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**Basic biographical data**

Name:	Isaac Deutscher
Other names (by-names, pseud. etc.):	Josef Bren ; (Major) Adam Grabiec ; Jan Grzela ; A. Krakowski ; D. Martens ; Ignacy Niemczycki ; Peregrine ; 'The Editors' ; 'A special correspondent'
Date and place of birth:	April 3, 1907, Chrzanów (Austria-Hungary)
Date and place of death:	August 19, 1967, Rome (Italy)
Nationality:	Austrian, Polish, British
Occupations, careers, etc.:	Journalist, writer, editor, lecturer, historian, political activist
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1932 - 1939

Biographical sketch**General assessment and summary**

Isaac Deutscher was an outstanding Marxist historian, essayist, journalist, self-educated intellectual and distinguished scholar, a life-long internationalist, and perhaps quite a typical 'non-Jewish Jew'.¹ Last not least his tremendous pioneering work – the three-volume biography of Leon Trotsky – , his countless publications, radio contributions and public speeches ensured, that the heritage of revolutionary Marxism and the reputation of Trotsky did not vanish into oblivion but was snatched from being besmirched; hence, it was Isaac Deutscher who threw a bridge between non-Stalinist pre-War Marxism and the New Left arising in the early Sixties. However, Deutscher mostly fell between two stools: for the Moscow-oriented communists, he was a dangerous and unpleasant renegade whereas for many conservatives and liberals, he was a crypto-communist or at least a tool of the Kremlin; and for a quite considerable number of 'orthodox' Trotskyists, representing different factions and tendencies within the international Trotskyist community, he became a target of some vitriolic and one-sided criticism, culminating in the verdict that he was a Stalinist or at least a lackey of Stalinism. Perhaps it

1) This term "denotes a type of Jew who adopts a universal outlook in response to the condition of Jewish marginality, and feels compelled to discard Jewish identity in order to achieve revolutionary goals. Isaac Deutscher originated the term and epitomizes the archetype." [Muraskin, Bennett: Isaac Deutscher (1907-1967), in: *Outlook / Canadian Jewish Outlook Society*, 2001 (Jan./Febr.)]. See also Clausen, Detlev: Entréebillet Kommunismus : eine Erinnerung an Isaac Deutscher, in: *Babylon : Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart*, 22.2007, pp. 87-97.

is correct to characterize him as a heretic – but not a renegade – in a way a quadruple heretic: one who first renounced orthodox Judaism and Zionism, then bourgeois Weltanschauung, then Stalinist communism and eventually 'orthodox' Trotskyism. A never wavering humanist and a faithful Marxist to the end, Deutscher, in the 1950s and 1960s (and, of course, beyond), had a considerable intellectual influence on many people who could associate neither with Western apologists of Cold War nor with Stalinism and reformism; and it is not unlikely that more people – particularly from middle class milieu – became Trotskyists or at least sympathizers of Trotskyism rather by the work of Isaac Deutscher than by the action of those Trotskyists (or, alleged Trotskyists, if you like) who used to attack him so vigorously².

Our biographical sketch is based on the material listed in the final paragraphs of the Selected bibliography section (in [part 2](#) of this bio-bibliographical sketch).

Family

Isaac Deutscher was born on April 3, 1907 in Chrzanów, near Kraków [Cracow], Poland³, as the eldest son of Jacob Kopel Deutscher⁴, a printer and publisher, and his (second) wife, Gustawa Deutscher (b. Jolles). In June 1947, Isaac Deutscher married his companion Tamara Lebenhaft (1913-1990)⁵, a teacher, journalist and literary critic of Jewish-Polish origin who had left Poland first for Belgium and then for Britain. In May 1949 the Deutschers became British citizens; the couple got a son, Martin Charles (1950-2014).

Childhood and youth — first 'heresy'

The boy, who proved as highly gifted and was equipped with an incredible memory and faculty for learning, was raised and educated by his orthodox parents in accordance with Jewish traditions. Considered a sort of infant prodigy and destined to become a Talmudic scholar one day, he first attended a local Jewish school being a brilliant student of Talmud and Torah, and then a gymnasium in Cracow where the family settled from 1923. However, already in the age of puberty, Isaac Deutscher rejected Jewish religiosity, became an atheist and began to break off what he considered oppressing chains with regard to his self-determination and further intellectual development – that was his first 'heresy'⁶. More or less fluent in several languages (Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, German, French, and Latin), he read extensively, and as an extra-mural student of literature, philosophy and history at the *Uniwersytet Jagielloński* (*Jagellonian University*) at Cracow he began to write, translate (into Polish) and publish poetry,

2) For the quite different and controversial Trotskyist assessments of Isaac Deutscher see the paragraphs *Posthumous works and works on Deutscher* and *Some assessments and appraisals* of our biographical sketch (see below).

3) Situated in north-western Galicia which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in 1919 became part of the independent Polish Republic.

4) Both parents of Isaac Deutscher became victims of the Holocaust and disappeared in Auschwitz during World War II. Two of Isaac Deutscher's three siblings, Manya and Salek, perished there, too.

5) Tamara Deutscher (b. Lebenhaft, daughter of Samuel Lebenhaft, and divorced wife of Hilary Frimer) came from an atheist and socialist Jewish family. She studied mathematics and history. Undoubtedly, she played a quite decisive role with regard to Isaac Deutscher's life and work; with Ken Tarbuck's words: "... Yet from the time of their marriage Tamara demonstrated an unswerving devotion to socialism and the ideas which Isaac held. This, however, was not a case of a woman subordinating herself to her husband. At every turn it was clear that she was totally committed to socialism in her own right. Their marriage became a true intellectual partnership, the products of which began to appear with the publication of Isaac's biography of Stalin which was published in 1949. Tamara subordinated her own career as a writer to that of Isaac, acting as his research assistant and, more importantly, as his collaborator in the fullest sense. It is clear that without her active, dedicated help the Isaac Deutscher that we knew from his writings would not have existed. [...] There was physical evidence of this close collaboration in the Deutscher's study. Two desks faced each other that enabled an easy flow of materials and ideas between them. Isaac's desk remained in place after his death, obviously giving support and comfort to Tamara in the years of widowhood that followed." [Tarbuck, Ken: Tamara Deutscher (1913-1990), in: *Revolutionary History*, 3.1991 (3), p. 43]. For some further appreciations of Tamara Deutscher see for example the obituaries by Daniel Singer (*Tamara Deutscher*, in: *The Independent*, 1990, Aug. 10) and by Ralph Miliband (*An historic partnership*, in: *The Guardian*, 1990, Aug. 9).

6) " Yet the father remained a deeply religious man, and he brought up Isaac in the same spirit. Isaac attended a Yehiva and was known as an *Ilui* (a youthful genius, in free translation) before his Bar Mitzvah. To seek secular education was a break with tradition in his family. Still wearing his ringlets and Hassidic garb, he passed the entrance examination at the local Polish high school and soon mastered Polish to perfection. Later on he made use of the extra-mural facilities of the University of Cracow. He had his teachers and mentors in those days, but he is essentially a self-educated man, with all the strengths and weaknesses of this type of scholar." [Goldsmith, Samuel Joseph: Isaac Deutscher : the original sovietologist, in: *Goldsmith, Samuel Joseph: Twenty 20th century Jews*, New York, NY, 1962, p. 38]

soon making a reputation among the literary avant-garde, students and intellectuals of the city; he also began to cope with subjects of literary and theatrical criticism and later even made interviews with Thomas Mann and Stefan Żeromski.

Deutscher becomes a Marxist — second 'heresy'

In 1925, Deutscher said farewell to his parents and moved from Cracow to Warsaw. Soon after taking up studies in philosophy and economics at the *Uniwersytet Warszawski* (*University of Warsaw*), another 'heresy' took place in Deutscher: radically renouncing his bourgeois background, he came to accept Marxism, making history, economics and the real antagonisms of society a very focus of his interest and activities. In 1926, he joined the ranks of the *Kommunistyczna Partia Polski* (*KPP*) (*Communist Party of Poland, CPP*), which under the military-autocratic regime of Marshal Józef Piłsudski had been outlawed and thus had to go underground. Earning his living chiefly as a proofreader (from 1925 to 1939) on *Nasz Przegląd* [*Our Review*]⁷, a Jewish newspaper in Polish language to which he also sporadically contributed articles, chiefly literary criticism; such articles on literature and theatre he also sent to other papers, e.g. to *Nowy Dziennik* [*New Paper*]. His passionate interest in literature and arts never vanished. At the same time, Deutscher was deeply involved in the editing of clandestine and semi-legal communist papers, in writing articles – which were published anonymously or under pseudonym with regard to censorship and political and police repression – for various party pamphlets and papers (as for example *Nowy przegląd* [*New Review*] and *Miesięcznik literacki*), and in producing leaflets. "To live a second life underground was the lot of many in a country without political freedom"⁸. The young man soon became a renowned party intellectual. Covertly, he continued his communist agitation even when he had to do military service in the Polish Army in 1929/30.

From communism to Trotskyism — third 'heresy'

Alerted by the Stalinist *Comintern* policy of the 'third period', by the hazardous implications of Stalin's adventurist and suicidal theory and practice of 'social fascism', and in view of the menacing rise of fascism in Germany, Deutscher soon began to fundamentally criticise Stalin's policy and the general line of the Stalinized *CP* (in Poland as well as abroad). His renunciation of Stalinist policy and theory was intensified by the many negative impressions which Deutscher got when visiting the USSR on behalf of the Polish *CP* in 1931⁹ and, of course, by the strong influence of Leon Trotsky who tirelessly attacked Stalin's regime in the USSR and *Comintern's* stupid course of 'social fascism', particularly in Germany, in innumerable pamphlets and articles, e.g. in his *Biulleten' oppozitsii*¹⁰ which Deutscher was a reader of. Like Trotsky, Deutscher strongly advocated a united workers' front against the danger of fascism. Within the Polish *CP*, Deutscher began to organize a small anti-Stalinist faction, challenging the party leadership and of course the *Comintern*. He factually became a Trotskyist – a 'heretic' once more, this time a 'heretic' from (Stalinist) communism. Eventually, after having written an article about the danger of a new barbarism in Europe (in case of a Nazi victory in Germany), objecting the policy of the *Comintern* and of the German *CP* in view of the rise of Nazism, which was published under his pseudonym A. Krakowski in a Polish-Yiddish paper, *Literary bleter* [*Literary Leaves*], Deutscher was expelled from the Polish *CP* in November 1932 for exaggerating the danger of fascism and for spreading panic among the workers. From that time, he was considered by the Kremlin and by all brands of Stalinist communism as a dangerous renegade, defector and traitor. Those Polish communists who were in solidarity with Deutscher's vitriolic criticism and his warnings, were excluded from the party, too. Deutscher together with other expellees formed the nucleus of a Polish Left

7) A newspaper of Zionist orientation. One of the paper's correspondents, Bernard Singer, became a life-long friend of Deutscher.

8) Goldsmith, Samuel Joseph: Isaac Deutscher : the original sovietologist, in: *Goldsmith, Samuel Joseph: Twenty 20th century Jews*, New York, NY, 1962, p. 39.

9) During his visit to the USSR, Deutscher was offered the post of a Professor at Moscow University, but he denied.

10) For more details about this mouthpiece of Trotsky see our feature about the *Biulleten' Oppozitsii*.

Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists) which immediately was greeted by Trotsky¹¹ who emphasized their double persecution by the henchmen both of Pilsudski and of Stalin. Deutscher belonged – together with Hersh Mendel (Sztokfisz), Solomon Ehrlich and Stefan Lamed – to the leadership of the Polish Trotskyist group at that time which only in 1934 formally affiliated as a section with Trotsky's *International Communist League (ICL)*. Trotsky's so-called 'French turn' (i.e. orientation towards entryist tactics) caused some trouble inside the Polish group, a majority of which eventually agreed with Trotsky. Thus, most of the Jewish (and Yiddish-speaking) members joined the ranks of the *Bund*, an anti-Zionist Jewish workers' organization, whereas most of the Polish (or, Polish-speaking) members – including Deutscher – joined the ranks (from 1935 to 1937) of the *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (PPS, Polish Socialist Party)*, by far the largest of the socialist parties of the country which also dominated the trade union movement. The Polish Bolshevik-Leninists remained a rather small group which in 1938 claimed a membership of only some 350 militants¹².

Still working as a proofreader, Deutscher tirelessly continued his studies and research work. As a consequence from dictatorship, censorship, and last not least from World War, only few of Deutscher's writings from his Polish period have survived¹³, e.g. a booklet about the first Moscow trial¹⁴. After having left the *PPS*, Deutscher "to have a platform he now had to set up one on his own, a monthly called *Widnokrąg* (i.e. Horizon). It was almost literally a one-man show."¹⁵

The question of whether a new, *Fourth International (FI)* should be launched or not, was controversially discussed within the ranks of the Polish Trotskyists¹⁶. Deutscher was one of those arguing against the proclamation of such a body at that time because he held that the conditions for its success did not already exist¹⁷, a position which was shared by the majority of the Polish section; thus, the two Polish delegates to the founding congress of the *Fourth International*, held at Périgny near Paris in September 1938, voted – together with one of the French delegates, Yvan Craipeau – against the proclamation of the *FI*. However, the Polish Trotskyists remained faithful, and loyally respected the discipline of the International. During the German occupation and the Nazi terror against the Jewish and Polish population, almost the entire Polish Trotskyist movement was physically wiped out, with the exception of only a handful surviving militants¹⁸. It should be added here, that in 1938 the *International Executive Committee* of the Stalinist *Comintern* dissolved the *KPP* on the charge that it was thoroughly infiltrated by secret police agents, saboteurs, etc. Most of those hitherto party leaders who lived in Russian exile, were executed or deported to Siberian forced-labour camps. Some two decades later, Isaac Deutscher, in a long interview conducted by K.S. Karol, dealt with the stirring fate of the Polish *CP*

11) T[rotsky], L[eon]: Privet pol'skoi levoi oppozitsii!, in: *Biulleten' oppozitsii (bol'shevikov-lenintsev) = Bulletin der Opposition (Bolschewiki-Leninisten)*, 1932 (29/30), pp. 18-19. For English version see T[rotsky], L[eon]: Greetings to the Polish Left Opposition, in: *Trotsky, Leon: Writings of Leon Trotsky [1932]*, New York, NY, 193, pp. 180-181.

12) See Alexander, Robert J.: *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985 : a documented analysis of the movement*, Durham and London, 1991, p. 650.

13) For more details see Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 36.

14) Deutscher, I.: *Proces Moskiewski*. - Warszawa : Tow. Wyd. "Światło", [1936]. - 32 pp.

15) Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 34

16) See for example Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 34

17) "[...] the three previous Internationals had all been proclaimed in period when the workers and revolutionary movements were on the upswing, and their establishment had thrown terror into the capitalist ruling class. In contrast, in 1938 there was a conservative and reactionary trend which would mean that the proclamation of a new revolutionary International would have little impact. This was particularly the case [...] because of the exceedingly small size of the groups and parties making up the International. Unlike each of its three predecessors, the Fourth International had no major national working-class or revolutionary group associated with it." [Alexander, Robert J.: *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985 : a documented analysis of the movement*, Durham and London, 1991, p. 651]

18) It should be noted that a tiny but heroic group of Jewish Trotskyists functioned in the Warsaw ghetto before it was liquidated by the Nazis; the group in 1940 and 1941 was even able to illegally produce some 8 issues of *Czerwony sztandar [Red Flag]* and 8 issues of *Przegląd marksistowski [Marxist Review]*. See Alexander, Robert J.: *International Trotskyism*, Durham, NC [etc.], 1991, p.651 and Lubitz, Wolfgang and Petra: *Trotskyist serials bibliography*, München [etc.], 1993, p. 70 and p. 215.

before the War¹⁹.

From Trotskyism to freelance Marxism: fourth 'heresy' — From Poland to Britain

The question of the International as a key issue in the Trotskyist discourse as well as some other differences with Trotsky led Deutscher to become a 'heretic' once again – a 'heretic' (or, dissident) from official and mainstream Trotskyism – however not a renegade from it; he never repudiated Trotskyism (as did so many other ex-fellow travellers of Trotsky). After having left the ranks of the Polish Trotskyists, Deutscher never again affiliated with any Trotskyist (or, other) party or group²⁰, but remained a 'homeless' Marxist, a political 'freelancer'.

In April 1939, just a few months before Hitler's troops invaded Poland and thus opened World War II, Deutscher emigrated from Poland to Britain and settled in London where for some months he earned his living as correspondent of *Nasz przegląd*, a Jewish newspaper in Polish language appearing in Warsaw²¹. Arriving in Britain, Deutscher hardly spoke a word of English; however, within a considerably short span of time he learnt English and to write in it – not only fluently but with a powerful, rich, outstanding and brilliant style, as almost all reviewers of his works – including many of his adversaries – emphasized. Already in 1939/40, Deutscher was successful in contributing a few articles to the renowned liberal newspaper *The Economist*, before he interrupted his journalistic work volunteering from 1940 to early 1942 to serve in the Polish Exile Army in Scotland²².

Deutscher as journalist

In 1942, Deutscher started a quite remarkable career as a *Fleet Street* journalist by joining the editorial staff of *The Economist*, soon advancing to the paper's foremost expert on Soviet and East European affairs and one of its principal military commentators. He held the post at *The Economist* until 1949. At the same time (and until 1947) he also was a member of the editorial board of *The Observer*, another renowned liberal newspaper²³. The total number of articles which Deutscher penned for *The Observer* and *The Economist* – many of them appearing anonymously or signed by "The Editors" or "A special correspondent" – probably exceeds 1,000²⁴. A good deal of his articles in *The Observer* were published under his pen-name Peregrine; as journalist on *The Observer*, he functioned as roving European (continental) correspondent, and at the same time enjoyed a column of his own, "Peregrine's European notebook". Recognised as a very authority on Soviet and European matters and on the history of the Russian revolution, Deutscher more or less frequently penned syndicated articles – probably more than 150 – which appeared in various renowned British and American papers – thus for example in *The Manchester Guardian* (1953-?), *The Reporter* (1949-1961), *The Nation* (1965-1966), *The Statesman* –

19) The interview was first published in vol. 13 of the French journal *Les Temps modernes*; an English version with title *The tragedy of the Polish Communist Party* was published in *Deutscher, Isaac: Marxism in our time / ed. by Tamara Deutscher*, London, 1972, pp.113-160, and earlier as a pamphlet: *The tragedy of Polish communism between the wars*, [London], 1956, 36 pp.

20) We are unable to determine whether or not the statement is correct that Deutscher "for a while joined the Trotskyist *Revolutionary Workers League*" in London (see [Wikipedia article about Isaac Deutscher](#), as viewed on Nov, 10, 2005), a small organization which stood outside the *Fourth International*. See also McIlroy, John: *Deutscher, Isaac (1907-1967)*, biographer and historian, in: *Oxford dictionary of national biography from the earliest times to the year 2000 / ed. by H.C.G. Matthew [et al.]*, vol. 15, Oxford [et c.], 2004, p. 934; McIlroy states that some of Deutscher's earliest articles in English language appeared in *RWL's paper Workers' Fight* under the pseudonym Josef Bren.

21) As already mentioned above, Deutscher since 1925 had worked as a proofreader at (and sporadically was contributing to) *Nasz przegląd*. With the outbreak of World War II, however, Deutscher was cut off from his income.

22) Under General Sikorski, parts of the Polish Army could escape from Nazi-occupied France to Britain where they were regrouped in Scotland. However, as we know from Tamara Deutscher, Isaac had to spent most of his military life in the punitive camps before he was released in 1942. It goes without saying that for a critical Marxist Jew like Deutscher, the Polish Exile Army in which the spirit of Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism was predominant, was no place to make a career. See also Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 38

23) Another prominent non-British journalist in the editorial staff of *The Observer* was Sebastian Haffner (pseud. of Raimund Pretzel, 1907-1999) who had come to England as a refugee from Germany. Whereas Deutscher contributed as a faithful Marxist to this liberal organ, Haffner did so from a rather conservative, however strictly anti-fascist point of view. He later should become one of the most renowned journalists and commentators in Germany

24) According to Syr , Ludger: *Isaac Deutscher : Marxist, Publizist, Historiker*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 400.

as well as in leading newspapers in some fifteen continental European countries, in India and in Japan.

Deutscher as historian, biographer, essayist and editor

— The 'Stalin' biography

Even more than by his brilliant journalistic work, Isaac Deutscher came to be known – particularly in Britain and the English-speaking world – as an essayist, historian and biographer. With the unfolding of the Cold War in 1946/47, Deutscher – at least partially – retired from full-time *Fleet Street* journalism and began to care about less 'ephemeral' works, the first of which should be his *Stalin, a political biography*, published by the renowned Oxford University Press in 1949, at the time the only exhaustive biography of the Soviet dictator and former World War II ally of Roosevelt and Churchill, but now – at the climax of the Cold War – the demonized bogeyman absolute. Partially praised as an outstanding example for objective and serious historiography, partially rejected as an apologetic work playing down Stalin's crimes and the danger of Soviet expansionism etc., the book was translated into more than a dozen languages and soon was taken notice of worldwide, its author gaining a degree of notoriety which was quite remarkable in view of the fact that Deutscher was a veritable outsider, neither a communist nor a spokesman of the West in the Cold War. *Stalin* went into many editions, the enlarged edition of 1967 containing a longer postscript relating to Stalin's last years. Whatever the shortcomings of his *Stalin* might have been – Deutscher now was considered as an eminent expert on the Soviet Union, by some as a 'Kremlinologist' or 'sovietologist', whose opinions were noted and which, of course, caused many discussions and controversies²⁵.

— Other book publications

His reputation as an outstanding writer and historian even increased by a number of historico-political books which he wrote during the 18 years between the publishing his *Stalin* and his death in 1967; most of these book publications were focusing on the Soviet Union, the Russian revolution, Stalinism, Maoism, and the Cold War; some of the books were thematic or chronological collections of essays, lectures or interviews originally published in various sources and countries. To mention only the most eminent books²⁶:

- *The Soviet trade unions* (1950),
- *Russia after Stalin* (1953),
- *Heretics and renegades*²⁷ (1955), a collection of essays on Marx, Trotsky, Carr, Stalin, the Beria affair and other topics,
- *Russia in transition* (1957), a collection of essays on post-Stalinism, on Khrushchev, Marx, Trotsky, Carr, Orwell and other topics,
- *The great contest - Russia and the West* (1960), a compilation of lectures delivered at various Canadian universities in 1959 on invitation of the *Dafoe Foundation* and the *Canadian Institute of International Affairs*,
- *Ironies of history - essays on contemporary communism* (1966), a collection of essays about Stalin-

25) "Some of Deutscher's analytical forecasts and assumptions were soon to become truisms. At the time, when the orthodox view was that Stalinism was eternal and unalterable, they appeared as a dangerous heresy." [Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 46]

26) For a fairly complete listing see the sub-paragraph on *Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by Deutscher* within our *Selective bibliography* contained in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch. Please note, that most of the titles listed here were published in different British and American editions, that there often have been later editions and prints as well as pocket book editions, sometimes with varying title proper, and that most of the books have been translated into various Western European languages and some even into Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, Greek, Farsi, and Hebrew. Unfortunately, we lack reliable information about the total print-run of all of Deutscher's writings, but - conservatively estimated - we would like to guess that the total of Deutscher books sold must be a six-part number. The 3 volumes of the original British edition of the *Trotsky* biography alone were sold about 6,000 times, some of the pocket book editions, however, had considerably bigger print-runs. With regard to languages/translations see also the introductory remarks in our just mentioned *Selective bibliography*

27) For Deutscher, both terms were crucial. He "draw a vital distinction between 'heretics and renegades', since he was to pour scorn over the latter, who had broken with Stalinism allegedly in the name of socialist purity, only to become the uncritical servants of the capitalist establishment [...]" [Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 30]

- ism and De-Stalinization, the Russian revolution, Stalin, Khrushchev, Lenin, Mao, Trotsky, Pasternak, Vietnam and other topics,
- *The unfinished revolution - Russia 1917-1967* (1967), an edited version of his *George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures* delivered at the *University of Cambridge* in early 1967 and at the same time a definitive summing up of Deutscher's views on the Russian revolution,
 - *The Non-Jewish Jew and other essays* (1968), published posthumously, edited and introduced by Tamara Deutscher, this collection contains some fundamental essays from Deutscher's pen about Jewishness, the Jewish question and about the Israeli-Arab war of June 1967, inter alia *The Non-Jewish Jew*, originally being Deutscher's address delivered at the *Jewish World Congress* in February 1958. The term "Non-Jewish Jew", coined by Deutscher to characterize those great humanists of Jewish origin (e.g. Spinoza, Marx, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Freud) who once had transcended the narrow boundaries of Jewishness and the confines of Jewish tradition, exactly could be applied to himself;
 - *Russia, China, and the West 1953-1966* (1970), a selection of Deutscher's journalistic writings, edited by Fred Halliday and published posthumously,
 - *Lenin's childhood* (1970), edited and introduced by Tamara Deutscher and published posthumously. This booklet is a fragment of a large-scale Lenin biography which Deutscher had begun to work on after having finished his *Trotsky* trilogy (see below). Yet Deutscher's sudden and tragic death in 1967 prevented the completion of this great work.

— *The 'Trotsky' trilogy*

Undoubtedly, the greatest and – not only in our opinion – most eminent and lasting of Deutscher's works has been his 3-volume *Trotsky* biography. Originally published by *Oxford University Press*, the famous trilogy has been constituted by the following parts:

- The prophet armed (originally published in 1954)
- The prophet unarmed (originally published in 1959)
- The prophet outcast (originally published in 1963)

After he had published his *Stalin*, Deutscher began work on a Trotsky biography; what was intended first as a one-volume work eventually extended to three volumes (with more than 1,500 pages altogether), the first of which was published in 1954, followed by the second in 1959 and the third in 1963; "this trilogy, superbly researched, clearly and energetically written, provides one of the most absorbing accounts of the history of modern communism and a magnificent 'monument to one of the most remarkable historical figures of the present century'. Deutscher, said a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*, is an exceedingly vivid writer with a sense of style and a warm and understanding sympathy for his hero: this makes him a first-rate biographer"²⁸. The trilogy went into many editions; the entire work or abridged versions of it, respectively, has been translated into various languages, e.g. French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Serb-Croatian, Greek, Turkish, Hebrew, Farsi, Japanese²⁹. Thus, his *Trotsky* found a worldwide dissemination, unparalleled for at least some three decades³⁰ and vigorously coining Trotsky's image in readers' mind. After he eventually was granted a U.S. visa, Deutscher in the preparation of his *magnum opus* could use the famous *Trotsky Archives* at *Houghton Library (Harvard University)*³¹, a veritable goldmine of information for a historian working on Trotsky. For his research work on the third volume of the trilogy – treating the final exile phase in Trotsky's life, 1929-1940 – Deutscher even had the privilege to access the then '*closed section*' of the

28) [Anon.]: Deutscher, Isaac, in: *World authors 1950-1970* / ed. by John Wakeman, New York, NY, 1975, pp. 385

29) Additionally, in 1991, a Russian-language 'pirate edition' of *The Prophet outcast*, introduced and commented by N.A. Vassetskii was published in Moscow with title *Trotskii v izgnanii*. In 1999, a Chinese translation of the entire trilogy was published in Beijing

30) It was only in 1988 that another full-scale Trotsky biography appeared, which could be considered congenial: the scholarly *magnum opus Trotsky* by the French Trotskyist historian Pierre Broué. For more information about this outstanding Marxist and about his *Trotsky* as well as about Broué's assessment of Deutscher and his trilogy, we would like to refer to the *Broué* chapter within our *Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet* website

31) Within the framework of the *Research Facilities* chapter our *Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet* website we are providing a feature about this unique archival collection

Houghton Trotsky archives, called *Leon Trotsky exile papers*, which, due to a stipulation once made by Trotsky himself, should not be opened to the public before 1980. Although some Trotskyists repeatedly had warned Trotsky's widow, Natalia Sedova, to beware of the 'intruder', she in 1960 eventually gave Deutscher special permission to consult the closed section; after some misunderstandings could have been cleared and Sedova had got acquainted with Deutscher's work, the widow of the great revolutionary and his renowned biographer became friends; Deutscher frequently visited the old woman, who then lived in Paris, and always treated her with affection; he was one of the speakers at her funeral in 1962³².

It goes without saying that Deutscher's *Trotsky* trilogy at least provoked as much controversy³³ as his *Stalin* did. Thus, Deutscher was highly praised by a great number of reviewers (e.g. E.H. Carr, the renowned British historian of modern Russia) whereas others confronted him with the reproach of being a hagiographer and apologist or having written his *Trotsky* from a point of view too close to the subject of his biography, i.e. having been carried away by sympathy³⁴. However, most reviewers, whether sharing Deutscher's view or not, correctly considered Deutscher's *Trotsky* as a very masterpiece of English prose³⁵.

Other activities

However, Deutscher's considerable publicity in the 1950s and 1960s was not only based on his masterworks about *Stalin* and *Trotsky*, his other book publications and his early journalistic work, but also on a variety of further activities of which we would like to mention the following:

- Deutscher wrote a considerable number of essays which originally were published in renowned British, American and French journals such as for example *Partisan Review*, *Dissent*, *Soviet Studies*, *New Left Review*, *Les Temps modernes*, *Les Lettres nouvelles*³⁶;
- he was also author of book reviews³⁷ – published chiefly in *The Times Literary Supplement* – and of obituaries³⁸ and other miscellanies;
- he edited (or, co-edited) several books, for example *The age of permanent revolution* which was an anthology of basic texts by Leon Trotsky, edited together with George Novack; this book was published in several editions and it was translated into German, Spanish and other languages;
- he wrote introductions or forewords to several works, for example to Hersh Mendel's *Memoirs of a Jewish revolutionary*;

32) See Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz*, London, 1971, p. 55. - Deutscher's graveside speech in honour of Natalia Sedova was published in the collection *Hommage à Natalia Sedova-Trotsky : 1882-1962*, Paris, 1962, pp. 45-49.

33) For a compilation and thorough discussion of various assessments (inter alia by H. Seton-Watson, M. Fainsod, F.C. Barghoorn, R. Pipes, J.L.H. Keep, A. Thulstrup, A. Stender-Petersen, E. Oberländer, B.D. Wolfe, H. Kehler, L. Labedz, P. Sethe, E. Litvinoff, J. de Kadt) of Deutscher as a Trotsky biographer see Haas, Leonhard: *Trotzki : Seher oder Blinder? Stimmen über Leiba Bronstein und Deutscher's Werk über ihn*, in: *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 15.1965 (4), pp. 467-506. - As at the early 1980s there were at least some 500 reviews (including book notices and the like) of the *Trotsky* trilogy. [See Syré, Ludger: *Isaac Deutscher : Marxist, Publizist, Historiker*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 400]

34) We agree with the following assessment by Paul Flewers: "[...] Deutscher's trilogy is not hagiographic. It is sympathetic, but certainly not uncritical. Indeed, one of its strong points is that he describes how the Soviet regime became bureaucratized and how the Soviet Communist Party became transformed into a ruling élite, and how Trotsky both consciously opposed and inadvertently assisted those processes. Having read a large number of biographies of Trotsky, I remain firm in my opinion that, despite its age and shortcomings, Deutscher's trilogy is still the best account of Trotsky's eventful life and is the work which I would recommend to anyone wishing to learn about one of the last century's most controversial and, for Marxists, inspiring figures" [Flewers, Paul: [Review], in: *Revolutionary History*, 10.2012 (4), p. 385]

35) We are dealing with the reception of the *Trotsky* trilogy and with the assessment of Deutscher as writer and historian in the paragraph *Posthumous works and works on Deutscher* below. Furthermore, we would like to refer to the secondary literature listed in the respective paragraphs of our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch.

36) For a fairly complete listing of journals, newsletters, bulletins and other resources to which Deutscher, frequently or sporadically, contributed essays, articles, reviews, notes, etc. see the sub-paragraph on *Books, collections, journals, newspapers, bulletins to which Deutscher contributed* within our *Selective bibliography*.

37) Thus, for instance, he reviewed works of E.H. Carr, G. Lukács and A. Kerenskii in *TLS*.

38) For example Deutscher, Isaac: Natalia Sedova - devotion to Trotsky, in: *The Times*, 1962 (Jan. 24).

- he was the author of a lot of radio scripts and radio talks³⁹, e.g. *The great purges*, a 3-hour documentary on the Moscow show trials (1962), or *The Stalin myth*, a 3-hour documentary on Stalin's rise to power and his rule (1957). He also participated in TV discussions in Britain, the U.S. and Germany;
- he participated in scholarly conferences and similar gatherings, and as an invited lecturer he addressed large audiences and delivered lectures for example at the *Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, the *London School of Economics (LSE)*, the *London University College Socialist Society*, the *Annual Socialist Scholars Conference*, the *New School for Social Research*, the *State University of New York (Binghamton)*, the *Princeton University*, the *Columbia University*, the *Harvard University*, the *Manitoba University*, the *Harpur College*;
- he gave a lot of interviews and took part in innumerable (public) discussions and debates;
- he was a contributor to encyclopaedias and similar reference works;
- the screenplay of the documentary film *Exile in Büyükada* (Venice, Cal., Pathfinder Home Entertainment, 2002) has been based on the final volume of his *Trotsky* trilogy;
- although deeply involved in historical research and writing, Deutscher all the time followed the course of events with passion and interest⁴⁰, engaging himself in the great political debates of his time and vigorously influencing the unfolding New Left by his writings and lectures. Deutscher was a main speaker at the famous Vietnam mass teach-ins in Washington and Berkeley in 1965, at various solidarity meetings and similar events, and last not least he was a prominent member of Bertrand Russell's *International War Crime Tribunal*.

Posthumous works and works on Deutscher.

As already mentioned above, some books composed of earlier published essays, lectures or journalistic work, were published after Deutscher's death (1967), chiefly by his widow, Tamara Deutscher, inter alia the fragment of his projected Lenin biography (*Lenin's childhood*, 1970). In 1981, the correspondence, edited by Hermann Weber, between Deutscher and Heinrich Brandler, once the spokesman of the Bukharinist (or, 'right') wing of the anti-Stalinist opposition within the German CP, was published in 1981 with title *Unabhängige Kommunisten : der Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Brandler und Isaac Deutscher 1949-1967*, in German only. Also exclusively in German, a volume with a preface by Tamara Deutscher was published one year earlier: *Reportagen aus Nachkriegsdeutschland* (1980).

There is a great quantity of secondary literature relating to Deutscher⁴¹, mainly, of course, reviews of his various books, and articles dealing generally with his historical works or with his entire writing and publishing. It is quite a truism that the very different assessments of Deutscher have been perfectly mirrored in those reviews and in similar items focusing on his work: besides innumerable affirmative and appreciative – though not necessarily uncritical – judgements there are at the same time innumerable contributions emphasizing his shortcomings, mistakes and blunders. Apart from the Stalinists' spokesmen, there have been at least two major groups of persons standing out for the most fundamental criticism⁴²: First, former communists who in view of the Cold War had shifted to the right, changed their hitherto positions radically from Stalinism to Stalinophobia and had become what Deutscher used to describe by the term 'renegades'. It goes without saying that these people could approach Deutscher only with hostility and suspicion; in their world-view there was no space for an 'anti-anti-communist'

39) Some of his *BBC* radio talks were published in *The Listener*. Some libraries and archives, as for example the *International Institute of Social History (ISSH, Amsterdam)*, are in possession of audio cassettes and tapes of Deutscher's talks, addresses and lectures.

40) "*While living with Trotsky, Deutscher never ceased surveying the world from his watchtower.*" [Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen* : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work* / ed. by David Horowitz, London, 1971, p. 46]

41) A selection of secondary sources is listed in our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch.

42) As an example for extremely vitriolic and fundamental criticism of Deutscher (or, better: for 'unmasking' or 'debunking' him), we can refer to the contributions by L. Labedz [for full bibliographic records see our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch].

like Deutscher, for a 'stubborn', dissident Marxist rejecting to take part in the West's anti-communist crusade. Second, not all, but a considerable number of, Trotskyists⁴³ obviously could not forget and forgive that Deutscher once had dissociated from the Trotskyist movement and that he had criticised not only this or that tactical measure of the 'Old Man' but also opposed the founding of the *Fourth International*, minimizing its role and importance in various of his writings. The common and main verdict of both groups of critics is that of Isaac Deutscher being *the* apologist absolute of Stalinism, or – to quote Daniel Singer – "a different devil to different people"⁴⁴.

Some other critics, e.g. French historian Pierre Broué and a former secretary to Trotsky, Jean Van Heijenoort, complained about Deutscher's shortcomings with regard to lacking in exactness and historiographical reliability⁴⁵.

Besides reviews, articles and, of course, obituaries, there have been published also some pamphlets and book-length publications about the life and work of Isaac Deutscher⁴⁶; the most relevant of them are – in our view – the biography by Ludger Syré⁴⁷ (1984) and a collection edited by David Horowitz⁴⁸ (1971); the last-mentioned volume contains critical, but sympathetic, assessments and appreciations, inter alia contributions by Tamara Deutscher, Daniel Singer and Lawrence Daly about certain aspects of Deutscher's biography, contributions by Louis Menashe, Marcel Liebman and Christopher Hill about Deutscher as historian and theoretician, as well as contributions by Steven Unger and V.G. Kiernan about Deutscher's Marxism, his political activism and his impact on the American New Left.

Ludger Syré's work – originally accepted as a PhD in 1983 – is a thorough study based on rich sources (including archivalia) about almost all aspects of Deutscher's life and work: his family background, his itinerary from Jewish child to Jewish heretic, from party communist to Trotskyist heretic, his journalistic work during World War II and during the Cold War, his analyses of the internal developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe, of the roots of the Cold War, his analyses of the socio-political restoration in Western Europe and Germany, etc. Some chapters of the work are focusing on Deutscher's historical-biographical master-works, on his involvement in political activism and his role in the formation of a New Left, on his assessment of Maoism, the Sino-Soviet split, etc.; the Deutscher reception is dealt with in author's introduction.

Deutscher's death

At the age of 60, Isaac Deutscher died untimely of a heart attack, during a visit to Rome, on August

43) Some leaders and writers from the Trotskyist scene, e.g. many of those adhering to the Healyist and Lambertist current, either totally ignored Deutscher or attacked and denounced him as a tool of Stalin, as a heretic, revisionist, liquidationist, ideological foster-father of Michel Pablo, or simply as petty-bourgeois liberal and Anti-Marxist. As examples for such rigid Trotskyist criticism of Deutscher, we can refer to the contributions by Tony Cliff, Robert Black, Cyril Smith [for bibliographic records see our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this bio-bibliographical sketch]. One could add another group of critics: those who disassociated from Trotskyism, but not – as Deutscher had done – to remain revolutionary Marxists or radical leftists; here one could mention Julius Jacobson as an example [for full bibliographical record see the just mentioned *Selective bibliography*]. However, we would like to clearly emphasize again, that the absolutely negative assessments of Isaac Deutscher by no means have been shared by all Trotskyist factions and currents...

44) Singer, Daniel: Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work* / ed. by David Horowitz, London, 1971, p. 44.

45) For a quite vitriolic, even crushing criticism of this kind, see for example the following by Jean Van Heijenoort: "*But what is surprising is that, in his accounts of such episodes, his narration is both detailed and erroneous. Even in the parts of his book [The prophet outcast] based on documents, errors abound. Dates are wrong, which lead to inconsistencies, later patched up at the price of further distortion. My impression is that Deutscher worked hurriedly in the archives, more like a reporter who grabs any information than a historian who sifts documents. [...] No serious student should accept a date or piece of information in his narration without first verifying it independently. There are few pages that do not call for some comment.*" [Van Heijenoort, Jean: With Trotsky in exile : from Prinkipo to Coyoacán, Cambridge, Mass. [etc.], 1978, pp. 153-154. – Again, in *Intercontinental Press*, 16.1978 (17), p. 518, Van Heijenoort stated: "*Deutscher's book, for example, is very useful in some ways, but historians will have to begin all over again because it includes so many errors. And his errors have been picked up and expanded upon by other writers.*" Tamara Deutscher replied on this in a letter to the editors, which was published in *ibid.*, 16.1978 (29), p. 895 with title *Deutscher comments on Van Heijenoort interview*.

46) For a fairly complete listing see our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch.

47) Syré, Ludger: Isaac Deutscher - Marxist, Publizist, Historiker, sein Leben und Werk 1907-1967, Hamburg, 1984, 422 pp. [for full bibliographic record see our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch].

48) Isaac Deutscher - the man and his work / ed. by David Horowitz, London, 1971, 254 pp. [for full bibliographic record see our *Selective bibliography* in [Part 2](#) of this biographical sketch].

19, 1967. "Thousands of people from Berkeley to Tokyo, who had never approached him personally, had the feeling they had lost not only a teacher but a fellow-fighter when he was more needed than ever"⁴⁹. A great memorial meeting took place in London where Deutscher was buried.

The Deutscher Memorial Prize

After Deutscher's death, a memorial foundation was launched which since 1969 awards annually the *Deutscher Memorial Prize* "for a book which exemplifies the best and most innovative new writing in or about the Marxist tradition"⁵⁰. The previous year's recipient of the prize delivers each year in November a *Deutscher Memorial Lecture*. As a rule, these lectures are subsequently published in a scholarly left journal, like for example *New Left Review* or *Historical Materialism*. Recipients of the *Deutscher Memorial Prize* were *inter alia* K. Murphy, L. Colletti, M. Rodinson, M. Liebman, W. Brus, R. Bahro, N. Harding, B. Kagarlitskii, T. Shanin, R. Brenner, T. Eagleton, E.J. Hobsbawm, J. Rosenberg, H. Kaye, D. Sassoon, M. Nicolaus, R. Blackburn, P. Gowan, N. Davidson. The prize was not awarded in 1971 and 1998.

Some assessments and appraisals

To illustrate some of the key remarks made in our biographical sketch, we would like to present some short and telling quotations from secondary literature relating to Deutscher's life and work (appraisals, obituaries, reviews, etc.)⁵¹

Dale Shin (2005):

"Originally published under the shadow of the Cold War, Deutscher's classic work [his *Trotsky* trilogy] helped to reacquaint readers on both sides of the Atlantic with its subject's prolific life and influence, at a time when 'Trotskyism' was a popular term of ridicule in left-wing circles – in the main due to the malicious slanders propagated by Moscow's paid intellectual publicists, as well as the petty sectarian feuding and obsessive hair splitting amongst Trotsky's self-styled adherents. Deutscher's monumental study, with each volume chronicling a different chapter of Trotsky's saga – from his role in the October uprising and civil war, through his leadership of the ill-starred Left Opposition to Stalin, to his exile from the USSR and eventual assassination at the hands of a Soviet agent – sought to redeem his rich (if uneven) legacy; but also to recall the democratic ideals that had animated the Russian Revolution in its early years, before the Stalinist counter-revolution buried them, along with the women and men who fought against their perversion. More than a decade after the collapse of 'communism', Verso has reissued Deutscher's magisterial trilogy so as to remove anew the amnesia, and anathema, that continue to surround Leon Trotsky and the revolution he was made for."⁵²

Anon. (1967):

"The independent line he took in Poland remained constant with him. He kept his Marxist faith. He would respect some of Stalin's achievements, but distrusted most of what he did, and had little respect at all for his ideological thinking. [...] Sometimes Deutscher was called a romantic, sometimes a prophet. The terms do not do full justice to his deep scholarship, based on his unremitting and intelligently selected reading of primary sources in Russian, Polish, German, French and, if need be, other languages – where he was helped as in all other ways, by his Polish wife Tamara. [...] What is true in the 'romantic' charge is that – with all his scrupulously careful sifting of facts – he could be enthusiastic about an idea or a man. His work would not have been so invigorating, or so controversial, if he had lacked this élan. He thought intensively and felt passionately. [...] It is a remarkable re-

49) Singer, Daniel: *Armed with a pen : notes for a political portrait of Isaac Deutscher*, in: *Isaac Deutscher : the man and his work* / ed. by David Horowitz, London, 1971, p. 52.

50) See [The Deutscher Prize Web Site](#). By the way, Tamara Deutscher until her death was a devoted member of the jury.

51) We are aware, that the selection of these quotations might be considered arbitrarily and not necessarily representative.

52) Shin, Dale: [Review] *Made for revolution*, in: *New Socialist*, 2005 (51), pp. 38-39.

cord for a man working alone, in London, in the country, and back in London, without a university faculty to help him in his research and thinking. He himself knew it was remarkable; he was quite sure that he had something of value to put out. There was also a great modesty about him, and in an unflinching kindness and a touching courtesy – at times, too, hours of sheer boyish glee – in his meetings with friends."⁵³

Lubomir Sochor (1968):

"Although Isaac Deutscher ceased being a communist in an organizational sense, he never gave up being a Marxist. He remained 'stubbornly' and 'obstinately' a Marxist who held fast to the Marxist scientific method and theory but did not recognize the authority of the various interpreters of Marxism. [...] Deutscher's point of view makes it easier to understand his study of the make-up of the minds of ex-communists, in which he sought to discover the distinction between heretics and renegades. Most of the renegades among the ex-communists are distinguished by their anti-communism. They are Stalinists turned inside out who still see the world in identical black-and-white terms. As communists they failed to see the difference between the fascists and the social democrats and as ex-communists they lose their ability to see the distinction between fascism and Stalinism. [...] None of the heroes in Deutscher's biographies appears as a 'deus ex machina' or as a 'diabolus ex machina'. The personalities are more or less talented spokesmen of the currents and factions of the revolutionary movement behind which stand complex and antagonistic social forces. [...] His point of departure for the study of Stalinism is the relationship between a certain type of bureaucratized revolutionist and the bureaucratization of the revolution in a backward country exhausted by the war and the results of foreign intervention. [...] Deutscher however did not employ simplistic schemata. Historical situations are determined but their determination is not one-sided, un-deviating, or clear-cut. They always hold certain alternatives. They permit certain narrowly limited but real choices or alternatives. [...] Deutscher's books are among the pearls of Marxist historiography. They bear comparison with such outstanding works as Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Engels' *The peasant war in Germany*, or Mehring's *Die Lessinglegende*. It is a characteristic feature of these books that they are not only history but at the same time sociology of the revolution, a concrete and yet generalized analysis of its driving forces."⁵⁴

Irving Howe (1964):

"Simply as a biography, *The Prophet Outcast* [...] is a masterful performance. One cannot imagine that in the next few decades there will be another life of Trotsky as full and authoritative as this one. Deutscher's research, including the first thorough use of the Trotsky archives at Harvard, has been prodigious; his knowledge of the anti-Stalinist European left between the two World Wars is expert; his writing, though a bit too florid for my taste, is in the grand style [...] Yet the very perspective of sympathy which provides Deutscher with enormous advantages as a biographer creates for him serious difficulties as a historian. He lacks intellectual detachment. He lapses against other writers, especially those of the democratic left, with whose views he disagrees. Frequently he comes forth as a partisan concerned to vindicate his own theories about Stalinism, theories he assimilates much too easily to Trotsky's thought. [...] Where, as it seems to me, Deutscher does not establish sufficient intellectual distance from his subject is in his failure to discuss adequately, let alone to criticize fundamentally, Trotsky's persistent loyalty to the Bolshevik tradition. [...] Deutscher's theory will surely prove to be popular in the coming years, even more so than it already is in certain left-wing European circles; for it seizes upon the authoritarian side of Trotsky's thought while dismissing the revolutionary-democratic side, and it yields to the abstraction of historical development or of technological progress those tasks which can be won only through conscious human struggle. Like many others, Deutscher suffers from a modern disease: the infatuation with History. He has not yet learned that devious and unpredictable as human history may be, History is a bitch."⁵⁵

Ken Tarbuck (1991):

"[...] It can be said that the Trotskyist movement would have been much poorer intellectually than it was without the joint effort of Isaac and Tamara. Their joint works reached a standard of scholarship and breadth of vision which was rarely, if ever, matched by Trotsky's latter-day followers. Considering that English was a second language for both of them, their mastery of its prose was of the highest order. Both Tamara and Isaac refused to become caught up in the internecine factional fighting of the left. This was not a refusal to commit themselves.

53) [Anon.]: Mr Isaac Deutscher : leading scholar of revolutionary Marxism, in: *The Times*, 1967 (Aug. 21), p. 8. [Obituary]

54) Sochor, Lubomir: The importance of Isaac Deutscher's work as seen by a Czechoslovak intellectual, in: *Intercontinental Press*, 6.1968 (29), pp. 739-741.

55) Howe, Irving: [Review] The life of Trotsky, in: *The New Republic*, 150.1964 (March 21), pp. 20, 22, and 23.

Rather it was an understanding that their contributions would have been less had they become embroiled in the many small sects claiming Trotsky's inheritance."⁵⁶

Anon. (1969):

"Even though many critics are unsure about the validity of Deutscher's works, they continue to praise his accomplishments. Walter Laqueur, who considers him more a prophet than a historian, writes: 'Of all those who have written about Soviet affairs since the Second World War, Isaac Deutscher is one of the most widely read and interesting. In spite of an inclination towards hagiography, his three-volume study of Trotsky is the definitive work on the subject and, at the same time, among the best contemporary political biographies. [...] His style is forceful, the sentiment not artificial; and there are striking historical analogies and literary allusions'. [...] William P. Gerberding believes that Deutscher has achieved acclaim in the West, even though he disagrees with the ideologies of the West, because of 'his lucid and vivid writing style. He is usually engaging and provocative, sometimes even when his dogmas fatally obscure his perceptions.'"⁵⁷

Ralph Miliband (1983):

"He was a consistent and severe critic of Stalin and Stalinism; but he allied his condemnation with a positive assessment of what had been achieved by 'revolution from above' which Stalin had engineered. A major theme of Deutscher's writings was that a new working class was coming into being in the Soviet Union, which would in time fulfil the promise of the 'unfinished revolution' begun in October 1917."⁵⁸

Perry Anderson (1992):

"The historical conditions that produced this singular revolutionary socialist have passed away. Neither the living connection with the world of Lenin or Luxemburg, nor the cosmopolitanism of an older East-Central Europe, was available to subsequent generations. Yet Deutscher's work continues to represent an indispensable source for the culture and politics of socialism, because of its peculiar combination of qualities. Among these was the serene political fortitude with which Deutscher met the contingencies of his own period – his unshakable fidelity to the political ideals of his youth, amidst so many conflagrations in which one edifice of the Left after another burnt down, or had to be reconstructed. That fortitude was the product of his absolute independence of thought – the entire freedom of his person and outlook from those fashions and phobias which have swayed the intelligentsias of the Left in one direction after another – successively Stalinist or Maoist, structuralist or post-structuralist, advocates of the new working class or the new social movements, Euro-communism or Euro-socialism. But his spiritual independence was the very opposite of sectarian or Pharisaical isolation. Deutscher had an ability to communicate with a greater audience than any other socialist writer of his generation in English. His books were translated, his articles read, across the world. Such universality was given by literary power. But this was not simply an aesthetic gift: it reflected an intellectual command of a classical Marxism so close to its sources in the full range of European culture and enlightenment behind it that it had no need of a specialized vocabulary [...] to find its words. The adoption of biography as his mode of writing history had a related meaning - a genre that has always possessed the widest appeal among the different kinds of literature about the past. In Deutscher's case, the biographical form had an additional, deeper meaning. In the life of an individual, he could join the discourses of morality and necessity that Marxism has often found it so hard to hold together. His *Stalin* and *Trotsky* are pre-eminently products of history, subject to the determinations of wider social forces that they expressed or rejected: but they are also moral agents, accountable for their actions and the consequences of them."⁵⁹

Ian Birchall (2004):

"After Trotsky's death in 1940 his followers were confined to small meetings and obscure newspapers. Deutscher, a gifted journalist and a fine writer, could not be ignored. Coinciding with a wave of radicalisation around CND, Deutscher brought Trotsky back into the mainstream and introduced him to a new generation. History is not made by great men, but history sometimes makes great men – Trotsky was one of them. Reading Deutscher's biography I realise just how outrageous it is that Trotsky's thought was transformed into something called 'orthodox Trotskyism'. There was nothing orthodox about Trotsky. He was a bold and original thinker."⁶⁰

56) Tarbuck, Ken: Tamara Deutscher (1913-1990), in: *Revolutionary History*, 3.1991 (3), p. 43.

57) [Anon.]: Deutscher, Isaac (Peregrine), 1907-1967, in: *Contemporary authors : first revision*, 5/8 (1969), p. 301.

58) Miliband, Ralph: Deutscher, Isaac, in: *A dictionary of Marxist thought / ed. by Tom Bottomore [et al.]*, Oxford, 1983, p. 119.

59) Anderson, Perry: The legacy of Isaac Deutscher, in: *Anderson, Perry: A zone of engagement*, London [etc.], 1992, pp. 72-73.

Theodor Bergmann (1998):

"Er hatte den Mut und die Kraft, Außenseiter zu sein. Er war Kommunist meist ohne Parteibuch, undogmatischer Marxist, kritischer Bewunderer Leo Trotzki's, gemieden von denen, die Trotzki in Erbpacht genommen hatten, nicht-jüdischer Jude, vaterlandsloser Geselle. Von den Stalinisten wurde er als Agent des Westens, von den Trotzkiisten als Apologet des Stalinismus bezeichnet. Er war Historiker, der einige bleibende, große Werke geschrieben hat, und Publizist, auch Journalist, der laufende Ereignisse kommentierte und dabei manchmal irrte. [...] Unzweifelhaft war er der bedeutendste Marxist der Nachkriegsperiode. Marxismus war für ihn keine Bibel, kein Kanon, kein Rezeptbuch [...] sondern ein hervorragendes, bewährtes Analyseinstrument, mit dessen Hilfe wir unsere heutige Lage verstehen und die richtige Strategie des Klassenkampfes erarbeiten können. [...] Seine Hauptsünde in den Augen der Erbpächter der Gedanken Leo Trotzki's war, daß er in den dreißiger Jahren Trotzki von der Gründung der Vierten Internationale abgeraten hatte. [...] Er glaubte auch nicht an eine Renaissance jenes orthodoxen Trotzkiismus. [...] Deutscher machte einen scharfen Unterschied zwischen Ketzern im Kommunismus und Renegaten des Kommunismus. Die Renegaten waren größtenteils unkritische, begeisterte, fast gläubige Anhänger des real existierenden Kommunismus, d.h. des Stalinismus bzw. des Maoismus gewesen. Unvorbereitet von der Realität enttäuscht, wurden sie zu Antikommunisten. [...] Der Ketzer dagegen bleibt Marxist und Revolutionär und versucht, aus vermeidbaren Fehlern, unvermeidlichen Irrtümern und zu verurteilenden Verbrechen, die im Namen des Kommunismus begangen wurden, zu lernen. Er kritisiert offen, auch auf die Gefahr der Exkommunikation hin. [...] Isaac Deutscher war und blieb revolutionärer Internationalist. Er unterstützte den Freiheitskampf der Kolonialvölker, behielt aber seine eigene Position bei. Denn er sah in diesen Befreiungsbewegungen auch nationalistische Kräfte am Werke. [...] Als jüdischer Kommunist war Deutscher veranlaßt, seine eigene Position, seine Einstellung zur Jüdischen Frage in der Arbeiterbewegung und seine Haltung zum Nahostkonflikt zu bestimmen. Er selbst sah sich als 'nichtjüdischen Juden' [...], d.h. er bekannte sich zu seiner Herkunft, verstand sich aber als Internationalisten. Dennoch wich er der jüdischen Frage nicht aus. [...] daher anerkannte Deutscher das historische Recht des jüdischen Volkes auf einen eigenen Staat, blieb jedoch kritisch gegenüber der Politik der israelischen Regierung."⁶¹

Michael Cox (2000):

"An admirer of Trotsky's but never an acolyte, Deutscher always approached the issue on the USSR there fore as a critical Marxist rather than a disenchanted liberal; someone moreover who had known what is what like to be hunted and hounded by the political apologists of Stalinism. Thus he looked at the Soviet Union not through the eyes of someone who was fascinated by Russia per se (like Carr) but as a revolutionary who was only really interested in the system there to the extent that its actions impacted on the cause of socialism elsewhere. Deutscher did not belong to any party or faction and made clear his differences with the organized followers of Trotsky. As he put it rather forcefully in a private letter to the French Trotskyist Pierre Frank, he was not and 'never' had 'been a believer in the Fourth International'. He remained as he once put it *au-dessus de la mêlée*. Yet Deutscher was always an activist in search of action and when given half a chance, as he was increasingly in the 1960s, he threw himself into the struggle, and nowhere more vigorously than in the United States where he played a crucial role in the early development of the anti-Vietnam War movement."⁶²

Pierre Frank (1967):

"Isaac Deutscher's death is a heavy loss for revolutionary Marxism. [...] As a participant in the Trotskyist movement, he was against the formation of the Fourth International in 1938. After seeking refuge in London in 1939, he ceased functioning as a militant and thereafter devoted himself to journalism and to writing the works through which he became known to an ever-growing public. His articles and essays on the Soviet Union had nothing in common – is there any need to say so? – with those of the official 'Kremlinologists'. The value of his writings, both in substance and style, came not only from his knowledge and talent; it is above all derived from the fact that the journalist and writer was deeply attached to Marxism as a method of thought and passionately dedicated to the international struggle of the masses for socialism. Thus he carried on the struggle as an unaffiliated combatant in a manner suited to his gifts. [...] This biography [the Trotsky trilogy] is incontestably a masterpiece worthy of the great revolutionary to whom it was dedicated. It is impossible to give an appreciation of the work

60) Birchall, Ian: [Review] All along the watchtower, in: *Socialist Review* <TSB 1521> [ISSN 0141-2442], 2004 (Jan.)

61) Bergmann, Theodor: Isaac Deutscher - ein jüdischer Ketzer im Kommunismus, in: *Utopie kreativ*, 1998 (97/98), pp. 95 and 103-105.

62) Cox, Michael: E. H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher - a very 'special relationship', in: *E. H. Carr : a critical appraisal / ed. by Michael Cox*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke [etc.], 2000, p. 127.

in which not only are the facts scrupulously set forth in contrast to the colossal lies and calumnies heaped up by Stalinism and the essence of Trotsky's theories and views presented in the clearest and most striking way, but in which Deutscher, who did not know Trotsky in his lifetime, was able to paint so lifelike a portrait of that many-sided and complex personality. He was likewise able to delineate the equally rich personality of Natalia, Leon Trotsky's companion, with much sensitivity. Those who will write about Trotsky in the future [...] may perhaps be able to add some new elements and make judgements different from Deutscher's, but they will have to take his trilogy as a point of departure. [...] In particular, we cannot forget that it often served to introduce numerous young people to Trotskyist ideas which led to their political activity within the Trotskyist movement itself."⁶³

David Horowitz (1971):

"[...] Throughout his life he remained a lonely, if towering, figure on the political and intellectual landscape of his time. This is not to say that his genius lacked recognition; his talents were so formidable that they compelled recognition. But despite his achievements as a biographer, historian, and Marxist he was, in a deeper sense, a shepherd without a flock. [...] A survivor of the classic period of revolutionary Bolshevism, Deutscher devoted his main intellectual energies to solving the riddle posed by the fateful close of that era and the course that Bolshevism followed under the leadership of Stalin. [...] In the end, it was Deutscher's unique achievement that he constructed in his exile a Marxist vision of Bolshevism and his fate, which could serve as a bridge between the tradition and achievements of the old revolutionary left and the new. [...] A real Marxist, Deutscher would say, does not spend his intellectual energies theorizing about Marxism; he uses Marxist insights to understand society and its development. It is but a measure of Deutscher's own achievement in employing theoretical insights that the quality of his history is apparent even to the non-Marxist, whose eye may not recognize the sources of its architecture, but whose sensibility can appreciate a masterpiece when it sees one."⁶⁴

Ralf Grötzinger (1988):

"Weder Rasse noch Religion noch Nationalität machten für Deutscher die Zugehörigkeit zum Judentum aus, sondern die Solidarität mit den Verfolgten und Ausgerotteten. Ilja Ehrenburgs 'Ich werde stets wiederholen, daß ich Jude bin, solange es auf der Welt auch nur einen Antisemiten gibt', galt auch für Deutscher. [...] Durch seine Schriften, insbesondere durch seine dreibändige Trotzki-Biographie hat er dazu beigetragen, das Gedankengut der Vorkriegszeit zu überliefern und einer neuen Generation von Sozialisten den revolutionären Marxismus bzw. Trotzismus nahezubringen. Er hat mindestens so gut wie die IV. Internationale dazu beigetragen, die Geschichte der Oktoberrevolution von allen stalinistischen Verfälschungen und Lügen zu befreien und die wirkliche Rolle Trotzki's darzustellen. Man kann, mit Ernest Mandel, sagen, daß in den fünfziger und sechziger Jahren kein anderes Buch so viele Leute zum Bruch mit dem Stalinismus und zur Annäherung an den Trotzismus geführt hat wie die Trotzki-Trilogie, die nach wie vor 'eine mächtige Waffe gegen bürgerliche und stalinistische Mystifizierungen und Verfälschungen der Geschichte' ist (Mandel). [...] Die Arbeiterbewegung bzw. die Linke war nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg entweder antikommunistisch oder stalinistisch; die wenigen Marxisten blieben isoliert. Der IV. Internationale mochte Deutscher nicht beitreten. Zudem schien er vielen Trotzkiisten suspekt aufgrund der Stalin-Biographie [...]. Man warf Deutscher vor, sein Versuch, ein objektives Bild von Stalin und dessen Politik zu zeichnen, sei in eine Legitimation des Stalinismus ausgeartet, das Verstehenwollen sei in Rechtfertigung übergegangen. Im trotzkiistischen Lager galt Deutscher plötzlich als Apologet Stalins."⁶⁵

Christoph Jünke (1997):

"Meisterhaft verstand und entfaltete er den noch heute weitgehend unbegriffenen Doppelcharakter der russischen Revolution als letzte der großen europäischen bürgerlichen Revolutionen und als erste proletarische Revolution in der Geschichte. [...] Er blieb ein unverbesserlicher Optimist, der auf die Frage, ob der Glaube an die Menschheit auch noch nach dem Holocaust und der Tatsache, daß dies keinerlei tieferen Eindruck bei den europäischen Nationen hinterlassen hat, gerechtfertigt sei, emphatisch antwortete: 'Er war es in jedem Fall, denn der Glaube an die endgültige Solidarität aller Menschen ist selbst eine der notwendigen Bedingungen, um die Menschheit zu erhalten und um unsere Zivilisation vom Bodensatz der Barbarei zu befreien, der noch immer fortwirkt und sie

63) Frank, Pierre: Isaac Deutscher, in: *World Outlook = Perspective mondiale*, 5.1967 (30), pp. 755-756.

64) Horowitz, David: Introduction, in: *Isaac Deutscher: the man and his work* / ed. by David Horowitz, London, 1971, p. 9.

65) Grötzinger, Ralf: Isaac Deutscher (1907-1967), in: *Inprekorr: internationale Pressekorrespondenz der IV. Internationale*, 1988 (199), pp. 23-24.

noch immer vergiftet'.⁶⁶

Justin Rosenberg (1996):

"[...] For Isaac Deutscher was not just another Marxist. He was one of the most eloquent of those who kept alive the critical spirit of classical Marxism at a time when in different ways that spirit was being stifled on both sides of the Cold War. For this alone the present generation of socialists is indebted to him."⁶⁷

Cyril Smith (1977):

"For, despite Deutscher's tributes to Trotsky's greatness, brilliance, heroism, etc., he was an opponent of every one of Trotsky's ideas, and above all an enemy of the Fourth International, the culmination of Trotsky's life work."⁶⁸

Leopold Labedz (1962):

"After a careful analysis of Deutscher's sayings and writings, precious little remains of critical independence and historical impartiality; and this explains the suspicion that all his protestations of liberalism and objectivity, justified by occasional reservations and reluctant strictures, are nothing but a mask necessitated by 'bourgeois' journalism and academic convention. Deutscher appears to be at the bottom unable to shed his dogmatic style of thinking and cannot understand free thought unbound by a body of scriptures. A heretic is after all only a rebel against a particular interpretation of dogma, not against orthodoxy as such. His vision of Soviet affairs is essentially simplistic. [...] Objectivity and a realistic attitude to facts cannot be based on a prophetic approach, but only on sober critical analysis. The picture that emerges is of a man who takes himself much too seriously as an analyst, who is careless about evidence, always ready to shift the argument to prove his oracular presence, reluctant to admit an error, more concerned with the recovery of faith than with the discovery of truth."⁶⁹

Ken Tarbuck (1992):

"It was a curious contradiction in Deutscher's make-up that he should have failed to understand the necessity for the Fourth International precisely because of the working class defeats of the period, since in many ways it had to try to do collectively what he tried to do individually by his withdrawal into the 'watchtower'. The Fourth International could never be a mere repeat - in a different form - of any of the other three Internationals. That is not to say, of course, that Trotsky and the other founders of the Fourth International started out with the intention of such a withdrawal, but that was to its historic role for many years. Nor did Deutscher understand that without organisation his own work would have been largely shouting in the wind, since those young people who were stirred by his writings could not have turned their message into meaningful activity without the prior existence of a political organisation."⁷⁰

Ronald Aronson (2005):

"Isaac Deutscher stands out among the early intellectual mentors of the New Left as the only one who expounded classical Marxism. [...] For those of us who were anti-Stalinist Marxists, reading Deutscher's Trotsky trilogy was a rite of passage. It was simultaneously a sympathetic, critical and reflective biography of Trotsky and a full-blown history of the Russian revolution. In his Trotsky trilogy and other books and articles on Stalin, the contemporary Soviet Union and China, the cold war, Marxism, ex-Communists and Jewish history, Deutscher offered a living Marxism that was both unashamed of its revolutionary commitment and able to grasp historic ironies and tragedies. [...] Paradoxically, the tragic story of Trotsky's rise and fall gave us a profound sense of hope, even as Deutscher showed at every turn the historical logic behind Stalin's victory and Trotsky's defeat. After all, Deutscher argued passionately that the logic of history would also demand the fulfilment of socialism's vision of equality, democracy and workers' power in an advanced industrial society freed from class rule and the market. Trotsky embodied the 'good' Communism, destroyed by Stalin, that became a revolutionary inspiration

66) Jünke, Christoph: Die Geister der Vergangenheit : vor dreißig Jahren starb der Marxist Isaak Deutscher, in: *Analyse & Kritik : AK ; Zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis*, N.F. 27.1997 (406), p. 3.

67) Rosenberg, Justin: Isaac Deutscher and the lost history of international relations, in: *New Left Review*, 1996 (215), pp. 3.

68) Smith, Cyril: The practice and theory of Isaac Deutscher, in: *Labour Review*, 1.1977 (6), pp. 325.

69) Labedz, Leopold: Deutscher as historian and prophet, in: *Survey*, 1962 (41), pp. 143 and 144.

70) Tarbuck, Ken: Ten years without Deutscher : an appraisal of the man and his influence, in: *Kendall, Walter: Isaac Deutscher 1907-1967 : a critical appreciation on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death / Walter Kendall ; Alistair Mitchell and Ken Tarbuck*, Worthing, West Sussex, 1992, p. 5.

for many in the New Left."⁷¹

John McIlroy (2004):

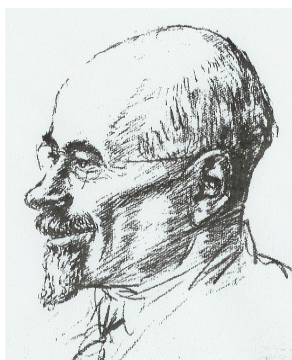
"He was a man of modesty, warmth, humanity, and immense erudition, as well as a writer of power and luminosity. His life can be understood only in the context of his generation, its political longings to realize socialism, and the indelible imprint which 1917 left on his consciousness. He remained implacably dedicated to the socialism he embraced in his youth. His faith in Marxism and his own understanding of it remained unshakeable. His insights enriched our comprehension of the Russian Revolution and its protagonists. History, in whom he invested such hopes, dismissed his prophecies. Adjudicating the 'great contest', she unmasked the inadequacies of authoritarian, bureaucratic planning and affirmed the dynamism of capitalism. she judged Stalin a failure, without vindicating Trotsky or Deutscher. Deutscher never properly grasped the limitations of Soviet economy and society, and he underestimated the central significance of democracy in its analysis. He was an optimistic fatalist who, if he was no prophet, endures as a great political biographer. His *Stalin* has stood up well to the opening of the Moscow archives. His *Trotsky* remains a historical masterpiece and an unsurpassed introduction to classical Marxism".⁷²

Paul Flowers (2018):

"Like many others, my first real encounter with the life and works of the Russian revolutionary [Trotsky] was via Deutscher's trilogy. Thirty years or so after my first reading of this work, and notwithstanding my various disagreements with the author's ideas and interpretations, I still find it an incredible read. Deutscher's fluent style, so clear and elegant, makes the 1500 pages of the trilogy a delight to read, however grim the subject matter is at times, enabling the events in which Trotsky was involved and the ideas which he elaborated and with which he engaged to come to life. By no means a superficial work, the pages nonetheless glide by. Trotsky's personality and political career, his prodigious talents and great strengths and his personal and political foibles, his ideas both inventive and disconcerting, his successes and failures, and the tumultuous events through which he lived, are presented in such a lively manner that every other biographical account of him cannot avoid feeling pedestrian and one-dimensional. That Deutscher sympathised with the subject of the trilogy was no secret, and over the six decades since the appearance of the first volume his political partisanship has been the major bugbear of a long stream of reviewers".⁷³

Note: The photograph on p. 1 was taken from *Spartacist : Deutsche Ausgabe*, New York, NY, 1996 (17), p. 28, © Oxford University Press. The picture on p. 17 is a detail from a drawing by Juliet Pannett, originally published in *Goldsmith, Samuel Joseph: Twenty 20th century Jews*, Freeport, NY, 1962, p.[36]

Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, 2006
last (slightly) rev. July 2019



71) Aronson, Ronald: [Review] The impermanent revolution, in: *The Nation*, 280.2005 (March 14).

72) McIlroy, John: Deutscher, Isaac (1907-1967), biographer and historian, in: *Oxford dictionary of national biography from the earliest times to the year 2000 / ed. by H.C.G. Matthew [et al.]*, vol. 15, Oxford [etc.], 2004, p. 937.

73) Flowers, Paul: The Prophet, Isaac Deutscher's Trotsky trilogy, in: *Critique*, 46.2018 (4), pp. 589-590.