

HOW CAN THE JEWS SURVIVE?

***A Socialist Answer
To Zionism***

By George Novack

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Isaac Deutscher had a flair for going to the dialectical point. That discernment was superbly displayed in his analysis of the non-Jewish Jew — a contradiction in terms. His study of that fascinating social type heads the articles posthumously published under that title by his wife, Tamara.* She has also supplied a sketch of her husband's childhood which illuminates his preoccupation with this subject.

Deutscher defined the non-Jewish Jew as the heretic who went beyond the boundaries of Jewry and yet remained part of the Jewish tradition. It might even be said para-

***THE NON-JEWISH JEW** and Other Essays, by Isaac Deutscher. Oxford University Press, 1968. 164 pp., \$5.25.

doxically that Jewry's most valuable contribution to world culture since the 17th century has come from those iconoclasts who shook off its trammels. "They all found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. They all looked for ideals and fulfillment beyond it, and they represent the sum and substance of much that is greatest in modern thought."

These men and women "dwelt on the boundaries of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs. Their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other . . . It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future." All were persecuted or exiled for their opposition to prevailing ideas and institutions.

In East Europe these non-Jewish Jews were part of and spoke for the Jewish workers in the ghettos. The Jews of East Europe were largely workers and impoverished middle-class elements. In the ghettos they were forced into, they were often the victims of bloody racist pogroms.

These Jewish ghetto dwellers sought to wage a revolutionary struggle against their anti-Semitic capitalist society and had a high degree of socialist consciousness. They rejected the utopian notion of Zionism,

taking the stand that they would win their liberation by overthrowing capitalism and thereby tearing down the walls of the ghetto. They saw the October Revolution as the first great step toward their liberation as Jews and as workers.

The East European Jewish intellectuals were at one with the radicalized workers. They were regarded by the workers as their spokesmen and they in turn regarded themselves as part of the workers' movement.

Deutscher's representative roster of non-Jewish Jews includes such titans of revolutionary thought and action as Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and Freud. These Jews were united, not only by their transcendence of Judaism, but by their shared beliefs in the lawfulness of the universe and history, in the unceasing changefulness of all things, in the relativity of good and evil, in the idea that true and effective knowledge is inseparable from practice, and in the ultimate solidarity of humanity.

The traits of these uncompromising rationalists were likewise characteristic of Deutscher, who saw his own views, values and destiny mirrored in their lives. These essays are, among other things, an effort at understanding not only the historical phenomenon and its finest exemplars, but his own self. They are by-products of a lifelong search for the secret of his own identity. For he belonged to that category of the non-Jewish Jew, and was one of its

most eminent representatives in our generation.

Isaac had reason to ponder the question: Who and what am I? His own career spanned incredible extremes. He started out in life as a Hassidic child prodigy in a Polish stetl who became a rabbi at 13; he ended it sixty years later as an atheist, a revolutionary Marxist, a writer of world renown. From immersion in the archaic atmosphere of the East European ghetto, he mounted to a mastery of the most advanced and cosmopolitan knowledge of his time.

He, too, "lived on the borderlines of various national cultures and was in society — Polish, Jewish, German, English — and yet not of it. In this he was in the Jewish tradition, and he never denied it." The tension of the sharp contrast between his Jewish childhood and his secular Marxist maturity vibrates like harp strings, imparting emotional resonance to these essays.

Their central theme is the irreconcilable contest between nationalism and internationalism which counterposes Marxism to capitalism, Zionism and Stalinism. Deutscher staunchly adhered to the positions of scientific socialism on the Jewish question, which he ably expounds and defends in these pages.

Marxism takes issue with the mystique of the chosen people in reference to the Jews or any other nationality. It gives a histori-

cal and materialist explanation for the exceptional endurance and peculiar characteristics of the Jews since their dispersion. The Jews have maintained existence and individuality as a nationality primarily because of the special role they played as a people-class in precapitalist society, where they were agents of the money economy among peoples living in a natural economy. Judaism and anti-Semitism had common roots in the distinctive functions which marked off the commercial Jew from the rest of the nations.

The coming of capitalism eliminated the necessity and changed the possibilities and prospects for perpetuating Jewry as a people apart, since its special function became the general condition of the social economy. During the 19th century both liberals and Marxists held the view that the Jews would shed their distinctive traits and separate identity through gradual absorption into an enlightened bourgeois or a future socialist society. Progressive capitalism did institute a certain degree of assimilation in Western Europe and North America, although it failed to complete it there. The process of social and cultural homogenization was barely begun in Eastern Europe because of its backwardness.

The development of world capitalism in this century upset this perspective. Imperialistic, crisis-torn capitalism swung over to an exacerbated nationalism of its own. One of its most malignant manifestations

was the resort to anti-Semitism, a ready-made means for diverting the wrath of despairing and deluded people away from the real authors of their misery by making the Jews a scapegoat for the crimes of a decaying capitalism. This relapse into barbarism was consummated in Germany, the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, through the frenzied chauvinism of the Nazis capped by Hitler's extermination of six million Jews.

The degeneration of capitalism coupled with the failure of the socialist movement to replace it in time gave the Jewish question an acuteness and urgency unanticipated by the first generations of Marxists. Hitlerism served to spur and fortify the feelings of national solidarity among the Jews which, for different reasons, had been fading in both East and West Europe. The harried Jews had to defend and define themselves anew in reaction to the menace to their very physical existence.

For the sake of self-preservation and national perpetuation, the survivors of East European Jewry who, especially among the workers, had been widely won over to the Marxist ideals of socialism, turned toward Zionism as the last hope of salvation. The project of seeking and securing refuge in a new Jewish state located in Palestine pushed aside the internationalist program and perspective.

There were dreadful pitfalls in this forced decision. "The world has driven the Jew to

seek safety in a nation-state in the middle of this century when the nation-state is falling into decay," Deutscher pointed out. The Jewish people, which was denied the benefits of bourgeois nationalism in its best days, was compelled to embrace a bourgeois nationalism of its own and constitute a separate Jewish state at a time when the progressive potential of that form of political organization within the capitalist framework had been reduced to a minimum.

To heap up their ill fortune, the Zionists chose to build their state in a tiny, poor and unfavorable terrain already occupied by another people, slowly awakening to its own national consciousness, which they then displaced by economic and military pressures.

Deutscher agreed that the Jews had the same right to self-determination as any other people on this planet. Indeed, because of their massacre during the second world war, European Jews had a special claim upon the generosity of the civilized world. He had been shaken to the marrow by the holocaust which he considered a unique historical tragedy almost defying explanation. (Here his feelings got the better of his reason, since Marxism cannot place the tragedy of the Jews in a category different from the long list of other genocidal acts committed under capitalist barbarism.) In his youth he had experienced pogrom terror in his native Poland. He had lost his be-

loved father and other members of his family in Auschwitz.

He was fully aware of the predicament of the Jews — in which he was so intimately implicated — and he was sensitive to the aspirations behind the Zionist dream. Yet he rose above his individual sympathies and antipathies to take a broad view of the complex and excruciating problem from the vantage point of historical materialism, as a Marxist was obliged to do.

He was sure that Zionism held out no real hope of resolving the Jewish problem in the long run. He compared the Israelis to a man who managed to save his life by jumping from a burning building in which many members of his family had already perished. Unfortunately, he landed upon a neighbor and broke his limbs. Instead of behaving rationally and fairly toward the unintended victim of the unavoidable fall, the Zionists have treated the Palestinian Arabs abominably and made them into a bitter foe.

Zionist chauvinism has had a deadly logic. By expelling the Arabs from their own land and conducting warfare against them for 20 years, the Zionist Jews have transformed themselves from a persecuted minority in other lands into an oppressor nation in their present habitat.

The tragic irony does not end there. The original Zionist experiment was inspired by agrarian socialist ideals embodied in

the Kibbutz — small communal settlements which seek to make "the desert blossom like the rose." After several decades, these Utopian colonies are hemmed in by capitalist relations which overshadow their admirable features. The kibbutzim have been converted into armed strong points in the national defense system and, because of the expansionist and militarist course of the Zionist government, take on an aggressive character.

The deformation of the most equalitarian sector of Israeli society is magnified a thousandfold in the country as a whole. Israel does not have an independent, strong and viable economic base; it must live from hand to mouth, depending on the largesse of wealthy Jews abroad — above all, the generosity and business investments of American millionaires. In the pinch, its economic well-being, territorial integrity and national security all hang on what military and financial aid is forthcoming from Washington. Thus, Israel must willy-nilly serve as an outpost of imperialist strategy in the Middle East, and so it is regarded throughout the Arab world.

Deutscher gave his final appraisal of the plight and the policies of Zionist Israel in an interview after the Six Day War of June 1967. He condemned the preemptive strike that brought quick victory to Israeli arms. "Paradoxically and grotesquely, the Israelis appear now in the role of the Prus-

sians of the Middle East. They have now won three wars against their Arab neighbors. Just so did the Prussians a century ago defeat all their neighbors within a few years, the Danes, the Austrians, and the French. The succession of victories bred in them an absolute confidence in their own efficiency, a blind reliance on the force of their arms, chauvinistic arrogance, and contempt for other peoples. I fear that a similar degeneration—for degeneration it is—may be taking place in the political character of Israel."

The lightning victory was worse than a defeat, he argued, because it paves the way for an eventual disastrous confrontation with the Arab states and the Arab masses. "They [the Jews] now appear in the Middle East once again in the invidious role of agents not so much of their own, relatively feeble, capitalism, but of powerful western vested interests and as proteges of neocolonialism. This is how the Arab world sees them, not without reason. Once again they arouse bitter emotions and hatreds in their neighbors, in all those who have ever been or still are victims of imperialism. What a fate it is for the Jewish people to be made to appear in this role! As agents of early capitalism they were still pioneers of progress in feudal society; as agents of the late, over-ripe, imperialist capitalism of our days, their role is altogether lamentable; and they are placed once again in the posi-

tion of potential scapegoats. Is Jewish history to come full circle in such a way? This may well be the outcome of Israel's 'victories'; and of this Israel's real friends must warn it."

What is the way out? If the Israelis are not to be caught in a bloody trap of Zionist devising, they will have to abandon the exclusive and aggressive Jewish state and opt for a Middle East federation of the Arab and Jewish peoples. It is true that the Jewish bourgeois-chauvinists and their Anglo-American patrons, as well as demagogues and reactionaries among the Arabs, are equally opposed to such a solution. That is why this desirable political goal cannot be realized except through the joint struggle against imperialism and capitalism in that area under revolutionary socialist leadership.

By a circuitous route, lined by six million dead, which has led from Eastern Europe to Palestine, the Jewish masses today face the same alternative as their fathers and grandfathers: either alliance with the forces of socialist revolution or a bloody catastrophe. There is no third way.

* * *

Deutscher addressed a sober warning about the fate awaiting them if they clung to capitalism and chauvinism, not only to the Israelis, but to those Jews in the imperialist metropolises who complacently live under the mistaken impression that anti-

Semitism is a spent force there. They are blind to the fact that such prejudice festers in many crevices of the Western countries and, in the event of acute insecurity, can burst forth with sudden ferocity, as it did in crisis-ridden Germany between the wars.

"Let this society suffer any severe shock, such as it is bound to suffer; let there be again millions of unemployed, and we will see the same lower-middle-class alliance with the Lumpenproletariat, from whom Hitler recruited his following, running amok with anti-Semitism," he wrote. "As long as the nation-state imposes its supremacy, and as long as we have not an international society in existence, as long as the wealth of every nation is in the hands of one national capitalist oligarchy, we shall have chauvinism, racialism, and, as its culmination, anti-Semitism."

Such a prediction may seem far-fetched and unduly alarmist to those privileged and short-sighted Anglo-American Jews who have been sunning in the prolonged prosperity and social stability of the post-war decades. Yet is based upon a keen insight into the ultimate direction of the main motive forces of capitalist development in our time. The warning has direct relevance for American Jews, young and old, who regard the Jewish problem as something remote from them and confined to Israeli-Arab relations or to the recur-

rence of anti-Semitism in East Europe and the Soviet Union.

They forget that the Jewish question is as pertinent to the United States as to Israel. More than twice as many Jews live in this country as in Israel. (According to the 1967 estimates of the Jewish Statistical Bureau, 5,721,000 live in the United States to 2,669,000 in Israel.) Like many other crucial questions of our era, the fate of the main body of Jewry will ultimately be settled by what happens on American soil.

At the present time there is a deadly symmetry between the attitude of the Israelis toward the Arabs and that of the American Jews toward the Afro-Americans and their liberation struggle. Many liberal and radical Jews have the same difficulty in comprehending why Afro-Americans are hostile to them as they do in grasping why the Palestinian Arabs are enemies of Israel. Are we not also an oppressed people, they anxiously ask; have we not also suffered from discrimination, even faced extermination?

They overlook the actual state of affairs. The amount of discrimination and prejudice encountered by Jews in the United States today is inconsiderable compared to the endemic racism which victimizes the blacks in so many ways. Furthermore, the upper and middle ranges of American Jewry, comfortably ensconced in bourgeois America, some of them bankers, landlords,

big and little businessmen, participate in the system of oppressing and exploiting the black masses, just as the Zionists have become oppressors of the Palestinian Arabs. Jewish teachers in New York, reluctant to give up their small privileges, resist the Afro-American demand for control of the schools in their own communities.

Protestations of good-will do not change the decisive factors in the situation. Because of the social positions they occupy and the economic functions some of them perform, the Jews appear in the eyes of the black masses as an integral constituent of the white capitalist power structure which has held them down for centuries.

"But," Jewish liberals expostulate, "are not the militant blacks also nationalistic, even practising 'racism in reverse'?" They fail to distinguish between the progressive nationalism of an oppressed minority and the reactionary chauvinism of an oppressive power. Black nationalism is justified because it aims at the self-determination and social liberation of 22 million people. It is revolutionary in its implications because the movement is not only fighting against racism, discrimination and inequality but is objectively directed against the foundations of U. S. monopolism and militarism.

If the aggrieved national feelings of Afro-Americans are sometimes expressed in embittered prejudice toward the Jewish people as such, this misguided attitude must be understood as an excessive defense reaction

to the injustices constantly inflicted upon the blacks by the present structure of society. But such utterances should not be allowed to stand in the way of supporting the black struggle for emancipation.

While they misjudge the real nature of their relations with the Afro-American community and its nationalism, patriotic Jews cherish the illusion that American big business is constitutionally different from the German industrial and financial establishment that pressed Hitlerism into its service. The grounds for such confidence are very flimsy. The past record of the American ruling class in protecting the Jews from harm is shameful.

During the 1930s Roosevelt's liberal Democratic administration did not heed the cries of the victims of Nazism and refused to open the doors guarded by the Statue of Liberty to more than a handful of Jewish refugees who were lucky enough to find sponsors here. In the last manifesto he drafted for the Fourth International in 1940, Leon Trotsky wrote: "The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States . . . In the epoch of its rise, capitalism took the Jewish people out of the ghetto and utilized them as an instrument in its commercial expansion. Today decaying capitalist society is striving to squeeze the

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Jewish people from all its pores; seventeen million individuals out of the two billion populating the globe, that is, less than one percent, can no longer find a place on our planet!"

During World War II the democratic imperialist governments did not lift a hand to deter Hitler from consigning the Jews to the gas ovens.

White racism, not anti-Semitism, is by far the most pervasive and powerful current of discrimination and source of persecution in the United States today. But if, with Deutscher, we look beyond the present conjuncture, there is danger for the Jews lurking over the horizon. Should there be a grave social crisis and a strengthening of ultrareaction, anti-Semitism could experience a frightening growth here.

The American ruling class, whose agents dropped the first atom bombs on the Japanese, conduct genocidal warfare in Vietnam, stood ready to use the H-bomb in the Caribbean confrontation of 1962 and maltreat their minorities at home, has shown itself capable of monstrous crimes. In case the survival of its power and profits hangs in the balance, why should it consider the six million American Jews to be less expendable than the six million European Jews it let Hitler exterminate? Inconceivable? So assimilated German Jews of the 1920s thought, too.

* * *

Conservative and liberal Jewry in the

West has been given a handy excuse for continued adherence to Zionism and democratic capitalism by the recrudescence of anti-Semitism in the Soviet bloc which feeds their prejudices against socialism. Deutscher deals with this phenomenon in a discussion of "The Russian Revolution and the Jewish Problem." Unlike the conscienceless apologists for Stalinism, he acknowledged that the Soviet Union had not succeeded in solving the Jewish question after 50 years.

In explaining the reasons for this default, he recalls that in the Lenin era the Bolsheviks tried to make good, as best they could under hard circumstances, the pledge contained in their program of equal treatment of national minorities. Under their auspices Yiddish culture and the Yiddish theater flourished. Zionist ideas were not suppressed and the Left Poale Zion, the Socialist Zionist Party, legally existed up to 1925-1926.

Those years witnessed the beginnings of a tremendous retrogression of the Russian Revolution. In an article on "Thermidor and Anti-Semitism," written in 1937, Trotsky explained how the revival of anti-Semitism was one of the vicious aspects of the Great Russian chauvinism that attended the rise and triumph of bureaucratic despotism.

"The omnipotent bureaucracy stifles the development of national culture just as it does the whole of culture. Worse still, the

country of the great proletarian revolution is passing through a period of profound reaction," he wrote. "If the revolutionary wave revived the finest sentiments of human solidarity, the Thermidorean reaction has stirred up all that is low, dark and backward in the agglomeration of 170 million people. To reinforce its domination, the bureaucracy does not even hesitate to resort in a scarcely camouflaged manner to chauvinistic tendencies, above all to anti-Semitic ones. The latest Moscow trial, for example, was staged with the hardly concealed design of presenting internationalists as faithless and lawless Jews who are capable of selling themselves to the German Gestapo."

Since then the virulence of anti-Semitism has waxed or waned according to its covert encouragement or public restraint by the Soviet authorities. Rearoused by the factional conflict with the anti-Stalinist opposition, it reached a crescendo in the Great Purge of 1936-38. Anti-Semitic sentiments were reinforced by the Nazi penetration of the Ukraine and West Russia. They were propelled to the verge of tragedy by the "Doctors' Plot" in January 1953, the last of Stalin's sinister frameups which was nullified by his death.

On the other side, Deutscher notes the following facts. Under Stalin two and a half million Jews were saved from the Nazis by being transported into the interior from the invaded territories of Russia. In 1948, for its own diplomatic reasons at the time,

Moscow helped bring the state of Israel into being.

The protests from outspoken Soviet intellectuals testify that official and unofficial anti-Semitism is still rife and surreptitiously shielded in the Soviet Union. Like many of the major problems of the USSR, the struggle against anti-Jewish prejudice must be an integral part of the slowly maturing movement of the Soviet masses to throw off bureaucratic domination and undertake a thorough housecleaning of Soviet society.

* * *

What does this survey of the vicissitudes of the Jewish problem come down to? Deutscher maintained that it confirmed the essential validity of the Marxist program, even though developments have taken a more complicated course than its original adherents foresaw.

The salvation of the Jewish people cannot come from reliance upon Zionist chauvinism, American imperialism or Stalinist bureaucratism. Every expedient short of the struggle for socialism, any substitute for that, will end in calamity for the Jews. They cannot achieve security for themselves or anyone else so long as the root causes of discrimination, racism and reactionary nationalism continue to exist. Indeed, the Zionists have dealt fatal blows to themselves by succumbing to these practises. These curses can be removed only by abolishing capitalism, as the East European Jewish workers formerly believed and the

non-Jewish Jews of the Marxist school taught.

The Jews have to link themselves with those forces in their own country and on a world scale that are fighting to overthrow imperialism and striving to build the new society. The solution of the Jewish question is indissolubly bound up with the complete emancipation of humanity that can be brought about only along the road of international socialism.