eyes of Runciman was the mission's sole purpose.

The book has some shortcomings. It needs a map that shows where the German population lived. It needs some explanation as to why there appears to be no regular communication with the French with whom Czechoslovakia had a non-aggression pact.

I wish, too, that it had included the mention in my father's notebook, on 14 September (four days before they left), to the Jewish delegation asking for 'quite special protection' if a 'negotiated settlement was arrived at'.

Otherwise, *44 Days in Prague* is a triumph: so very personal and so full of integrity, sparing nobody wherever the research led. ■

Mark Stephens is the author of *Ernest Bevin: Unskilled Labourer and World Statesman* (Spa Books, 1985). He is the eldest son of Sir David Stephens, Ecclesiastical and Crown Appointments Secretary to two Prime Ministers, Clerk of the Parliaments 1963–74 and member of the Runciman Mission.

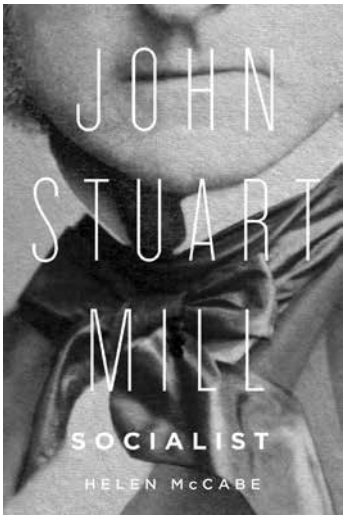
Mill's North Star

Helen McCabe, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021)
Review by Ian Packer

The title of this thoughtful and powerfully argued book will be a surprise to most readers of this journal. Because, of course, the Victorian thinker, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), is best known as a key figure in the history of liberalism. His book, *On Liberty* (1859), is often thought of as a foundation stone of Anglo-American liberalism for its robust defence of the liberty of the individual against the claims of both State and society. Famously, Mill declared that the individual's liberty should only be curtailed in order to 'prevent harm to others'. Since the late nineteenth century, Mill has been regularly invoked by British Liberals to support their views and their party. Indeed, so central is his place in Liberal Democrats' sense of their identity that each incoming president of the party is presented with a copy of *On Liberty*.

Helen McCabe does not dispute that Mill was a liberal. Her argument is that he was also a socialist and that the socialist aspects of his thought were central to his view of society and how society should develop. This approach is not as startling as it might seem at first sight. Mill was not only a passionate advocate of individual liberty; he was also a fierce critic of how nineteenth-century capitalism operated. He believed the economic system of his time was excellent at creating wealth, but also that it was wasteful, put constraints on the liberty of many individuals, was inherently unjust in its distribution of material rewards, promoted economic growth at the expense of all other factors, and produced antagonistic relationships between different social groups and individuals. This kind of analysis led Sidney Webb, the founder of Fabianism, to believe that Mill's writings pointed the way forward to the development of socialism; while Friedrich Hayek, one of Margaret Thatcher's favourite economists and author of the *Road to Serfdom* (1944), was so repelled by aspects of Mill's writings on the economy that he suggested Mill was more responsible than anybody else for converting British intellectuals to socialism.

Moreover, the question of whether Mill himself can be thought of as a socialist, rather than someone who just influenced later thinkers in this direction, has been the subject of a good deal of recent academic debate. The starting point for McCabe is Mill's declaration in



his *Autobiography* (1873) that, by the mid-1840s, he placed himself 'under the general designation of socialist' – something that at the very least needs to be explained. McCabe investigates what Mill might have meant by this statement through a careful examination of his writings. Mill certainly did not suggest he was a Marxist – he probably never read a word that Marx wrote. He did not believe in the necessity of class antagonism, or of a future revolution. His view of socialism was shaped by interactions with earlier socialists such as Saint-Simon, thinkers who Marx dismissed contemptuously as 'utopians'. Mill thought of himself as a socialist primarily because he hoped that in the future society would move beyond capitalism through the gradual creation of cooperative forms of production in which all could share equally.

Whether this is enough to categorise Mill as a socialist has not been universally accepted, by any means. But McCabe's book makes two exceptionally important contributions to understanding Mill's relationship with socialism. Firstly, she addresses and effectively combats three key ways of arguing that Mill was not 'really' a socialist, despite his declaration that he should be seen as such. The first of these arguments is that Mill only briefly flirted with socialism and abandoned these ideas by the mid-late 1850s. The second is that it was not Mill who was the socialist, but his long-term companion and collaborator, Harriet Taylor (1807–1858), whom Mill married in 1851 after her first husband's death. Taylor's importance to Mill's writings has been increasingly appreciated and some commentators (Hayek included) have contended that the socialism in Mill's work comes from Taylor, not from Mill. After her death in 1858 he reverted to his earlier liberalism. The third argument is that Mill could not have been a socialist when he published his key work, *On Liberty,* in 1859, as the work does not endorse socialism.

McCabe argues that Mill's positive analysis of socialism was actually long-lasting, as exemplified in his unfinished work on 'Socialism', which he began in 1869, and the final edition of *The Principles of Political Economy* (1871). These views began to take shape in the late 1820s, even before he met Harriet Taylor, and it is not possible to demonstrate that Mill was merely a ventriloquist for Taylor's ideas, even if these were more clearly socialist than those of Mill (whether Taylor's thought should be categorised in this way is a complex question and not easily resolvable). Finally, McCabe suggests that while *On Liberty* was not a work about socialism, it is not incompatible with the kind of socialism Mill espoused, nor should it be seen as constituting the totality of Mill's thought, or his ideas of how society should develop in the future.

McCabe's second major contribution to understanding Mill and socialism is to put his ideas on this subject at the core of his thought, rather than seeing them as just some interesting speculations by Mill. For McCabe, socialism was Mill's 'North Star', to which society should try to steer as its ultimate destination. Democracy and liberty were stages on this journey, but it was necessary to transform property rights and the economy to produce a society in which all people's happiness counted equally and everyone could be empowered to become the best version of themselves. Mill remained a devotee of the utilitarian philosophy he learned from his father, the Scottish philosopher, James Mill (1773–1836), in which the greatest good of the greatest number should be prioritised. But, by combining this with liberalism and romanticism, he worked out a unique

vision of how contemporary capitalism should be criticised on moral grounds and how it might develop in a better way in the future.

McCabe's work is strongly argued, and her detailed analysis of Mill's works provides a strong underpinning for her views – though, as she admits, she is unlikely to convince those liberals who are committed to seeing Mill as the key liberal thinker of the last two hundred years. McCabe's work can also be seen, though, as an important contribution to Mill's contemporary relevance. Mill is not just seen today as a founding father of the Liberal Democrats – he can also be claimed by some kinds of conservatives. Mill was an enthusiastic supporter of the British empire – he worked for the East India Company from 1823 to 1858 – and his arguments for free speech and individual autonomy in *On Liberty* can be used to support campaigns against 'cancel culture' and generally for libertarian causes, especially in America. But McCabe is anxious to reclaim Mill as very much a man of the left. This is not just a matter of Mill's early feminism – when he was briefly MP for Westminster in 1865–68 he introduced an amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill arguing for women's suffrage. To McCabe, Mill has much to offer those who are thinking about how to create alternatives to a globalised capitalism. Indeed, his emphasis on voluntary associations of individuals in local cooperatives fits in very well with the approach of many Greens, anarchists and New Left thinkers generally. By foregrounding this aspect of Mill's thought, McCabe has ensured that Mill's place in the twenty-first century will continue to be a matter of debate – as is only appropriate for the author of *On Liberty*. ■

Ian Packer is the author of *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land* (2001) and *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–1915* (2006).

Liberal darling of the mob

Robin Eagles, *Champion of English Freedom: The life of John Wilkes, MP and Lord Mayor of London* (Amberley Publishing, 2024)
Review by Hugh Gault

Robin Eagles is an expert on John Wilkes, editing the diaries Wilkes kept from 1770 to 1797, the last twenty-seven years of his life, for the London Record Society in 2014. Eagles is also familiar with, and very knowledgeable about, the history of parliament in the pre-Victorian era.

The ostensible reason for publishing this full and detailed biography in 2024 was that Wilkes had become Lord Mayor of London in 1774, exactly 250 years before. It is a comprehensive and impressive work, exploring every aspect and, as far as one can tell, virtually every detail of Wilkes's life from his birth, probably in 1725 (300 years ago) to his death aged 72. This is a work of scholarship that draws together, and expands upon, the myriad other assessments of Wilkes over the last couple of centuries. There were several such in Wilkes's own lifetime and many since, including a flurry from the 1950s into the twenty-first century. Writers as well-known as Raymond Postgate in 1956 and George Rudé in 1962 have written lengthy books on him.

So, the obvious question is why Wilkes should continue to resonate with different generations so long after his death.

He was an unattractive character, often in behaviour and apparently in physique. Yet he clearly had an appeal that transcended these limitations: a good friend