George Eliot and conservatism. Part 2

George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, the Positivists, and Karl Marx

by

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In his classic study of that phase of the English labour movement he terms *Before the Socialists*, Royden Harrison focuses on the period 1861 – 1881, “*two decades which separated the last of the Chartists from the first of the modern socialists*”, and which, we might add, coincide quite closely with the years of George Eliot’s (GE) life as a literary celebrity. To establish GE’s coordinates on the political landscape of my chosen six-year span of 1864 - 72, I want to look at her relationships to key movements, events and persons, and use them to provide further evidence that she was not “*thoroughly conservative*” (see Part 1), and also to plot her positions in the range of opinion which stretched leftwards from the starting point of liberalism to Marx.

Dr. Karl Marx, as he was often called at the time, is, I believe, an appropriate choice as point of reference both because his position on the left edge of the political spectrum is practically indisputable, and also because the question of possible contact between GE and Marx clearly interests GE scholars in its own right. Gordon Haight, Frederick Karl, Rosemary Ashton, Nancy Henry and Kathleen McCormack all mention Marx in their biographical studies of GE. The most frequently mentioned link between Marx and GE is John Chapman’s friend Andrew Johnson, who shared friends with Marx and helped Marx with financial technicalities. This somewhat tenuous link is used to float the possibility that Marx and GE may have met at John Chapman’s house 142 Strand in the early 1850s and even that GE came into contact with Marx’s ideas in the written form of *The Communist Manifesto,* which was published in German in 1848 and translated into English in 1850. Even their paths did cross, it is so unlikely that GE had any acquaintance with the *Communist Manifesto* that we can rule out the possibility failing evidence to the contrary, of which none at the moment exists. Eric Hobsbawm’s masterly book *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism* includes an account of the publication history of *the Communist Manifesto* in various languages, and on the basis of such authority there is no reason to suppose that GE came into contact with either the German or English version, which immediately after its appearance *sank without trace.* (Hobsbawm, p. 103).

My opinion is that they probably never met, although they lived quite close to each other for some years, the Leweses in St John’s Wood and the Marx family in Kensal Green, but that in itself tells us nothing about any contact they may have had.

However, we know for sure that Marx knew of George Eliot and that he had read at least one of her novels – *Felix Holt the Radical*. In *Karl Marx and World Literature,* S. S. Prawer quotes a letter from Marx to his daughter Jenny in which he makes good-natured fun of a friend of the family, J. R. Dakyns, a geologist, whose red hair reminded Marx of GE’s hero:

Well our friend Dakyns is a sort of Felix Holt, less the affectation of that man, and plus the knowledge. I could of course not forbear making a little fun of him and warning him to fight shy of any meeting with Mrs. Eliot who would at once make literary property out of him.

Letter from Marx to daughter Jenny, 10th June 1869, quoted in *Karl Marx, a Life*, Francis Wheen,New York, 2000. P. 189)

Marian Comyn (née Skinner), a friend Eleanor Marx knew from her acting, also testifies to the love of contemporary fiction in the Marx home: “*And I remember a discussion at luncheon on Victorian authors, and the admiration expressed by the whole family for Charlotte and Emily Bronte, both of whom they placed far above George Eliot.*”

(*Karl Marx, Interviews and Recollections*, ed. David McClellan, London and Basingstoke, 1981) p. 162

It’s a fairly safe bet that *Felix Holt the Radical* was not the only GE novel known to the widely-read Marx family, who loved contemporary English fiction.

George Henry Lewes was better known to Marx than GE was. We can be reasonably sure that Marx would have read Lewes’s *A Life of Goethe* and his *Biographical History of Philosophy,* and we know for certain that daughter Jenny Marx read Lewes’s book *Mr Darwin’s Hypothesis*, from which she wrote extracts in her notebooks (Worobjowa, Olga and Sinelnikowa, Irma, German translation from Russian, *Die Töchter von Marx,* Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1984 p. 59).

Marx’s knowledge of Lewes as journalist and editor is also documented. In 1868 Marx had Engels write a review of the German edition of *Das Kapital Vol. 1*, in the hope that this would create interest for an English translation. With the help of the Positivist Prof E. S. Beesly, co-prioretor of the *Fortnightly Review* and a friend of both Marx and the Leweses, they hoped the *Fortnightly,* of which Lewes had been the chief editor until the end of 1866, would publish the review. In preparation of the submission, Marx assumed wrongly that Lewes had a financial interest in the *FR* and described him as the *Goethe Man* and a *half Comtist*. Beesly did what he could to help get Engels’s review into print but it was eventually turned down as it was thought to be “*too dry*” for the *FR* readership. The incident shows how very familiar Marx was with Lewes’s role in journalism and in the book trade, even though he had a few details wrong. (ref. Googlebooks online edition of the Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe – MEGA, Berlin 1993)

On the other hand, there is no known mention of Marx either by GE or by GHL. We do, however, have very good evidence that they were by 1870 at the latest familiar with the name Dr. Karl Marx and that they knew something of his role in the International Working Men’s Association (IWMA), precursor of what came to be known as the International.

The clearest evidence that George Eliot and George Henry Lewes knew of Karl Marx in 1870 is provided by Matilda Betham-Edwards, a novelist and travel writer. In late December of 1870, Betham-Edwards spent time together with GE and GHL at the holiday home of their common friend, Barbara Bodichon, on the Isle of Wight. (The following crucial information on the meeting of Betham-Edwards with Marx and how she reported on this to the Leweses at Bodichon’s holiday home was generously passed on to me by K. K. Collins who encountered it while researching his excellent and fascinating book *George Eliot, Interviews and Recollection.)*

Firstly, Matilda Betham-Edwards recounts her attendance at a meeting of the Council of the International Working Men’s Association:

*At the time I write of (1867-70-1) the International Working Man's Association held its sittings in High Holborn under the presidency of Dr Karl Marx. As the author of "Das Kapitel" (sic) may now be pronounced a historic personage, these recollections do not call for apology.  
Strange it was to quit the world of fashion and pleasure for the purlieus of penury, toil, and clubs of political exiles!*

*At eight o'clock on a summer evening the Kensington High Street showed one unbroken stream and counter-stream of glittering equipages and gay toilettes, all West-End London bound being to theatres, dinners, and entertainments manifold.*

*As one journeyed eastward it was not so. Lurid November was more in harmony with the surroundings here! Instead of growing more animated the great high road of Holborn main artery of industrial London became quieter and less peopled.*

*We stopped at a small shop, of which shutters, front and side door were all shut, the latter being opened by a young foreign mechanic in working dress. The council assembled immediately the workshop closed, so that members had no time to change their clothes. Following our conductor we climbed a dark, narrow staircase, and were ushered into a small, dingy, but well lighted room, the council chamber of redoubtable International Working Man's Association.\* Round the table sat perhaps a score of workingmen, most of them foreigners, German, French,*

*\* The public was not admitted to these sittings. My companion of the other sex was a member and prominent supporter of the movement.*

*Spanish, Italian, with two or three Englishmen. Intellectually the types were good, and much as one might differ from the rest, all showed the same quiet determination and fixity of purpose. The average physique was poor. All looked more or less worn out with the day's labour, whilst some were terribly attenuated and sallow.*

*My attention was naturally concentrated on the figure of the President, a figure no more attractive than that of Charles Bradlaugh, but fully as rememberable. The portly, commanding frame, the powerful head with its shock of raven black hair, the imperturbable features, and slow, measured speech, once seen and heard could never be forgotten. Yet, in spite of the colossal intellect and iron purpose here embodied, neither in Karl Marx's physiognomy nor in Charles Bradlaugh's did I read a certain inexorableness characteristic of a quite different personage to be portrayed later. I should say that the predominating mental trait of the German social reformer was that Teutonic, speculative dreaminess so often allied in Germany with reasoning power of the highest order.*

*The proceedings were not at all lively. One by one several members stood up, and after reading a report laid propositions before the council. Occasionally the street bell tinkled, when the secretary would go down and admit a tardy member. Citizen after citizen—thus each speaker was called—said what he had to say, then reseated himself. Soon after ten o'clock the meeting broke up, the gloomy little council chamber was left to darkness and solitude.*  
(quoted from Rees, Joan *Matilda Betham-Edwards: Novelist, Travel Writer and Francophile*, 2nd ed. (Hastings: Hastings Press, 2007), p. 38.)

Betham-Edwards’s biographer, Joan Rees, dates this meeting in High Holborn in 1868, which makes sense although she provides no evidence for the date. After checking a number of details, I am as certain as possible that the account of the meeting is truthfully told,

Betham-Edwards tells how she provided Barbara Bodichon, GE and GHL during the Isle of Wight stay with a tantalisingly short account of the meeting of the IWMA :

*It happened that a Socialist friend, Mr. Cowell-Stepney by name, had lately escorted me to a sitting of the International, presided over by Dr. Karl Marx, the founder of International Socialism, who more than any other man has influenced the Labour movement throughout the civilised world.  Now this sort of experience was quite out of Mr. and Mrs. Lewes's way.  Their world was the world of the intellectual élite, not of "the man in the street," the hewers of wood and the drawers of water.  So to the least little particular I could give, all paid the utmost attention.*

* Cowell-Stepney was a member of the General Council of the International, and Marx mentions him in a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of 11th February 1869:  
  *The treasurer of our General Council, Cowell-Stepney* [*[3]*](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1869/letters/69_02_11.htm) *– a very rich and distinguished man, but wholly, if in somewhat foolish fashion, devoted to the workers’ cause – enquired of a friend in Bonn about literature (German) dealing with the labour question and socialism.*
* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1869/letters/69_02_11.htm>

In a nut-shell, Betham-Edwards’s account of her encounter with Marx shows there is no reasonable doubt that GE and GHL knew of Marx by the end of 1870 at the latest.

There is further good reason to believe that the name Marx would have been familiar to at least one of the Leweses a month or so before their Christmas trip to Ryde. In *Farewell Causerie*, written by Lewes for the final edition under his editorship of the *Fortnightly Review,*Lewes reported on first Congress of *International Working Men’s Association* (IWMA or International), which took place in 1866 in Geneva. I first became aware of this from Rosemary Ashton’s biography of Lewes (*G. H. Lewes* *an Unconventional Victorian*, London 2000) and her selection of GHL’s essays (*Versatile Victorian*, Bristol Classic Press, 1992). After listings all possible claims to what might qualify as the most significant event of 1866, Lewes writes:

*These are, some of them at least, events of importance, but the philosophic student will probably see far more significance in an event which was neither imposing in outward aspect, nor suggestive in its prophecies to the ordinary mind; that event is the Congress of Workmen at Geneva.*

After pointing out correctly that the British press had ignored this event, he provides a very short and not very coherent summary of what he says were the resolutions of the Congress.

*The English plan is nothing less than making strikes universal; the French plan is nothing less than that of removing Industry from its present condition of Capital and Labour, and substituting universal cooperation.*

*The Fortnightly Review,* December 1866 Vol. VI pp. 891 – 2 online at books.googlebooks.de

It is true that the English delegation placed great stress on the sole of the trades unions in political struggle, but there is little in results of the Congress to support Lewes’s generalisation. Citing two French magazines (*Revue Contemporaine* and *Revue des Deux Mondes*) as his sources, he gives some idea of the growth of the IWMA and its involvement in *the long struggle between Capital and Labour, which is the deepest problem of our time*. Important here, however, is that Lewes had been interested in the International Working Men’s Association, which, though not originally his brainchild, had been very much under the guidance of Marx since its founding in the great meetings in St Martin’s Hallin late September 1864. At that meeting Marx was on the stage but didn’t speak to the very large audience. E. S. Beesly, by 1866 a friend of the Leweses and a colleague of GHL, was the Chairman and gave the opening speech. This interest in the IWMA and his personal acquaintance with Beesly increase the likelihood that GHL and consequently GE had heard of Marx and something of his role in the British and international labour movements as early as the mid 1860s.

In 1870 Prof Edward Spencer Beesly, whom I have mentioned before as a good friend of both the Leweses and of Karl Marx, offered the latter his cooperation in any way Marx thought might be useful for their shared political aims. Marx took up the offer and asked Beesly, who enjoyed a position of authority and respect as historian and political journalist, to write a history of the International Working Men’s Association for the *Fortnightly Review,* of which Lewes was no longer editor but which, it is reasonable to suppose, was a part of his regular reading material on current affairs. Marx provided Beesly with almost all the material he needed for the article and checked the proofs for accuracy before they went to print.

Beesly wrote the article, an excellent account of the International’s development and activities, which was published in the November 1870 issue of the *Fortnightly Review*, just a month or so before the Leweses left for Christmas on the Isle of Wight. We do not know for sure if either of them read the article, though given their connection with both Beesly and the *Fortnightly Review*, as well as Lewes’s interest in the International which existed in 1866 and possibly earlier, it is more than likely. Had they done so they would have encountered this paragraph:

*To no one is the success of the association* (the International Working Men’s Association) *so much due as to Dr. Karl Marx, who, in his acquaintance with the history and statistics of the industrial movement in all parts of Europe, is, I would imagine, without a rival. I am largely indebted to him for the information contained in this article.*

*Fortnightly Review*, November 1870 pp. 529 – 530 (online at book.googlebooks.de)

Marx and Beesly had been brought together again in 1870 by their interest in the Franc-Prussian War. The outbreak of the war also meant that Betham-Edwards’s meeting with the Leweses at Ryde in late December 1870 and her account of her meeting with Karl Marx (see above) could hardly have happened at a more opportune moment. The Franco-Prussian War, a terrible if brief military conflict between two countries that were very dear to the Leweses, started in July 1870, and before the end of the year Paris was under siege. At the outbreak of the war, France was seen as the aggressor, attacking Germany to prevent German unification and the consequent economic strength. However, after the battle of Sedan in early September at which the German army routed and humiliated the French, even taking Emperor Louis Napoleon prisoner, public opinion in Britain changed. As both Marx and Beesly had feared, after achieving military dominance, Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor of Germany, changed the defensive character of the war by annexing Alsace Lorraine and demanding astronomical sums in compensation from the French government.

GE and GHL were also intensely interested in the war, talking and thinking about it for hours and reading at least two newspapers (*The Times and The Daily News*) a day for information. As it is widely believed that GE generally avoided the daily press, it is worth quoting her at length to show that this was not the case during the war of 1870, the subsequent siege of Paris, and then the declaration of the Paris Commune:

12th August 1870, letter to Sara Hennell: “*We are excited even among the still woods and fields by the vicissitudes of the War, and are chiefly concerned that cannot succeed in getting the day’s ”Times“. We have entered into the period which will be marked in future historical charts as “The Period of German Ascendancy.” But how saddening to think of the iniquities that the great harvest moon is looking down on! I am less grieved for the bloodshed than for the hateful trust in lies which is continually disclosed.”*

25th August 1870, letter to Barbara Bodichon (who was at this time French by marriage), almost exclusively about the War: “*I am very sorry for the sufferings of the French nation, but I think these sufferings are better for the moral welfare than victory would have been. The war has been brought down on them by an iniquitous government .. .*

In this letter GE’s sympathy with Germany is clear, despite Barbara’s close personal association with France.

12th September 1870, letter to Cara Bray: *“We think of hardly anything but the War, and spend a great portion of our day reading about it .The deplorable demoralization of the French army (*Sedan fell on 1s September*) and people divides one’s sorrows with the horrible carnage. And every day now one shudders in expectation of what may happen in Paris: the people flying at each other’s throats will be worse than the enemy’s shells.”*

This letter was written after the fall of Sedan, and it is true that by mid September the fate of Paris was becoming the crucial issue. GE’s clarity on this point suggests that her reading was not confined to the two newspapers already mentioned.

14th September 1870, letter to Emanuel Deutsch: “*Several hours are filled for us by reading and talk about the War, and for a still longer time we think and dream of it. ... One can only hope that this is not the mere beginning of sorrows.”*

15th September 1870, letter to Mrs. Mark Pattison: “*But the painful, too engrossing thoughts raised by the War urge me to counteracting thoughts of all friendly bonds. ... Probably like us you spend a good deal of the day in reading the papers and discussing events contained in the telegrams and correspondence. I read through two daily newspapers, The Times and the Daily News – an excess of journal reading that I was never drawn into before.”*

10th October 1870, letter to Barbara Bodichon: *“O what a lovely autumn is shining on those hideous guns which are being hauled along to Paris!”*

18th October 1870, letter to Oscar Browning:*”Thoughts about the war are not sanitary and they urge themselves through every other subject. No! I do not agree with our friend Prof. Beesly, and in general pray do not infer my opinions from those of my friends. I pity deeply the suffering of the French people, but I condemn those who are acting for them and determining their fate. Our sympathies were entirely with the Germans in the beginning of the War, but I cannot help admitting to myself that if they had been in a higher moral condition – I mean the whole of the nation and its government – the War might not have reached this hideous stage.”*

The strongly worded denial that she agrees with Beesly is very interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it shows her resentment at the apparent suggestion that she agreed with someone on the grounds of mere friendship, an inference that obviously stung her. Oscar Browning and GE were probably referring to Beesly’s passionate pamphlet *A Word for France, Addressed to the Workmen of London*, which appeared at the beginning of September 1870, a week or so before the publication of Marx’s *First Address of the General Council of the IWMA on the Franco-Prussian War*, with which it shared striking similarities as well as major differences. It is little wonder that GE disagreed with Beesly, as his pamphlet was written very much from a Positivist point of view, was extremely Francophile, and even pleaded for an intervention on the part of Britain and other European countries in support of France, something that neither GE nor Marx would have agreed with. The other major demand, recognition of the newly declared Republic, certainly found the support of Marx and possibly of GE. It is at this point that we start wondering if GE’s reading extended to Marx’s publications on the war and later on the Commune. On the strength of his pamphlets written on behalf of the IWMA, Marx had, by June 1871, emerged from the obscurity of his London exile to achieve international fame or infamy, depending on one’s point of view. I will pay greater attention this below.

GE Journal 2nd December: *“I am experimenting in a story, which I began without any very serious intention of carrying it out lengthily ... .”* This story eventually became *Middlemarch.*

2nd December 1870, letter to Mrs. Richard Congreve, wife of the Positivist: “*I have been reading aloud to Mr. Lewes this evening Mr. Harrison’s article on Bismarckism, which made me cry – it is in some parts movingly eloquent.”*

Frederic Harrison was the other leading Positivist with whom the Leweses had close and regular contact – a few years earlier he had advised GE at great length on the legal niceties involved in *Felix Holt the Radical.* In the article, which was later published in the F*ortnightly Review* on 1st December under title of *Bismarckism or the Policy of Blood and Iron*, Frederic Harrison attacked Prussian militarism and called for the recognition of the French Republic, declared after the fall of Louis Napoleon. GE’s comments provide firm evidence that her reading on the war was not confined to the daily press.

GE Journal 31st December 1870 (on return from the Isle of Wight): *“ ... the papers tell us of still harder weather about Paris where our fellow-men are suffering and inflicting horrors. Am I doing anything that will add the weight of a sandgrain against the persistence of such evil?*

*Here is the last day of 1870. I have written only 100 pages – good printed pages – of a story I began about the opening of November, and at present mean to call “Miss Brook”. ...*

*In my private lot I am unspeakably happy, loving and beloved. But I am doing little for others.”*

This entry and the other references above to what became *Middlemarch* are interesting because they show GE’s frame of mind while planning and writing *Middlemarch* and at the same time worrying about the war in France, which by now had become a civil war, chiding herself for her inability to make a difference to the world at large.

2nd January 1871, letter to Sara Hennell: “ *... this hellish war ... In the beginning I could feel entirely with the Germans, and could say of that calamity called “victory” – “I am glad.” But now I can be glad of nothing. No people can carry on a long fierce war without being brutalized by it, more or less, and it pains me that the educated voices have not a higher moral tone about national and international duties and prospects. But like everyone else, I feel that the war is too much with me ... .”*

On 24th January 1871 GE wrote to her friend Edward Bruce Hamley, congratulating him on his letter to *The Times* on *The Conduct of the War.*

On 27th January 1871 she wrote to Francois D’Albert-Durade, expressing sorrow for the suffering and worries for those caught up in the war. On the 25th April she wrote to him again, again expressing sympathy for the French people. In a letter to Frederic Harrison of 7th May 1871 she makes no mention of the Paris Commune, which fell at the end of May ending the siege of Paris and with ensuing atrocities carried out by French troops on the resistant population of Paris. In May, discussions began with Blackwood about the publication of *Middlemarch*. On 17th June 1871 she writes to Barbara Bodichon, expressing concern about the safety of acquaintances in France. *“How about dear Madame Mohl and her husband? I have been wondering through all the horrors whether M. Mohl had returned to Paris ... “* . With his usual diligence Haight informs us in a footnote that “*GE had seen Mary Mohl at the Viadots’ in London, 15th April 1871. Julius Mohl had been with her in England during the war, but returned 13 February 1871 to Paris, where he remained during the Commune.*”

Late June 1871, letter to Frau Karl von Siebold: “*... I assure you that the effort to help and comfort your wounded country-men is one in which we gladly join now, as we did at the beginning of the War. .. ..*

*The accounts we read of Paris are saddening for the whole world. The destruction there is the world’s loss, and the calamities of the unhappy French nation seem to be constantly opening fresh vistas.*

*I think you misconceive the state of English minds generally at the opening of the War. So far as our observation went, English sympathy was mainly on the German side. It was not till after the battle of Sedan that there was any widespread feeling on behalf of the French.”*

It is also interesting that Haight provides an explanatory footnote to GE’s words *The destruction there is the world’s loss, ....*  He explains: *The Communist insurrection in May had destroyed the Tuileries.* I think this footnote, arbitrary and historically crude as it is, reveals something about Haight’s personal attitude, some might say *conservatism.* There was enormous destruction going in Paris, including shelling of the besieged city by French troops. As a purely military measure, the Communards did burn down the Tuileries Palace but there is no reason to suppose that GE only had this in mind when she wrote of *destruction.*

We know that the Leweses donated to a relief fund for both French and German victims of the war. On the other hand, after the fall of the Commune at the end of May 1871, Parisians fled to London to escape both the terrible recriminations inflicted by the new French government and as well as prosecution on charges which carried the death penalty. The press was unanimous in its condemnation of the Commune, but Marx and some Positivists defended it, and after it fell were extremely active in housing and protecting these fugitives (to its great credit the British government refused requests from the French government to extradite these fugitives on the grounds they had committed no crime according to British law). As far as we know, the Leweses did not get involved with this help. Given GE’s repeated wish to do something useful, we can wonder why she refrained from getting involved in the humanitarian aid for the refugees of the Commune. Perhaps she or Lewes feared that publicity deriving from such a partisan involvement in a radical cause would damage the sales of the forthcoming book. In Part 1 I argued along similar lines to explain the appearance of the *Address to Workingmen by Felix Holt* in January 1868.

The correspondence of these months in the second half of 1870 and the first half of 1871 demonstrates that GE’s preoccupation with the Franco-Prussian War exceeds in intensity her interest in any other political event, whether in the UK or abroad. The war affected her at various levels – personal contact with people directly involved, emotional distress at the suffering, the horror of seeing two countries whose cultures she greatly admired at war with each other, and the intense craving to know and understand what was really happening. On the final point, she mentions frequently reading the items in *The Times* and in *The Daily News*, as well as discussing and thinking about the events in France and Paris. She says that reading about the war sometimes occupied several hours a day, which would mean that she read more than was printed in the two newspapers she read as often as possible. We know she read and was very moved by Frederic Harrison’s article in the *Fortnightly* on Bismarckism, but what else might she have read and would any of that reading have brought her into contact with the name and the ideas of Karl Marx?

Beesly and Harrison were amongst the most prominent and prolific writers and public speakers on the war. After the fear that Bismarck would use an initially defensive war as an opportunity to expand Prussian or German territory at the expense of France became a reality, Beesly and Harrison went extremely close to demanding that Britain should intervene militarily on the side of France – their Positivist mentor Congreve actually did demand this. Beesly’s and Harrison’s main demands were the recognition of the Republic that was proclaimed after the collapse of Emperor Louis Napoleon’s government. A republican French government was formed which made peace with Bismarck, and after months of siege, parts of Paris were taken over by a popular uprising and the Paris Commune, a self-governing Paris under popular control, was established from the middle of March 1871, The new French government, with Bismarck’s help, set about putting down this uprising. When Beesly and Harrison gave their public support to the Paris Commune, seen by many in Britain as a communist revolution, they were relentlessly attacked by the press, particularly by *The Times*, which didn’t stop them writing letters to the mainstream press to put their views on the Commune. To put it in perspective, we can say that two of the Lewes’s friends and regular visitors were amongst the most prominent defenders of what the Establishment saw as a revolution of the most extreme form in Paris, and which threatened to spread to other major French cities. This placed the two Positivists on the very fringe of the political spectrum, alongside Karl Marx and some members of the International Working Men’s Association. It was over the IWMA’s support for the Commune that led to leading trade unionists like Odger leaving IWMA, where they had been on the General Council. Attitudes to the Commune were a kind of political watershed, with only the Positivists and the IWMA expressing explicit support.

The controversy over the Commune also led to Marx’s name appearing frequently in the mainstream press, something the Leweses were as good as certain to have read. Marx wrote three Addresses on the subject of the war on behalf of the General Council of the IWMA, the first on 23rd July 1870, only four days after the outbreak of the war, the second on 9th September 1870, and the third and longest on 30th May, 1871. Although undersigned by all the members of the General Council, it was widely known that Marx had written the Addresses, something he confirmed in a public statement. Without going into the addresses in detail, we can say that they by and large covered the three phases of events; the aggressive war started by France; then the German victory at Sedan which saw the capture of the French Emperor, and the subsequent expansionist continuation of the war by Bismarck and the establishment of the new French Republic; and thirdly the siege of Paris, the establishment and fall of the three months of the Paris Commune, followed by the terrible retribution inflicted by the French troops. It was the third phase which split the Positivists and the remaining members of the IWMA in London from the mainstream press and public opinion, both conservative and liberal, and from much of the labour movement. At the end of the third address (30th May 1871) the names of the trade unionist leaders, who had until then been members of the IWMA General Council, are conspicuous by their absence. The three Addresses are now known as *The Civil War* in France and in fact their publication made Marx a very well-known figure, both because the pamphlets were widely distributed and read, and because they involved Marx in controversies covered by *The Times* and other main newspapers.

Let’s first look at the circulation of the three Addresses. The standard Soviet biography of Marx provides a useful summary:

*The revolutionary ... wing of the International* (i. e. the members who didn’t leave over the issue of the Commune) *saw The Civil War* (here, the third address) *in France as its programme document and did its utmost to circulate it. The first English edition of 1,000 copies appeared on June 3th(1871), followed by another 2,000 copies at the end of June, and a third in August. ... The English bourgeoisie failed to kill it by a conspiracy of silence. Already by mid-June, the bourgeois newspapers began to carry extracts from Marx’s work supplied with hostile comments, or leaders containing biased attacks against the International. .... Marx and Engels took up the challenge issued by the bourgeois press. In a short time they wrote more than twenty letters, statements and refutations to the editors of the various newspapers, most on behalf of the General Council. These were hoping to use the traditions of the bourgeois press which prescribed the publication of all letters to the editor. However ... only a few of these statements were printed in The Times, The Daily News and other newspapers.*

*Karl Marx, a Biography* Progress Publishers Moscow1973 p. 522

In his biography of Marx, the leading British Marx scholar David McClellan writes of the first Address, dated 23rd July, 1870:

The General Council could have no material influence on the course of events but the Address was very well received in Britain. John Stuart Mill sent a message of congratulation to the General Council, even Morely expressed his approval, and the Peace Society (*closely associated with Mill)* financed a print order of 30,000 copies.

(*Karl Marx, a Biography,* David Mclellan palgrave macmillan 2006. P.364

On the later *Civil War* in France, the third Address dated 30th May, 1871, and by far the longest and most significant of the three Addresses, Mclellan writes:

The Civil War in France (the title given to the Address) was the most brilliant of Marx’s polemics, and had an immediate success unknown to any of the previous pronouncements of the General Council. It ran through three editions in two months, sold 8,000 copies in the second edition and was translated into most European languages.

(Mclellan, p. 372)

I think it important to add that the sales of this pamphlet were all the more significant because the political stand point it propagated was a very unpopular one, supported in London by only the IWMA and the Positivists. Most progressively minded people, such as Mill and probably the Leweses, would have generally agreed with Marx, albeit for different reasons, on the first two Addresses but would not have shared the support for the Commune. This did not of course mean that they would not want to read what he had to say. Readers will make up their own minds as to whether the Leweses were likely to have read any of the three Addresses, which they could certainly easily have acquired had they wished to do so.

The fiercest of the controversies flared up after in May 1871 Beesly had translated and published as a pamphlet an article written in April by a French Positivist, probably Dr. Robinet (see English Defence of the Commune p. 107), who was taking part in the Commune as a doctor. The pamphlet entitled *Political Notes on the Situation in France and Paris by a French Positivist* (reprinted in *The English Defence of the Commune*, pp. 109 – 117). In it the writer praises and probably overestimates the role of the members of the International Working Men’s Association. Although he distances himself from the philosophy of the IWMA, Dr Robinet, obviously a courageous and honest man trying his best to inform his English Positivist friends of the real situation in the Commune, praised the integrity of those members of the French section of the IWMA taking part in the Commune. This did not escape the attention of Marx, who, towards the end of the third and final *Address of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association* stitched together a quotation from the *Political Notes.* He writes;

An honourable French writer, completely foreign to our Association, speaks as follows:

“The members of the Central Committee of the National Guard, as well as the greater part of the members of the Commune, are the most active, intelligent, and energetic minds of the International Working Men’s Association ... men, who are thoroughly honest, sincere, intelligent, devoted, pure, and fanatical in the *good* sense of the word.”

(*Civil War in France: The Paris Commune, International Publishers, New York* p. 81)

While showing his skills in political agitation, Marx does not falsify what the French Positivist had written. *The Times* picked up on this quotation, and implies that the Positivist pamphlet and the Address of the General Council are sides of a coin. *The Notes are quoted with the entire approval of the Council of the International Association,* *The Times* wrote, in an attempt to implicate Beesly in a kid of collusion with the IWMA.Given the ferocity of the campaign waged against the Commune and the alleged role of the IWMA in it, it is no surprise that Beesly responded with a letter published in *The Times* on 20th June. Without joining in the vilification of the IWMA, Beesly points out with factual correctness that the author of the pamphlet praises the integrity of the communards but condemns their aims. He also ends his letter by stating categorically; “*I will only add that, as Positivism and Communism are irreconcilably opposed on the most essential questions, no good can be served by compounding them.”* The next day a long leader appeared in *The Times*, clearly written by a senior and well informed member of staff, which answered Beesly and took the welcome opportunity to attack the Commune, which had fallen at the end of May. Although now that the facts are known, the allegations of *organized terrorism* and *violence made by The Time*  have a grim irony (it is estimated that after the fall of the Commune around 60,000 citizens of Paris of all ages and both genders were indiscriminately slaughtered by the French government troops), the leader was powerfully argued and Beesly wisely let it go.

I have given so much space to this controversy because it seems very likely to me that it was followed by GE and GHL. Beesly, a friend of the Leweses, had been attacked by *The Times*; he then had a letter in response published, and then *The Times* printed a leader dedicated to renouncing his views and compounding them with those of the dreaded IWMA. It is hardly likely that the Leweses would have been unaware of this public drama and its main players. We might add that, whatever one thinks of his politics, it speaks for Beesly’s commitment that he did not let *The Times* pressure him into dissociating himself from Marx, although he also saw Positivism and communism as at some point of departure diametrically opposed to each other,

In another, earlier, very long and at times blood-curdling report on the situation in Paris in *The Times*, 16th March 1871, Marx is mentioned twice by name, once in connection with a letter he was supposed to have written to the working men of Paris, criticizing them for disorganizing labour and preventing employment. In *The Times* of March 18th a letter from Marx was printed in which he pointed out that the letter he was supposed to have written was a forgery, and *The Times* of 22nd March reported his correction, saying: “*M. Marx says this statement has evidently been taken from the Paris Journal of 14th March, where also the publication in full of the pretended letter is promised and that the Paris Journal of 19th March contains a letter dated London, February 23, 1871, purporting to be signed by him (*Marx), *the contents of which agree with the statement of our correspondent, but which letter M. Marx declares is from beginning to end a forgery.*” *The Times*, March 22 Issue 27017.

In an article in the *Fortnightly Review* Fredric Harrison drew further attention to this falsification:

A large portion of the boulevard journalism is devoted to simple forgeries. A case in point is the long letter of M. Thiers to the Pope, now officially asserted to be a fabrication. Another is letter pretending to be written by Dr. Karl Marx. This now known to be a forgery. The same is the case with various proclamations and addresses of the *Internationale* (sic), letters and orders of leading Communists, and professed statements of theirs. Forgeries all – wilful, idle lies, which goaded the fury of the public, and earned for the writer a few francs.

Originally printed in the *Fortnightly Review*, August 1871 under the title *The Fall of the Commune*, and reprinted in *The English Defence of the Commune (1871)* edited and introduced by Royden Harrison, London 1971: pp. 201 – 238.

Under News in Brief *The Times* of June 9, 1871 (issue 27085) carried a somewhat lurid report about the arrest of “*a number of women known to have been in intimate relations with leading members of the Commune*” and letters found at the home of one of the women. *“One of these letters referred to a remittance from “the friends and brothers” of Berlin of a sum of 600,00 F payable at St. Denis. This fact was held to justify a current report from Paris that M. Jules Favre had requested the German Chancellor* (Bismarck) *to institute a strict inquiry into the connexion of Karl Marx and other members of the International with recent fearful events in Paris.*

Jules Favre was a leading member of the new Republican Government who had very incompetently led the peace negotiations with Bismarck, and Marx had attacked him both personally and politically in his *Civil War in France*. It is indicative of Marx’s international status that his name is used in connection with two leading European politicians.

Later, on Friday October 27 1871, *The Times* printed another article which would have promoted Marx’s name, a lengthy article under the heading: *The International Working Men’s Association*. My guess is that the article was written by the member of the General Council and then still close friend of Marx, J. G. Eccarius, who did occasionally write for *The Times,* at least once even providing a short factual report of a meeting of the General Council of the IWMA! In any case, the article on the origins and growth of the IWMA is an excellent account which mentions Marx and Engels several by name and quotes at length from the *Communist Manifesto* and from the *Inaugural Address* written for the IWMA by Marx in1864 and accredited to him in the article. The article’s mention of the founding meeting at St. Martin’s hall on September 28th 1864 also mentions the presence of Marx, who sat on stage but did not speak, and of Beesly, who delivered the address from the Chair.

My point is, therefore, that like most politically-interested people in London in 1871 GE and GHL would almost certainly have had a clear notion of who Karl Marx was. By 1875 he was so well known that Frederic Harrison did not even need to name him but ironically referred to Marx as the *great German Lawgiver.* In the article *Carlyle and Comte on Government,* published in 1875, (Order and Progress pp. 31 – 43), Harrison is keen to dissociate Comte from the *communist, subversive and terrorist* (p. 39)International, showing that within four years Marx had become politically out of bounds even for Harrison, though Beesly, while making no bones about how strongly they disagreed, never ceased to admire Marx and always spoke positively of him. In 1884, soon after Marx’s death, Beesly wrote: *Dr. Marx and I were always good friends; to the end of his life I had a great esteem and regard for him, and I am sure he considered me a well-meaning person ...*. But more importantly here is that by 1875, Marx’s reputation could not be ignored by anyone interested in current affairs and social theory, and that certainly included the Leweses.

I have tried to present the evidence for my argumentation here as fairly as possible, distinguishing between the various levels of certainty and leaving the reader to decide on how convincing my conclusions or suggestions are.

Bob Muscutt