

Isaac Deutscher

Marxism, Wars and  
Revolutions:

Essays from Four Decades

Edited and introduced by  
*Tamara Deutscher*

With a preface by *Perry Anderson*

Verso

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Isaac Deutscher, who died seventeen years ago, was one of the greatest socialist writers of this century. He was a Marxist and a historian. But in the way in which these two vocations were connected in his work, the place he occupies in the literature of each is unlike any other. Deutscher's fame rests above all, of course, on his political biographies of Stalin and Trotsky — two masterpieces on the fate of the Russian Revolution. In them, all Deutscher's powers were concentrated on the object of his life's study; and it is there that readers new to his legacy will continually start. This volume serves a complementary purpose. The collection of essays and addresses that it contains gives us the best intellectual portrait of the biographer himself — that is, of Deutscher as a mind. For the essayist, in the nature of the genre, could speak more directly and personally, and over a more various and unexpected range of topics, than the historian: subjective experience and conviction find greater expression in these interventions than in the major objective reconstructions of the past themselves. From them, we can see Deutscher as he was, a much more complex and multi-dimensional figure than the terms by which he became best known in his life-time would suggest: not simply a scholar, but a thinker, of the Left; and not only a commentator on events, but a committed participant in them. Thanks to the care of Tamara Deutscher, the symposium of texts below — which includes several that have never before been published, or collected, in English — presents a more comprehensive view of Isaac Deutscher, as a fighter and a critic, an intellectual and militant, than any previously available.

What do they reveal? In the first instance, through their prism, the original context that nurtured Deutscher comes into view. The universalism of the mature writer tended to conceal these origins: but it was in fact a very particular regional experience that made possible

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## An Open Letter to Wladyslaw Gomulka

and the Central Committee  
of the Polish Workers Party\*

I am addressing this letter to you in order to protest against the recent secret trials and conviction of Ludwik Hass, Karol Modzelewski, Kazimierz Badowski, Romuald Smiech, Jacek Kuron, and other members of your Party. According to all available reports, these men have been deprived of liberty solely because they have voiced views critical of your policy or certain aspects of it, and because they have expressed disappointment with the bureaucratic arbitrariness and corruption which they see rampant in their country. The charge against them is that they have circulated leaflets and a pamphlet containing 'false information detrimental to the State and its supreme authorities' — the public prosecutor, it seems, did not accuse them of any crime or offence graver than that.

If this is the accusation, then the persecution of these men is disgraceful and scandalous. Several questions must be asked: Why, in the first instance, have the courts held their hearings *in camera*? Surely, no matter of State security was or could have been involved. All the defendants have been academic teachers and students, and what they have tried to do was to communicate their views to fellow students. Why have they not been given a fair and open trial? Why have your own newspapers not even summarized the indictments and the pleas of the defence? Is it because the proceedings have been so absurd and shameful that you yourselves feel that you cannot justify or excuse them; and so you prefer to cover them with silence and oblivion? As far as I know, prosecutor and judges have not impugned the defendants' motives or cast any serious doubt on their integrity. The accused men have proclaimed themselves to be, and have behaved like, devoted non-conformist Communists, profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of revolutionary Marxism.

I know that one of them, Ludwik Hass, was, even before the

Second World War, a member of the Communist, so-called Trotskyist, organization of which I was one of the founders and mouthpiece. He then spent seventeen years in Stalin's prisons, concentration camps, and places of deportation. Released in 1957, he returned to Poland so free from all bitterness and so strongly animated by his faith in a better socialist future that he at once decided to join your Party; and he was accepted as a member. No one asked him to renounce his past, and he did not deny his old 'Trotskyist' views even for a moment — on the contrary, he upheld them frankly and untiringly. This circumstance alone testifies to his courage and integrity. Do you, Wladyslaw Gomulka, really believe that you have, in your 'apparatus' and administration, many people of comparable disinterestedness and idealism? Look around you, look at the crowds of time-servers that surround you, at all those opportunists without principle and honour who fawn on you as they fawned on Bierut, and as some of them fawned even on Rydz-Smigly and Pilsudski. On how many of these bureaucrats can your government, and can socialism, count in an hour of danger, as it can count on the people you have put in prison?

Recently your government claimed with a certain pride that there have been no political prisoners in Poland since 1956. This claim, if true, was indeed something to be proud of in a country the jails of which had always, under all regimes, been full of political prisoners, especially of communist prisoners. You have not, as far as I know, jailed and put in chains any of your all too numerous and virulent anti-communist opponents; and you deserve credit for the moderation with which you treat them. But why do you deny such treatment to your critics on the left? Hass, Modzelewski and their friends have been brought to the courtrooms handcuffed and under heavy guard. Eyewitness accounts say that they raised their chained fists in the old Communist salute and sang the *Internationale*. This detail speaks eloquently about their political characters and loyalties. How many of your dignitaries, Wladyslaw Gomulka, would nowadays intone the *Internationale* of their own free will and accord?

I have been informed that before the trial, during the interrogation, the official who conducted it alleged that Hass and other defendants had worked in contact with me. I do not know whether the prosecutor took up this charge in the courtroom. In any case, the allegation is a complete falsehood. Let me say that if the defendants had tried to get in touch with me, I would have readily responded. But the fact is that I have had no contact whatsoever with any of them. I have not even seen a single one of their leaflets or pamphlets. I

judge their behaviour solely from reports reaching me by word of mouth or through Western European newspapers.

I ought perhaps to explain that since the Second World War I have not participated in Polish political life in any way, and that, not being a member of any political organization, Trotskyist or otherwise, I am speaking only for myself. I should add, however, that on a few very rare occasions I have broken my self-imposed political abstinence. I protested when you, Wladyslaw Gomulka, were imprisoned and slandered in the last years of the Stalin era. Knowing full well that I could not share all your views, I expressed solidarity with you. Similarly, I do not know whether I can fully approve the views and behaviour of Hass, Modzelewski and their comrades. But in their case, as in yours, I think I can recognize reactionary police terror for what it is and tell slander from truth.

Another occasion on which I allowed myself to have a say on Polish political matters was in 1957, when I explained in a special essay 'The Tragedy of Polish Communism between the World Wars'. You may remember that your censors, Stalinists of the so-called Natolin group, confiscated the essay when *Polityka* tried to publish it, and that then you, Wladyslaw Gomulka, ordered the essay to be widely distributed among Party members. In those far-off days, just after the 'Polish spring in October', you held that Polish Communists ought to know my account of the havoc that Stalin made of their Party, delivering nearly all its leaders to the firing squad. You knew that I had been one of those very few communists who, in 1938, protested against that crime and against the disbandment and denigration of what had once been our common Party. Moscow 'rehabilitated' the Polish Party and its leaders only after seventeen or eighteen years; and then you, Wladyslaw Gomulka, apologized for having kept silent in 1938, although you had not believed the Stalinist slanders. I do not believe that you are right now in persecuting and imprisoning members of your own Party and your critics on the left; and I cannot keep silent.

May I remind you of your own words spoken at the famous Eighth Session of the Central Committee in October 1956? 'The cult of the personality was not a matter just of Stalin's person,' you stated then. 'This was a system which had been transplanted from the USSR to nearly all Communist Parties . . . *We have finished, or rather we are finishing, with that system once and for all.*' (Your italics.)

But are you not to some extent re-establishing that system? Do you wish these trials to mark the tenth anniversary of your own

rehabilitation and of that 'spring in October', during which you raised so many hopes for the future?

In the name of those hopes and in the name of your own record, the record of a fighter and of a political prisoner under Pilsudski and Stalin, I appeal to you and to your colleagues of the Central Committee: Do not allow this miscarriage of justice to last! Dispel the secrecy that surrounds the cases of Hass, Modzelewski and their comrades. If you think that they are guilty of grave offences, then publish the full report of the court proceedings and let it speak for itself. In any case, I appeal to you to order an immediate and public revision of the trial. If you refuse these demands, you will stand condemned as epigones of Stalinism, guilty of stifling your own Party and compromising the future of socialism.

London, 24 April 1966

Isaac Deutscher

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## Dialogue with Heinrich Brandler

15 February 1948

Brandler has returned from Cuba and has a temporary United Kingdom visa. He is working on his memoirs. 'The more I think about my reminiscences,' he says, 'the more difficult it is for me to find a satisfying way of writing them. I feel that the language — *my* language — can no longer be comprehended by my reader, by the German worker of today. My friends are pressing me to write because I can do nothing sensible and worthwhile in practical politics now. And this is true. I would like to get into contact with a living and lively German worker. Even for my memoirs, such a contact is very much needed.' Brandler goes back in his story to the 1890s, to the Congresses of [German] Social Democracy. 'Only now do I realize how tremendous was the treasure of ideas which the German workers' movement acquired by its own exertions and quite independently. We were so impressed by the achievements of the Bolsheviks that we forgot our own. Take Lenin's *Imperialism*, which is quite correctly regarded as a standard work. Already at the 1907 International Congress in Stuttgart, and at other conferences at the end of the previous century, most of the ideas which Lenin developed in his *Imperialism* were already being debated, mainly by Kautsky.'

Before the First World War, Brandler belonged to the radical wing of German Social Democracy. Leader of the Chemnitz branch of the building workers' union, he was close to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. About Rosa he speaks with emotion, but not uncritically. He says that the tragedy of the revolution in Germany consisted in the fact that none of the leaders had any concrete programme, or any concrete idea how to proceed, not even Rosa. Rosa was easily carried away by the mood around her; she created enthusiasm among the masses, then was carried away by that enthusiasm and overrated its power. For example, she would come to Chemnitz, inflame thousands of her listeners and then say to

Brandler: 'Well, now you will be able to move forward in your organizational work.' 'I used to answer,' continued Brandler, 'that we should be very glad to retain just a tiny part of that fever and transform it into a more permanent, more durable and more constant effort; Rosa used to reply with a wave of her hand, and turn away from me, saying: "There is no use talking to you."' Brandler relates this in a simple and honest manner, without putting himself forward as a teacher's favourite, though he does say: 'I was the kind of cheeky good-disciple who could afford to do things others could not. I used to answer her back much more sharply than others.' Brandler makes the impression on me of a mixed product of two schools: that of Bebel and that of Rosa.

I asked Brandler whether he knew about Rosa's work on the history of Poland. He had asked her about this in 1911 or 1912. She said that she had already done quite a lot of preparatory work, but that she would probably never have time to write a connected history of Poland. Brandler does not think there are any of Rosa's manuscripts still unpublished: Frölich had published nearly all of them. But there are some unpublished letters. There is, for example, one still in Brandler's possession, in which Rosa speaks lightly about her letters from prison to Liebknecht's wife: 'I do not have to tell you — these are more or less Rosa's words — that I wrote to Karl's wife to keep up her morale; but for the movement and for Marxists there is nothing in these letters.' She was definitely against the idea of publishing them and gave the impression she was embarrassed by them.

### Early German Communism

On Spartacus, Brandler says that there were 3,000 members at most by the end of the war. 'And a good half of them were moral pacifists not Marxists.' Brandler was not present at the founding Congress of the KPD in December, but says the Congress was possessed by an ultra-leftist mania which Rosa Luxemburg and Jogiches tried in vain to counteract. 'Our tragedy was that we were unable to restrain the elemental forces of the revolution till the time when action was possible, unlike the Bolsheviks during the July Days. That's the source of the January tragedy.' When I talked with Rosa right after the Congress, she was more depressed than ever. She felt that the

<sup>1</sup>The Spartacist uprising of January 1919 and the subsequent murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

current was carrying her to catastrophe and she did not even try to divert it.'

How did Rosa view the project of setting up the Third International? Brandler says it was precisely Rosa who turned the whole Central Committee against the Comintern and that he, Brandler, was the only one to vote for joining it. 'Rosa said: It will be a Russian *Krämerei* [shop] with which we shall be unable to cope. We shall perish with it.' He says he was too naïve to understand Rosa's fears. He did not fully realize the psychological and cultural differences. He knew Lenin and other Russian leaders from before the war, and from Zimmerwald and Kienthal; but he could not then understand the nature of the Russian quarrels. He was struck by one characteristic of the Russian emigration: by the fanatical hatred of Mensheviks and Liquidators towards Lenin, and by the equally fanatical admiration of Lenin among the Bolsheviks. 'For us this hatred and this adoration, this tremendous importance of a single individual, was quite incomprehensible. I understood this many many years later, too late in fact.' Was it true that Rosa retracted the criticisms of the Russian revolution contained in her pamphlet? Brandler says he could not answer that question. He had had no opportunity to discuss this with Rosa, and there were all sorts of contradictory rumours.

About Liebknicht, Brandler talks with pious sentiment but without respect. He maintains that as a personality, as an orator and agitator, Zinoviev was incomparably greater. This seems strange to me, because Brandler detested Zinoviev as he detested few people in his life. Liebknicht — says Brandler — had not a shred of demagogy in him, and without some demagogy one cannot really be a great agitator. Yes, he could arouse his audience, but he did not possess Zinoviev's power of fascination. In political questions he was erratic, indecisive and lacking in experience. As he was aware of this, he was quite satisfied with playing second fiddle. In the central organs of the party he occupied a secondary place, though he was extremely popular and liked by the masses.

Brandler speaks differently about Jogiches. Even now, thirty years after Jogiches's death, one feels from Brandler's words that Jogiches was in fact the leader of the whole group. Brandler maintains that Jogiches's death was in fact a suicide. This was not an assassination — says Brandler — this was a suicide. He spoke with Jogiches at a Berlin railway station just one hour before the latter's death. 'It was only afterwards that I understood that what Jogiches was telling me was in fact his political testament. He insisted that I

should move from Chemnitz to Berlin, while I maintained that I must not abandon the Chemnitz organization. Jogiches also gave a brief characterization of all the members of the Central Committee, stressing their weaknesses and faults and the fact that they were not up to their tasks. "But you are also a member of the CC", I said. To this he answered: "Yes, but I can do nothing. I belong to a different generation." (He was then fifty years old.) "My time is over. Now you, men of the younger generation, must take over the leadership of the party." Usually Jogiches spoke little, so this conversation was all the more surprising. He was terribly depressed. Rosa's death was the ultimate blow for him, though even before that both he and Rosa were painfully aware that we were all carried by a current over which we had no control. After this talk with me he — the master of conspiratorial work — went to a place where he must have known that danger awaited him: he went to visit Mathilde, Rosa's secretary. Counter-revolutionary squads were all around and many people in the house were arrested. He stood at an open window shouting at the top of his voice all manner of insults addressed to the counter-revolutionary squads. They shot him straight away. It was obvious that he was seeking death.'

We talked then about the Halle Congress, the March events and the expulsion of Paul Levi. Brandler describes the split among the Independents in Halle as '*Das Theater*'.<sup>2</sup> He was against the split. His view was that the Communist Party, after the split with the KAPD,<sup>3</sup> should be given time to get stronger and, *gradually*, to attract militants from among the Independents and the Social Democrats. Because of the Halle split, the party became suddenly inflated. It expanded so rapidly that the leadership was unable to control the huge influx of members. However, Zinoviev's great speech in Halle impressed Brandler very much. 'Against all my fears, which later proved well founded, Zinoviev converted me to his view. And yet in Halle I really came to hate Zinoviev, his way of speaking and behaving, and all his detestable demagogy. I then thought: This man will prove disastrous for our movement.'

Brandler sees a direct link between the Halle split and the March insurrection. 'The party had grown so big that many members

<sup>2</sup>The split in the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) at its Halle Congress of October 1920, after which a majority of the Independents entered the KPD.

<sup>3</sup>To be precise, the expulsion of the ultra-left opposition from the party at the Heidelberg Congress of October 1919, which was followed six months later by the formation of the KAPD (Communist Workers' Party of Germany) from their ranks.

believed that the hour of revolution had struck. People were so impressed by the sheer number of party members that they refused to consider the overwhelming strength of the enemy. If we had been spared Zinoviev's *coup de théâtre*, we would have expanded more slowly and yet we should have reached our goal more certainly.

How much truth was there in Trotsky's view, expressed somewhere, that already in the Lenin period, around 1920, Zinoviev introduced the corruption of leaders of foreign parties as a matter of course? At first Brandler confirms this without reservation, and mentions the names of corrupt leaders of the Independents, among them the name of Koenen.<sup>4</sup> But then he corrects himself and says that the corrupt practices were not always direct and not always personal. He quotes old Adler, who used to say that he was never surprised when a party was searching for money, but was always surprised when money was searching for a party. 'Without the financial help of the Comintern — says Brandler — we would have been developing in a much healthier manner. Before, we were publishing a few newspapers with pennies contributed by workers. We were dependent on workers, we had to be in constant touch with them, and we would not have embarked on enterprises which were above our real political strength. All this changed from the moment when we received money from the Comintern. Suddenly we owned twenty newspapers; we had not enough editors — we had either workers who could not write, or "drop-out" students who could write but had very little in common with the workers' movement. Thalheimer employed them in *Die Rote Fahne* and dismissed them after two months at the latest. Our financial means were all the time greater than our political possibilities, and we began to judge our strength and importance according to the length of our purse and not according to the support of the workers. This was bound to lead to disaster.'

Although Brandler was in '90 per cent agreement' with Paul Levi's criticism of the March Action, he himself spoke for Levi's expulsion because he considered that in the circumstances Levi should have presented his arguments in a different manner. After March, Brandler fled to Moscow. There he spent several evenings with Lenin, who questioned him closely: 'He questioned me as only Lenin used to do. He did not discuss big problems, but asked about

<sup>4</sup>No doubt this is Wilhelm Koenen (1886–1963), on the executive of the USPD in 1920, and immediately elected to the *Zentrale* of the KPD after the Unification Congress of December 1920. He retained this position until 1924, when the left faction removed him as a Centrist.

all sorts of small details through which he arrived by himself at great general conclusions.'

### The Events of 1923

When asked about Stalin's letter (of August 1923 to Bukharin and Zinoviev) on the need for purely defensive tactics in Germany, Brandler confirms that the letter was authentic and that the version of the letter which Trotsky published was indeed correct. Brandler was the first to translate this letter from Russian into German, in Moscow; but he did this only a year after the letter had been written. He says further that he 'had no idea of the quarrels within the Politbureau about the policy for Germany'. Brandler was at that time vice-chairman of the Comintern — Zinoviev's Deputy. The Executive of the Comintern was then only a modest office. Lenin was present at its meetings only two or three times; he simply had no time to come more often. After the March events, however, he became alarmed and returned to Comintern work, but only for a short spell — preparing for the Third Congress. The Soviet delegation to the Comintern presented, outwardly, a united front, so that other members knew little or nothing about the disagreements among the Russians. At that time, there were no private or confidential talks with them. This is how Brandler explains the differences between his version of the 1923 events and Trotsky's. 'It is quite possible that at Politbureau meetings Trotsky's position was indeed as he described it later. But in the Executive of the Comintern, these differences between him and the rest of the Soviet delegation were concealed.'

Brandler further maintains, firstly, that the whole Soviet delegation considered the situation in Germany as a revolutionary one and, in spite of his — Brandler's — protests, was determined to set a date for the revolution; and secondly, that the whole delegation insisted that he and the others should join the Saxon Social-Democratic government in order to arm the workers. 'I kept on explaining to them that the Saxon government was in no position to arm the workers, because since the Kapp Putsch all weapons had been taken away from Saxony and neighbouring provinces, so much so that even the police were not armed. When the police needed arms, very small quantities of weapons were brought from Berlin. In answer to that Zinoviev thundered, banged his fist on the table and so on. We were instructed to move the headquarters of the Party from Berlin to Saxony, because the revolution was allegedly to begin in Saxony. When I tried to persuade them that this would mean a



complete destruction of the Party apparatus, the same scenes were repeated; Zinoviev thundered and banged his fist on the table. In the end, a ridiculous compromise was reached. Part of the Central Committee was to be left in Berlin and part moved to Chemnitz. I spent the whole evening with Trotsky, who tried to persuade me that I should submit to the decisions of the Comintern.'

Brandler does not answer clearly on whether Trotsky was in fact personally convinced that the revolutionary situation in Germany was ripe, or that Brandler should enter the Social-Democratic Government in Saxony. With Stalin, Brandler did not talk about this; and anyhow, he says, nobody on the Executive at the time paid any attention to Stalin. The latter was, however, present at the last meeting, shook Brandler's hand and together with others toasted 'the future victorious leader of the German revolution'. 'Only Radek,' says Brandler, 'was convinced of the unreality of all these decisions.' Outvoted, Brandler declared that he would submit to the decisions of the Comintern. This is how he explains his motives: 'I told myself that these people had made three revolutions. To me their decisions seemed nonsensical. However, not I but they were considered seasoned revolutionaries who had achieved victory. They had made three revolutions and I was just about to try to make one. Well, I had to follow their instructions. During my return journey from Moscow to Berlin I bought a newspaper at the railway station in Warsaw. From this newspaper I learned that I had become a Minister in the Saxon government. What a situation! Things were being done behind my back and I knew nothing. All this was meant to put me before a *fait accompli*.'

Asked whether today he would consider the 1923 situation as revolutionary, Brandler does not give a clear answer. From the way in which he describes events, one has the impression that his answers would, on the whole, be affirmative. But he does not draw any final conclusion. He maintains that the Social-Democratic government of Saxony was completely helpless in the face of the communists, and that even the Central government was at their mercy. He recalls that after his return to Germany, the Labour Minister of the Central government sought to meet him. When they did meet, he told Brandler: 'Listen, we are accepting all your conditions without any reservations, but you should not keep your revolver at our heads; tell the workers to return to work.' All this seems to point to a revolutionary situation, but Brandler mentions another circumstance. All strikes were economic, connected with inflation. All rises in wages were wiped out within a week by rises in prices. The problem was

how to pass from economic struggle to a struggle for power: 'We did not know how to do this, and we were unable to find out. Then came stabilization.' (Brandler all the time seems to identify the financial crisis of 1923 with the crisis of the regime, and the stabilization of the currency with the stabilization of the social order.)

'The fundamental problem of our movement was the gulf between ourselves and the older class-conscious part of the proletariat, which had gone through the Bebel school and was in the ranks of the Scheidemannists.<sup>5</sup> We had in our ranks the proletarian element who had become politically active under the influence of the War — full of revolutionary fervour, but politically absolutely raw. Such had been the position ever since 1918. Our task was to unite these two elements.<sup>6</sup> When in December 1918 the founding Congress of the party passed ultra-left resolutions, Rosa was so depressed that she wondered whether she should "continue to participate at all". She even thought for a moment of leaving the KPD and returning to the Independents. I tried to dissuade her — this was one of the last talks I had with her. I told her that we would achieve more with the raw workers full of revolutionary zeal than with trained cadres of a conservative frame of mind. Yet this discord, this divorce, ought to have been overcome. But the stabilization of 1924 made it even deeper.'

### Moscow in the Twenties

After the *Krach* in Germany,<sup>7</sup> Brandler went back to Russia, where he remained from 1924 until 1928 as an 'honorary prisoner'. Immediately after his arrival in Moscow, at the beginning of January 1924, he met Krupskaya, who told him of Lenin's serious condition: he had already lost the power of speech, did not take part in any political work, but very much wanted Brandler to come and tell him all about the situation in Germany. This was only two to three weeks

<sup>5</sup>Supporters of Philipp Scheidemann, i.e. the right wing of the SPD.

<sup>6</sup>In this rather opaque passage, Brandler puts forward the idea that the German working-class movement became divided into two sections, partly through the events of the war and partly through the foundation of the KPD, and that the task of the KPD was to re-unite the movement. This re-unification could not take place on an ultra-left basis, hence the reference to the resolutions passed at the founding Congress; nor could it take place if external pressures did not force the older, conservative workers to the left, out of the SPD. This is why he refers to the 'stabilization of 1924' as a factor deepening the gulf between SPD and KPD.

<sup>7</sup>The October 1923 defeat of the KPD.

before Lenin's death, but according to Brandler Krupskaya maintained that although he was completely paralysed, his mind was quite clear and active. (Why then after his last attack in 1923 did Lenin demand to see neither Stalin nor Trotsky, though the struggle between the two had already become public knowledge?) 'The date for my visit to Lenin — Brandler goes on — kept on being postponed. There were rumours that this was "Koba's<sup>8</sup> doing" — he definitely did not want me to contact Lenin. I reported these rumours frankly to Krupskaya, who denied them, but she was so embarrassed and so confused that this only seemed to confirm the rumours. A few days later Lenin died.' Here Brandler recalls a telephone conversation he had with Lenin in 1921. There were crackling noises on the line all the time, and Lenin said: 'Again some idiot is trying to listen in.' Brandler adds that everybody was eavesdropping on everybody — even Dzerzhinsky's phone was tapped.

Brandler now relates his life as an 'honorary prisoner' in the Hote Lux. He also relates an episode of 1921 which throws light on the Comintern atmosphere at that early stage. One day he saw by chance on Zinoviev's desk a pile of correspondence from Germany. These were letters not from official organs of the Party, but from Zinoviev's private informants. 'I was very indignant that Zinoviev should correspond behind my back and in secret with his own informants in Germany. I raised this question at the session of the Executive in Lenin's presence. Lenin agreed with me and insisted that such behaviour should cease. However, I am convinced that when he talked alone with Zinoviev, he reproached him only for being careless with his letters, for keeping them so accessible that I had a chance to see them. But I do not think that he criticized him for conducting his private correspondence and his private detective work. This was the Russian method, to which they all got accustomed in the course of their factional struggles. To us, Western communists, such a method was then completely unacceptable. Today I have learned that I was too naive, that this was the correct method; and I only regret that I did not apply it myself — I would then have known what was going on in the organization behind my back.'

Dismissed from the post of vice-president of the IKKI, Brandler was in 1927 appointed to the vice-presidency of the Peasant International (*Krestintern*). He was also made Dzerzhinsky's assistant in the Supreme Council of the Economy (*Vesenkha*), where he co-operated closely with Pyatakov and took part in preparing the first Five-Year

<sup>8</sup>Stalin's party pseudonym in the underground before the revolution.

Plan. Brandler says that during the factional struggle, all factions sought his support, as well as the support of other foreign leaders. In that period he had long talks with Trotsky and met Radek, Pyatakov and others even more frequently. Trotsky apparently said that the Opposition would prefer to co-operate with him, rather than with Ruth Fischer, but that for the time being nothing could be done about this. (Brandler speaks with great contempt about Ruth Fischer, especially about her latest phase, just before 1948, attacking her for her 'anti-Bolshevik atrocity propaganda'.)

Asked whether Dzerzhinsky was at all qualified to be the head of the Economic Council, Brandler bursts out laughing. It becomes obvious from what he says that Dzerzhinsky's role was purely that of police surveillance. He met the latter quite often before he became his assistant; but after this appointment he saw him only once, and that during a holiday in Kislovodsk. Brandler worked with Pyatakov, who was nominally Dzerzhinsky's deputy but in fact the real director. Brandler relates how incredible the economic chaos and disorder was in the Soviet Union. The accusations of economic sabotage, so common in that period, were the result in the first instance of a complete lack of experience or any technological tradition. On theoretical questions, the experts of the Economic Council were the equals of the best European experts; but in practical questions they were completely inept. 'Every morning I looked out of my window to make sure that the Soviet Union had not yet crumbled.' Workers recruited from among the peasants broke tools and machinery. 'One day Pyatakov asked me to join him in inspecting a coal mine where there was trouble. In the train we looked through the appropriate documents. The seams were 600 metres under the ground. The "miners" to work them were recruited from among the peasants, although the director of the mine was against this and in an article in the local paper had explained that British coalmining experience had already proved that one could not send peasants so deep down under the ground, because they were unable to get acclimatized and therefore unable to work properly. The local GPU arrested the director, accusing him of counter-revolutionary activity and sabotage because he dared to compare the building of socialism with early capitalism in Britain. In the meantime, the new "miners" had indeed damaged and destroyed the ultra-modern machinery with which the mine was equipped. Pyatakov was furious: "Idiots! Barbarians! Illiterates! Even we did not know what a savage nation we had made the revolution with." When we came to the mine, we immediately freed the director, of course. But Pyatakov

addressed him more or less like this: "You were right, but now we give you six months to bring order into the mine. If you cannot manage this within six months, you'll go back to prison." Brandler justifies Pyatakov's methods by saying that one could not deal with Russians in any other manner.

Brandler maintains that during that period he did not engage in any factional struggle in Germany. He tried to talk with German communists who were visiting Moscow, but this was not easy because foreign comrades would get into trouble if they were seen with Brandler even in the street. The situation was indeed grotesque, because at the same time all possible honours were showered upon him, and he even had the ear of the GPU. It was only while he was inspecting factories that he realized that people were terribly frightened of him, for they looked upon him as Dzerzhinsky's associate. 'Heads of department or important economic leaders thought I would revenge myself for my political demotion by harassing them and denouncing them to the GPU for some misdeed, even if they had not committed any. I gave up all these inspections, when I realized the atmosphere around me.'

'Then came the crisis of 1928, when the Comintern started to adopt the line about social-fascism, united front only from below, etc. I demanded that my personal documents be given back to me, and my return to Germany facilitated. I told Bukharin: "For four years I have submitted to your decisions, though I disagreed with them. Now this is finished. I do not intend to follow your policy any longer. Now I see it as my duty to begin a struggle against you inside the German Party." They proposed various posts abroad to me, on condition that I did not return to Germany. I was even told that "the leadership of the German party consists of such asses that we cannot allow you to return." Bukharin, seeing my stubbornness — now that he is no longer alive I can say this — suggested that I adopt a two-faced attitude (*dvurushnichestvo*). "Why get into a fight?" he was saying. "Why enter into a struggle? As a vice-president of the Peasant International you can travel around the world as much as you like; and while agreeing formally with everything, you can do what you really think is best." I told Bukharin: "I am not a born diplomat and I shall never become one." I had a farewell meeting with Stalin. It was my shortest meeting with him and in a sense the most pleasant. He said "You must be off your head! We can live in peace but you do not want it. You have persuaded yourself that your duty is to fight against us. Please yourself, go away and fight. But you know that we can also fight you, and we know

how to whip and flog our opponents. We shall give you a good and proper hiding."'

## Correspondence 1953–59\*

### From Deutscher to Brandler

16 February 1953

Lieber Genosse Brandler,

This time I am rather late in answering, and I apologize for this. I have spent the last few weeks in the British Museum, and, when after a day's work and journeyings I return home, I find little time for my correspondence. As I read various things in the Museum, I come occasionally across your name. Recently, for instance, I have re-read the Protocols of the Third CI Congress, where you are often quoted and where I found that you were elected Honorary President of the Congress.

I agree with you that my first guesses about the Prague trial need to be corrected or rather abandoned in the light of later developments.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot say that I have arrived at any satisfactory view or hypotheses about the latest developments in the SU. Like yourself, I have refused, for the time being, to write on these developments, because it is no use to speculate or to give vent to moral indignation before one has thoroughly understood what is going on. I have read and re-read your article in nr.2 of *Arbeiterpolitik*. While I agree with the general trend of your argument, some of your formulae still seem to me somewhat doubtful. Since you have asked for my comment, I shall say frankly that sometimes you seem

\*The following letters are a selection from the full correspondence, published as *Unabhängige Kommunisten*, ed. Herman Weber, Colloquium-Verlag, Berlin 1981. The text printed here has been marginally shortened, to eliminate purely ephemeral matter. The translation of Brandler's letters is by Ben Fowkes.

<sup>9</sup>The reference is to the show trial of Slansky, Clementis and other Czechoslovak CP leaders in Prague in November 1952.

to make too strong a *peregib*<sup>10</sup> towards Stalin. When you say that the construction of socialism demands other people than those that have grown up under capitalism and that the development of socialism is accompanied by accentuated class struggle to the end, this may be true as a general historical proposition. But it is difficult to agree that the need for the new socialist man implies the necessity of the purge trials à la Stalin-Yagoda-Yezhov. Surely you do not want to suggest that it was necessary for Stalin to destroy the old Bolsheviks as part of his struggle for the new socialist man, however necessary that may have been for him from a much narrower and less sublime viewpoint. Nor do I think that Stalinism has been educating the new socialist man. The only credit which one must and ought to give Stalinism is that it has been creating in Russia and in the countries of the Soviet orbit the *material and organizational preconditions* of socialism. In *social psychology* and *culture* it has fostered, on the contrary, bureaucratic rigidity and stupidity on the one hand and an almost zoological individualism on the other. I wish you made this distinction more clearly. It is no use quoting Marx about the weak classes and races that must inevitably perish under the pressure of economic necessity. Marx wrote this about the victims of early capitalist development and competition to which the political destruction of whole generations of Communist revolutionaries by the Stalinist terror cannot be compared. I think that I guess your motives behind these *peregiby* — your reluctance to *appear* to say the same things which are shouted now from every anti-Soviet housetop; and with this motive I am in wholehearted sympathy. But while I would be very careful about expressing moral indignation over Stalin's deeds, I would be at least as much careful not to express anything that could be taken as moral approval. You yourself take the same line when you say that under Russian conditions there developed the Stalinist *Bürokratismus*, the renunciation of Communist principles in domestic and foreign policies. Surely the renunciation of Communist principles cannot go hand in hand with the education of the socialist man, which, you suggest elsewhere, is the function of Stalinism. It is not that I object to your basic argument. My criticism applies rather to the emphasis you give to various parts of the argument.

And here are a few other, minor points: You say that the splitting up of the large estates was not in the interest of the proletariat only in the East German zone. I remember that when I was in Germany I

<sup>10</sup>*peregib* is a Russian expression meaning to overdo, to overemphasize, to exaggerate.

was often told that the agricultural workers were not at all satisfied with the share out. They often suggested *Genossenschaften*, but this was then very categorically discouraged by the Soviet military administration. Something similar happened in some parts of Poland. It is not correct to say that there were no broad democratic workers' organizations in pre-war Poland. The reformist parties existed legally and were mass organizations in the fullest sense of the word. So were the trade unions. The Communist party had its ups and downs. Its influence dwindled to a minimum under the unfortunate 'Third Period'-line. But previously there were times when it not only was a mass organization but when it did in fact lead a majority of the Polish working class — and this under the Warski-Kostrzewa leadership! Nor is it correct to say that the post-war Polish CP consisted only of emotional pro-Soviet enthusiasts and job-seekers. There was no lack of these elements to be sure; but there were still thousands of people who had gone through the old underground party, suffered for it in prisons, etc. Even the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg has never been altogether dead in the Polish party. Nor is it quite dead even now!

I have the impression that you may underrate the potential effectiveness of American policy. When you say that the Soviet Union achieves in the main its purposes, in contrast to the imperialists who do so to a much smaller extent, I wonder whether you make due allowance for the probability that American policy will grow more effective as the American rearmament drive begins to yield its results. The crises in which American diplomacy has found itself several times in the last two years or so have in part been due to the circumstance that the USA has not had enough military equipment both for itself and its allies. This will change in the near future, when the American war industries get into their full swing, and the impact of the change may make itself strongly felt in international affairs. You are, of course, right in underlining the advantages which planned economy gives to the Soviet Union. This letter has grown a bit too long and I must finish. I am sending you a copy of the *Documentary History of Chinese Communism*.<sup>11</sup> This is a most interesting volume.

Tamara joins me in sending you our best wishes

Yours Isaac Deutscher

<sup>11</sup>*Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz and John Fairbank.

15 July 1953

Dear Genosse Brandler,

I must first ask your forgiveness for my indecently long silence. Apart from all sorts of other trouble, I have had to prepare two books for the printers in recent months. Two — because in addition to the book on Trotsky, I have written a book on *Russia After Stalin*, which appeared in the United States last month and is to be published in this country the day after tomorrow. In connection with this, we have now delayed the publication of the book on Trotsky for a few months, although it is already printed. Thus both Tamara and myself were so fully occupied these last few months that we had to delay our correspondence; and even now we are still in the maelstrom. How I wish I could visit you in Germany and have a long and exhaustive discussion on current affairs! So much is happening and there are so very few people with whom one can have a fruitful exchange of views. Apart from this I really long to see you.

In the first instance, I was more than a little taken aback by the attitude *Arpo*<sup>12</sup> adopted towards the events of June 16–17. I am afraid I cannot share your feelings over those events. It seems to me peculiarly tragic that Germany can never find in herself enough revolutionary energy on the right occasions and at the proper time and somehow does find it in herself on the wrong occasions and at the wrong time. It goes without saying that the workers of Berlin had their very good grievances and that the Russians and their marionettes have done everything to provoke the storm. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the effect of the Berlin revolt has been objectively counter-revolutionary and not revolutionary. In a similar way the German bourgeoisie and the German peasants once rose in revolt against Napoleon, who freed in some measure the bourgeoisie and the peasants from their servitude. Napoleon offended the national dignity of Germany and his armies plundered the peasants just as much as the Russians have done in our days. To this extent their revolt against Napoleon was humanly understandable and inevitable. But in the last instance the German bourgeoisie and peasants did yeoman service to the Holy Alliance. One cannot humanly condemn the workers in East Germany for what they have done; and yet the effect of their action is equally deplorable. In Napoleon's time at least your Steins and Gneisenaus beat Napoleon with his own stick and

<sup>12</sup>*Arbeiterpolitik*, the organ of the *Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik*, published in Stuttgart between 1948 and 1959.

themselves introduced bourgeois reforms. In our day nobody even tries in Germany to beat the Russians with their own stick, that is, with socialization and planned economy.

To this extent, the June days were far below the level of anything that happened in the revolts of various German classes against Napoleon. I think *Arpo* was definitely mistaken in hailing these events as the revolutionary awakening of the German proletariat. I understand the psychological motives behind this mistake. I understand how extremely difficult if not impossible it was for you not to share in the enthusiasm which the news from Berlin must have evoked in the German working class in Western Germany. And yet I would have expected you and your friends to rise above your local German viewpoint, because you are surely aware that German developments have lost their independent significance and have become part of the world-wide conflict. It is sad to say, but Eastern Germany is now in some respects in the position in which Serbia was in 1914. You remember how many times the leading Marxists of that era pointed out that Serbia's cause, if taken in isolation, was a just one. But that it was nevertheless wrong to 'side with Serbia' in the First World War. It seems similarly wrong to 'side with Berlin' now. In both cases, the local issue was merged with a much wider conflict and a local just cause was exploited for purposes which had nothing in common with it. I have sometimes been in a position where I had to write to you that I thought you went a little too far in justifying Stalin's policies. This time I am afraid that you went too far in quite the opposite direction, in associating yourself with the anti-Russian movement.

It is obvious that the events in Berlin have already had a very negative effect on the developments in Moscow. The whole trend of events in Russia from Stalin's death until the East German earthquake went consistently in the direction of a socialist democratization of the regime. This trend has suffered a very severe setback because of Berlin. There has been very clear beneath the surface of Soviet politics an intense struggle between the diehards of Stalinism and the adherents of gradual socialist democratization, with the military Bonapartist elements watching the struggle in the background and waiting for their opportunity. The Berlin revolt has compromised the idea of a gradual relaxation of the Stalinist regime. Beria's downfall is closely connected with this. Beria was one of those who stood for democratic reform, and the reformists, seeing themselves weakened and threatened, offered Beria as a scapegoat because in his position as Chief of the Police he was morally vulner-

able and therefore cast for the role of a scapegoat. I have dealt with this matter at considerable length in my new book, and I am sending you out two copies, one for you, and one for your friend who was so good to get for me Thalheimer's writings of fascism. I shall await your comments with great interest.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps I shall have an opportunity to come over to Germany, but for the moment I do not see how I can do it. Tamara joins me in sending you our very best regards.

Isaac Deutscher

### From Brandler to Deutscher

1 August 1953

I was indeed concerned about your silence. Your 'After Stalin' is rich recompense. If you were able to come for a few days to Germany, that would be magnificent. I too have no one with whom I can have a thorough discussion. My most long-lasting impressions of London are the evenings spent in your kitchen with yourself and Tamara. Can you organize it so that your book is issued soon in German? For us it is now a matter of urgency to provide for the German workers a clear and well-informed account of developments in the Soviet Union. I am convinced that your book will have a lasting effect on all those people who are trying to understand what is happening there. For this reason I immediately mentioned it in No. 15 of *Arbeiterpolitik*, so that at least those who knew English could profit by the book. If a German translation does not come out soon, we shall print a part of it in each forthcoming number of the journal. I hope you are in agreement with this.

And now I come to your objections to our position on the events in the Eastern Zone. You write: 'it seems to me that the effect of the Berlin revolt has been objectively counter-revolutionary.' I think this is completely wrong. Not only is your analogy with the revolt of the peasants against Napoleon in 1813 rather lame, like most analogies; it is also inapplicable in every respect to the rising of the decisive strata of the working-class of the Eastern Zone. These

<sup>13</sup>Isaac Deutscher here refers to his postscript to the second edition of *Russia After Stalin*, published also in the collection of essays *Heretics and Renegades*, London 1955, pp. 173-90, under the title 'The Beria Affair'. See too his two essays on the same question in *Russia, China and the West*, London 1969.

decisive working-class strata would not dream of reversing the genuinely progressive achievements, such as the removal of power from the bourgeoisie, the nationalization of the most important means of production, and the planned economy. Not even the Social Democrats dare propose this openly. The workers rose against the mismanagement of the SED bureaucrats, the transfer of Russian methods to Germany, and the spoliation of the country through reparations. All these things formed an obstacle to the preservation of the measures taken in the direction of the development of socialism. How can one draw a parallel between these workers and the peasants of 1813 east of the Elbe, who petitioned for the maintenance of serfdom, and did service in the militia in order to drive out Napoleon, the executor of the French Revolution, who brought serfdom to an end. Comrade Deutscher, that is not admissible. The occupation policies of the Soviet Union have driven millions into the camp of United States and German imperialism. In East and West Germany there are millions of workers who say today: if what is happening in the Eastern Zone and in the Soviet Union is socialism, then let us rather have American capitalism. But the greater part, even of those who indignantly pose this alternative, are to be won for socialist measures provided they correspond to the possibilities in Germany.

The decisive forces, who will have the leadership in every movement once it has progressed from the stage of spontaneous revolt to the organized struggle, will be first the class-conscious nucleus from the old generation, who have fought for Soviet power since 1918, who have not let themselves be corrupted either by Fascism or by the SED bureaucracy; and secondly those people between twenty and fifty years old, who are well aware that the cause of their misery is not socialist measures but bureaucratic mismanagement, Russian methods, and spoliation through reparations at the expense of current production.

You can only compare the movement in the Eastern Zone with 1813, you can only view it as tragically inappropriate to the epoch, if you overlook all these considerations. Those who have risen against the occupation policies of the Soviet Union are the present-day Steins and Gneisenaus — tens of thousands of them rather than two — and they want to make the Soviet Zone an ally of the Soviet Union instead of an object of barter with the USA. Their struggle takes precisely the same direction as that of the reformers in the Soviet Union who want to liquidate Stalinism. If Beria is supposed to have been liquidated because he was blamed as a reformer for the rising in East Germany,

then this is a pretext which borders on the ridiculous, for it would hit all the reformers, of whom he was hardly the most important.

The spontaneous and unorganized rising of 1953 was not a consequence of the reform plans but of the terroristic repression of the experienced workers. Its objective was to carry through the plans for the economic and political construction of the Soviet Zone in a manner consonant with the interests of the workers. The rioters were the camp-followers rather than the initiators of the movement. It may be that the confusion in the SED apparatus may have stimulated the eruption of the masses. But this confusion was a result of the orders of the Kremlin, which has still not grasped that even the corrupt instruments of its policies remain Western Europeans, who cannot implement an about turn from one day to the next just because it has been ordered from above.

Like everyone else (including even the network of spies and agents paid by the Western Powers and the Adenauer government), we were surprised by the *occasion* and the *strength* of the spontaneous rising of 16 and 17 June 1953. But we had already reckoned with spontaneous uprisings in the theses adopted at our national conference in 1951. From 1946 onwards we tried to organize resistance in individual factories and localities through active intervention from below and demands for improvements in conditions. This failed owing to police and SED terror, and our comrades paid dearly for it.<sup>14</sup> We were unable to bring this to the notice of the public because it was beyond our strength to mobilize the masses for resistance and for the liberation of those who had been condemned, without endangering the remaining links between our comrades. According to the recent theses issued by the CC of the SED, 'Brandlerite and Trotskyist agents had the leadership in many places'. Although we still have no reliable reports of our own, I can assure you that our comrades did not encourage any counter-revolutionary activities; on the contrary, they will quite certainly have put a stop to excesses by the mob or provocations by agents. Good comrades of ours will certainly have been among the victims now delivered over to Ulbricht's campaign of vengeance. Zaisser was dismissed because he instructed the police not

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Schmidt, leader of a group in Erfurt, was condemned in 1948 to twenty-five years in a labour camp. This marked the end of a period of relative toleration in East Germany for the ex-members of the KPO, which had lasted from 1945 to 1947. The post-war agitation of the *Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik* is dealt with in the final chapter of K.H. Tjaden, *Struktur und Funktion der KPD-Opportunisten* [KPO], Meisenheim-am-Glan 1964.

to intervene unnecessarily.<sup>15</sup> This is what Ulbricht and his kind call a capitulation. Herrstadt, chief editor of *Neues Deutschland*, has also been sacked for capitulation, because he published reports in which the critical mood of our SED members and proletarians was reflected, very faintly.<sup>16</sup> However, I am convinced that this victory of the Stalinist government in the Eastern Zone will be still more short-lived than the one you prophesy for the Soviet Union, if indeed that actually takes place.

I and my comrades by no means view the events in East Germany from a narrow German standpoint. I am aware that Germany stands in the centre of the Soviet-American conflict in Europe. I am also aware that it is not the pivot of the world situation. But the rising in East Germany is a gain, an accretion of strength for the socialist camp, and not an event like the Serbs' defence of their country in 1914, which could only be justified in isolation. In the conflict between rival cliques in Moscow, the rising in the Soviet Zone can, and will perhaps, be exploited against the representatives of the New Course. The decision will be reached on 5 August as to whether the Stalinists in Russia defeat Malenkov or not.<sup>17</sup> In this context, there are more important matters than the setback the reformers have allegedly met with in the Soviet Zone. The commercial treaties concluded by the Soviet Union on the basis of the New Course, the armistice in Korea, the clever moves undertaken in Austria and Yugoslavia, etc., have already made it possible to break through the American front in ways which are ten times as significant as the disturbance in the Soviet Zone. If the New Course prevails in the Soviet Union, the rising of the East German workers will be on the positive side of the balance, not the negative side.

From the point of view of world politics, the meaning of the New Course is that the Soviet Union is orientating itself towards the working class on an international scale. If that happens in the Soviet Zone of Germany as well, the rebels of June will be the best allies. It is impossible to exaggerate the impact such a policy would automatically have on the working class of West Germany. The USA is not yet ready to accept the pre-conditions for a simultaneous evacuation of Germany by all the occupying Powers. The time still available is

<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Zaisser, Minister of State Security, February 1950 to July 1953. Expelled from the SED in 1954.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Herrstadt, Chief Editor of *Neues Deutschland*, the central organ of the SED, from 1949 to 1953. Expelled from the SED in 1954.

<sup>17</sup> The Supreme Soviet of the USSR was due to meet on 5 August.

entirely sufficient, under the New Course, if it is carried through in the Soviet Zone, and with the assistance of the decisive strata of the working class who rose in revolt in June, to convert East Germany from the nightmare it is at present into a magnet for West Germany, which will change the mood there into its opposite.

For Germany itself, the rising means that the workers have demonstrated for the first time since 1945 that they can be the decisive force if they fight. Since 1945 the German workers, like the German philistines, have viewed political events in the same way as the weather, i.e. 'we can't do anything about it'. In England you will not be able to sense the new spirit. A worker, who does not belong to our group, wrote to me that he is once again proud to be part of the German proletariat. I am too.

Has Professor Carr's third volume not appeared yet? We impatiently await your *Trotsky*. If only you could visit us, even for a short time! Best regards to yourself, Tamara, and your son.

Heinrich Brandler

#### From Brandler to Deutscher

25 August 1953

Dear Comrade Deutscher,  
The results of the negotiations in Moscow with the East German representatives have demonstrated that your fear that 16 and 17 June might harm the 'New Course' has not been confirmed.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, the return of the factories removed to the Soviet Union, the abandonment of further reparations, and the limitations of the costs of the occupation would scarcely have been conceded so quickly if the workers had not entered into action. Since the USA is not at present ready to evacuate Germany, and the Soviet Union will not give up the Eastern Zone without the evacuation of the whole of Germany, there is time for the improvements in the East to work themselves out. If the workers in the Eastern Zone can attain a standard of living similar to that in the West, all that is necessary then is for the hated Ulbricht regime to be removed, and then the way will be clear for the workers of East and West not only to defend the nationalization of the means of production and the planned economy

<sup>18</sup>Between 20 and 22 August 1953, negotiations took place in Moscow between delegations of the GDR government and the Soviet government.

against the cupidity of German and American capitalists, but also to fulfil the tasks of the plan more effectively than they would do under the whip of the foolish bureaucracy.

I fear the French workers may be defeated if the struggle cannot be heightened so as to go beyond the framework of a trade-union fight over wages. Auriol is reacting like the Italian government did against the factory occupations of 1920. Many thanks for the Carr. I have sent you the first volume of the *Marx-Engels Werke*, which has just appeared.

Best regards,  
H. Brandler

#### From Deutscher to Brandler

16 September 1953

Sehr Lieber und Geehrter Genosse Brandler,  
Many, many thanks for the very interesting volume *Zur Deutschen Geschichte*. It is a very useful book to have and a most pleasant gift. I should have thanked you earlier, but I suffered from some ill health recently and was compelled to take a complete rest. The doctor diagnosed a 'false angina pectoris', but as it is only false I do not worry about it and I hope that I am now well on the way to recovery. I am about to undertake a long journey — to Palestine. Together with my family, I shall be embarking on a small boat at Marseilles on 3 October; we shall stay in Palestine for about five weeks and return to England late in November. I have been invited to Palestine by my Hebrew publishers (Am Oved, the publishing house of the Israeli Trade Unions); and I have in Palestine a sister, the only surviving member of my family, whom I have not seen for thirty years. All my books have been published in Hebrew, and the *Trotsky* is to appear in Hebrew simultaneously with the English edition. My writings, I am told, exercise a fairly strong influence there on the mind of the young generation. This is a somewhat paradoxical development, for, as you may imagine, I have all my adult life been a strong opponent of Zionism. It is impossible to be an opponent of Zionism now; the millions of murdered Jews have given the State of Israel a tragic if only negative justification. However, I cannot be a Zionist either, even now.

I would like to return to our argument about the meaning of the June events in Eastern Germany and their effect on Soviet policy. I



am afraid your reasoning has not convinced me so far. When I denied the June demonstrations any revolutionary significance, I did not doubt for a moment that the workers in the Eastern Zone did not come out to demonstrate in favour of a capitalist restoration. They merely acted under the impulse of their immediate grievances. But beginning on a strictly economic basis, the demonstrations soon acquired the character of a political revolt against the Pieck-Ulbricht government. Because of this they inevitably strengthened the position of the Adenauer government and of its American protectors. You see in the June events the beginning of an awakening of the German proletariat as an independent force acting in its own class interests. I would like to believe that this is so, but the absolute passivity of the working class in Western Germany contradicts your assumption. If the German workers had acted with equal vigour and determination against both Ulbricht and Adenauer, your view might have been justified. But are you not struck by the strange contrast between the behaviour of the workers in the East and in the West? It is because of this contrast that one is entitled to speak about the counter-revolutionary consequences of the June events. Of course, the propagandists of the SED are simply stupid when they describe the June events as the result of machinations of Nazis and imperialist agents, although there is no doubt that the latter did what they could to fish in troubled waters. But even if they had not done so, even if no lumpenproletarian elements had joined in the demonstrations, even if the whole revolt had remained within the limits of a dignified proletarian action, its objective consequences would have still remained far from revolutionary or progressive, precisely because of the wider political context.

Curiously enough, even the most reactionary elements in the West have understood this. Far from being frightened by the 'revolutionary' élan of the East German workers, they welcomed enthusiastically the events of June. Eisenhower, Dulles, even McCarthy greeted the Berlin demonstrators as their allies in the struggle for 'freedom'. What a paradox. Or is it a paradox? Maybe I do not feel, as you say, the new wind blowing in Germany, although I doubt whether you yourself could feel much of that new wind in the recent election in West Germany. But I certainly do feel the wind blowing in America and England. Here there has been not the slightest doubt in any political grouping of any significance that the demonstrations of June were a signal victory for the West in the cold war, and not an independent revolutionary act of the German proletariat. In so far as there have been any misgivings in the West, they have troubled those

elements — for instance in the British ruling circles — which are inclined to seek some conciliation with Russia, and which were afraid that the Berlin revolts would make the Americans so insolent as to rule out any chance of a conciliatory policy in the near future. One may risk the statement that 'enthusiasm' for the Berlin workers was strongest among the most extreme counter-revolutionary elements in the West. Again, all this might not have mattered much if the picture of the class relationships in Western Germany had been different from what it is.

You may not approve of my comparison with 1813 and say that it is impermissible to compare the workers of Berlin with the peasants who petitioned for the preservation of serfdom. But you yourself go on to say that both in East and West Germany there are millions of workers who say today that they prefer American capitalism to conditions in the Eastern Zone. Does not this prove the correctness of the comparison? We shall not differ about the extent to which Soviet policy must bear the blame for this. But once we have apportioned the blame, we still have to face the facts as they are. And it is unfortunately a fact that for the foreseeable future the practical alternative before Germany is between the capitalist regime of Adenauer and the bureaucratic quasi- (or if you like pseudo-) socialism of Pieck and Ulbricht. It may be that the Russians will abandon Pieck and Ulbricht; but then they will do so in favour of politicians standing for capitalism, in favour of Christian Democrats or at best of Social Democrats. And when *Arpo* now clamours for the dismissal of the hated government of Pieck and Ulbricht (and hated they indeed are), it clamours for nothing else, regardless of its excellent intentions, but the substitution of a bourgeois government for that of Ulbricht and Pieck. It may be that a bourgeois government would in a sense be a lesser evil, because it would open the prospect of a more normal class struggle in Germany, although this is highly debatable. But I have the strong impression that this is not what *Arpo* wants to say. You speak as if you imagined that it was possible in Germany today for some revolutionary socialist government to spring into the place now occupied by Pieck and Ulbricht. You speak in other words as if there existed a real revolutionary party in Germany. In your letter you even write that 'the decisive forces, who will have the leadership in every movement once it has progressed from the stage of spontaneous revolt to that of organized struggle, will be the class-conscious nucleus from the old generation, who have fought for Soviet power since 1918.'

This seems to me, frankly, a strange illusion. You know that I have

the greatest respect and admiration for the revolutionary Marxist tradition in the German labour movement, and for those men of the old generation who, despite so many cruel disappointments, try to hand down that tradition to the young. But I cannot for a moment imagine that the 'class-conscious nucleus from the old generation', small and decimated as it is, can assume the effective leadership of a German revolutionary movement. Apart from individuals, exceptional individuals like yourself, who may preserve freshness of mind and strength of character when they are over seventy, the leading nucleus in any revolutionary movement must be much younger. The tragedy of the German movement, and not only of the German, consists, so it seems to me, in the gap, the vast gap, between the old nucleus — or rather its survivors — and the present young generation. You yourself have so often written about the absence of any revolutionary party in Germany that I do not see how you can forget your own words. It is this absence of a revolutionary party that has allowed the long-bankrupt Social Democracy to come back and to play its present role in West Germany, and a party of puppets to perform a quasi-revolutionary role in Eastern Germany. And as long as this is so, the German working class is paralysed as an independent revolutionary factor. And what the events of June revealed once again is that paralysis, not the beginning of any awakening. Because of this, an action which had all the outward appearances of a revolutionary deed went to strengthen the hands of counter-revolution.

You disagree with my view that the June events weakened the party of reform in Moscow. You point to the latest economic concessions Moscow made through Pieck and Ulbricht to disprove my contention. In fact, the Russian policy towards Eastern Germany initiated after June consists in the substitution of economic concessions for political reforms. The same trend can be observed since July also in domestic Soviet affairs. This new phase of policy reflects in my view the dialectical contradictions of the present situation. On the one hand, the need for reform is overwhelming both inside Russia and in Eastern Europe, including Eastern Germany. On the other, the Soviet ruling group has caught fright, the reformist elements in it have been weakened, and it seeks a way out by trying to satisfy the need for reform on the economic but not on the political ground. It goes without saying that economic concessions resulting in a higher standard of living will eventually pave the way for political reform. But the operative word here is 'eventually'. In the meantime, economic concession serves to put off political reform. It may well be that from a general point of view this is the sounder and the safer

course to take for the Soviet ruling group. We are not in a position to judge this, and only the future can show.

This argument has grown far longer than I wanted it to be, and I must finish now. When are you returning to Hamburg? We still hope to pay you a visit in the autumn, after our return from Israel. Tamara joins me in sending you our warmest wishes.

Yours, Isaac Deutscher

From Brandler to Deutscher

12 January 1959

Dear Comrade Deutscher,

Thank you very much for sending me the first 170 pages of your manuscript of *The Prophet Unarmed*. Communists who read this second volume will find your work something to wonder at, for it gives an account of the struggles over the succession of Lenin on which no one will ever be able to improve. It will still remain important when this period has been presented in full, with all its dialectical contradictions, and when the role of the masses has been treated on the basis of their economic and social situation. Given the biographical form of your work, this could not be done there. Every biography which is not written by an absolute opponent of the hero becomes a justification, even when as in your biography it makes critical points about some of the hero's main weaknesses. I believe I can say this without being presumptuous.

I was in the Soviet Union from the end of October 1921 until July 1922, and then again from the beginning of May 1924 until the end of October 1928. In between, I was also present from the middle of April until the middle of May 1923, at the session of the IKKI at which we were compelled to include Thälmann and Ruth Fischer in the *Zentrale*. It was at this meeting that Trotsky discovered in the shape of Thälmann the 'proletarian gold' that was needed to provide a counterweight in the *Zentrale* to my 'Social-Democratic tendencies'. That provided extra support for Zinoviev's faction in the KDP. Stalin intervened too, winning to his side Maslow, who had been retained in Moscow at Lenin's suggestion. I was against this method, but I went along with it, just as I submitted to discipline in the session from the middle of August to the end of September. This second session was the one in which the plan of action for the revolution was decided. The pre-history of October I have just mentioned is not

without importance. For your depiction of the unarmed prophet, 1923 is only an episode, which it was in the life of Trotsky as well. But for the KPD, this episode is the beginning of the period which led to its collapse.

Radek introduced the April meeting, and Trotsky introduced the one in September. Radek was too familiar with the conditions in Germany to have demanded the entry of the Zinoviev-faction into the *Zentrale*. Nevertheless, he organized this, on instructions from Moscow, and not because he saw it as an appropriate way of bringing the KPD to a state of readiness. It was not the first time Radek had come to Berlin with commissions from Zinoviev to which we objected. In most cases, I succeeded in convincing him overnight of the impracticability of Zinoviev's proposals. He then received a scolding from the latter, but took this on his own account. What I did not know in April 1923 was that a factional struggle was proceeding in the CPSU. I knew neither of its existence nor of the issues involved. The Maslow-Ruth Fischer faction was informed about this, if not by Zinoviev himself, then through their connection with Shlyapnikov, of the Workers' Opposition.

For Radek, the situation was tragi-comic: in Moscow he was thought of as a German; for us he was a Russian. He received blows from both sides. I often used to tell him that we found it difficult to swallow that he negotiated as a representative of the Soviet government with Seeckt and German ministers, and at the same time as Comintern representative with us. Objections like this made him very angry. In Moscow, he defended our policy as far as possible. Since I was only allowed very rarely to mention the disagreements with Radek in the *Zentrale*, I was denounced by the Maslow-Ruth Fischer faction as a tool of Radek's faction. It was not possible to ignore his Schlageter speech at the Fourth Congress;<sup>19</sup> but the *Zentrale* did not adopt his line, it was rather the Ruth Fischer faction and the conciliator Paul Frölich who advocated it.<sup>20</sup> Radek was

<sup>19</sup>This speech, made by Radek to the Third Plenum of the Enlarged EKKI in Moscow on 20 June 1923 (and *not* to the Fourth Congress), extolled the German nationalist fanatic Leo Schlageter, who had just been shot by a French firing squad in the Ruhr, and inaugurated the 'National Bolshevik' period of summer 1923 during which the KPD tried to outbid the German Nationalists in the fight against the Versailles Treaty.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Frölich had been a member of the *Zentrale* since 1919, with one interval; throughout 1923 he was an adherent of Brandler. But in January 1924, in common with several other members of the Brandlerite majority, such as Ernst Meyer, he went over to an intermediate position between Right and Left. For some years afterwards, the 'conciliators' Frölich and Meyer tried to provide a bridge between Right and Left in the KPD.

accused by Moscow of being the author of my definition of the five forms of the workers' government.<sup>21</sup> In reality, he tried to prevent this definition from being adopted; not because he thought it incorrect but, as I learned years later, because it irritated Zinoviev, and Radek found this inconvenient for his factional struggle in Moscow.

Neither in Moscow, nor during Radek's and Pyatakow's stay in Germany, did we learn anything of the Russian factional struggles. That is hard to believe, but it is a fact. Only in December 1923 did we learn of these conflicts, after Zinoviev's letter accusing me of treachery to the revolution — which was a complete volte-face on his part from his initial attitude. We — that is, Thalheimer and myself — replied that we would take up a position on the factional struggles when we had familiarized ourselves with the material. That was in January 1924. Not because I wanted to save my position, as you write on page 145. It is not true that I or Thalheimer (whose position on the question of October 1923 was the same as mine) gave our support to the Triumvirate. Nor did the *Zentrale* issue any such declaration. When I travelled to Prague in the middle of December, from where I was supposed to proceed to Moscow, Ulbricht assured me that he would be careful to prevent any stupidities, and said I should remain firm and that the majority of the Party stood firmly behind me.<sup>22</sup> Only after a week of waiting did I get a false passport for my journey to Moscow, and I arrived when the negotiations had already come to an end. All that was required of me was my assent, i.e. my signature. *I refused it.*

Walcher and Pieck tried to convince me by saying that if I refused I should not get into the new *Zentrale*. That the KPD delegation had given its support to the troika during my absence is possible, even likely, but I knew nothing of this myself. After all, the resolution, which received the assent of Klara Zetkin too, corresponded to the troika's view of the situation.<sup>23</sup> But neither Thalheimer nor myself accepted it. As late as the Fifth Congress [of the Comintern], I opposed the resolution as incorrect — see the official minutes — and declared that although I would submit to party discipline, I would

<sup>21</sup>This definition put forward by Brandler at the Eighth Party Congress in January 1923, was part of an attempt to lay down the conditions under which the KPD might enter a possible workers' government in Saxony. It was strongly opposed by the Left.

<sup>22</sup>Walter Ulbricht was at this time a member of the Brandlerite majority leadership on the *Zentrale*. He dissociated himself from the Right in 1924, but was unable to secure re-election until 1927.

<sup>23</sup>The resolution of 21 January 1924 on the 'Lessons of the German Events', adopted by the Presidium of the EKKI, detailing the 'mistakes' of the KPD in the course of 1923.

still strive for a revision of it.<sup>24</sup> This revision could not take place, because the question of the German October was entangled with the factional struggle in the Soviet Union. And that is how the KPD was ruined.

I do not understand the basis for your assertion that Radek and Pyatakov advised me to call off the uprising. When this decision was made, at the time of the Chemnitz Conference, neither Radek nor Pyatakov was in Germany. They could not give any advice at all, for they were both *en route*. It would be correct to say, instead, that Radek and Pyatakov told me afterwards that I had done the right thing — Zinoviev too said the same at the beginning. Responsibility for the 'cancellation' falls on me alone. I communicated this proposal to all the members of the *Zentrale* who were present in Chemnitz, and they all accepted it. Graupe, the minister, informed us that the interventionist troops were on the march, and that they had been sent for protection against an invasion from Bavaria.<sup>25</sup> He would have to leave the Conference, he said, if a general strike were decided on and proclaimed, because that would constitute the signal for an uprising. In the plenary meeting I immediately came out sharply against this mystification, and declared that we should not allow ourselves to be held back from doing anything by this exercise in camouflage.

After discussions with the other members of the *Zentrale*, I advised against the proclamation of a general strike, and in this course I received the assent of all the *Zentrale* members present, including Ruth Fischer. My decision was based on the following reflections: in spite of all our own information services, we had only the announcement by Graupe, and confirmation from the Dresden police after I had asked them by telephone. If the information was correct, this would mean that we had been taken by surprise by the enemy in the strategically important region of Saxony-Thuringia, and would have to fight on the defensive. I was of the opinion, and I still am today, that a defensive uprising is condemned to defeat, and should only be risked if there is no other possible way out.

The united front policy, with which we had conquered the leadership of all those fighting against the miseries caused by the galloping inflation, was bound to collapse the moment the government was able to procure the means of subsistence and could not only promise but also issue money which retained its value. The so-called Cuno

<sup>24</sup>The text of Brandler's speech in his defence is in *Protokoll. Fünfter Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale*, vol. 1, Hamburg 1925, pp. 218–36.

<sup>25</sup>George Graupe, SPD Minister of Labour in Saxony, April to October 1923.

strike in Berlin was an especially prominent example of this tendency — whereas you use it to illustrate your adoption of the common assertion that the Berlin workers were burning with revolutionary fighting spirit.<sup>26</sup> We had this experience with all the strikes, demonstrations and attempts to control food and market prices in 1923. It is one thing to make radical speeches, of the kind tossed around by Ruth Fischer, and not only by her, in 1923; but it is quite another thing to make the transition from the fight against everyday shortages to the revolutionary, life-and-death struggle for power. This was not a piece of knowledge first obtained by me in 1923; all the struggles since 1918, the Kapp Putsch and so on, had taught me this.

When Lenin asked me in November 1921 why, despite my opposition to the armed resistance mounted against the Severing–Hörsing disarmament action in Central Germany,<sup>27</sup> I had accepted and published Béla Kun's appeal — 'Communists, do not let yourselves be disarmed, take weapons where you can find them' — I replied that I not only considered this to be the correct line in general, but even more so in this case; for there were tendencies present in the German working class, and in the KPD as well, which admittedly did not openly reject armed struggle, but which looked upon it with indifference, after the defeats of the period 1918 to 1920. I was opposed to armed resistance against the action of Hörsing, which itself had the objective of provoking an armed struggle, because we could bring this proclamation to nothing more effectively if we did not allow ourselves to be provoked. The weapons the Central German workers had hidden after the Kapp putsch in the copper mines near Leuna, and in other good hiding-places in the Thüringer Wald and the Erzgebirge, could never have been fetched in time. We should have had to march out empty-handed, under the scornful laughter of the other workers. In this context, I informed Lenin of my anxieties, and requested him to send us a dozen experienced civil war experts, with whom I hoped to change the situation in the party. Lenin agreed, and at the end of 1922, after my return to Germany thanks to the Rathenau amnesty, we were sent some.<sup>28</sup> Only after the

<sup>26</sup>The general strike in Berlin and elsewhere began on 9 August. It brought down Cuno on the 11th, and continued until the 15th.

<sup>27</sup>This is a reference to the March Action of 1921, which took the form of resistance to the occupation of the mining district around Halle by the police, who had been sent in by the SPD head of the local administration, Otto Hörsing, and the Prussian Minister of the Interior, the leading SPD politician Carl Severing.

<sup>28</sup>After the assassination of Walter Rathenau, and in connection with the campaign for the defence of the republic which followed, some of the participants in the March

Anti-Fascist Day, for which I issued a proclamation, was there any readiness demonstrated in the party for this task. Trotsky described my proclamation as a sign of the revolutionary situation. 'If Brandler is writing proclamations like this . . . then we are almost there.' That is what he said to Walcher, when the latter visited him in the Caucasus.

Thus I did not oppose the preparations for the uprising of 1923. I simply did not view the situation as acutely revolutionary yet, reckoning rather with a further sharpening. But in this affair, I considered Trotsky, Zinoviev and other Russians to be more competent — mistakenly. I strongly objected to the attempt to hasten the revolutionary crisis by including communists in the Saxon and Thuringian governments — allegedly in order to procure weapons. I knew, and I said so in Moscow, that the police in Saxony and Thuringia did not have any stores of weapons. Even single sub-machine guns had to be ordered from the *Reichswehr's* arsenal near Berlin. The workers had already seized the local arsenals twice, once during the Kapp putsch, and again in part in 1921. I declared further that the entry of the communists into the government would not breathe new life into the mass actions, but rather weaken them; for now the masses would expect the government to do what they could only do themselves.

I did not understand why a fixed date was to be set for the revolution, and said that for this purpose they would have to send us someone with expert knowledge. I was given the choice between Zinoviev and Trotsky, and I chose Trotsky, the organizer of the Red Army, as against Zinoviev, the agitator. This had nothing to do with taking up a position towards the factional struggle in Russia, because I simply knew nothing of it. Nor was there any personal sympathy or antipathy involved. In secret discussions I was offered not only deliveries of weapons, but also eventual military assistance in East Prussia. Now, plenty of money was given out for the purchase of weapons, but weapons were not acquired — only in some places comrades were corrupted, e.g. in Hamburg. I was given assurances about weapons which were already available, but these never corresponded to the truth. Not even in the case of the Hamburg rising were there any weapons; this is why it started with the plundering of a few police stations.

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Action were amnestied, including Brandler (August 1922). He was working with the Czech communists in Prague at the time, and made his way back to Germany in September.

The minutes of the KPD Congress of 1924 prove that Thalheimer and myself did not offer to make our submission to the troika. Things were quite different from this. Our friends demanded that we should refuse to submit to the order exiling us to Moscow and take up the fight at home, and be prepared even to split the party. I rejected this idea for the following reasons: 1. This would not further the continuance of the party's active united front policy, with the objective of liquidating the SPD by winning over their most active working-class members to communism. Moscow would fight us with the cynical accusation 'They capitulated to Ebert and Seeckt; they fight against the Comintern and the Soviet Union.' 2. The KPD was financed by the Comintern, which enabled it to issue twenty-seven newspapers and pay 200 functionaries. Even if, as our supporters claimed, we were to win over half the membership, we would not be able to publish even as many as four newspapers or pay a dozen functionaries from our own resources. I saw no other possibility, I said, than to take up an attitude of critical expectation that the new *Zentrale* would make a mess of things, and to make sure that the nucleus of lesser functionaries remained active. This nucleus would rapidly come into concrete conflict with the factory and trade-union line adopted by Ruth Fischer and Maslow. This development alone could provide a fresh and firm basis for the party to recover from its sickness. And so we travelled to Moscow, into exile.

Best regards to yourself and Tamara,  
from Heinrich Brandler

#### From Deutscher to Brandler

4 February 1959

Sehr Lieber and Geehrter Genosse Brandler,  
Both Tamara and I were very sad to hear that you were ill and had to go to hospital. We do hope that the treatment will improve your health and we send you our best wishes and warmest regards. Your general comment on the first two chapters of *The Prophet Unarmed* gave me much satisfaction. I could let you have the rest of the volume in page proofs, but I hesitate to inflict this on you in your present position, unless you definitely want to read it.

Let me once again explain, in general terms, the attitude from

which as a historian I have viewed the 1923 controversy over Germany. I have done my best to approach it objectively and to weigh carefully the conflicting evidence, without taking sides. This approach, of course, has nothing to do with any liberal objectivism. Wherever I deal with the conflicts between revolution and counter-revolution or communism and anti-communism and reformism, I stand as a historian on the side of those who fight for the revolution, without ceasing to present the counter-revolution objectively. But when it comes to the internal factional struggles in the communist camp, I feel that as a historian I must be above them and not commit myself to any apologetics for one faction or another, even where my sympathies either went or still go one way or the other. I think that in 1923 both Trotsky and yourself were in an impasse, and that consequently both you and Trotsky were right and wrong at the same time. I think that Trotsky underrated, as Marx and Lenin did so often, the objective factors which worked towards a temporary stabilization of capitalism — temporary yet very long-lasting indeed. I am coming back to this problem in the third volume, where I am putting together all the crises of the inter-war years: 1919, 1921, 1923, 1929–33, 1936–38, and showing how in all these crises Trotsky committed the same mistake. Yet, this was a mistake which as a revolutionary he was as if compelled to make — mistakes which underlay his tragedy and do not detract from his greatness.

You, on the other hand, saw in 1923 more clearly the objective difficulties in the way of a revolutionary party. (This comes out in, among other things, your speech at the Congress of the Polish Communist Party in September 1923, which the Polish *Histpart* has now published in *Z Pola Walki*.<sup>45</sup>) Yet at the same time you were under pressure not only from IKKI but also from your own position as a leader of a revolutionary party, to commit yourself to a revolutionary course of action. You were, therefore, torn between your sense that objectively the situation was not revolutionary and your acceptance of a revolutionary line of action. This conflict in yourself again reflects itself very strikingly in your speech at the Polish Congress. If you had followed your own sense of the objective difficulties only, you would have refused to act on Zinoviev's and Trotsky's advice. You would have said: 'Comrades, I consider your policy to be wrong, I cannot carry it out, I wish to bear no responsibility for it, and I stand aside.' You would then have spared yourself all the subsequent criticisms which were so often unjust, but were

<sup>45</sup>*Z Pola Walki*, I, 4, Warsaw 1958, pp. 134–40.

also inevitable, because in the eyes of so many communists you were associated with a policy of defeat. But you could not stand aside. You committed yourself to prepare the German October. Yet, having done so, you did not really act on your commitment. You hesitated, you were torn by contradictions in your attitude. I do not think that the historian can blame you for this, much though contemporaries did blame you. Your predicament reflected the tragedy of the German and international communist movement at that time. I think that this view is implied in the first two chapters of *The Prophet Unarmed*, and will be absolutely clear to the reader who will have read vol. III.

However, I cannot blame Trotsky for the things for which you are still blaming him — they have to be seen in a historical perspective and not merely in the context of an inter-factional struggle. I do not think that Trotsky was wrong when he favoured in April 1923 the introduction of Thälmann into the German leadership. Thälmann did represent an important current in the German Party, and it was only right that that current should be represented at the top. Trotsky acted, of course, on the assumption that the German party would be directed in the spirit of democratic centralism, on the basis of a collective leadership, where no communist current would be excluded and no group or clique would have a monopoly on the leadership. That Thälmann subsequently acquired that monopoly does not make Trotsky's action in 1923 wrong. In politics as in law we should beware of retroactive condemnation. In April 1923 Trotsky could surely not foresee what a fatal role Thälmann would play one day. Nor do I think that it is right to speak of Thälmann as belonging to the Zinoviev faction in April 1923.

As you say, the German events of 1923 are in Trotsky's biography an episode, and this compels me to treat it much more summarily than I would have liked to do, and to condense the narrative to the utmost. This results in some unavoidable imprecision. Thus, at one point I write: 'And so when the moment of rising arrived, Brandler, supported by Radek and Pyatakov, cancelled the battle orders.' This sentence implies clearly enough that you cancelled the orders on your initiative, and that Radek and Pyatakov only supported you. On the same page I say that they 'advised you' to cancel the orders. Now, the English 'advised' is not quite as specific as the German '*Rat geben*' — it is more vague. However, it would have been better if I had said that they 'backed Brandler when he cancelled the orders for insurrection'. Unfortunately, the page proofs have gone back to the printer, and I doubt whether I shall still have an opportunity to correct this. I shall

certainly do so in any subsequent edition. Politically, however, in the context of my narrative, this slight imprecision is not important at all: what I have argued in this context is that the two Trotskyists, Radek and Pyatakov, took up the same position as you did, and that the triumvirs therefore blamed Trotsky and Trotskyism for the German defeat. This was so, regardless of whether Radek and Pyatakov 'advised' you to act as you did, or whether they merely approved your decision *post factum*.

In explaining your behaviour, I say that you were 'anxious to disentangle the German question from the Russian issues'. This I give as your main motive. You do not object to this, but you deny that you 'declared your support for the official Russian leadership, that is the triumvirs'. You say that you arrived in the January session of IKKI after everything had been settled, and that you had no idea of the conflict between the triumvirs and Trotsky. Here as a historian I have to take into account the evidence of other witnesses, your friends as well as your opponents, and to make allowance for a possible slip of your memory. You spoke in the session of IKKI on 11 January 1924. Five days later, on the 16th, there assembled the 13th conference of the Russian party, which was occupied mainly with the excommunication of Trotsky. It is impossible that you should not have known this, and that the main theme of the Russian conference should not have been the subject of some talk at IKKI, at least behind the scenes. Thalheimer in *Eine Verpasste Revolution* makes no bones about the fact that your group turned against Trotsky as early as it could. The record of the session of IKKI shows that Warski and the other Poles were defending Trotsky against the attacks from the triumvirs, and that they were doing this at this same January session of IKKI. They were for this reason attacked by Zinoviev and his people during the session. You were there and you kept silent. Your silence spoke for itself, and the historian cannot but deduce from it that you decided not to defend Trotsky, who defended you through Radek. When one has in mind your subsequent and long-lasting antagonism to Trotsky, one is entitled, I think, to interpret your silence of January 1924 as an act of support for the triumvirs. I am saying this without any polemical intention and without any desire to blame you, but merely in order to explain why I brought in the consideration of your 'support for the official leadership, that is the triumvirs' among the many factors of the situation.

I have not taken over the 'assertion that the Berlin workers were burning with revolutionary fighting spirit'. What I say is that in Berlin the *party organization* was in a militant mood, and this I state

as a fact without going into its evaluation. Surely, this was so — otherwise the opposition of the Berliners to you and their support of Maslow and Fischer would have been inexplicable. That I have not a shade of sympathy for the 'militancy' of Fischer and Maslow I have given several very clear hints in various places, hints which I am sure you have not missed.

All these are small details, however. I am very grateful to you for your comments and for your very exhaustive and informative letter. I am sure that I shall have an opportunity to write at greater length about the events of 1923, and then I shall, with your permission, use your explanations. Once I have finished with the third volume of the *Trotsky*, I am going to write an analysis of the development of socialism in this century, beginning with the origin of German revisionism and ending with the present situation. In this context 1923 will, of course, be of great importance.

Once again, we are sending you our heartfelt wishes.  
Isaac Deutscher

#### Heinrich Brandler to Tamara Deutscher

Hamburg, 20 August 1967

Dear Comrade,  
The first news of today was the report in the midnight radio bulletin that Isaac Deutscher had died of a heart attack in Rome. And I, who cannot move, cannot work any longer, I am still here. The last of my friends in Leipzig died. Death is not so bad for those it strikes, but for their nearest, their friends. We were already so much looking forward to Isaac Deutscher's dispute with Leonhard in Cologne. That's not to be. The large circle of Isaac Deutscher's friends will not find a substitute for him; nor will all those who valued his activity, though they may not have agreed with him on everything.

Dear Comrade Tamara, please accept the expression of my deepest sympathy at the loss of Deutscher; and convey it also to your son. If I can at all be of help to you, please do let me know.

With heartfelt greetings,  
Heinrich Brandler

Tamara Deutscher to Heinrich Brandler

31 August 1967

Dear Comrade Brandler,  
Thank you so much for your letter. You know what immense respect Isaac had for you, and how greatly he admired you. You were for him one of those very, very few people — perhaps the only one — with whom he could find a common language. He was rejoicing at the sight of the new generation, those youngsters 20–22 years old, who were beginning to look for a real socialist, Marxist *Weltanschauung*. Isaac used to say that only the old — like you — or those very, very young understand him: the generations in-between were ground to dust between the heavy millstones either of Stalinism or McCarthyism.

I need not tell you with what sentiment we remember our rich evenings over the poor meals in our kitchen in our London flat.

I am sending you my respect, and also my love.  
Tamara Deutscher

## Conversation with Trygve Lie

Oslo, 28–29 April 1956

Trygve Lie is now the Governor of Oslo and lives in an American-style skyscraper a few kilometres from the city. The skyscraper looks a little incongruous, all the more so because it is surrounded by shacks and inferior tenement houses. Trygve Lie's flat is on the 14th floor: it consists of enormous rooms furnished in ultra-modern style, and looks like a luxurious gigantic first-class waiting room at a railway station. From the window there is an extensive view over fjords, forests and hills, and with a little imagination one might think one was looking at Manhattan and the Hudson River. As he led me into the room, I said:

'You seem to have brought a bit of New York here.'

My host was visibly flattered and started telling me in detail how, when he was still at his United Nations headquarters and learned about the building of this skyscraper in Oslo, he had arranged to have this flat reserved for him. At the door his first question was whether the taxi driver knew his address.

'Did you tell him: take me to Trygve Lie's home?'

'Yes, he knew,' I said though I was not sure whether it was not the hotel porter who had actually directed him. Again, I could not miss the satisfaction on Trygve Lie's face.

He sat opposite me. He looked exactly as in the newspaper pictures, but even more expressionless: very large, with elephantine — as if swollen — head and fishy eyes.

I spent several hours with him. He talked volubly, though with a very restricted English vocabulary and in rather primitive and crudely constructed sentences — which was surprising if one considers that he had spent so many years in England and the United States, and held so high an office. Much of the time he spoke to me as if I were his, not Trotsky's, biographer. He was still proud of the reprisals he took against Trotsky, boasted of them, had no idea that



he was giving himself away until the moment when I made him feel a little of what I thought of all this. Then he got nervous and raised his voice, shouting at me repeatedly:

'Beware what you write, Mr Deutscher. Beware what you write!'

There was a hint of a threat in the intonation, though not so much in the words. For a moment I felt in this essentially parochial Scandinavian a streak of the New York gangster who suspects someone of the intention to expose some of his dirty doings and is on the point of blackmailing the suspected denunciator. I did my best to calm him in order to get the information I was seeking. As he talked about himself and Trotsky, he dwelt on his role as the man who saved the Norwegian Labour Party from communism — and that not only in connection with Trotsky — as if he were trying to ingratiate himself with a conservative, right-wing bourgeois public. At other moments he was boasting of what he did, as if he were talking to a good Stalinist. He was not quite sure where I stood and how he should treat me. And so imperceptibly, even to himself, he was switching from one viewpoint to the other, until late in the conversation he began to guess something and said:

'Ah, I see you are an admirer of Trotsky!' And again: 'Beware what you write, Mr Deutscher. Beware what you write!' Altogether a flea boasting that it once buzzed in the nostril of a lion, and even stung the lion.

'Did you ever meet Trotsky personally? Did you know him before he came to Norway? How did it happen that you gave him the right of asylum in 1935?'

'I first met Trotsky in 1921, when a delegation of the Norwegian Labour Party went to Moscow to negotiate with the Communist International and to clear the conflict we had as member party with the Executive of the International. We were received by the Executive, by Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev. Trotsky said nothing. He spent with us only an hour and then left excusing himself — he was busy elsewhere. I did not see Trotsky again until 1935. In March of that year the Labour Party took over the government in our country. I was then, in 1935, as a young Minister of Justice, approached by Olaf Schöffle and asked to give Trotsky a visa. Olaf Schöffle was one of the great leaders of our party in its Comintern period and headed the left wing of the party till the end of his life. He was not a Trotskyist but was always a great admirer and respecter of Trotsky and was, of course, closer to him than anyone of us, including Tranmael who was also Trotsky's great wellwisher.

'As to the asylum, I tell you most emphatically that we never gave

Trotsky the right of asylum. But I must also say that as a young and inexperienced minister I committed in this matter two mistakes. Mistake number one was that I let Trotsky in. Yes, my mistake was not that I expelled him but that I let him in. Listen to the story how it really was. My civil servants were strongly against admitting him, but Schöffle and the other party leaders all wanted him to come. There was a vote in the government and against two votes it was decided to let him in. But we did not give him asylum. I instructed our consul in Paris that he should give him an entry visa on two conditions: 1. that he should first obtain a French return visa; 2. that during his stay in Norway he should not interfere either in Norwegian or in any international politics. But Trotsky was smart and he never signed any such commitment. And the consul never communicated these conditions to Trotsky.'

At this point I interrupted, asking rather gently whether, if the consul had never communicated these terms to Trotsky, Trotsky's behaviour could in this matter be really described as 'smart'.

'Oh, yes, Mr Deutscher, oh, yes. He was a smart man, you do not know how smart he was. And I was a young and inexperienced minister. He outmanoeuvred me at every step, at every step. It is difficult to describe this. For he was an incredibly smart man.'

This was one of the refrains of the conversation: 'He was a smart man, he outmanoeuvred me all the time.'

'True, the consul told him nothing about these conditions, so he came to us without a French return visa. What could I do? I let him in. And the party was for letting him in. But then Schöffle told Trotsky that he must not interfere in Norwegian or international politics. But Trotsky was a smart man and he never signed anything. Only Schöffle told me that Trotsky accepted the conditions. And here my mistake number two: the party leaders, Tranmael and Schöffle, told me that I should go with them and pay a formal visit to Trotsky in Knudsen's home. I should not have gone. But I was young and inexperienced, and so I went. When we came to him, Tranmael said we must interview him for the *Arbeiderbladet*. Trotsky was a great man, a great historic figure, and they were all very proud to have him here and they wanted to have him interviewed for the party paper. Trotsky refused. He was a smart man. He said: Well, you made it a condition that I must not interfere in politics, so I don't. He talked to us about the weather all the time, and did not want to answer any political questions. So I as Minister of Justice said that for this occasion I waive the restriction. In the end we persuaded him to give us the interview. But I said I waive the

restriction for this occasion only. I checked the interview. I had no objection to anything he said about world affairs, and I authorized publication. This was my mistake number two.'

'Mr Lie, tell me as a socialist and as a lawyer, did you think that you were entitled to demand from Trotsky that he should refrain from any political activity concerning international, not Norwegian affairs? Would you say that this was the traditional liberal conception of the right of asylum? Do you imagine how, for instance, Marx who lived and worked most of his life in London, would have reacted if the English governments a hundred years ago, had interpreted political asylum in this way?'

'What you are saying, Mr Deutscher, is exactly what the liberal party in our parliament was saying when they attacked me. Also some comrades in my own party. However, no political refugee has the right of asylum; it is not a right but a government's prerogative to grant asylum. We did not give Trotsky any asylum. We only thought that his life was in danger and we let him come here to save his life, nothing else. I must say that for a long time Trotsky adhered to the conditions we set. He was beleaguered by journalists who wanted interviews, but he refused. He did not — or so it seemed to me, a young and inexperienced minister — interfere in any politics. I knew this very well because I had some police control over what he was doing. It was not an efficient control; there was no censorship of his mail. But I knew that he kept strictly to the terms of his entry permit and refused to give any interviews.'

'When then did relations begin to deteriorate?'

'We began to get some alarming information about Trotsky's activities in connection with the Fourth International. We had at the time a special contact with the international police through which various governments exchanged information of mutual interest. We had from the Belgian police some alarming reports which were also confirmed by the French police. There was still not enough in those reports to justify reprisals against Trotsky or even any ground to warn him. But we were suspicious of his secretaries who went to Paris and back, and so we withdrew entry permits of some of these secretaries. Among them was Wolf, who was later killed in Spain. Then, on 5 August there came the Nazi attack on Knudsen's and Trotsky's home. They got hold of some documents, but they were of no importance. I assure you, Mr Deutscher, that the action I later took against Trotsky had nothing to do with these documents which were of no importance. But this was also the time of the election campaign in our country. The conservatives and the Nazis made of

Trotsky's stay here the most important electoral issue. I talked to Koht [at the time Foreign Minister] and to other members of the government, and we all saw that the election will be decided on the Trotsky question. We were afraid we were to lose the election. Trotsky appeared in court twice as witness in the case of the Nazis who attacked his home. And so I said to myself: It was time I did something about this. First I had Trotsky brought to my office at the Ministry of Justice. He was brought under police escort, but this was still before I ordered his internment. The talk we had was not very friendly. We spoke in German. I reminded Trotsky that he was not to interfere in any politics — Norwegian or international. Trotsky argued that he was granted asylum, that he never did and never would interfere in Norwegian affairs, but would not take any obligation as far as international affairs were concerned. I told him: You must sign such an obligation now.

'You should have seen the look he gave me when I told him this. I cannot describe to you that look. He was a proud man, you know. He stood up and said: Do you think, I, Leon Trotsky, with my past, with my record, that I am going to sign such a document? He spoke so about himself: "I, Leon Trotsky". You do not know what a proud and egocentric man he was. Then I told him: Leon Trotsky (I did not call him Mister and I did not call him Comrade, but just Leon Trotsky), Leon Trotsky, I said, and what about the Norwegian Labour Party and the election? That made Trotsky laugh. He was a great man. What did he worry about Norway and its Labour Party? He said: What do I care about your elections? You are a rotten gang and you have no idea about international affairs.'

'And you know what? He came to my office, and though he had never been there before, he knew where every minister had his office, and he pointed through the window at the office of the Prime Minister and said to me: You and your *Pantoffel* Prime Minister who sits over there, you will all be refugees driven out of your country in two years from now. Well, we were refugees, and when we were driven from Norway, we remembered his words, but this was after four not after two years.'

'Well, this was my first talk with Trotsky in my office. It must have been in August, soon after the attack. Then the electoral campaign got into full swing and the business of Trotsky was becoming more and more a central issue. Then I ordered him to be interned and had him again brought to the Ministry of Justice. I told him that I have taken the necessary steps to prevent him from participating in politics. You should have seen that proud man. "I, Leon

Trotsky" — he spoke of himself. Yes, he was a great man. I have met five great men in my life. You know who they were: Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Churchill and Roosevelt. Trotsky was perhaps the greatest of them, except for Roosevelt and perhaps Lenin. Oh, he was a great man. And he was so well educated, he knew everything. And his logic was sharp like a knife. And he was humane, very humane. Quite a different man from Stalin. When I sat with Stalin, I felt something was freezing in my back. I just felt I was afraid to death of that man. With Trotsky it was different. He was very humane. But I was frightened all the same, frightened of his sharp logic, of his shrewdness, of his smartness. He could outmanoeuvre me, and all of us and you too, Mr Deutscher. At every step he outmanoeuvred us all.

'It was enough to meet these two men — Stalin and Trotsky — to know that Trotsky was by far the more intelligent and able. He was a genius. You felt it when you talked to him. And so I thought he was the more dangerous of the two. You see, he was the only man who could bring communism to complete success. So I hated him. Do not forget that in our party there was a considerable communist or near-communist element. And I was opposed to it. I am proud of this that I played a role, quite an important role, in defeating the pro-communist element in our party. No, I could not have been Trotsky's friend. He was a great danger to us all. And I hate dictators. I fought Trotsky in 1936 and I fought Hitler in 1940. I could only intern him by a royal decree, and so I got the royal decree which enabled me to intern him, otherwise our Constitution gave no power to do this. But I hate dictators.'

'Excuse me, Mr Lie, but in 1936 it was not Trotsky who was a dictator but you. It was you who ruled by decree then, wasn't it?'

'Yes, I did it by decree all right. But are you, Mr Deutscher, Trotsky's admirer? I see you are his admirer. You think I acted wrongly, do you? Now, tell me frankly what do you think of my behaviour? You do not approve of it?'

'Well, Mr Lie, if you ask my frank opinion I will tell you. If one day somebody writes your biography, someone who admires you, he will perhaps not be very proud of this particular chapter in your career.'

'Oh, I see, you are Trotsky's admirer, you are. Beware what you write, Mr Deutscher, beware what you write. I have documents, documents, and documents to show that I was right. I told Trotsky: You broke the conditions and I am going to intern you and allow you no contact whatsoever with the outside world. And I established a

editorship over all his mail. I hired a villa at Hurum and I put him and his wife there, and I placed twenty policemen to guard him. And you know who was in charge of the police guard: Jonas Lie. Later Jonas Lie was one of the wartime traitors, one of the leaders of Quisling's party. He was in charge of the place and he was sending me reports every day about what Trotsky did and how he behaved in the course of the day. So I thought I knew very well what Trotsky was doing. But you know what a smart man he was? He outmanoeuvred me again, me, a young and naive minister. His friends sent him a cake into his internment place. And, you know, in the cake they smuggled in some documents to him. Then he said he had to visit a dentist in town. I allowed him to go. He left the policeman outside the dentist's door to stand guard. But in the waiting room there was already a comrade of his waiting for him and getting some documents from him. We learned all this later. At first we had no idea. But Trotsky knew how to do clandestine work, he knew it. He was a genius at this, too.'

'Mr Lie, you interned him at the time of the first of the great purge trials, the Zinoviev and Kamenev trial in Moscow. And he, Trotsky, was the chief defendant in these trials. You cut him off from all contact with the world. As a lawyer, do you think that you were right in refusing him every opportunity to answer the accusations? Perhaps he smuggled his answer to Vyshinsky? Indeed, I am sure that this was what he smuggled out. Now, tell me, if someone accused Trotsky in Norway of a burglary, would you as a lawyer refuse him the right to defend himself? And here was Trotsky, accused of poisoning thousands of Soviet workers, plotting to assassinate Stalin and other Soviet leaders, presented as Hitler's agent and spy and you, Mr Lie, refused him any possibility of defending himself. You think you were right in doing that?'

'But why did he not apply to me and said that he wanted to answer Vyshinsky? I might have permitted him. Yes, I cut him off from all contact with the world, that is true. And he had the right to defend himself, that's also true. But we did not give him asylum. And why should our little country have to be dragged into his struggle with Stalin? We could not take the risk. We were a small country, with Hitler on one side and Stalin on the other, and we could not afford embroiling ourselves. There were bigger countries, bigger democratic countries than we, and none wanted to give him asylum. Why should we have risked our existence? He was a great man, but too great for our little Norway, too great for us. And he was in the wrong because he did not observe the conditions of his residence permit.'

'But are you not, Mr Lie, putting forward two different and even conflicting arguments which cancel each other? First you say that as a small country exposed to pressure from two great powers you could not risk giving Trotsky asylum and all the rights that that implied. One can understand this viewpoint — there is truth in it. What this amounts to is that you were perhaps morally in the wrong, but that you could not afford to be morally in the right. And then you go on to say that it was Trotsky who was morally in the wrong. Surely, you cannot have it both ways? But let me ask you another question which is of the greatest importance in this story. Did the Soviet Ambassador ever ask for Trotsky's expulsion or internment or extradition? Did the Soviet government, as some believe, ever threaten you with stopping their imports from Norway or with a financial boycott?'

'No, never. They never asked for Trotsky's expulsion. They never threatened us with any economic reprisals. We acted of our own accord, for our own motives because of the domestic situation, because of the elections, and because of Trotsky's behaviour. Only once Yakubovich, the Soviet Ambassador here, came to see me at the Ministry of Justice, but this was already after I had interned Trotsky. He came to me, but I did not even let him talk, and before he said anything I smiled and told him: "We have taken care of the Trotsky case. I have ordered Trotsky to be interned." Yakubovich smiled and left without saying a word. That was all.'

'Could you tell me how and why you decided to expel him from Norway? And how did it happen that he went to Mexico?'

'We could not afford to keep him interned here. It involved us in too large expenses. I had to hire a villa; I had to keep twenty policemen on the spot. So when I had him in my office for the second time I told him this. You should have seen him! You should have seen how he reacted. A year before, he was an ordinary modest refugee. Now he was a cock again and a proud man. He had been impolite to the guards, he cheated their vigilance, and so on. Then I asked him who might possibly give him a visa. He had mentioned Diego Rivera several times as his friend and suggested that Mexico may be a possible refuge. But he said he would not go there unless he were invited: and unless he were given safe transport. I sent a man to the Mexican envoy in Stockholm, and they at once agreed to give him asylum. I was a little uneasy, because I expected them to ask us whether he would get a Norwegian return visa. You can imagine how happy I was when they did not ask for that. I then informed Trotsky about the arrangements for the journey. I had hired a tanker *Ruth*. Then I gave Trotsky a passport and asked him to sign some sort of a

document. He refused to sign and said he would not go on that tanker. I was telling him that this was a very good solid vessel, with very comfortable accommodation and excellent food. But he was not interested. He said "Stalin knows all about your *Ruth*. The tanker would be torpedoed, it will never reach the British Channel. What kind of defences has that ship?" — he asked. I guaranteed him that we would maintain absolute secrecy. I told him that nobody knew about all this except me, him, and the owner of the ship. But he still refused to go on the *Ruth*. Then I told him that I shall order the police to take him aboard the tanker. And he had to yield. But he still refused to sign the document, and he signed it only when he stood on Mexican soil. The ship was not allowed to use her radio or to give any signals, and only when she was in mid-Atlantic did the news leak out.'

On this the interview was practically concluded. There came still a few 'Beware, Mr Deutscher, beware' and Lie was obviously alarmed at what I might write about him. When we got out of the lift and he politely arranged to get a taxi for me, he still said: 'So you think that a biographer will blame me for all this, and that's what you are going to do?' To this I answered:

'I said, Mr Lie, that your biographer may blame you. But surely, you realize that I am Trotsky's biographer not yours. And it is not my job to judge your behaviour in my book.'

This put his mind at rest. He once again inquired, as he had done at the beginning of the conversation, about the American sales of my books and was evidently impressed when I told him that they were selling very well; his autobiography was apparently not a success. We parted in a friendly way, he assuring me once again of his admiration for my *Stalin* which he said he consulted regularly — the volume was indeed on his desk and had many marks in the margin.

Coulsdon, Surrey.  
4 May 1956