

Two views on the atomic bomb

I read with interest the article 'The amoral scientists—the tragedy of Hiroshima' (*Curr. Sci.*, 2000, 78, 19–22). In this connection I wish to bring to the attention of our readers views by two refugees from Hitler's Germany who became famous in their respective fields.

The first was Hans Bethe who did so much to shape quantum physics and was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in Astrophysics. He collaborated in the development of the atom bomb and then fought for nuclear arms control. To the

specific question 'Was it right to have built the atom bomb' his answer was, 'Yes, because it ended the war against Japan quickly, with fewer Japanese casualties than would have occurred if the fire bombing of Japanese cities had continued. Atom bombs also helped to ensure that the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union never became hot wars'.

The other was Bertolt Brecht the renowned playwright who wrote the following postscript to the American

production in his play *Life of Galileo* in the summer of 1947 at Beverly Hills, California with Charles Laughton as Galileo:

'It must be understood that our production took place at the time, and in the country of the production of the atom bomb and of its use for military purposes: when atomic physics was wrapped in impenetrable secrecy. The day the bomb was dropped will be difficult to forget for anyone who experienced it in the United States. It was the Japanese

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war which had cost America her real sacrifices. The troop transports went off from the West Coast, and returned there with the wounded and the victims of Asiatic diseases. When the first news reports reached Los Angeles, people knew that this meant the end of the detested war, the return of sons and brothers. But the great city gave an astonishing display of grief. The present writer heard bus-conductors and sales-girls in the fruit markets express nothing but horror. This

was victory; but there was a bitter savour of defeat about it. Then came the secretiveness of the politicians and the military about this gigantic source of energy—secrecy which infuriated the intellectuals. The freedom of research, the exchange of information about discoveries, the international fellowship of scientists were clamped down on by officials who were deeply mistrusted. Great physicists fled precipitately from the service of their militaristic government;

one of the most celebrated took a teaching job which compelled him to waste his working time at teaching the most elementary fundamentals of physics, in order not to have to serve under these officials. It had become a disgrace to discover anything.'

S. RAMASESHAN

*Raman Research Institute,
Bangalore 560 080, India*
