

Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations

I would like to express my thanks to the Deutscher Committee for the great honour of this award.¹ The Isaac and Tamara Deutscher memorial prize is a uniquely valuable institution in many ways but the most valuable aspect is surely the legacy of Deutscher himself. For Isaac Deutscher was not just another Marxist. He was one of the most eloquent of those who kept alive the critical spirit of classical Marxism at a time when in different ways that spirit was being stifled on both sides in the Cold War. For this alone the present generation of socialists is indebted to him. But Deutscher also did this with real personal and intellectual flair. And for that reason, his memorial lecture, by recalling the spirit of the man, also presents a great annual opportunity—to restate, in the confident tones of Deutscher himself the enormous, enduring strengths of the Marxist understanding of the contemporary world. And it is this opportunity which I would like to take up tonight by discussing my own field—namely the theory of international relations—for which, as I will argue, the legacy of Deutscher has a special relevance.

There is something very peculiar about international relations theory as a branch of intellectual learning. In the entire period of its existence, the systematic reflection on the nature of relations between states seems to have produced no great books, to have inspired no classics of the political or historical imagination. In moral terms, it has appeared to be unable to rise to a positive, progressive statement of human existence. And as a field of theoretical endeavour, it has proved again and again to be an intellectual dead-end. In short, as a body of writings ‘international theory is marked not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty’.²

These are the ruminations not of an embittered dissident, but of one of the discipline’s most celebrated exponents, namely Martin Wight. Writing in the late 1950s, Wight concluded that after four centuries of the existence of the states system, there was still what he described as ‘a vacuum in international theory’,³ a vacuum which contrasted strikingly with the wealth of *domestic* political theories of the state which had grown up over this period.

The Necessary Poverty of International Relations?

How had such a peculiar state of affairs come about? Wight had his own explanation for this. It was a consequence, he argued, not of the deficiencies of individual writers, but rather of the nature of the subject-matter itself. Making a famous distinction, he asserted that ‘Political theory and law . . . are the theory of the good life. International theory is the theory of survival.’⁴ What he meant was that within its national borders a society has some freedom to choose its own path of development—a choice which a political theory of the good life might help to frame. But beyond those borders, in its relations with other societies, the need to survive in a potentially hostile environment imposes its own imperatives which must ultimately override the moral requirements of any political theory. What then are these imperatives—which determine the actual behaviour of states—and where do they come from? Wight’s answer echoes the premise of all orthodox international relations theory: ‘So long as the absence of international government means that Powers are primarily preoccupied with their survival, so long will they seek to maintain some kind of balance between them.’⁵ And it is this necessary pursuit of the balance of power which produces both the evacuation of moral choice and the drastic descriptive simplification of the behaviour of states. For, as he put it, international politics is consequently ‘the realm of recurrence and repetition; it is the field in which political action is most regularly necessitous.’ All in all, if the balance of power was ‘the masterpiece of international politics’ in a practical sense, it was nonetheless also the

¹ This is the text of the Isaac Deutscher Memorial lecture delivered in the New Theatre, London School of Economics and Political Science, on 21 November 1995. I would like to thank Chris Boyle, Simon Bromley, Gregory Elliott, Beate Jahn and Ellen Wood for stimulating discussions and helpful suggestions during the preparation of this lecture.

² M. Wight, ‘Why Is There No International Theory?’, in H. Butterfield and M. Wight, eds, *Diplomatic Investigations*, London 1966, p. 20.

³ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁵ ‘The Balance of Power’ in *ibid.*, p. 174.

root cause of ‘a kind of recalcitrance of international politics to being theorised about’.⁶ And the moral and intellectual poverty of international theory was therefore a necessary and an irremediable poverty.

Is that it, then? Should we just give up hope of anyone ever writing great works of international theory? Those of us who work in this field need, I think, to keep reminding ourselves of what a curious outcome for our discipline this represents. If, as Wight argued, international theory has had an impoverished imagination, can this really be the consequence of its subject matter?

After all, it is at the international level that the extraordinary drama of modernity rises up to its full height. It is at this level, and this level alone, that we can glimpse the process of the capitalist transformation of humanity as a *whole*: the rise of the West, the engulfing of the non-European world, the globalizing of the sovereign-states system and the world market, and the mighty world wars and revolutionary struggles which this development has brought in its train. How could a discipline which in this sense occupies the terrain of *world history* as its home ground fail to rise to such a stirring theme?

The Lost History of International Relations

In fact, faced with this epic character of its subject matter, I think one is forced to ask whether the cause of the stunted development of international theory in fact lies elsewhere. What if Martin Wight had it the wrong way round? What if the problem lies not with the subject matter, but rather with the intellectual shape of the discipline itself, and with the ideas through which it wrestles with what Deutscher called ‘this heaving chaos of a world’?⁷ Above all, one would have to ask whether the intellectual centrality of the balance of power itself—which for Wight was simply the *result* of a brutal reality—has in fact been the major *cause* of the theoretical underdevelopment of international theory. It is this proposition—and more importantly the question of an alternative framework—which I want to explore this evening.

Now, the weaknesses of balance-of-power theory are familiar enough. For my purposes, however, the main one can be illustrated if we ask ourselves how a man with such a deep and impressive historical sense as Wight could nonetheless write that, whether we look at the international politics of the sixteenth century or the twentieth century, we find, ‘the same old melodrama’ of the balance of power. In this world-weary phrase, the sense of history—not as the accumulating clutter of events and dates, but as the making and remaking of the human world—is surely expiring. And the most dramatic history of all, the one which produced the modern international system in which we live, the real history of international relations—has already been lost, leaving the ‘vacuum in international theory’.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 21, 33 respectively.

⁷ Isaac Deutscher, ‘The Ex-Communist’s Conscience’, reprinted in *Marxism, Wars and Revolutions: Essays from Four Decades*, Verso, London 1984, p. 58.

Much has changed in the thirty-five years since Martin Wight issued his sigh of intellectual resignation, and his conclusions have been challenged from many directions. But what I do not think has yet materialised is the overall theoretical redefinition, the alternative big picture to the balance of power, the single, simple idea which would fundamentally reorient international theory—not by adding yet another critique of the balance of power, but by finally replacing it at the defining apex of the discipline.

Which brings us to the big question: can there be such an alternative theoretical framework—one which has the same intuitive simplicity as the balance of power, but which enables us finally to recover the lost history of international relations, breaking with the old theory which has shown us only an empty, meaningless struggle for power? I think there can. In fact, I will argue that not only does such a framework already exist; but that it is also one in which Isaac Deutscher played an important role. The framework I am referring to goes under the name of ‘uneven and combined development’. It is associated most famously with the writing of Leon Trotsky. And I want to use the rest of this evening’s lecture to explain why I believe that this theory is the key to recovering the lost history of international relations.

Like all great intellectual advances, the theory of uneven and combined development has a retrospective simplicity which makes you wonder why it was not formulated at an earlier date. Its starting point is the straightforward empirical observation that the historical world of capitalism did not appear simultaneously everywhere out of the same social and cultural conditions. On the contrary, it appeared first in the north-western corner of Europe and spread outwards into a surrounding world of many different kinds of pre-existing culture and society. For this reason, it is impossible to speak of capitalist world development today without presupposing an international history of expansion and incorporation.

A World in Capital’s Image

This global expansion of capitalism was of course anticipated by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*. But the image presented there was in fact not an *international* one but a *transnational* one. In this image, capitalism would spread from one country to the next like a brush fire, consuming whatever cultures it found in its way, and reducing all societies to the same basic contradiction of bourgeois and proletarian. The fact that the world was divided into separate political communities did not materially affect the texture of this historical process: the barriers separating the communities would be battered down by the heavy artillery of cheap commodities, and all pre-existing societies, whatever their character, would be dissolved. Capital was going to create ‘a world after its own image’.⁸

Things did not, however, turn out quite this way. In fact, what Trotsky

⁸ Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 71.

saw half a century later, above all when he looked at his own native land of Russia, was that while countries outside Western Europe were certainly being dragged into the process of capitalist development, they were not following the classical path to modernity supposedly taken by England and France. Somehow, capital was not creating a world in its own image.

The reason for this lay partly in the historical unevenness of existing human social development: the world overrun by the Europeans was made up of many different societies—from the stone-age tribes of North America to the ancient empires of the East which had for centuries been more materially advanced than Europe. This meant that capitalist world development would proceed from many different starting points and in each case find different cultural obstacles to overcome. And this applied in some respects within Europe just as much as outside it.

But it was not just a matter of different starting levels. Trotsky saw that, even when all these societies were incorporated into an international system, it still did not follow that they would all converge upon some common future destination in advanced liberal democracy. There was something about the *way* capitalism was spreading which pointed in a very different direction. It was here that Trotsky made his great theoretical advance. And he did so precisely by reintroducing into this historical process its specifically *international* dimension. The key, he argued, was quite simply that the development of backward societies took place under the pressure of an already existing world market, dominated by more advanced capitalist powers. This simple fact has paradoxical consequences.

On the one hand, it means that technology and investment are available internationally, so that late developers do not have to retrace the whole path of scientific research and slow capital accumulation taken by their predecessors. Trotsky could see that partly by this leap-frogging of technical stages, Germany's economy was already overtaking England's. On the other hand, this same 'privilege of historic backwardness',⁹ as he called it, carried a price—potentially a very heavy price—in the peculiar contortions of social structure to which it gave rise. In the case of Czarist Russia, the state orchestration of industrialization had led to the emergence of a growing, though highly localized, working class in the major cities. But precisely because of the central role of the state and the dominance of *foreign* investment, there was no corresponding rise of a politically confident, indigenous bourgeoisie. This meant both that industrial conflicts were becoming directly political, provoking the state into more and more repressive forms, and that the supposed historical agent of liberalization, namely the bourgeoisie, was so small and insecure that it was repeatedly drawn instead into the arms of the autocratic state as the only guarantor of property and order.

Meanwhile, however, the vast bulk of the population—the peasantry—remained formally outside this urban process. Outside, but by no means

⁹ Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, New York 1980, p. 5.

unconnected. For the deepening international indebtedness of the state caused it to lean ever more heavily on the peasantry for taxation—in effect converting it into ‘a tributary of the Stock Exchanges of the world’.¹⁰ In turn, that outside world now had an interest in the continued survival of the archaic Czarist state which was the only guarantee of debt repayments—the more so as the internal Russian opposition was driven towards more and more radical political forms.

Unstable Fusions of Old and New

What on earth was going on here? Was this a capitalist state—or did it remain pre-capitalist? Trotsky’s answer, in effect, was that it was neither. The international pressures of uneven development were driving Russia into a combined pattern of development. They were leading to a fusion of the old and the new, an unstable amalgam of Western and Russian elements with its own peculiar developmental tendencies. And the more Russia was integrated externally into the international system by these means, the more its internal social structure was being twisted into a shape that actually prevented it from developing along the path taken by the liberal states of Western Europe. This led Trotsky to his famous pronouncement: ‘England in her day revealed the future of France, considerably less of Germany, but not in the least of Russia and not of India.’¹¹

Read through the history of capitalist development in England, then, all the sociological co-ordinates in Czarist Russia were completely askew. But that was precisely Trotsky’s point: to read it in that way would be to suppress the *international* process of uneven and combined development which forms its actual historical matrix. And Russia, of course, was not alone. Since, by definition, almost all countries except Britain would share this condition of relative backwardness, combined development was going to be, not the exception, but rather the norm. Once this point is granted, all unilinear models of social development necessarily fall by the wayside. The centrality of international relations to understanding any national path of development becomes apparent. And the social integument of the international system itself is finally laid bare.

Let me explain what I mean by spelling out three implications of this account for international theory. First, as we’ve seen, capital did indeed create one world, but not a homogeneous one fashioned in the image of the capitalist societies at its centre. To understand why this is so, we have to grasp the peculiar *international* mechanism of capitalist expansion which, even as it incorporates other societies, fuses with them in unpredictable combinations. It follows, I think, that if we want to understand what the international system is today, we *cannot* begin with a logical model of homogeneous states: the variety of political forms is simply too great. We would have to begin instead with a historical analysis which reconstructs the uneven and combined international development of capitalism which has produced such a variegated world of states.

¹⁰ Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, London 1962, p.181.

¹¹ Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, vol. III, London 1933, p. 378.

But, second, the need to conduct this analysis carries us beyond the political structure of the states system, and requires us to visualize what Trotsky called 'the social structure of humanity'. This phrase sounds rather abstract but Trotsky meant by it something very concrete: the actual interrelation of all these different societies by virtue of which they make up a larger dynamic whole, the contradictory but irreversible unity of human social development created by the spread of the world market—and all the tensions and conflicts arising from this geopolitically combined but sociologically uneven development of the international system. Within this totality, the states system is a crucial, but by no means a free-standing element. On the contrary, it is partly their historical and geographical location within this social structure of humanity which explains why the English, German and Russian states took on such different political forms.

Furthermore, it is this same overall social structure of humanity which the Great Powers are dragged by their own interests into managing geopolitically. For, if the capitalist penetration of Russia distorted Russian society, it also, by the same token, incorporated that social distortion into the political structure of the world market. 'We thus see', he wrote in 1906, 'that the world bourgeoisie has made the stability of its state system profoundly dependent on the unstable pre-bourgeois bulwarks of reaction.'¹² The uneven and combined development of capitalism therefore expresses itself at the interstate level as a problem of geopolitical order.

Third, if this is so, what would be the specific contribution of international theory to the social sciences? It would, I think be to see this process as a dynamic whole. It would be to show how the fate of the international system reflects and organizes at the level of world politics that uneven and combined development of capitalism which is its actual substance, and which comprises in fact the central, defining event of modern world history. With this move, we have filled Martin Wight's vacuum in international theory with the world-historical sociology of modernity. And in doing so, I now want to argue, we have also found the key to the lost history of international relations.

Let me give you the gist of my argument. At first sight, the course of twentieth-century history appears to diverge dramatically from any Marxist understanding. In particular, the socialist revolutions which were predicted in the industrialized heartlands of capitalism never occurred. Instead they took place in the peasant periphery. Socialism itself turned out to be not the realm of human freedom, but rather a brutal authoritarianism, just one more of those tyrannies which have challenged the civilized liberal world and sought to overthrow the balance of power. Far from being the historical successor to capitalism, socialism was finally defeated by it in the Cold War, thus proving that there is no higher form of society than liberal capitalism. Marx has therefore been decisively refuted by the passage of history.

Not only do I dispute this conclusion. I think it rests upon a fundamental misreading of what has been happening in the twentieth century.

¹² Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, p. 240.

And just as the apparently anomalous pattern of Russian development under Czarism begins to make sense as soon as one grasps the uneven and combined character of capitalist expansion, so something similar applies here. Far from refuting Marx, the international politics of the twentieth century has in fact played out an enormous human tragedy which is comprehensible *only* if we recognize in it the uneven and combined form of capitalist world development. It is this tragedy of capitalist world development which comprises the lost history of international relations.

To see how this is so, we must begin by going back to the historical event which Trotsky's theory was originally formulated to explain—or rather, to predict: namely the Bolshevik Revolution itself. We must start by bringing this event back down to earth, by seeing it, as Isaac Deutscher did, not as a bolt of lightning straight out of the pages of Marx striking the open field of history, but rather as an outcome of the international spread of capitalism which had produced the twisted shapes of Czarism and the international conjuncture of the First World War. And we must remember that, according to this theory, the very thing which made Russia the weak link in the chain of European states—namely its relative backwardness and the contradictory effects of combined development—also dictated the impossibility of socialism being established in that country. Socialism, after all, is not a free-floating utopia which can be approached from any starting point, given only the political will. Marx's whole purpose was finally to ground this ideal sociologically by identifying the vectors of transformation within the specific characteristics of advanced capitalism. Czarism could produce insurrections, revolutions even, but not socialism. Any attempt to go further would run up immediately against the political weight of the peasantry, who could certainly be mobilised to overthrow Czarism, but who would resist their own dissolution through collectivization and industrialization.

The Strangled Revolution

In other words, the so-called scissors crisis of the late 1920s—in which the antagonism between town and country deepened, and whose persistence eventually triggered the course which was later known as Stalinism—this crisis was not an unforeseen contingency which dropped out of nowhere. Its inevitability—or something like it—was written clearly in the structural co-ordinates and political sociology of the revolution itself and was clearly foreseen and prepared for in Trotsky's account of permanent revolution. I say 'prepared for'. What I mean is that the Bolshevik leaders saw this contradiction, and placed their hope in a German revolution, which would somehow rescue them before the political imperatives of backwardness strangled the revolution from within. As Lenin put it: 'At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German revolution does not come, we are doomed.'¹³ Well, it did not. And they were. That, surely is the first thing we would have to say about the historical meaning of Stalinism. And that is why,

¹³ Cited in David Horowitz, *Empire and Revolution*, New York 1969, p. 13.

¹⁴ Deutscher, *Unfinished Revolution*, London 1967, p. 34.

when Deutscher described Stalinism as ‘the amalgam of Marxism with Russia’s primordial and savage backwardness’,¹⁴ this was not just a political slogan. It was a basic intellectual precondition for understanding what the Soviet Union was and became.

The political shock waves generated by the Bolshevik Revolution travelled far and wide. They resonated especially throughout the turmoil which gripped central and eastern Europe in the years after the First World War. But what magnified the intensity of their impact there was not just the *geographical* proximity of these countries to Soviet power. It was also their *structural* similarity deriving from parallel experiences of combined development which made these societies far more sensitive and vulnerable to the destabilizing effect of the Bolshevik revolution.

And in this context, one begins to appreciate, above all, the uniquely fraught condition of Germany in this interwar period: caught between victorious liberal powers in the West and the earthquake shaking it from below in the East. A society whose own peculiar pattern of combined development had crystallized a strong military-aristocratic definition of the state and a politically weak bourgeoisie; a society whose belated political transition to a liberal republic took place after the Great War under conditions of nationalist humiliation and strong working-class activism. It is under these conditions of combined development thrown into deep crisis that we start to see that distinctive confluence of hypertrophied nationalism, hysterical anti-communism and revanchist militarism which would later find expression in the monstrosity of Nazism.

In fact, in a book dedicated to the memory of Isaac Deutscher, the American writer David Horowitz developed these points into an alternative interpretation of the overall meaning of the Second World War.¹⁵ Horowitz drew directly on Barrington Moore’s classic study of six different historical roads from agrarian societies to the emergence of modern states.¹⁶ Moore had argued that the emergence of modern societies was an unavoidably violent process because it could not take place without the forcible uprooting and dissolution of the peasantry. What his case studies showed was that in each case it was the particular alliance between old and new classes which was formed to manage this trauma which decided whether the modern state that emerged would be democratic or authoritarian.

Three Forms of One Process

Now, it is striking that the political forms of the leading states in the Second World War—liberalism, fascism and Stalinism—did indeed represent three different outcomes to this historical process of capitalist modernization. But what Horowitz is able to add to Moore’s account is the realization that these three outcomes, for all their differences, were actually not separate historical experiences. On the contrary, it is only by locating them within the overall process of uneven and combined development that we can fully understand what Stalinism and fascism really

¹⁵ David Horowitz, *Empire and Revolution*.

¹⁶ Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Harmondsworth 1967.

were. If this is so, then the full meaning of the Second World War itself cannot be grasped in terms of an interstate conflict over the balance of power, nor in terms of a contest between separate political ideologies. Rather it was a struggle over the future of the international system between three antagonistic forms of state, all of which had been thrown up within the same process of capitalist world development. It was, in this respect, an ironing out through war of the accumulated political contradictions which that process had built up within the social structure of humanity—an ironing out which cost humanity over fifty million lives.

Well, a partial ironing out. Because although fascism was destroyed, the Soviet Union emerged strengthened from the conflict. It is the survival of this second antagonistic form of combined development which explains why the World War was followed immediately by the Cold War. And it was not because the capitalist world now faced an external threat from the spread of socialism. To see it in these terms is to accept at face value the ideological self-definition of the Cold Warriors themselves.

We get a much better sense of what was really going on if we recall that, outside the military conquest of Eastern Europe, Soviet expansion took place entirely in the underdeveloped world in the aftermath of decolonization. For the creation of a hundred-odd new states over a thirty-year period did not simply increase the mathematical complexity of power-balancing. It also generalized across whole regions of the globe, and in a hundred new ways, the classic conditions of combined development: independent states locked into the dynamic imperatives of development by their incorporation into the world market and states system, but based internally on unstable amalgams of capitalist and non-capitalist society, and tending towards more and more authoritarian political forms. Decolonization replaced a world of unsustainable European empires with a states system full of potential mini-Czarisms, any of which might explode and drag other similar states down its new path of combined development. And just as within societies where capitalist relations are weak, the bourgeoisie falls in behind the authoritarian state, so too internationally, the dominant liberal powers found themselves supporting dictators in the name of order.

The challenge of postwar American foreign policy, then, was to hold the world market together politically at a time when the uneven but accelerating capitalist transformation of Third World societies threatened to push more and more of them in the direction of the Soviet road. In fact, whether we look at the military occupation of the defeated fascist powers, the bipolar confrontation with the Soviet Union, or the conduct of relations with the Third World, we find that the major social content of US foreign policy in the postwar period was not ordering of anarchy, or spreading of democracy or even the narrow pursuit of economic self-interest: it was the geopolitical management of combined development and its consequences on a world scale.

Trotsky actually predicted this international conjuncture of American hegemony, with its threefold geopolitical orientation of US foreign pol-

icy and its paradoxical fusion of self-assertion and involuntary entanglement. 'It is,' he wrote in 1928, 'precisely the international strength of the United States and her irresistible expansion arising from it, that compels her to include the powder magazines of the whole world into the foundations of her structure, i.e., all the antagonisms between the East and the West, the class struggle in Old Europe, the uprisings of the colonial masses, and all wars and revolutions... [making her] constantly more interested in the maintenance of "order" in every corner of the terrestrial globe...'¹⁷

It was, however, left to Isaac Deutscher to see that prediction come true, and to witness it approaching a bloody new climax in the jungles of Vietnam. And it was Deutscher who broadcast from his journalistic and literary watchtower a political commentary which interpreted contemporary international politics as the continuing history of uneven and combined development.

Blood-Stained Liberal Capitalism

And that, I suggest, is why we are still remembering Deutscher here tonight, for that perspective remains the key to the lost history of international relations in our century. The core of that history is not simply the defence of the balance of power against a series of bids for world empire: such an image tells us almost nothing of what these conflicts were about, or where their leading participants—all historically new forms of state—came from. Yet nor is the core of this history the triumph of liberalism over external totalitarian competitors. For as we have seen, neither Stalinism nor fascism and their many variants were really external to the world historical process of capitalist development. On the contrary, it is only by exploring how they grew out of that chaotic process that we can ground our understanding of what they actually were. Nor yet, finally, is it (as Francis Fukuyama once told us) the final defeat of socialism by capitalism which closes off the future and brings History (in the Enlightenment sense) to an end. To see it that way is actually to accept the ideological self-definition of Stalinism.

The core of this history—the lost history of international relations—is surely the tragedy of the uneven and combined development of capitalism internationally, a development which threw up *within its own movement* the tormented political forms which liberalism has then confronted as its military competitors. Liberal capitalism, however, cannot evade its responsibility in this process. For it has been the dominant liberal powers who from the start have stood at the head of this historical process of capitalist development, who have directed it geopolitically, who have done most to press it forward, and who have profited most from it. In so doing, they—or rather, we—have played our ample part, all too easily concealed by the uneven and combined character of the historical process, in making all this happen, and thereby in realising on a scale which Marx himself could never have imagined, his grim prophecy: 'If money... "comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one

¹⁷ Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, New York 1970, p. 8.

cheek”, capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.’¹⁸ The disastrous conflicts of twentieth-century world politics, despite all appearances, do not lie outside this coming of capital into the world: on the contrary, they are the historical form which its uneven and combined international development has taken.

Where, then, does this leave the theory of the balance of power? Let me clarify the status of my argument. The invisible hand of the market did not disappear from the imagination of economists as a result of Marx’s theory of value. In a similar way, balance-of-power calculations were often central to the events I have been discussing, and they are not going to disappear from international relations as a result of the theory of uneven and combined development. The reason for this is that the invisible hand and the balance of power are not, after all, fictions. They are metaphors for the peculiar, impersonal forms through which our collective human agency is expressed in the historical world of capitalism. If and when they do disappear, therefore, it will be through a process of social transformation, not one of cognitive reformulation. But just as economic theories which took the invisible hand for granted could never discover the social foundations of capital, so too an international theory based uncritically on the balance of power will never show us the human, social content of world politics. On the contrary, if we take these metaphors at face value, if we make them the starting point for our social theories, then, precisely because they already reflect our historical agency back to us in a mystified form, any social science which we build upon them will only complete the mystification.

And it is *this* which entails that balance-of-power theory must not any longer be the integrating, overarching theory for international relations. In this role it becomes, and has in fact always been, not the masterpiece of the discipline but its jailer, imprisoning it within an impoverished conception of reality and condemning it to languish in that state of intellectual and moral emaciation which Martin Wight reported to a puzzled world all those years ago. The time has come for it to be, not abandoned, but intellectually demoted, removed from the central defining apex of the discipline. In its place, we need a conception which incorporates the international dimension of modern world history at the centre of its understanding, but which does not do so by abstracting the international from its dynamic historical and sociological integument. And this, I suggest, is the promise of the Marxist idea of uneven and combined development for the discipline of international relations.

The Prism of Backwardness

And what, finally, of its promise for Marxism itself, and for the present generation which stands in the uncertain light of this post-Cold-War world? Let me end with a recollection and a prediction. Speaking to a student audience here at the LSE in 1965 towards the end of his life, Isaac Deutscher tried to disentangle in the minds of his listeners the original meaning of the Marxist anticipation of socialism from the vulgar parody

¹⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, Harmondsworth 1976, pp. 925–6.

to which the tragedy of the Soviet experience had temporarily reduced it. With great eloquence and clarity he patiently explained—no doubt for the thousandth time—why a revolution in a backward country could not on its own produce a socialist society. He outlined what enormous distortions and inversions of classical Marxist thought had been required in order to appropriate that heritage for such a revolution. And he analysed the regressive and paradoxical impact that this had had on the intellectual and political development of western Marxism. Not the least part of this was of course the suppression of the theory of uneven and combined development which could have made historical and sociological sense of the distortions which Marxism itself was experiencing.

I wonder. Did that audience, as he spoke, begin to unthink the monolithic ideological assumptions which dominated the Cold-War world into which they had been born? Did they, as I do when I read his speech thirty years later, glimpse the foundation of a completely alternative history of the twentieth century, the real historical sociology of its uneven and combined development which has lain all these years beyond the intellectual reach of both liberalism and Stalinism? As he drew to the end of his speech, Deutscher turned to the future: 'You, and people of your generation should look wholeheartedly to [a time] when Marxism will no longer be the Marxism with which we had to live—the Marxism projected through the prism of backwardness, of backward civilisation and backward societies.'¹⁹

Well, that time has now come—not, to be sure, in the way that Deutscher would have wanted it, for he never gave up his hope that the Soviet Union and Maoist China would somehow reform themselves into communist democracies. But come it has. And this is surely where we stand today: for it now falls to the present generation of socialists to find, in Deutscher's phrase, a new 'Marxism in our time', just as it falls to the present generation of international theorists to reincorporate into our understanding of the present that lost world history of the twentieth century. If there is any sense to what I have been arguing tonight, then these two tasks will be closely linked, and the theory of uneven and combined development will be central to both of them. And for that reason, I predict that the name of Isaac Deutscher, who sustained this perspective through the dark, Manichean years of the Cold War will, in their aftermath, find new honour.

¹⁹ Trotsky, 'Marxism in our Time', *Marxism, Wars and Revolutions*, p. 254.