



## **Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 20**

Isaiah Berlin Online aims to post, in the fullness of time, PDFs of all Berlin's uncollected and unpublished work, including lectures, interviews and broadcasts, so that it is conveniently readable and searchable online. The present PDF is part of this series.

The PDF is posted by the Isaiah Berlin Legacy Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, with the support of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust

All enquiries, including those concerning rights, should be directed to the Legacy Fellow at [berlin@wolfson.ox.ac.uk](mailto:berlin@wolfson.ox.ac.uk)

Gavriel Cohen's Conversations  
with Isaiah Berlin: No. 20



For more information visit [bit.ly/GC-IB](https://bit.ly/GC-IB)

© The Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust and Henry Hardy 2024

**First posted in Isaiah Berlin Online  
and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library 24 August 2024**

**Last revised 24 September 2024**

# Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 20

Conversation date: 6 October 1988

Transcriber: Judy Friedgott

Disk conversion: Howard Atherton, Apex Technology Ltd

Consultant Hebraist: Norman Solomon

Recording: [bit.ly/GC-IB-20A-tape](https://bit.ly/GC-IB-20A-tape) | [bit.ly/GC-IB-20B-tape](https://bit.ly/GC-IB-20B-tape) | [bit.ly/GC-IB-20C-tape](https://bit.ly/GC-IB-20C-tape)

## Selected topics

Reaction of IB's friends to his ideas: Stuart Hampshire  
Hampshire's reticence, his disapproval of IB's philosophical and political views

The failure of socialism

Joining Europe: Herbert Hart, Douglas Jay

Mandrake in the *Sunday Telegraph* on IB's letter in *The Independent*

The Jerusalem Foundation

'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century'

Respect for Herbert Hart's views

Schlesinger, Morgenbesser, Wollheim

IB's enemies: Raymond Postgate, Robert Kee, Marshall Cohen

Attacks on *Historical Inevitability*: Christopher Dawson, Henry Fairlie, John Lewis

Enemies continued: Hans Aarsleff, Anthony Arblaster, Bernard Crick

Envy of IB

Criticism of IB: Amartya Sen, Charles Taylor

Deutscher's enmity; IB's scotching of his application for a post at Sussex; *Black Dwarf* attack

Christopher Hitchens

IB's opinion of Deutscher

Jock Balfour on Deutscher

The Hodgkins

Reason for envy of IB: Max Beloff, Leonard Schapiro  
Oliver Chandos and the St James's Club

*Side A*

GC It's all right; I can see that it's all right.

IB Right.

GC In the last meeting – one second, sorry – if you remember, I asked you how did friends of yours, colleagues of yours, react towards some of your ideas? It was in the context of your telling me about how you shocked Habermas with your stories. I could see why he was shocked.

IB Certainly, so could I.

GC Pardon? Surely you were used to people being shocked?

IB No.

GC Not really?

IB No.

GC And I asked you, how did Stuart react to ...?

IB I didn't talk to Stuart much.

GC That you told me.

IB I told you – I can't tell you: he disapproved. On the whole, I think there was some distance. I think his whole philosophical outlook was, he felt, different from mine. We didn't talk very much

about these matters, and so I can't really report that. We talked about things in general – about people, about opinions, even about politics sometimes, but we never had an intellectual argument.

GC But he is a very close friend of yours, in a way probably one of the really nearest friends.

IB He disapproved of my entire approach to philosophy. He became a logical positivist quite early, and then reacted very violently against anything that Freddie Ayer said, and believed exactly the opposite. He didn't go all the way into some kind of metaphysics or something of that sort, but somehow he became very repressed about all that. I don't know of anybody with whom he had a profitable discussion about philosophy, not just me. He may have tried to talk to Bernard Williams. Certainly nobody in Oxford. He may not think so. He didn't talk to other colleagues either.

GC More Stuart than you?

IB Certainly. I talk about anything to anybody.

GC That's what I wanted to ...

IB As you know. Of course.

GC One can say, of course, that ...

IB My views irritate Stuart, they irritate him, and so we stopped doing it. But it is true: if you ask who did Stuart talk to about philosophy about – he talked to Herbert Hart. Herbert Hart says he can't understand a word he writes. So there wasn't much discussion there either. He approved of him, but it didn't really quite work. I think he must have talked to Bernard Williams a lot,

because he is a very sharp critic and very spontaneous and they are great friends. Otherwise there's David Pears, there's Patrick Gardiner – there are all kinds of philosophers in Oxford – there's Strawson. No good at all. No contact.

GC I mean, philosophy and politics. It's a major part of ...

IB Stuart is the man who doesn't want to expose himself. He doesn't want the risk. His philosophy is part of himself, and because of Mrs Ayer, partly because of his marriage, he became totally self-concealed. He must have fallen under her spell in about 1936–7, and after that his entire life became totally concealed. If you arrived by train with him to Paddington Station and you said, 'Can we share a cab, where are you going?', he'd say, 'No, I'm afraid not' – and not say where he was going. He was going to – I knew perfectly well where Mrs Ayer was living, but that couldn't be said. The words couldn't be uttered. Because she was paranoid about secrecy, and this communicated itself to him, and his entire life became totally locked up.

GC It doesn't interfere with friendship?

IB He was quite all right as a tutor: he was able to talk to pupils, because that was neutral. He didn't feel in any way a personal relationship. As far as I know, he never had a pupil who was personally devoted to him, in the sense of following him, because he always kept at a distance. To some extent that is true of me too. I have never had disciples either – not much.

GC We talked about that. We'll come back to it.

IB Exactly. For other reasons perhaps. But any way, the point about Stuart is that I think if I had been a socialist, a strongly left-wing socialist, and believed in Freud, and believed in the

philosophy of mind, and believed in all that, Stuart would have talked to me. He did talk to Wollheim to a certain extent, for those reasons, but that didn't work either in the end.

GC And yet, as I said, politics and philosophy is a major part of your life and his life.

IB Yes, certainly.

GC And you could go on being close friends.

IB We did.

GC Despite the fact ...

IB Despite barriers – certain forbidden territories.

GC It's very interesting.

IB Yes, it's quite – it's forbidden. But we could talk about philosophy. I read his book. I would ask some questions – he would answer. It wasn't all that – but nevertheless.

GC And about politics?

IB He disapproved of me too strongly.

GC I know.

IB That was impossible. Mrs Ayer was extreme left. She was always a Communist. His present wife is the same. She is also extreme left-wing feminist. The result was there was no point in talking to me, because he regarded me as an amiable sceptic, without sufficient convictions, and that made it impossible. He was very

mystified by the fact that I was violently anti-South-African, and I signed any letter I was given against Franco. That struck him as somehow vaguely inconsistent. Surprising.

GC He really thought that you were reactionary.

IB No. Yes. Well, liberal, but that was bad enough. Stuart's whole life – his deep disappointment about playing no political part. When he came back to England from America, he hoped the Labour Party would use him – nothing happened. When Stuart meets trade unionists whom he approves, they have no common language. So that he's – I have more common language than he has. I get on very well with – during the war I got on terribly well with the trade union leaders, both in America and the ones who came from England. I had no difficulty of communication, and surprisingly they had none with me – we chatted very freely. I discovered a lot about American labour as a result of very cosy talks with – I think I told you all that, about the CIO and all that. But I had the same thing with the American Federation of Labour – no barriers, however tough and crude they were. When I wanted to talk to them, it worked. Stuart never, with anybody like that.

GC So when it comes to Stuart, I can see now the point. When he said to you that you are amused by life ...

IB Yes, that was only about a fortnight ago.

GC You are not constrained ...

IB I don't think about possibilities of change – my thoughts aren't continually on the open possibilities of radical alteration.

GC So what did you tell him when he said it? That he was right?



IB No, I don't think I said anything. I think I said he was wrong, no. That I wasn't just an amused sceptic, but that in fact I discovered that all these doctrines in which he believed led to nothing but disaster (*laughs*), and begged him to explain why socialism, in which all his life he had believed, has not been successful anywhere in the world, and has above all not generated any of the things it promised. He agreed that it was so. He didn't argue. I said, 'Look, the principal thing about socialism – it must generate food, shelter; it must produce enough for the population, if equally divided. Well, it's failed to do that.' I said, 'Well, tell me why is it a failure everywhere?' 'Well, Sweden,' he said. And I said, 'Not enough. Even Sweden is very mixed. It's not exactly a socialist country. It's a New Dealish ....' I said, 'I was entirely in favour of a New Deal. I was entirely in favour of the Welfare State.' He knows that. Not enough. And the very idea that – I was in favour, of course, of England going into Europe, because I thought otherwise ...

GC You were in favour?

IB Yes, certainly. Because I thought otherwise England would be left out on a limb. For the same [reason?] I talked to Gaitskell about it. Gaitskell, of course, economically said that it was not a good idea because the economies of Europe and England were not complementary; they could not be combined; they were competitive; they produced – but politically there was a very strong case for it not to be left an offshore island, as people used to say. Later he denounced it because the Labour Party did, but fundamentally he was not against it. I can tell you that. And his wife even less. But Stuart said, 'Well, it may have to happen', because the Labour Party appeared to be half in favour. But in general he said the horror of a lot of men in black hats and huge cars coming from Milan and Frankfurt and spoiling our beautiful, decent, just Welfare State could not be contemplated. That was the

emotional resistance. That I didn't feel. I felt anything which led to a greater efficiency need not be combined with a hideous degree of exploitation and injustice. But he thought – somehow his xenophobia is quite large, in that sense. He pretends it doesn't exist. He's a very deep English patriot. That's why his present position is very awkward – because he's an American and he has to say everything in England is finished. He doesn't want to believe that, but he says it; partly in self-justification, I think. Just as Bernard Williams says it even more vehemently. All these exiles have to say England is no good, it's gone, Mrs Thatcher, it's impossible, it's a dreadful country, everything is collapsing, nobody any good, etc. And then when you say, 'Well, who in America is all that good?', they are a little bit frustrated. They talk about colleagues who are all right. In Berkeley there are a lot of decent left-wing people, maybe. So there are in Birmingham, probably, but that doesn't help; or in Leeds.

GC When the argument about joining Europe or not was in the air, did you argue a lot about this with friends, did you try to convince ...

IB No. I knew for example that Herbert Hart was 100 per cent against, because Douglas Jay told him to be. He has great respect for [him], they are very old friends, and Douglas convinced him that the English standard of living would go down if that's what happened. And that's all that mattered. That it was dangerous for the English standard of living – he believed it. In fact it did not turn out to be true. But still. Douglas Jay, who is a ferocious xenophobe, and to some degree an anti-Semite – yes, in a very mad, unimportant, trivial, totally unoffending way – he also hates the Scotch and the Irish. Only the English are any good. But when someone like Soskice appears, who is half Jewish, of course – he adored him, he thought he was a saint. There's a touch of eccentricity and lunacy in Douglas – that's why one doesn't mind.

It's not a serious – but still, he was anti-Israel all right. When he was with Cripps in the Treasury, there was a good deal of understand[ing?].

GC Douglas Jay was in Cripps's kindergarten.

IB More or less, yes. Certainly. Because of his xenophobia, and because of the genuine .... He is not a socialist, Jay. Labour Party. No. Cripps *was* a socialist. Douglas Jay was not a socialist. Labour Party, same as Gaitskell, exactly, or Healey.

GC And Herbert is socialist?

IB No – Labour Party. None of these people fanatically want public control, or to control the means of production. They never talk in these terms. There is not the faintest interest in Marxism on the part of any of them, which is a sign. If you are a socialist you must take Marxism – you may be against it, but you must take it seriously, because it's the only form of socialism which ever became famous. There would be no socialism without it.

GC We took as an example joining Europe, but there were probably some other such issues. I am interested to see the nature of your friendships with, let's say, Stuart ...

IB My attacks on the Soviet Union, for example. Stuart never defended it. I would say to him that I really couldn't talk to Communists during the – before and after the war we talked about it. He said, 'I think that some of them are vicious; they really don't mind about the massacres, and so on. No, I just think they are poor fools,' he would say: that was a certain difference. But then, when I used to attack him, he would say, 'All very well ....' His violence during the Vietnam War was very, very great and when I used to

...

GC American in nature, he was influenced ...

IB To a degree. And when he was at Princeton, he was fanatical on that subject. I know. But then I used to say, 'But look, all right, but then there *is* a case for being against imposing Communism on a country who didn't necessarily want it, or imposing Communism on any country. 'Ah, but do you know what left-wing people say?', he says. 'Look at Finland.' But he would repeat that, so he was never a fellow-traveller. He thought about it, about being Communist, before the war, but he never did become it, never. He was faithful to England. He was accused of being an agent, of course, but that's all nonsense, yes.

GC Let's leave for a moment Stuart aside ...

IB But with me it was no good. I used to take up every anti-socialist position possible, in his mind.

GC Did he try to convince you?

IB No. Never.

GC You gave up arguing.

IB A long time ago. The great moment was when we were crossing to Ireland in 1936 – I think it was 1936, yes – we went to Ireland, Stuart and I, to join a man called Con O'Neill, who is now dead, and got us into Europe, and we did a tour of Ireland, all three of us. And on the boat coming over, I'll never forget it, I talked about philosophy to him, and about politics too, and the Jews, which I frequently talked to him about. He said, 'I thought you were a socialist and a logical positivist; it turns out you are a phenomenologist and a Zionist.'

GC Really? (*laughs*) In 1936, you said?

IB Yes. 1936. Certainly. It didn't matter because it was a joke. He was always very good on Israel, and against people like Tony Lewis, liberal attackers. He can't see why Israel has to be better than anybody else. He quite understands the position. He doesn't hate – Lebanon, yes, all right. But he didn't become addicted[?] – he didn't boil. Because he doesn't like the sort of pseudo-high-mindedness of the other side. Funnily enough. He wasn't happy in Israel, mind you. He was not a great success in Jerusalem, as you know.

GC I know. [?]

IB He couldn't communicate, exactly. But in spite of that – I told him, 'Look, fundamentally you are not pro-Israel, not really. I don't see why you should say that.'

GC I realise that he was not ...

IB No. Only because he couldn't get through to people.

GC And yet – you gave up arguing philosophy and politics, and you remained friends.

IB Oh, absolutely.

GC Yes, I know.

IB We are very cosy, we are absolutely easy with each other. When we see each other, there is no barrier of any kind. He can say anything, and I can say anything. We talk about people very freely,

and books, literature, people, life, common acquaintances – everything; everything except philosophy and politics.

GC Now other friends that are close to you, was it important to you to convince them, or was it important to them to convince you?

IB But just to finish the other thing. Stuart has got me wrong about that: that's the point politically. He's got me wrong. By which I mean – I am a liberal, it's true, that's all I am. I am extreme right to the left and extreme left to the right. But the fact that Stuart can never attack somebody to me because he is reactionary, hoping for support from me, shows that he thinks that I am soft on that side. I am not. I happen not to be. He is much more prepared to defend Shamir than I would be – 'Well, in their position I can see how it would be' – which I am not prepared to do. Did you see, by the way, talking of my Jewish activities – did you see a piece about me in the *Sunday Telegraph*?<sup>1</sup>

GC No.

IB Very funny. Do look at it.

GC Usually a friend of mind brings it to me a week later.

IB You'll be able to find it in St Antony's. A comic piece. Let me explain. I wrote a letter to *The Independent*.<sup>2</sup>

GC I know.

IB You didn't see that?

<sup>1</sup> In Mandrake's column, 2 October 1988, 13f–g. IB's account of the piece is somewhat approximate.

<sup>2</sup> 'Israeli Solution', *Independent*, 28 September 1988, 19.

GC I asked for it in the Embassy.

IB You haven't seen it yet?

GC Not yet. You told me about it, the article and the letters and so on. I'll get it.

IB No, that's the dossier, all right, but that doesn't matter so much. I finally wrote a letter defending a not particularly nice man<sup>3</sup> for writing what I regard as a balanced piece. I went on too far, maybe, in praising it. But I wanted to. The *Sunday Telegraph* column by Mandrake (I don't know who that is, a gossip writer of some sort) writes a humorous piece about me saying that *The Independent* didn't realise it had a scoop, because it was the first time, so far as was known, that I had written a letter on a political subject spontaneously, to a newspaper. Anyway, talk about – in private I have all kinds of views, and I speak of them – that's known. I don't avoid the subject at all, but it was the first time that I came out off the fence. They had a total scoop. It was a humorous article, mildly ironical about me, but friendly, on the whole.

GC Who is the writer?

IB I have no idea. Mandrake? The gossip writer.

GC Is that his real name?

IB No, of course not. Oh no. Mandrake is a plant which is aphrodisiac. 'Mandragora' in Italian; that's the name of a play by Machiavelli.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Wheatcroft.

GC Mandragora?

IB Mandragora, yes. Mandragola? Mandragora. That means Mandrake. It's supposed to be, when you – there is a legend – if you pluck this plant it yields blood for some reason. It doesn't. But it has all kinds of mysterious alchemical properties – in the Middle Ages – dangerous in some way – probably both a poison, and aphrodisiac – it's a special kind of plant. Continue, yes. So you might look at that because it's funny. There is a photograph of me. I hate appearing in public. They are right, it is a scoop. And that's why I didn't want this article to appear. I don't know who wrote it, but I can't object, because it's amiable, although it's slightly familiar. (*laughs*) It says all kinds of nonsensical things about the fact that I am one of the few surviving people in the world whose views on public affairs are absolutely authoritative,<sup>4</sup> a philosopher with totally – totally untrue – I never pronounce – America, England – I am a great authority on this important subject. What? Yes.

GC What did Aline think about it?

IB She urged me to write, to send the letter. She is more dovish than I am – a good deal.

GC Now?

IB Always has been. When I used to attack Communists, she said she rather liked them, personally, [?] and so on. But in this case she was more dovish, she urged me – thought it was cowardly not to. I wobbled – should I write, should I not, but finally said, 'All right, if I am accused of cowardice' – I sat down and sent it off. When she read it, she said, 'I must say, it's a bit strong.'

<sup>4</sup> 'He is the last of the Great Academic Authorities on Public Affairs.'



GC She did say that?

IB Yes. I said, 'I meant it to be.' It was very unimportant. But I'm in bad odour with the Jews on all grounds, at the moment. So I have to go to a dinner for the Ambassador here, I told you. I shall probably get some acid remarks.

GC I'm not sure.

IB And maybe not. The thing which annoys me ...

GC He's going back to Israel now, by the way, and he's going to be less of a Likud man, I think.

IB Because?

GC I don't know, because you see basically he's ...

IB He has become head of that foundation, you know that.

GC Yes. Clore?

IB Clore. That'll occupy him.

GC I didn't know that the foundation has activities in Israel.

IB Its office is in Israel, the main office. They spend more money in Israel than anywhere else. Oh no it's an Israeli thing. Fundamentally, it's an Israeli foundation. They *can* spend money on anything. She must spend a lot of money on the Tate extension, and thousands of things in England, but the bulk is intended for Israel. Teddy has got a great deal of money out of her, for the Jerusalem Foundation. Certainly. I don't know which way he'll

direct it, because I am a little bit uneasy about his religious tendencies. [?] minded the rabbonim more than necessary. He was terribly impressed by the Rebbe in Brooklyn<sup>5</sup> – maybe not terribly – he thought he was a marvellous man.

GC He was lately there.

IB Last year. And he said something to him about lighting a candle, and this – they had a mystical conversation, profoundly moved. My cousin.

GC Let's leave Stuart. I'm asking you about other friends, close friends, like Herbert and others. Did you mind, in their case, to convince them, or did they mind about your political ...

IB Yes. Oh, Herbert does argue with me. Herbert, yes. And Jenifer even more. I am very fond of them both. They both like me very much. So we have very direct relations. But when, for example, I wrote a piece called 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century', and it was reprinted in that book,<sup>6</sup> Herbert read it and said it was *deeply* reactionary. Well, maybe.

GC And did you argue?

IB No. I said ... Because he didn't bring it ...

GC You didn't think that it was reactionary?

<sup>5</sup> Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–94), 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe; IB's 4th cousin once removed.

<sup>6</sup> IB, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century', *Foreign Affairs* 28 (1950), 351–85; repr. in IB, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969); now in IB, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 2002).

IB I didn't think anything. I just thought it's what I believe. I didn't classify it.

GC So you didn't try to ...

IB I didn't say 'Why?'

GC No, but ...

IB I thought he would think that. Yes. I can't remember, but the bulk of it was purely anti-Soviet, really, is what it was. It was mainly about ... I don't know, but anyway he didn't like it, no. When did I write it? Very early after the war. Maybe in 1949, 1950 – that sort of period.<sup>7</sup> I can't remember to whom I sent it, or where it was printed – *Foreign Affairs*? Maybe.

GC I think it was *Foreign Affairs*.

IB Probably *Foreign Affairs*. I can't think. Not in England, certainly. I should think ... *Encounter*? I don't know. What does he say, Hardy?

GC 1948 now ...

IB 1950, 1951, maybe. Maybe it's later than I think.

GC I think it was a little later. I'll find it.

IB No. Let me look.

\*

<sup>7</sup> It was commissioned by Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of *Foreign Affairs*, in a letter dated 31 August 1949, and submitted by IB with a letter dated 1 February 1950.

IB Begin again.

GC Yes. So I was asking you ...

IB Whether I show everything ...

GC To Herbert.

IB No. Only things that interest him, like political theory. If I write things he doesn't necessarily react, because he doesn't usually read them, or not necessarily. I submit things to Herbert because he's a very sharp and just critic, and what he says is well worth – always serious and always interesting. When he objects, or when he agrees, I am always rather pleased because I respect and admire him very much indeed; he's an extremely intelligent and very balanced man. He's on the whole the person whose strong disapproval intellectually I would most mind.

GC You *would* mind?

IB Oh yes. He rarely was shocked; he is occasionally, but not very often.

GC You said that – articles in political philosophy, he is very often critical.

IB Well, *Four Essays on Liberty* he didn't particularly like, but he agreed with some things, not with others.

GC So when you said that you mind his reaction, it's mainly on moral issues or on philosophical ...?

IB No. Political issues. On moral issues I have never disagreed with him. Never.

GC So political, I see.

IB She attacks me in a comical way because she is very extreme, but it's a joke.

GC Who else do you mind?

IB Whose views do I mind?

GC Yes. Politically and philosophically.

IB I don't know that I mind anybody's much, because I don't talk to a very many people about it, in Oxford, or outside Oxford. Whose do I mind? Who would I be upset if I sub[mitted] ... and then disapproved. I don't think anybody. I have got no allies really, and no disciples. I know people in America – Arthur Schlesinger, for example. I like him very much, but he's not likely to disagree, I know that.

GC (*laughs*)

IB Because in a way – Stuart thinks he's no good at all. Thinks he's fundamentally rather cheap and rather – no good. The game[?] – for the same reason that he disapproves of me, because he's a crypto-reactionary, in his sense. He feels he is not a socialist, not a sympathiser. Oh heavens – who is there who ...? I suppose if I was violently attacked by Morgenbesser, I would mind. I have great respect for him because I think he's – he's rather eccentric, but he's extremely clever and extremely honest. If a man is very clever and very honest ... Richard Wollheim I don't expect to agree with, but then he doesn't expect to agree with me. We are on very good

terms, but then again he is rather a maverick. He also doesn't have very many allies. He is very much a man on his own. But I'm just trying to think who there could be. Would you like to suggest somebody?

GC In your early days?

IB You mean before the war?

GC Before the war, or in the 1940s.

IB I couldn't remember. I don't think I would remember. A colleague among the philosophers? I suppose if the philosophers I admired – if someone like Price or someone like Ryle, who were the chief philosophers of Oxford, said I was no good at all, I wouldn't like it. That's all it comes to.

GC And I mean when you have ...

IB I have been attacked, of course, very violently. I have enemies – about half a dozen, at least. No, Carr is nothing like as much an enemy as others.

GC Who are your enemies?

IB People who are violently – I wish I could remember. People who have really personally attacked me, I mean intellectually but personally? Where I feel it's not just critical but hostile. Let me see. Before the war – I can tell you the nasty reviews, because one never forgets those.

GC There are very few.

IB Not very few. Not at all very few. You don't know them. You are mistaken. The book on Karl Marx received a *violent* attack from Raymond Postgate in the *New Statesman*.<sup>8</sup> Personally violent. But I'd never published anything before the war, so there was nothing to attack. Then there was a very nasty article about me in *Picture Post* by a man called Robert Kee, which is the nastiest thing I ever saw printed about anybody.<sup>9</sup> I couldn't think why he did it. His friends combined to protest to him about it. He was an interviewer, he was a journalist, came with a camera and so on. He was a friend of James Joll, who lived in New College under me. He said, would I see him? This very handsome young man appeared and asked general – I can't remember what he did – and then wrote an extremely insulting article about me – I don't know: my appearance, my voice, that sort of thing.

<sup>8</sup> 'Karl Marx', *New Statesman and Nation* 18 no. 456 (18 November 1939), 732, 734. 'Violent' is an exaggeration.

<sup>9</sup> 'Eternal Oxford', *Picture Post*, 25 November 1950, 13–21. 'Fat, animated, forty, swollen with sedentary delight at the miracles and absurdities of this persisting world [...]. He was a Very Important Don – the best talker in Oxford, they said, which meant not only that there were in England at that moment at least a dozen young men, once his pupils, all talking exactly like him, but also that, in his own particular nimble, cut and thrust line of talk, he was the best in the world' (13).

## KARL MARX

36

Karl Marx. By I. BERLIN. Home University Library. *Butterworth*. 2s. 6d.

When I first began to study Marx, a quarter of a century ago now, I was able to acquire all the books on him in English without the least strain on my pocket money. There was Spargo's *Life* and a Kerr book by Louis Boudin called *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx*. There was nothing else at all. The Russian revolution called forth one or two studies by dons, which I still have on my shelves; but they were patronising and rubbishy. For years Marx remained the most underwritten of economists. And now he is the most overdescribed. Every sort of study is available, sometimes in several specimens: "human interest" (Carr), emendatory (Cole), adulatory (any C.P. author), abusive (Father Larkin), cheap (my own) or merely accurate (Beer). What claims has Mr. Berlin to issue another? Well, his book is easily, though not well, written. It is reasonably priced and has over 250 pages. It shows no prejudice and contains no major errors. But here I am afraid praise must stop. It contains far too many minor errors. Some of these (such as dating the "June days" in Paris in '48 a month late and suggesting the workers were led by Blanqui; or confusing the 1871 meeting of the International with the Hague conference of 1872) suggest an extensive ignorance of background. The account of the Commune is really very bad indeed. The "dialectic" and historical materialism have been explained better before, and no attempt is made to discuss and meet the objections of common sense to the former. A long analysis of a little known early work (*The German Ideology*) is of obvious value, but in order to include it Mr. Berlin has attempted to explain historical materialism before bringing in any account of the *Communist Manifesto*, a merely freakish *tour de force*. The Labour Theory of Value is scarcely even explained, and its truth or relevance to modern life not discussed. Yet more than half of Marx's own writing is directly or indirectly concerned with it. Even the personal estimates of character are peculiar: Hyndman is described as "agreeable" and of Marx it is noted that he objected to "cowardice" and was unsentimental. It is not observed that it was *mental* cowardice alone that he was able to despise; the theorist of revolution throughout his life had no opportunity of finding out if he was himself a physical coward. It is not noticed that his furious denunciations of the Duchess of Sutherland, Louis Napoleon and other products of the capitalist system, or his carefully cultivated brutality to all but the few

37  
 "correct" followers, are to even the most amateur psychologist evidences of a repressed but powerful sentimentality. Indeed, the chief objection to Mr. Berlin's essay is that not only in such relatively difficult topics as psychology but even in such obvious questions as the dictatorship of the proletariat he has made no attempt whatever to relate Marxism to modern conditions or summarise controversy since the days of Bernstein.

RAYMOND POSTGATE



**F**AT, animated, forty, swollen with sedentary delight at the miracles and absurdities of this persisting world, he regarded us and our assignment with benevolent horror. He was a Very Important Don—the best talker in Oxford, they said, which meant not only that there were in England at that moment at least a dozen young men, once his pupils, all talking exactly like him, but also that, in his own particular nimble, cut and thrust line of talk, he was the best in the world. We had come, we explained, to find out what sort of place 'Oxford' was today. "How very embarrassing for you," he said, considerably.



*Author*

*C. S. Lewis, Magdalen, author of eighteen books, including 'The Screwtape Letters.'*



*Historian*

*Hugh Trevor-Roper, Christ Church, author of 'The Last Days of Hitler.'*



*Philosopher*

*Isaiah Berlin, New College, one of the best talkers in Oxford.*



*Warden of Wadham*

*Maurice Bowra, expert on Greek and Russian verse.*

GC Where was it?

IB *Picture Post*.

GC And when?

IB Nineteen forty-something – when did *Picture Post* appear? Before I went to ... Between 1946 and 1950. And I always rather like to think of him as an enemy. I've met him since. And then from time to time he says, 'Do you still [feel] very violently about that? Do you still feel wounded?', he says. I say, 'One moment, I'll consult. Yes, I'm afraid the scar is there. I'm so sorry, I'm afraid it's there.' I am very polite to him. It's a kind of joke by now. But I regard him – when people say, 'Ah yes, Robert Kee, my [sc. your] enemy.' He hasn't said a word about me since. But he knows. And people wrote to him saying ... He shortly after that, it's true, tried to commit suicide – but that's neither here nor there. He's married five wives,<sup>10</sup> he's that kind of person. A great many of my friends like him very much.

GC And who wrote him?

IB James did, because he was responsible for arranging the interview. Said, 'How could he?' And somebody else did too. I can't remember who, some friend. David Cecil said he thought it was the most awful thing about anybody he'd ever seen, and he is quite just in these matters. He had no motive, except the truth. Usually people say, 'I think you're being too ... I don't think it's as bad as all that.' Nobody said that. 'Let's not be too ...'. Wait a minute, I'm just collecting these things. Then there was the famous attack on me by a man called Marshall Cohen which appeared in something like the *English Review of Metaphysics*, I believe it was

<sup>10</sup> Only three.

called.<sup>11</sup> Something produced in St Andrews. Maybe it was called the *Journal of Philosophy* – I can't remember. He probably reprinted it somewhere. That was an attack on 'Two Concepts of Liberty', quite straightforward. And it was a personal attack. It's quite serious, quite well done. The intellectual parts of it I strongly disagree with, I think he's wrong, but they are quite intelligent. But the personal thing is no good. 'Who is this man? Why does he think he's so important? Why should people regard him as so important? Sir Isaiah Berlin' – a lot of that. So that must have appeared in the 1950s. I think you'll find it in Henry Hardy – in the bibliography [?]. Not by me. I think he also mentions things about me. He is a philosopher in America. Came to Oxford. He tried to apologise. When I was in New York, he tried to get an American poet whom both of us knew – he's a kind of American highbrow, he was at Harvard. He more or less lost the job at Harvard because Quine, who is the dictator of philosophy in Harvard, thought a man who could write such an article about me didn't deserve a job. That was perhaps too strong. Morton White, my friend in Princeton, sent him to see me. What happened was that he came, and he thought I thought he was a bit brash; he was obviously a rather – [a] Jew with a certain amount ofchutzpah, and we had quite a nice – so I gave him tea. He was a tremendous name-dropper; and then I never asked him to tea again. That's all that happened. And that he resented, very bitterly. He thought it didn't go well. It rankled. He obviously wanted to have a relationship with me of some sort. That's really what was responsible for the personal part of it. So that was a real attack. I never replied to it.<sup>12</sup> but there was another man in America who wrote exactly the same points, without the personalities, so I replied to that in my Introduction, when I answer objections.<sup>13</sup> Some other Jew, in fact. I never mentioned Cohen, at

<sup>11</sup> 'Berlin and the Liberal Tradition', *Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960), 216–27.

<sup>12</sup> But see L 40/1.

<sup>13</sup> A. S. Kaufman, 'Professor Berlin on "Negative Freedom"', *Mind* 71 (1962), 241–3: *ibid.*

all, I thought it was *infra dig*. Well, then let me see. Other very na[sty] – *Historical Inevitability* was attacked by everybody. Nobody didn't. Nobody defended it.

GC Nobody defended it?

IB No. Nobody. It was attacked by Catholics, by Marxists, by the *Spectator*,<sup>14</sup> by Christopher Dawson,<sup>15</sup> who was a Catholic historian. As you can imagine, nobody did [?] – anti-determinism of that kind was likely to tread on everybody's toes. Come in, Aline, come in. (*Aline comes in*) [?] All right. *Historical Inevitability* was attacked by absolutely everybody. I don't think anybody defended it at all. The nearest person who could have defended it was Popper, but all he did was to say – all he said was ...

*Side B*

IB Ah yes, I did. Yes, I did bring it. Well let me see now. I'm trying to think who else. No, Christopher Dawson was a well-known Catholic historian, who was – that sort of thing, serious man. He reviewed me in some law journal. He wasn't hostile, he wasn't rude, but very pained. The idea, [?] Christianity comes in. God can't ... we have no responsibility if God knows our future – that won't do. Stop[?] foreknowledge.

GC But he – a I like his writing, by the way.

IB He's a serious person. His real name was Robinson.<sup>16</sup> He changed his name. Wait a moment. After him, who else attacked that? Oh about, I think – oh, Marxists did. There was a man called

<sup>14</sup> Henry Fairlie, 'Mr Berlin's Anti-Determinism', *The Spectator*, 14 January 1955, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher, Dawson, *Harvard Law Review* 70 (1956–7), 584–8.

<sup>16</sup> Not so: IB confuses him with Geoffrey Dawson.

Lewis, who was a professional Communist hack who wrote philosophical books on Marxism, Dr Lewis, I think.<sup>17</sup> He was a man of no importance, but he wrote two or three professional Communist [?] which praises [*sic*] Popper and denounces me.

GC But you see, you could expect it from ...

IB Absolutely. Oh no, I'm not surprised. But you asked me. But enemies – these are not enemies. Lewis [?] to me – I never met him; I couldn't; he was just a fourth-rate hack. Nobody respected him. In the Soviet Union he was read. That was the only person. Then [?] serious enemies – Carr, as you say.<sup>18</sup> Wait a moment. E. H. Carr, certainly. Well, of course. That's more real – real controversies – more than one. That's a continuous thing with Carr. Wait a moment. I don't remember them all. Perry Anderson is a Communist, and he attacked me in, I suppose, the *New Left Review*.<sup>19</sup> There's a list of people who prevented Marxism from making a success [?] before the war. White/Wight[?] – all the best German leftists went to America, and all the bad people came to England, and there are a whole collection of reactionaries who stifled Marxist ideas, such as Namier; Wittgenstein comes into that class, quite unnecessarily; Gombrich, Popper, myself. I come among the German refugees, for some reason, because I am a refugee of the Russian Revolution – that's why I hate it. And

<sup>17</sup> Presumably John Lewis (1889–1976).

<sup>18</sup> 'The New Scepticism' (leading article on 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century'), TLS, 9 June 1950, 357; 'Sociology' (leading article on 'Freedom and Its Betrayal'), TLS, 9 January 1953, 25; 'History and Morals' (leading article on *Historical Inevitability*), TLS, 17 December 1954; 'What is History?' (letter), *Listener*, 1 June 1961, 973, 975; *What is History?* (London, 1961: Macmillan), 38–40, 46/2, 70–1, 86–9, 93, 97, 121–3.

<sup>19</sup> 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, first series, 50 (July–August 1968), 3–57, esp. 25–8; repr. in Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn (eds), *Student Power* (Harmondsworth, 1969: Penguin), 214–84, esp. 239–42 and 281.

Gombrich is[?] not too bad in his own way, but I am appalling – bland and superficial. It's extremely strong, that. He was an undergraduate in Oxford who used to come to my lectures – certainly displeased him. But he's rather a violent man. But anyway, he was a real enemy. I've never met him. He's the most eloquent, the best-known of the what might be called neo-Marxist English journalists – [?] historians too. In two quite important books. He's an enemy, [?] quite naturally so. Then who else? Wait a moment. There's a man, an ally of his, who I'm sure doesn't think he's an enemy, who went to King's, where he still is – he's a fellow, who writes Marxist [?] books – I've forgotten his name. He was writing a life of Engels – I don't know if that ever appeared. He writes about English workers in the nineteenth century, that kind of thing, sort of E. P. Thompson-like things. I think he was at Nuffield, I've forgotten, quite a nice man who also attacked me – not very violently, but still, a touch of nastiness. Then there is a man – wait now, I don't reply to these people, that's why I don't remember. There is a man, an American Marxist of the name, something like Mayer,<sup>20</sup> who wrote a violent attack on me in an American periodical to which I have written myself – I can't remember what book he was reviewing in particular, probably my collected works – a thing called the – wait, it's got a funny name because it comes from an Indian word;<sup>21</sup> it's a periodical produced by one of the liberal arts colleges in America. Various people defended me, people wrote letters; but they sent me their articles defending me, the editor wouldn't print them, but they are unknown to me – unknown allies. That really was very nasty, but I

<sup>20</sup> Presumably Russell Jacoby, 'Isaiah Berlin: With the Current' (review of *Selected Writings*), *Salmagundi* 55 (Winter 1982), 232–41. See also Jonathan Lieberman, 'Isaiah Berlin and the Limits of Liberal Theory: A Response to Russell Jacoby', and Russell Jacoby, 'A Reply to Lieberman', *Salmagundi* 57 (Summer 1982), 185–90, 191–2. *Salmagundi* is published by Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York.

<sup>21</sup> In fact from Franch 'salmigondis', it seems.

couldn't mind it because it's a small American periodical; it's quite well known though. For the moment let me – and you will put it in later. Anyhow, it's a liberal arts college called something like – I don't know what – the something College, somewhere in New York State, which produces a quite well known periodical, [in] which this man, who is a rather angry American Marxist, denounced [me] for being predictable, platitudinous, wrong about everything, and anyhow no good, in every way. A sharp attack. Completely misinterpreting everything, too. But still. That was a real personal attack. Then there was, much later – it was after Carr and all that – there was a man called Aarsleff. He's a Danish philologist, and he wrote an article out of the blue (I know him, quite nice too when we met). He wrote me a letter enclosing a typescript of his review, which was about to appear in the *London Review of Books*, about my *oeuvre* in general.<sup>22</sup>

GC When was it?

IB I don't know – two or three – three or four years ago – two or three years ago. Fairly recent. His name is Hans Aarsleff and he wrote me a letter saying how sorry he was that I hadn't been to Princeton since – what a nice evening we had together – how he hoped to meet me again – said, 'I'm sending a copy of my review, which of course' – at the usual risk, of course. It was a very strong attack on my views, misinterpreting me entirely, I thought. Printed by Karl Miller, who wanted to get up a controversy, I could see. So I replied, at great length, provided it appeared in the same copy as his review, which they don't usually do. But they did it in my case because they thought it was good for business that there should be this confrontation. So there is his article and my piece. Then he wrote another, even more violent piece. (After that, no more

<sup>22</sup> Hans Aarsleff, 'Vico and Berlin', *London Review of Books*, 5–18 November 1981, 6–7; reply by IB, *ibid.* 7–8; letters from Aarsleff and IB, 3–16 June 1982, 5.

personal letters. I wrote a rather mocking letter, about his thing.) Another piece. There was a brief reply by me saying I wasn't going to bandy words, I wasn't going to argue with him, and I quoted – in my remark I said: 'Strange to think that a man with such prodigious learning has so little understanding.'<sup>23</sup> Mainly about Herder's – the interpretation of Herder – the interpretation of other people, for purely intellectual reasons. He did it because he's a violent defender of the Enlightenment. He thought I defended the anti-Enlightenment too much, and it provoked him. He's a very learned Dane, and he lives in Princeton. He's not a very interesting man. He's read every single letter Leibniz ever wrote – that must be five million words. Nobody ever has, before or after. He's that kind of man. He's a pedant, but he's a very worthy – he's a genuine scholar who suddenly took against me, blew up, for no reason I could think of, simply because he thought I was famous on very little capital, and he was not famous with a great deal of capital, a sudden jealousy, envy of some sort – blew up. It's like walking across a field, suddenly a bomb blows up at your feet, very surprising, couldn't have anticipated it. He's not a Marxist or anything like that.

GC But, Isaiah, generally speaking, did it appear to you that there was nearly no jealousy and envy. It's rather surprising.

IB No, I think there is. I think you're wrong. I don't know how much you expect, but quite a lot of people are envious of me. In my life, there have been. And I know who have been. Envy more than jealousy, because the idea was that on very little I have done too well. That's the view, that's the rationalised view – which I accept. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. You want to know who's envious of me? Let's go on with the enemies.

<sup>23</sup> IB quotes 'Whitehead's pertinent observation about scholars "who know so much and understand so little" [untraced]. Professor Aarsleff's two philippics seem to me to be excellent illustrations of this sad truth.'



GC I don't think that there are many, or if there are, deep in heart, but ...

IB Look. I'm not widely disliked. I agree.

GC To an extent that you would be surprised.

IB Yes. Quite surprising.

GC Taking into account your real success, taking into account the character of intellectuals that are really always envious ...

IB Comparatively little.

GC Relatively speaking, it is surprising.

IB Wait a bit. I'll give you a list in a moment.

GC I'll tell you that once Avishai and myself, we discussed it and tried to figure out why.

IB There are people who think that I've done too well on too little. Stuart thinks that, for example. Stuart used to say to me, 'Why do you read about philosophy? We want to hear more about Russian literature.' I could see what that meant. Why don't I abandon a subject in which I am really no good and do something which is easier, and about which I know more? He would like to know more about Tolstoy. That sort of line. I know exactly what that meant.

GC Are you sure?

IB I am absolutely sure. Exactly.

GC It was not literal?

IB No. It wasn't positive; it was negative. I'll tell you. No, I'll come to that in a moment. Fascinating subject. Let me go on about enemies. I can't remember the name of that reviewer, damn it. Still persecutes me. His name was Mayer, I think, Michael Mayer, something – I don't know, some sort of Mayer – Stuart Mayer. The second name is Jewish, but the first name is proper American, like Newton Mayer, or Stuart Mayer, or Calvin Mayer. The name is on the tip of my tongue. No, let me go on, enemies. Now in England. There is a terrific, violent article – piece about me by a man called Arblaster – no, I don't think – that's why – you don't know them, that's why you thought so few. Anthony Arblaster. He is a lecturer in politics in the University of Sheffield, and he's among – very left wing. He's a friend of Steven Lukes. And he wrote a review<sup>24</sup> in – I think, can't remember, probably *Political Studies*, somewhere like that, in which, quite apart from a general attack, he maintained that I had changed what I had written – certain things in the first edition of *Karl Marx*, because times had changed, people became more favourable to Marx, that I had written a book during an anti-Marxist period, that I was a time-server. The same thing with E. H. Carr. That I had changed certain things in the other book and made certain things milder, or at least qualified certain things, not because I really thought so, but in order to fit in with the times. I didn't want to be quite so violent because it became more fashionable to believe these others things, so I tried to work my passage back. I didn't quite do it, but anyhow. I was accused of deep intellectual dishonesty and I'm trying to suck up, trying to make up to people who would otherwise be critical of me. I couldn't have liked that very much. I remember asking Richard [Wollheim], who was a friend of his, why. He said, 'Oh, I think it's

<sup>24</sup> A. Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision: A Note on the Text of Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*', *Political Studies* 19 no 1 (1971), 81–6. The article does not discuss IB's *Karl Marx*.

just – I think his motive is scholarship, he just wants to get it right.’ Far from it, if you look at it. And I didn’t reply to that either.

GC When and where was it?

IB A long time ago, about twenty years ago, probably. I think it is was in *Political Studies* – I think so. But again, you have Henry Hardy. Arblaster, he’s alive,<sup>25</sup> he’s there; he’s never made much of a success of his life. He’s a leftist, professional leftist, whose general line was: Why do we criticise the Soviet Union when we ought to criticise ourselves? We are just as bad. [?] And then there was an attack on me of a perfectly – fairly sharp attack, not by an enemy, but still polemical. (This is more than polemical, the last one, this really was a personal attack.) A far less personal attack, purely intellectual attack, by that man who wrote a life of Orwell – what’s his name? Big biography of Orwell; he was a professor of politics, quite a friend of mine really.

GC Bernard Crick?

IB That’s right. His inaugural lecture, in London.<sup>26</sup> It was an attack on me. I went to it. It was an inaugural lecture, which you can’t answer.

GC Not a personal attack?

IB Well, it was – everything he writes is personal. He’s a polemical writer, he’s a neurotic and he’s unbalanced. I know him quite well. He doesn’t disapprove of me, because he thinks I’m not too bad, but in this case it was an attack, yes, certainly, about my individualism and my – about freedom from. The usual attack.

<sup>25</sup> Born in 1937, Arblaster died in 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard R. Crick, *Freedom as Politics* (Sheffield, 1966); repr. in his *Political Theory and Practice* (London, [1972]).

Plenty of people have written against that, but not personally. I mean lots of critics, but these are not enemies. Sen has, for example. Sen, the great economist, Indian.

GC Did he?

IB Oh yes, Cambridge, certainly, but not – he was very polite. Years ago. Yes, on the Berlin versus Carr issue. [?] Criticism, of course. My great friend Chuck Taylor wrote a critical article in the Festschrift which was given to me. But he's anything but an enemy – a dear friend; I love him. No, that's quite different, these are not enemies. Nor is Sen. Oh, Sen is a friend. No, I distinguish critics, and everyone – which I positively encourage, from whom I learn, quite genuinely. Deutscher was an enemy.

GC Deutscher?

IB Yes.

GC And did he publish something?

IB Yes. [?] That's a complicated story I'll tell you about in a moment. [?] lunch. I knew it [?] anyway. Deutscher was quite complex. That was a review in *The Observer* of *Historical Inevitability*, which will date it for you.<sup>27</sup> Straight attack. Then the literary editor rang me up and said, 'You know, there's an article by Deutscher, I wonder if you'd like to answer? It's very critical, you know.' Richard defended me – Wollheim – of all people.<sup>28</sup> That was a violent Marxist attack. My relation with Deutscher I'll tell you now. I first met Deutscher in the British Museum. He approached me and said to me, 'I think you know my friend E. H. Carr. I think we

<sup>27</sup> Isaac Deutscher, 'Determinists All', *The Observer*, 16 January 1955, 8.

<sup>28</sup> 'Determinism' (letter), *The Observer*, 30 January 1955 (with a reply by Deutscher).

are both friends of his. Will you please come to Lyons Corner House and have a cup of coffee.’ Which should date it for you: the Lyons Corner House disappeared long ago, corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. He was very polite, perfectly nice. We talked about the Russian Revolution and so on. [?] met him. I didn’t really know quite who he was. I knew him more or less. He had written a book already on Stalin, probably – before, after, I can’t remember.

GC (*unclear*)

IB Oh, then I would know him. He was working for *The Observer*. He was David Astor’s protégé during the war, very much so. That was all right. Then, nothing happened. Then he sent me a piece, quite politely, which he had written on Stalin – no, on the comparison of the Russian and French Revolution, in which Stalin was compared to Napoleon.

GC Ah, to Napoleon, not Robespierre?

IB No, Lenin was Robespierre. He made the Revolution. But then the counter-revolution, which was semi-counter, was Napoleon. He was anti-Stalin: Robespierre was a hero. Napoleon is not: how can he be? All right. So I thanked him. Then, the first sensation of displeasure was when I went to a paper by him on Trotsky in Balliol. E. H. Carr invited me to dinner that night, in Balliol. Christopher Hill was there, and I was there, and Deutscher was there [?], and we heard a paper. It was quite an amusing occasion at which he read this paper on Trotsky, and he said some typically unrealistic things in it, which I won’t repeat to you as they are of no interest as far as my life is concerned, and at the end he said ‘Saint-Simon said that’ about something; ‘Isaiah Berlin’, and glared at me – since I knew about Saint-Simon, I was to take notice of that – and suddenly, across the room, in a rather fierce way. I

remember only one thing, which I wouldn't quote to you. Pelczyński, who liked him, was a fellow Pole: said to him, 'Mr Deutscher, why must Marxists talk in this very complicated and not always intelligible language?' He didn't say gobbledygook; it's what he meant. 'Why must they talk like this? Why can't they talk plain prose?' Deutscher rose to his feet and said: 'Young man, a doctrine, a theory, by a great thinker which is believed by four hundred million people, from Indonesia to Latin America, does not need to apologise for the terminology which it uses. It is a scientific system. I do not see why it should not have a scientific terminology, like Einstein.' Very typical, quite angry.

GC I met Deutscher and I thought when he was speaking that, had he not become a Marxist, he would have become an orthodox rabbi.

IB He was a fanatic.

GC He *was* a fanatic.

IB He took no interest in the West. His entire life was wrapped around Eastern Europe; that's all he cared about. I didn't like him. I thought he was a nasty fellow. All my life I've thought that. Now I had better tell you a story about him and me.<sup>29</sup> All right. Then he wrote this famous review (it's not that famous – [famous] to me anyway), which was a savage attack, short but savage; as I say, even Richard was stirred to defend me; I didn't ask him to. [?] left-wing enough. Still. Then the following happened: it's quite an interesting story. I had a letter from a man called Martin Wight – you know who I mean, from Chatham House – who was professor in Sussex by that time, saying that there was a plan in Sussex on the part of

<sup>29</sup> A more accurate version of the story can be gleaned from B 377–81 and MI2 387–8.

some people – oh, I forgot: yes, all right, in a moment – to make Deutscher a professor of something like Marxist theory, or twentieth-century socialist theory, something like that, not Russian history, which people afterwards said – no, it was on some political subject. I was then on a committee which was appointed by, probably, the UGC or somebody, to testify to the intellectual academic level of that university while it was still incubated. First two or three years of these new universities they had to have certificates. There was a scientist, Mott, there was a biologist and a physicist and me, and a fourth person, and we used to go down and they used to report what they were doing, and we used to nod and say, ‘Very good, very good.’ Fulton was the Vice Chancellor. We approved and we said it was all right. It wasn’t always all right, but still we said that. Perfectly good university really. Anyway, because I was a member of that committee, would I serve on the electoral board for this job for which Deutscher was being considered? I didn’t know what – I replied to him, saying that I found it difficult because I thought, on the whole, he had very strong political views, that he regarded his views not as simply theoretical expositions but as attempts to proselytise, because he certainly regarded his function as a man who wanted to tell the truth in order to get converts, which he was perfectly entitled to do. That I had no objection to his being made this, provided somebody else was appointed who had different views, in the same field, so at least the students would be able to hear both. But that in general, I thought it better, on the whole, that I shouldn’t be on the committee at all, and that I would certainly not block it in any way, and had nothing against it, but broadly, I think, they ought to choose somebody, probably – somebody else. It was better that I shouldn’t be chosen at all; it was difficult for me. He then came to see me, Martin Wight, and he said he thought I was probably right. What about Leonard Schapiro? I said, ‘That’s the opposite, he’s just as fanatical on the opposite side; they really ought to have somebody a little more temperate.’ In the end the job was

abolished. It wasn't appointed. But the secretaries, who of course copied the letters to the students at that period, managed to get through the information that it was I who had stopped it and deprived a very learned and distinguished man of a post on purely political grounds. So a piece about me appeared, attacking me, in, again, I think, the *New Left Review*.<sup>30</sup> I can't remember if it was signed, or not. Later, I heard that Mrs Deutscher believed [?], so I wrote her a letter<sup>31</sup> telling her what I had actually done, and that I had actually said – that I did say to Wight that, if they wanted to make him a Research Fellow, I would have no objection. And if Oxford wanted to make him a Research Fellow, I would still have no objection, because he had very considerable capacities for that. But, to make him sole professor in a field in which he would have a complete free run, I thought was unfair to the students. Exactly [the same] would have been, probably [?] Leonard Shapiro, but I didn't add that. That was that. Then, I remember there was a man called Hitchens, a left-wing journalist – you've heard his name? He's called something Hitchens. He writes for – he's now in America – he used to write for the *New Statesman*, and he writes now for *The Nation* in New York, with Chomsky and all these people. I know him; I met him somewhere. And he mentioned this crime on my part somewhere. And I wrote to him and told him the true facts. He had the decency to take it back, in the next article. He is extreme left. Nevertheless he knows me and he was prepared to believe me, so that he recanted. He was the only person who ever – who wrote it? God knows who: probably anyone might have done that. I should think – what was the Indian's name, the famous Pakistani who used to write for it?

GC Ah yes, I know: Tariq Ali.

<sup>30</sup> In fact [Tariq Ali], 'In Defence of Perry Anderson', in 'Dwarf Diary', *Black Dwarf*, 14 February 1969, [12].

<sup>31</sup> Letter of 22 April 1969, in the Isaac Deutscher papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; see also letter of 2 June 1969, *ibid*.



IB Tariq Ali might have written it. It was that kind of piece. But for a long time I was on the black list of all these people as the reactionary who took steps to stop the great Deutscher from getting a job which he wanted. His widow certainly believed it. She wrote me back a letter saying she didn't realise that I would not have been – that I had said that I would support the research position. It's true, I did. Anyhow, that's my relation with Deutscher. But when Deutscher died in Rome, I wasn't entirely displeased because his attack on Israel during the Six Day War was very violent. He was a real enemy. He thought it was an irrelevant obstacle to the progress of history. He believed in history as autostrada. He was a great friend of Carr. The only thing he had against Carr was, Carr wasn't sufficiently interested in ideology. He was a bit too English about that. But still, they asked me to write an introduction to his book after he died, called – what is it? – something about un-Jewish Jew.<sup>32</sup>

GC Did they?

IB The widow did, yes. That I wouldn't do. I disliked him too much. It was ridiculous. I didn't think well of him. I thought the book on Stalin wasn't honest. The book on Lenin wasn't honest. I thought he was a tricky fellow. I don't know if he'd become a rabbi. He was too twisted. It wasn't just an accident, there was something cunning and, I don't know, and sort of Jewish, in that sort of way.

GC I know what you mean.

IB I'm sure you know what I mean. A bit like Sneh, in some ways. He was a Yiddish journalist, you know that? Originally. He was only in Moscow once for a Yiddish journalists' conference. Yet he

<sup>32</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. Tamara Deutscher (London, 1968).

pretended he knew all about it. He would never admit that that's how it began. But he was a very good writer. Very gifted. Did he go to Israel? No, I don't think he ever did. Maybe he did.

GC I'm not sure.

IB He could have done. Yes. [?] Far the funniest thing was when he wrote an article in *The Times* – I think about the Chinese Communist quarrel, about the quarrel, something like that, my friend Jock Balfour, who was an old Foreign Office ambassador, Sir John Balfour – he was ambassador in Argentina, in Spain, but I knew him in Washington; he's a very nice man.

GC (*unclear*)

IB Middle East? I never knew that. John Balfour? I didn't know that. Extremely eccentric and very nice. Extremely nice man, great friend of mine. He thought that Isaac Deutscher was my pseudonym – Isaac is Isaiah and Deutscher is Berlin. He wrote me and congratulated me on the article.

GC You told me the story when you ...

IB It's a joke. A long time ago I told you. I had to put him right. He was a great friend of mine. I had friends in the Foreign Office of a genuine kind. I got on much too well with them really. My only trouble about me – we are about to talk about this jealousy business – is to some extent I act as a – what might be called in German as a Renommierjude<sup>33</sup> – I act as a fig leaf. When people

<sup>33</sup> 'A Jew of good repute': 'in pre-Nazi-Germany there was the expression "Renommierjude" which referred to a Jewish member of some club or society that was admitted to the society despite being Jewish in order to show how progressive the society presumably was.' From <https://www.banjohangout.org/archive/335911>. Thanks to Conradin Cramer for deciphering this word.

want to show they are not anti-Semitic, they elect me. (*laughter*) That's what happened to clubs. Or people who say they are my best friends. I am regarded as an acceptable Jew, which puts me in an embarrassing position. I know that plays its part. Anti-Semites don't dislike me. (*laughter*) That's my trouble. Like T. S. Eliot, or Douglas Jay, or – what other anti-Semites did we talk about? Mention the name of an English anti-Semite whom I might know, somebody in Oxford, I don't know ... Somebody I might know. An ordinary – known to be anti-Semitic to some degree. There aren't very ferocious ones.

GC Hodgkin.

IB Exactly: I am the friend of both the brothers. Terrible. I didn't really like Thomas Hodgkin, but we were friends, supposedly.

GC (*unclear*)

IB Well, I don't know about that. Perhaps he [Thomas Hodgkin]<sup>34</sup> was, but he wasn't my taste – but we *were* old friends. I did stay with him in Jerusalem. In the Austrian Hospice in 1934. And when we came back on the backs of mules we were stoned. It was a Friday afternoon and the Sabbath was coming. We went through some pious district. Stones were thrown at both of us.

GC Was he an anti-Semite or anti-Zionist?

IB No, anti-Zionist. He was careful to be ... No, he was a Communist, as you know, but he was a high-minded Christian Communist, and he would have been very careful not to be. I think fundamentally he was, probably. Didn't like Jews. His father

<sup>34</sup> F 98.

certainly was – anti-Semitic. His father was a Provost of Queen's. He certainly was.

GC And the Lady Hodgkin, is that the wife?

IB Wife. Dorothy. She's not a Lady?

GC No. She's OM.

IB OM, Yes.

GC And Nobel Prize.

IB Nobel Prize. And Chancellor of the University of Bristol. [?] Certainly Communist. Lifelong.

GC Now this problem of why I think people ...

IB Why is [there] jealousy? I can tell you. In a way, I am bound to cause envy. I see that. Because I'm too happy. Even not proper success. I'm too happy; I'm too jolly; I don't suffer visibly and I have had a satisfactory life in every way – successful – and obviously some people think I'm rather complacent. There I sit, smiling away. And that irritates people, because it's bound to. I am trying to think ...

GC But it doesn't – less than one ...

IB ... one could expect. I have given you a list of my enemies, we haven't talked about Carr.

GC No, Carr is a story ...

IB A separate story. All right. Wait a moment. People who are jealous of me. Have I come to the end of my enemies?

GC (*unclear*)

IB Oh, certainly. Very.

GC Max?

IB Max Beloff? Yes, in a very crude fashion. But now he's a Lord, less so.

GC He's mellowed.

IB No, because he's a Lord and it's all right. He's arrived. Max Beloff, certainly. Oh yes. Wait a minute – enemies. Wait. Mainly people who have written, that's the only way I know. People are reported to me [?] nasty amongst my ... [?] people, for obvious reasons. People who have been jealous, I can tell you. Certainly Leonard Schapiro, who was brought up with me, same career. From St Paul's onwards. I got a scholarship at Oxford, he did not. Then it began. And I understand it. He had every right to feel these things. My family was socially much below his in Riga. He was a great snob about the English. I was a foreign Jew, to him. His mother was from Glasgow, he was very pleased about that. Therefore it somehow annoyed him. He used to say to me, 'I listened to you on the radio – nobody could take you for an Englishman, of course, your accent is ...'.

GC (*unclear*)

IB Oh yes, certainly.

GC (*unclear*)

IB No.

(*Aline comes in*)

IB You've ... Are you going out again?

AB (*inaudible*)

IB Ah yes, I see. (*unclear*)

AB (*inaudible*)

*Side C*

IB Chandos – Oliver Chandos – St James's Club he is – no longer the enemy. But anyway he wrote on behalf of the committee. Maybe he still was – ten years later. Ba'al teshuva.<sup>35</sup> I didn't know quite what – I could easily say, 'You missed your chance; I didn't get it then; I'm not coming now.' So I thought I would torture him a little bit. So I wrote back saying,

My dear Chandos,

No greater compliment has ever been paid to a human being in the whole course of human history. I cannot tell you how proud ... But, before I reply, could you tell me what exactly happened ten years before, when I gather there was some – when my name was originally mooted? Without knowing that, it is difficult for me to give an opinion, to agree to say yes or no.

He wrote back to me saying:

<sup>35</sup> 'Master of the return': a repentant sinner. For the story of IB and the St James's Club see MI2 219–20.

My dear Isaiah Berlin,

I thought we were Oliver and Isaiah to each other [reproachfully]. I have no idea at all to what you are referring. We were very disappointed that you withdrew your candidature. I had no idea of the reason, but I do hope this time, etc. We never knew.

That's just a lie. But that's the line he took. Quite a clever line. Then I accepted, and never went. I more or less said – he said 'The secretary would like to see you', and I wrote back saying [?] inconvenient to come, and never, never went to that club again. I think I once went to lunch with Bill, who belongs to it. That's why I didn't want to go. But I thought on the whole I ought to accept if they want to repent. It's easy to say no. It's easier to say yes and then not to do anything. I refused to have anything to do with it. I appeared on the list. Then they went bankrupt and as a result of the bankruptcy they became members of Brooks's. (*GC laughs*) That's where the story ends. Since then a lot of people were elected to Brooks's: Solly Zuckerman, Victor Rothschild. There was a great case of blackballing of a man called Lord Weinstock.

GC Lately?

IB Not so long ago. Victor telephoned to me and said, 'Do we resign?' I said, 'Wait.' I talked to some member of the committee and said, 'Would you say that the fact that Arnold Weinstock is a Jew had something to do with being blackballed?' It appeared on the front page of the *Sunday Times* [?] – it shouldn't have done. He said, 'How can you suggest such a thing? Monstrous!' Naturally. I rang up Victor and said, 'Look, we can't do it, because the assumption is that if any Jew is blackballed in any club, all other Jews have to resign. That we can't do. That can't be done.' So Victor, in great relief, remained, and later resigned, for other reasons.

GC By the way, Lyttleton saved a Jewish family from Germany in 1939. I know the family.

IB. [?] The point is he [?].