

8. High days and holidays

Life for revolutionary exiles in England was not all one long slog of making and unmaking revolutions. Indeed, Liebknecht first encountered Marx not at a political meeting, but at a summer picnic of the German Workers' Education Society. Engels, exiled in smoky Manchester, liked nothing better than to follow the traditional pursuit of the English country gentleman – fox hunting – in his case with the Cheshire hunt.

Karl's own leisure pursuits were less traditional, but essentially those of a typical German academic, and in his early years in London he fenced at a 'salon' in Rathbone Place, off Oxford Street. His taste for wine, like that of Engels, also dated back to his student days. With a public house, the Lord Southampton, at the corner of Grafton Terrace, we can only surmise that many a happy hour was spent inside. Liebknecht mentions other inns, including 'the Old [Mother] Red Cap so called from a picture of little Red Riding Hood ... and the Mother Shipton' (in Camden Town). He himself lived a short distance away, at 3 Roxburgh Terrace, in Kentish Town; while the 'Old Mother Red Cap' is recalled in the 'World's End' pub opposite Camden Tube Station.

Liebknecht also described a drinking spree in central London, when he, Marx and fellow German exile Edgar Bauer visited every single public house along Tottenham Court Road. Today Tottenham Court Road is mainly known as a place to buy furniture and electronic equipment, and there are comparatively few pubs, but the rate books reveal a total of eighteen in the 1850s. The three revolutionaries were soon thrown out of the last pub, after being drawn into a typical pub argument about the rival claims to fame of England and Germany. This did not lower their spirits, and after a policeman heard them smashing street lamps, they had to rely on Karl's intimate knowledge of the topography of central London to shake off the police and make their way home and not to prison.

Beer, not wine, seems to have been Karl's main drink at this time, as it was of English workingmen. Between 1830 and 1869 beer houses could be opened without a licence from the Justice of the Peace, and very heavy drinking was prevalent. Despite his own tastes, Engels described 'intemperance in the enjoyment of intoxicating liquors' as the principal failing of the English working classes.

He witnessed, at first hand, the devastating impact of alcohol upon the life of poor immigrant families in the streets of Manchester.

In one of the most popular surveys of London, in 1851, Charles Knight claimed that 'beer is to the London citizen what the water in the reservoirs of the plains of Lombardy is to the village peasantry'. Of course, the fact that London water was so unhealthy made the work of the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association as suspect to the populace as that of the brewers, with the great philanthropist Lord Shaftesbury noting as late as 1871 that there was scarcely a pint of water in London which was 'not distinctly unhealthy'.

Marx, who took part in a Hyde Park demonstration against the Sunday Observance laws, which Shaftesbury supported, loved the commodity which often went with beer: tobacco. He was a 'passionate smoker', particularly of cigars, and the various homes he inhabited must have been heavy with stale tobacco smoke. Most of the cigars he smoked were very cheap, and he liked to 'save' money by insisting on the lowest price brands. Still, he once joked that the royalties from writing *Das Kapital* would not pay for all of the cigars he had smoked while working on the volumes. It was perhaps to get away from the smoke of his own house, as much as the smoke of central London, that the Marxes, when they lived in Soho,



A picnic on Hampstead Heath, May 1864

Excursions to Hampstead Heath were a treat for the Marx family. In this Daguerrotype, Engels and Marx stand either side of the young Laura, Eleanor, and Jenny.

would escape each Sunday northwards to the green fields of **Hampstead Heath**. There, at least, he was able to relax.

'A Sunday on Hampstead Heath was the highest pleasure to us', wrote Liebknecht:

The children spoke of it all week and grown people too anticipated it with joy. The trip itself was a feast. From Dean Street, where Marx lived, it was at least an hour and a quarter, and as a rule, a start was made as early as 11 a.m. ... some time was always consumed in getting everything in



Jack Straw's Castle, Hampstead, as it was in the post-war period

This was a favourite public house of Marx and his friends.

readiness, the chicken cared for and the basket packed. That basket ... it was our commissary department, and when a man has a healthy strong stomach ... then the question of provisions plays a very large role. And good Lenchen knew this and had for often half-starved and, therefore, hungry guests a sympathising heart. A mighty roast veal was the centrepiece hallowed by tradition for the Sunday in Hampstead Heath.

Liebknecht's description is detailed enough to give an almost complete picture of a London Sunday, far away from the empty central streets and the closed entertainments, and what he wrote of trips to the Heath in the Dean Street days was equally true of the early days in Kentish Town.



Jack Straw's Castle, Hampstead, in January 2007

The public house closed down in 2004 and underwent a major re-development, which saw its Dickens room – recalling that writer's association with the building – stripped out. When it re-opened, the rear of the building had been converted into luxury flats.

The march itself was generally accomplished in the following order. I led in the van with the two girls – now telling stories, now executing callisthenics ... Behind us some friends. Then the main body of the army, Marx and his wife and some Sunday guest requiring special attention. And behind these Lenchen ... Once arrived on the Heath, we would first choose a place where we could spread our tents at the same time having due regard to the possibility of obtaining tea and beer. But after drinking and eating their fill, as Homer has it, the male and female comrades looked for the most comfortable place of repose or seat; and when this had been found he or she – provided they did not prefer a little nap – produced the Sunday papers they had bought on the road, and now began the reading and discussing of politics – while the children, who rapidly found comrades, played hide and seek behind the heather bushes. But this easy life had to be seasoned by a little diversion, and so we ran races, sometimes we also had wrestling matches, or putting the shot (stones) or some other sport ... The walk home from Hampstead Heath was always very merry, although a pleasure we have enjoyed does not, as a rule, awaken as agreeable feelings as one we are expecting. Against melancholy – although there were only too many good reasons for it – we were charmed by our irrepressible

humour. The misery of exile did not exist for us – whoever began to complain was at once reminded in the most impressive manner of his social duties.

If these were rural pleasures, the Marxes also enjoyed urban pleasures, and in particular the theatre. They would often walk from Haverstock Hill to Sadler's Wells in Holborn to see Shakespeare performed, and they were deeply impressed by Henry Irving, whom they saw (and heard) as Hamlet at the Lyceum in 1874. In 1877 Marx sent a Lyceum ticket for a performance of *Richard III* to a Russian exile, Peter Lavrov (1823-1900). Lavrov had survived the crushing of the Paris Commune to join Marx in the founding of the First International, and would later become a prominent spokesman for the 'Narodnik' (People's Will) movement in Russia, which assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

While Marx gave theatre tickets as gifts, his daughter Eleanor joined the New Shakespeare Society, recited in front of the Browning Society (once picnicking down the Thames with its members), and took to the stage. She had always been a lively and entertaining person. It was characteristic of her that when she was ten, and in a popular parlour game of the period produced her 'Confession', she replied to the question 'what is your idea of happiness?' – with 'champagne'.

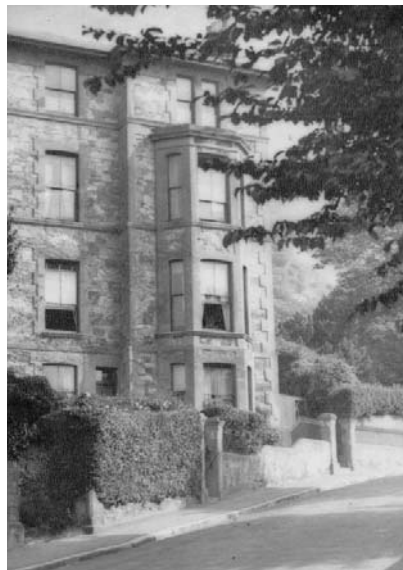
Marx was interested in all her

doings. He was, indeed, a good and caring father. One of his favourite games was playing 'Cavalry', pretending to be a horse, with a child – as knight or hussar – borne aloft on his shoulders. Throughout his life, he saw to it as far as he possibly could that however much he and Jenny might have to suffer through their poverty, their children would not have to suffer too. Indeed, in their aspirations for their children – private schooling at the South Hampstead Ladies College, piano lessons, dancing and lots of reading – Karl and Jenny could be seen not as revolutionary, but as bourgeois parents.

Engels never had this sense of family. His free union with the Irish factory girl Mary Burns (1822/3-1863), and later – on her death – with her sister Lizzie (1827-1878), left no place for children, although Lizzie welcomed the Marx children and showed them around Manchester. Eleanor remembered one summer day when all the female members of the household were lying on the floor the whole day, 'drinking beer, claret etc ... with no stays, no boots, no petticoat and a cotton dress on'; by the time Engels returned, they were 'drunk as a jelly'.

Engels used to visit Marx regularly in London, too, before he came to live there himself, and once he had to write to Jenny apologising for leading Marx astray: he received the answer that since their 'nocturnal wanderings' Marx had been confined to bed for a week with an alleged chill.

Real illness certainly affected the leisure pattern of the Marxes, as it affected the leisure pattern of most Victorians. In 1874 Marx visited the spa at Karlsbad in Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic, and called Karlovy Vary), staying – as 'Herr Charles Marx, Privatier' – at the Germanic Hotel. 'We are very exact indeed in all our "duties" [i.e. taking the waters]', wrote Eleanor, who accompanied him, 'being fully dressed and out at the "Brunnen" [springs] by six o' clock, frequently still earlier. We take long walks, and altogether get on well here.' Marx found time away from the thermal springs to go shopping for souvenirs for his family and friends.



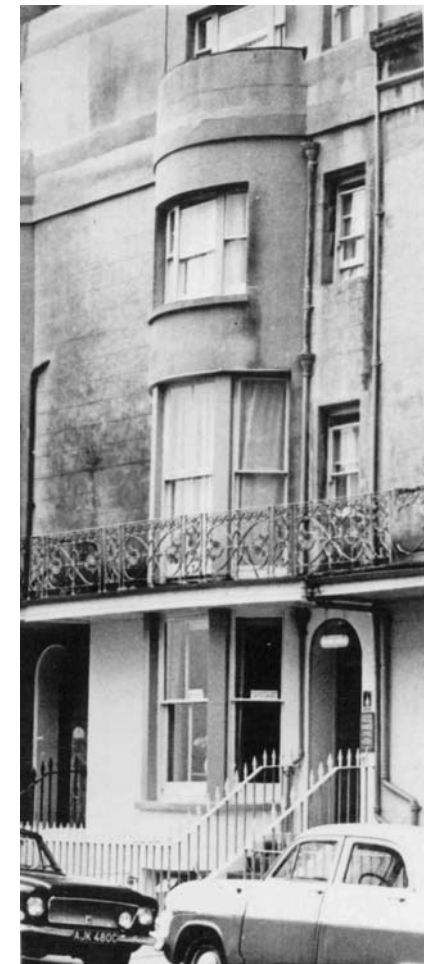
The House at Ventnor, Isle of Wight, where Marx spent his last winter of convalescence, 1882-83

Among his gifts was an elegant cigar case, inlaid with ivory, that he brought back for Engels.

Until 1989, a magnificent museum and large statue marked Marx's visit to the spa town, but they have since been swept away, together with memorials to Yuri Gagarin and Czech anti-fascist fighters such as Julius Fucik. Fortunately, a statue to Goethe – who visited the baths no less than thirteen times! – remains.

Health reasons also took Marx to Algiers and Monte Carlo in 1881, to Geneva in 1882 and, nearer to home, to Ventnor in the Isle of Wight. Ventnor, renowned for its air, was no more a proletarian holiday resort than Monte Carlo, although it had been graced by Herzen for a whole summer in 1854. Marx's German contemporary, Karl Baedeker, described it, in his *London and its Environs, including Excursions to Brighton, the Isle of Wight* (1879), as having a winter climate 'almost Italian in its mildness'. It was, he added, 'much frequented by persons suffering from complaints of the chest'.

Another non-proletarian resort favoured by Marx was Eastbourne, developed under the patronage of the Duke of Devonshire. It was the most respectable seaside resort on the south coast, more respectable than Brighton to the west and Hastings to the east, which he also visited, or Margate, which could be approached by river down the Thames. The river world of London was a pleasure world as well



Cavendish Place, Eastbourne

Engels stayed here, while taking the air at the fashionable resort, in 1883, 1886, 1887, and 1889.

as a working world, with Richmond to the west and Southend to the east.

Another very respectable place visited by the Marxes was Harrogate, not far from Bradford and Leeds, but

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very different from them. It was another spa town, not a popular resort, recommended by a doctor friend. Engels once went on holiday not to Blackpool in Lancashire, but to Great Yarmouth.

Neither Marx nor Engels followed, therefore, the work and leisure patterns of 'the masses,' already plain in the year of revolutions, 1848, when in the short Whitsuntide break, a yearly festival in the life of the working classes, 116,000 trippers left Manchester for the sea. By the time of Marx's death, a visit to the seaside (for very different reasons from taking the waters) had become a fact of urban life.

'The masses,' 'a human ocean,' figure in Liebknecht's *Memoirs* in a non-political way, when he describes a visit with two of Marx's daughters – presumably Jenny and Laura – to the Duke of Wellington's funeral procession in 1852. 'Take good care of the children! Don't mix up with the crowd,' their mother warned him as he went out. Once among the crowd, Liebknecht felt himself compelled 'to resist with all my strength, trying to protect the children so that the torrent will rush by without touching them.' There was, however, a hint of a

political moral in the story, as all was: 'in vain' ... 'Against the elemental forces of the masses, no human strength will avail'.

How to get there

The Rising Sun, Tottenham Court Road, W1

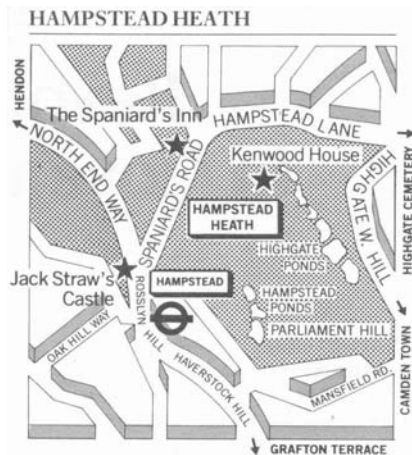
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