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_Between Zion and Utopia_


To say the least, the twentieth century has not been, as Talleyrand remembered the ancien régime, a "douce temps de vivre". The fifty years since the Great War have, of course, seen changes unprecedented in the history of the race, much of which can still be accounted as Progress. But just precisely because of the great store that so many had set in the hope of change, the mood of our age has been colored by a melancholy, bitter-sweet sorrow. For in contrast with other times we have been defeated most recently not so much by alien forces and an enemy's hostility, as by our own dreams, or by diabolical parodies of them. And from that first great crusade to make the world safe for democracy, the twentieth century's victories have most often come in a form that made a graveyard of their author's hopes and visions. Difficult thus for all men, an age like the present is doubly tough on the intellectual, who must most publicly live and die according to the fate of his ideals; especially since he can no longer, like his predecessors, ascribe his failures to the power of ignorance and reaction. The toll which has in consequence been taken of the energies of liberalism is witnessed, for example, by those twin malignancies born of the Cold War's ambiguities: Stalinism, and the disgraceful flight of too many academics into the seeming refuge of the CIA and its surrounding foundation apparatus.

It is witnessed also by the dreadful sense of loss that comes with the news of the death of anyone of the pitifully small handful who have had the toughness of mind and resilience of spirit to face up
to the realities of the age. Thus to review this last group of his essays is to be acutely aware of how much dimmer our way will be in the absence of the late Isaac Deutscher. Born in Galicia in 1907, Deutscher's life was almost fated to be lived according to the ambiguities of that part of the continent where the liberal tradition of the West ran hard up against the primitivism and poverty of Central and Eastern Europe. He was born also, according to Tamara Deutscher's memoir of her husband, into the midst of the contradictory currents that were then washing across the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. The shtetl of the early part of the century was the site of a three sided struggle between traditionalism, and the newer, secular ideals of socialism and Zionism. As a very young man, thereby, Deutscher had to choose between—or he would perhaps put it, was privileged to choose between—the orthodox observations of his ancestors and the intoxicating spirit of religious skepticism; and then only a few years later between the new orthodoxy of the party line and his own appreciation of the contemporary political situation. The most famous of his later writings are, of course, the monumental biography of Trotsky, and his continuing observation of Marxism's fate in the Soviet Union. But this collection of reportage and occasional pieces demonstrates his abiding concern with the whole complex of forces that shaped the world of his youth. And as he was a literary artist of considerable powers, Deutscher's essays also preserve the nuances of feeling and expression by which his generation apprehended their situation. Deutscher remembers, for instance, his father's admonition that unless he would learn to write in an international language, like German, he would never pass beyond Auschwitz, the city closest at hand to their family home, while fate's tragic decree was to limit the father but not the son to Auschwitz, into which he vanished during the holocaust of the Second War. His ear also caught Ben Gurion's unconscious appropriation of the official vocabulary of Soviet anti-Semitism, and the irony of his labeling as rootless cosmopolitans those Jews who would not give their unreserved support to the project of the new Jewish homeland.

Indeed it seems to Deutscher that the Jew has been destined to bear a special witness to history's perversity. A petty capitalist already when the peoples among whom he lived were scarcely above the level of a barter economy, the Jew has often been unable to shed those long practiced habits when changed circumstances require it. In Russia this meant that many Jews strongly resisted the Soviet experiments of the 1920's to suddenly transform them into farmers; instead they became the white collar workers of the post-revolutionary bureaucracy, and exposed themselves in the process to a continuation, in variant form, of the age-old animosity of the