and temporary value of the old political economy, which assumed private property and inheritance as indefeasible facts, and freedom of production and exchange as the *dernier mot* of social improvement'.[207] Thus, as Mill moved further towards socialism, he came to regard 'all existing institutions and social arrangements as being… 'merely provisional".[208]

In particular, he saw a distinction – again, first pointed out to him in the writings of the Saint-Simonians – between the 'laws of production' and of 'distribution'. Most political economists, Mill writes, 'confuse these together, under the designation of economic laws, which they deem incapable of being defeated or modified by human effort'.[209] Instead, though he continued to see 'the laws of the Production of Wealth' as 'real laws of nature, dependent on the properties of objects…and dependent on the unchangeable conditions of our earthly existence', he now saw 'the modes of its [i.e. Wealth's] Distribution' as being 'subject to certain conditions, depend[ant] on human will…and…being but the necessary consequences of particular social arrangements, are merely coextensive with these'.[210] 'Given certain institutions and customs, wages, profits, and rent will be determined by certain causes', but those institutions and customs are changeable by human endeavour, and are not 'an inherent necessity, against which no human means can avail'.[211]

It is already clear that Mill thought *political* institutions, such as monarchies or aristocracies, were not 'an inherent necessity', but 'changeable by human endeavour'. His realisation that these have a considerable economic impact, and that, therefore, the apparent 'laws' of economics are *also* changeable is a key element in the increasing radicalism of his politics. It is because this is true, that we can think of further solutions to inequality, economic and class-based limits on freedom, and problems of class warfare (which destroys communal fraternity) than merely trying to diffuse the ownership of property via tinkering with inheritance law.

This passage on international law, then, in *Vindication*, is an important sign of Mill's view on law and the extent to which it is a human construction of custom and deliberate design. It is symbolic of how *much* he thought was within the purview of reformers, even if he also had clear

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[203] *Ibid.*
[204] *Ibid.*
[205] *Ibid.*
[206] Georgios Varouxakis, *Liberty Abroad: J.S. Mill on International Relations* (Cambridge, 2013, pp.45-48.
[207] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.175.
[208] *Ibid.*, p.241. Mill is quoting Austin.
[209] *Ibid.*, p.255.
[210] *Ibid.*
[211] *Ibid.*, pp.255-57.

commitments to only making changes which were evidently feasible and 'available as a present resource' – though, as noted above, he also thought it was the government's responsibility, in some respects, to push for the *most* progressive 'available' options.

3.4. Mill's *Vindication*

Mill's *Vindication* is evidently a very partisan piece – but we have seen, above, how partisan Mill felt about the republican party in France. In it, we see similar attitudes to those he expressed in 1848, as well as more detail regarding his disapproval of the July Monarchy. We see, again, his defence of the actions of the Provisional Government (and individual politicians comprising it), and support for their ideas and progressive policies. And we see, also, his evident desire that events in France not be misrepresented in the English Press, as France held out hopes to all of Europe for meaningful, progressive reform. In particular, we see – again – his emphasis on good politicians being selfless and acting in the common good, and good policy being aimed at the welfare of the *whole* community (and, specifically, at republican reform to government, and socialist-inspired reform of the economy). We also see a reminder of his willingness to see very fundamental institutions as 'merely provisional', and the next section will explore in more detail how 1848 helped Mill to move to even more radical positions on economic reform via greater knowledge of the possibilities of socialism.

4. Mill, 1848, and Socialism.

For Mill, the events of 1848 were intimately bound up with Socialism, and with his changing attitude towards it, increasing knowledge of it, and growing willingness to openly endorse it. In this final section, I want to trace that change in his political philosophy (from 'Democrat' to 'Socialist') in which, as the many mentions above already show, the events of 1848 played a vital part.

Mill had a long-standing relationship with socialism, particularly Owenism in England and Saint-Simonism in France. His father, James Mill, knew Robert Owen, and encouraged Jeremy Bentham to invest in his scheme at New Lanark.[212] However, apart from agreeing with the general aim of improving the lives of poor people in England, and with the feminist arguments of William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, Mill was not an Owenite in his 20s or 30s.[213] This said, he maintained an interest in Owenism, and owned a copy of Owen's *Book of the New Moral Order* (1849)[214].

On a trip to France in 1820, Mill met Henri Saint-Simon – though he was, as Mill recalls in the *Autobiography*, 'not yet the founder either of a philosophy or a religion, and considered only as a clever *original*'.[215] In 1828, Mill met the Saint-Simonian Gustave d'Eicthal, who had come to England to study the industrial revolution.[216] This was the beginning of a life-long correspondence and friendship (although d'Eichthal's activities after 1832 meant that he and Mill did not see each other for thirty-two years, he recorded with delight how Mill came to see him unannounced in Paris 1864, and his son added that they resumed the close friendship of their youth from this date

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[212] Letter 2256, James Mill to Jeremy Bentham, 3 December 1803, *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham,* Volume 8, edited Stephen Conway, (Oxford, 1988), p. 361.

[213] See Mill's debating speeches, 'Population: Proaemium', *CW* XXVI (1988), p.286; 'Population', *CW* XXVI, pp.287-296; 'Population: Reply to Thirlwall', *CW* XXVI, pp.296-308; 'Cooperation: First Speech', *CW* XXVI, p.308; 'Cooperation: Intended Speech', *CW* XXVI, pp.308-313; 'Cooperation: Closing Speech', *CW* XXVI, pp.313-325; 'Cooperation: Notes', *CW* XXVI, pp.325-326.

[214] This is preserved in the John Stuart Mill Library, Somerville College.

[215] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.63.

[216] *Ibid*., p.171.

until Mill's death in 1873).[217] Although Mill read with avidity the Saint-Simonian literature d'Eichthal sent him, and even translated Bathélemy Propser Enfantin's 'Final Address' into English[218], he declined to become a full member of the sect[219]. Though he records the important effect a number of their ideas had on him – in particular, their ideas regarding history and political economy already mentioned above – during the 1830s and 40s, and often expressed high hopes for their society as moral regenerators of society, he was not a Saint-Simonian, or any other kind of socialist, in the 1830s and early 1840s.

Mill records a significant change in his attitude towards socialism in the mid-1840s, such that, around or just before 1848, he and his future wife (Harriet Taylor) would put their politics 'under the general designation of Socialist'.[220] His account is worth quoting at length:

> In the *Principles of Political Economy*, these opinions were promulgated, less clearly and fully in the first edition, rather more so in the second, and quite unequivocally in the third. The difference arose partly from the change of times, the first edition having been written and sent to press before the French Revolution of 1848, after which the public mind became more open to the reception of novelties in opinion, and doctrines appeared moderate which would have been thought very startling a short time before. In the first edition the difficulties of Socialism were stated so strongly, that the tone was on the whole that of opposition to it. In the year or two which followed, much time was given to the study of the best Socialistic writers on the Continent, and to meditation and discussion on the whole range of topics involved in the controversy: and the result was that most of what had been written on the subject in the first edition was cancelled, and replaced by arguments and reflexions which represent a more advanced opinion.[221]

That is, the French Revolution of 1848 both allowed Mill to more confidently assert his socialist opinions, and also improved his knowledge of what 'socialism' meant (or could mean), in particular by bringing to his (favourable) attention the writings of Charles Fourier (mediated via Considerant) and Blanc (who, after c.1850, became close personal friend of Mill).

As noted above, Mill had already begun to move from his inherited form of radicalism before 1848. His adoption of key elements of Saint-Simonism is a sign of this. In particular, the view that fundamental institutions (including property and the family) were 'merely provisional' (detailed above) led him – in his words – to develop 'more heretical' opinions regarding 'removing the injustice…involved in the fact that some are born to riches and the vast majority to poverty', including a new 'ideal of ultimate improvement' whereby:

> society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat, will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all; when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice; and when it will no longer either be, or thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits

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[217] Mill, Letter 24, to d'Eichthal, *CW* XII (Toronto, 1963), p. 26; Eugene d'Eichthal, 'Introduction to the Correspondence of John Stuart Mill', *Cosmopolis: An International Monthly Review* VI (1897), pp. 2-21.
[218] Enfantin, *Final Address*, trans. Mill, *CW* XXV, pp. 1256-9.
[219] Mill, Letter 29, to Gustave d'Eichthal, *CW* XII, pp.46-47.
[220] Mill, *Autobiography*, p.239.
[221] *Ibid.*

> which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to.[222]

Mill had already begun to criticise 'the widening breach between those who toil and those who live on the produce of former toil', and the fact that the main 'nexus' of relations between employers and employees was 'cash payment', leading to alienation and antipathy.[223] He expressed a 'hope' that this 'breach' might be 'heal[ed]' via profit-sharing schemes in 1845, and these are also the only possibility for economic transformation, and aligning the interests of workers and employers, considered in the first edition of *Principles* (1848)[224]. When Mill does briefly consider the 'probable future development of this principle' (i.e. profit-sharing), it is to explain it is free from the objections against "'Cooperative Society" in the Communist or Owenite sense' because it is 'expedient' to allow 'those who supply the funds, and incur the whole risk of the undertaking' a 'greater reward or more influential voice than the rest', otherwise there would be no incentive to 'practice the abstinence through which those funds are acquired and kept in existence'[225].

However, though he notes that 'giving to every person concerned an interest in the profits' has many benefits to the capitalist, he adds 'after the point of greatest benefit to the employers has been attained, the participation of the labourers may be carried somewhat further without any material abatement from that maximum benefit'.[226] Mill predicts that '[a]t what point, in each employment of capital, this ultimatum is to be found, will one day be known and understood from experience; and up to that point it is not unreasonable to expect that the partnership principle will be, at no very distant time, extended'.[227] Interestingly, Mill concludes, '[t]he value of this "organisation of industry" for healing the widening and embittering feud between the class of labourers and the class of capitalists, must, I think, impress itself by degrees on all who habitually reflect on the condition and tendencies of modern society', where 'the majority of the community' will not 'forever, or even much longer, consent to hew wood and draw water all their lives in the service and for the benefit of others'.[228] The conclusion, that is, is the same as three years' previously (that is, profit-sharing is the best available option, and benefits both employers and employees), but the concept of the 'organisation of labour' is a new term (in Mill's work), and evidently echoes (and may well be a direct reference to) Blanc's *Organisation du Travail*, first published in 1840.

A specifically Blancian form of 'organisation of industry' is discussed in much more depth from 1852 in *Principles*, alongside other forms, such as consumer cooperation (based on the Rochdale model).[229] Mill also includes a detailed discussion of Fourier and (more briefly) Blanc in his expanded chapter on Property from the same period, alongside Owen and Saint-Simon. The 1852 edition shows an expansion in Mill's knowledge of possible forms of socialism, and what 'socialism' might mean – reflecting, of course, not only improvements in Mill's own personal knowledge of

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[222] *Ibid*., pp.239-241.

[223] Mill, *Claims*, pp.382 and 379.

[224] Mill, *Principles*, pp.1006-1013. Interestingly, Mill records that in his first conception of the book, the chapter in which these discussions occur ('On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes') did not exist at all, and was added at the instigation of Harriet Taylor (and written, he adds, often in words 'taken from her lips') – Mill, *Autobiography*, p.255 – perhaps proof of what he also accords to Taylor: that she inspired him to be less 'indulgent' towards 'the common opinions of society and the world'; less 'content with seconding the superficial improvement which had begun to take place in those common opinions'; less 'inclined…to put in abeyance the more decidedly heretical part of my opinions' which he 'now look[ed] upon as almost the only ones, the assertion of which tends in any way to regenerate society' – Mill, *Autobiography*, pp.237-239.

[225] Mill, *Principles*, p.1013.

[226] *Ibid*.

[227] *Ibid*.

[228] *Ibid*.

[229] *Ibid*., pp.775-793.

existing forms of socialism (he began reading Considerant, for instance, in 1849[230]), but also developments in socialist theory and practice itself – most notably, in Mill's writings, the development of consumer cooperation in Britain, though also, of course, the development of what we would now called Marxism, referred to somewhat obliquely in Mill's much later *Chapters on Socialism*[231].

The changes between the manuscript and the 1852 edition of *Principles* also shows Mill's idea of what is 'available as a present resource' and 'expedient' changing, in part through witnessing what people were actually capable of in terms of working cooperatively[232]. In part, too, this is because of changes to his own view of what justice would really look like. One clue to this is that the manuscript and 1848 edition of *Principles* contains no mention of Blanc at all; the 1849 edition calls the idea of 'that all should work according to their capacity, and receive according to their wants' 'a still higher standard of abstract justice', whilst 1852 removes 'abstract' and calls this idea simply 'a still higher standard of justice'.[233] These changes lead to Mill describing socialism as "an ultimate result of human progress'[234], and to the culmination of his discussion of 'the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes' being not a prediction of expanding profit-sharing, but of expanding producer and consumer cooperatives, a state of affairs which, he says, so long as women took an equal share and role in the management of these cooperatives, would be 'the nearest approach to social justice, and the most beneficial ordering of industrial affairs for the universal good, which it is possible at present to foresee'[235].

The events of 1848, then, both expanded Mill's knowledge of socialism, and made him more willing to seriously engage with, and endorse it, publicly. As he puts it in the 1849 Preface to *Principles*:

> the increased importance which the Socialist controversy has assumed since this work was written [i.e. early 1848], has made it desirable to enlarge the chapter which treats of it; the more so, as the objections therein stated to the specific schemes propounded by some Socialists, have been erroneously understood as a general condemnation of all that is commonly included under that name.[236]

In Mill's writings from 1848, his endorsement of 'legitimate socialism' may have seemed to be more connected to root-and-branch political reform (including to religion and the family, as well as to forms of government) than to serious transformation of property-rights and property-relations. Evidently, Mill was concerned about the sensibleness of *completely* eradicating private property, and also of the concept of 'equal shares'. And he felt the experiments in the National Workshops had shown that workers were not yet ready for equal shares without *any* need to contribute their labour.[237] Similarly, Mill was very cautious about the claims of 'Communism' (a view with which he linked Blanc) during 1848. Even so, we can see from *Principles* that he was – in fact – thinking much

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[230] Mill, Letter 5, to Harriet Taylor, 19 February 1849, *CW* XIV (Toronto: 1972), pp.9-10; Mill, *Principles*, p.203. Gregory Claeys dates Mill's more serious consideration to 1850, though I think the inclusion of Fourierism in the 1849 edition of *Principles*, as well as these letters, make 1849 a more plausible date (Gregory Claeys, 'Justice, Independence, and Industrial Democracy: The Development of John Stuart Mill's Views on Socialism', *Journal of Politics*, 49 (1987), p.131).

[231] Mill, *Chapters*, pp.703-753.

[232] For an excellent discussion of Mill's 'progressive' understanding of justice and expediency, see Persky, *The Political Economy of Progress*, pp.207-209.

[233] Mill, *Principles*, pp.202-203, for detail of changes see notes g-g and j. For more on Mill and Blanc's principles of justice, see McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.

[234] Mill, *Principles*, p.xciii (Preface to the 1852 edition).

[235] *Ibid*., p.794.

[236] *Ibid*., p.xcii.

[237] Mill, *Principles*, p.783.

more seriously about economic reforms than his published works would suggest (at least overtly), something he continued to do after 1848, in part through further knowledge of forms of socialism which the February Revolution (and subsequent events) brought to his attention. His socialism developed further after 1849, but 1848 was a catalyst, and also helped Mill see what forms of socialism might be 'available as a present resource', helping embed socialist ideas into his preferred progressive, radical reforms. Just as he had sent *Principles* to Marrast, Mill also sent copies, in later years, to cooperative societies in Britain to help educate workers about political economy, and also published affordable editions of *Principles*, as well as speaking at Co-operative society events – and, as noted before, self-identified as a socialist in his *Autobiography*. This is not wholly because of the events of 1848, but they certainly played a significant role in this transformation. Mill started to take much more seriously socialist ideas regarding 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' because of 1848, and to fit many of them into his own idea of 'utopia', and achievable, desirable reform.

5. Conclusion: Mill and the Events of 1848 in France.

Mill was consistently a radical – and consistently a radical not only deeply interested in events in France, but who felt where France led, Europe might follow; and whose radicalism was embodied by the Revolutionary cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!". I have taken a very historical approach here to Mill's reaction to 1848, giving a relatively detailed account of his reactions, opinions, and reflections. But in showing this detail, we get a better idea of the wider impact of the events of 1848 on Mill's view of possibly, and desirable, radical reform, for 1848 plays a key role in his transition from 'Democrat' to 'Socialist'.

Mill had always been a committed 'democrat' in terms of advocating republican, representative democracy. He records in the *Autobiography* that he became *less* of a democrat as he became more a socialist, and 1848 had a role to play in this, too. In 1859, for instance, Mill defends the concept of educational qualifications for suffrage, arguing that even a very simple literacy and numeracy test of 'copy[ing] a sentence…in the presence of the registering officer, and…perform[ing] a common sum in the rule of three…would probably have saved France from her present degradation'.[238] This is because '[t]he millions of voters who, in opposition to nearly every education person in the country, made Louis Napoleon President, were chiefly peasants who could neither read nor write, and whose knowledge of public men, even by name, was limited to oral tradition'.[239]

Even before 1848, Mill was already moving away from some elements of his original 'Democrat' position. He was disappointed in the Reform movement in Britain (and, evidently, in France, though he still thought France was better, and more progressive, than Britain, even under the July Monarchy). He was frustrated by the pace of reform, and the inability of his old comrades to stick to their radical beliefs in the face of popular unrest and the famine in Ireland. More fundamentally, he was moving away from his old beliefs about the 'fixed' nature of the laws of production, and that Benthamite reforms could be the '*dernier mot*' in what was possible regarding both liberty and equality. Similarly, he retained a commitment to fraternity, often missing in other forms of more liberal radicalism: it was this which led him to bemoan the widening breach between workers and employers, and to seek for ways in which their interests could be aligned and combined; and to continue to emphasise the importance of government which took *everyone's* interests into account, and could give reasons in which evident consideration had been made for the interests even of those who felt neglected if there were complaints. Some of this can be traced back to his engagement with Comte and the Saint-Simonians, and also the influence of Harriet Taylor – in

[238] Mill, *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, *CW* XIX (Toronto, 1977), p.327.
[239] *Ibid.*

particular, his changing view of historical change, and of the possibilities for economic reform as 'modes of distribution' were human constructs, and thus within the purview of radical reform to a greater extent than he had used to believe.

His frustration led him to speak favourably of a revolution in England: a *real*, progressive, radical Revolution in France left him almost speechless with delight. He felt a kind of partisan sympathy with the Provisional Government that perhaps even surpasses what he felt about the Girondins when a teenager – as they, after all, were already long dead. This partiality shines from all his writing on the Provisional Government in 1848 and afterwards. The mix of what he saw as selfless republicanism mixed with 'sensible' kinds of socialism, which took seriously the demands of working people, involved them in seeking solutions, and genuinely sought to both govern in the general interest, and enlighten the people as to what that interest really was, evidently chimed with his own beliefs.

The success of the Revolution made him bolder in declaring his own socialist beliefs – even if this boldness, as it was couched in Mill's usual thoughtfulness and desire to see all sides of the question, was misinterpreted by some of his contemporaries (as it continues to be misunderstood by scholars today, who deny that Mill was ever 'really' a socialist[240]). It also brought to his attention the ideas of socialists such as Blanc and Fourier (who he had not previously taken seriously), and the possibilities of a socialism which was organised by the workers themselves, did not involve the immediate eradication of private property – or, indeed, in the case of Fourier, it's complete eradication at all – and might be 'available as a present resource'. He felt that the Provisional Government proved that the right kind of government could call on the best elements in the characters of working people to great success – and that many working people were only waiting until they had the sense that they had a government which did indeed have their interests at heart, before they would exert themselves for great things.

This was a Revolution which was achieved without much violence, and did not degenerate into a 'Terror'. It offered further hope that Reform in Britain, even if it needed to be extra-legal and 'revolutionary' need not be bloody, or cause more distress than the normal vicissitudes of 'boom-and-bust' capitalism. Even though many of Mill's hopes were dashed – both in terms of British reform, and in terms of the sustained radicalism of French politics by both the reactions of the National Assembly to the June Days, and the eventual rise of Napoleon III – he retained a faith in the possibilities of economic reform led by the workers themselves, via not just profit-sharing but cooperation.

Consumer cooperation took off in Britain after the French Revolution of 1848 – the Rochdale Pioneers were founded in 1844, but found real success, and general renown after George Jacob Holyoake published his *Self Help by the People: History of Co-Operation in Rochdale* in 1857. Mill approved of consumer cooperation, but he really saw the possibilities of economic transformation in producer cooperation of the kind experimented with in France after 1848, by independent

[240] See, for instance, L.E. Fredman and B.L.J. Gordon, 'John Stuart Mill and Socialism', *Mill Newsletter* 3/1 (1967), pp.3-7; J.R. Hainds, 'John Stuart Mill and the Saint-Simonians', *Journal of the history of Ideas* 7/1 (1946), pp.103-12; Donald L. Losman, 'J.S. Mill on Alternative Economic Systems', *American Journal of Economic Sociology*, 30/1 (1971), pp.84-104; Dale E. Miller, 'Mill's "Socialism"', *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 2/2 (2003), pp.213-38; Jonathan Riley, 'J.S. Mill's Liberal Utilitarian Assessment of Capitalism versus Socialism', *Utilitas* 8/1 (1996), pp.39-71 and *Liberal Utilitarianism: Social Choice Theory and J.S. Mill's Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.216-221; J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'John Stuart Mill, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4/2 (1943), pp.127-60; William Thomas, *Mill* (Oxford, 1985), p.90; Donald Winch, *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.50-83.

groups of workers as well as via the National Workshops. Certainly, he saw the future – after 1848 – as lying in 'association' of some kind, determined by the workers themselves. Although he did not support government aid for starting up these cooperatives, feeling their fared better when they had been set up by workers who made the initial sacrifice themselves, and had to rely on their own 'slender means'[241], he did countenance an array of government provisions where 'association' might not be suitable, for instance local government provision of gas, street-lighting, and some provision of education.[242] From his writing in 1848, we can also see he felt the government could be more directively progressive, enlightening the people as well as merely educating them, than perhaps we might expect from Mill, and certainly than we would associate with 'neutral' forms of liberalism.

In particular, he saw in events in France real grounds for hope that meaningful, progressive reform would be demanded, and enacted, by working people in a way which was feasible, grounded in sound understanding of political economy, and based in good policy. In this way, it granted him a glimpse of a new, socialist 'utopia' which – in *Principles* – he describes as 'the nearest approach to social justice, and the most beneficial ordering of industrial affairs for the universal good, which it is possible at present to foresee'.[243] Although his hopes for reform sweeping Europe, as evidenced by his sentiment that 'there never was a time when so great a drama was being played out in one generation' were ultimately disappointed, then, this turned out to be only the loss of one battle in a war the successful outcome of which 1848, in the end, made him more optimistic about.

[241] Mill, *Principles*, p.776.
[242] *Ibid*., pp.936-953.
[243] *Ibid*., p.794.