

NOTES AND VARIANTS

FOREWORD

It is well known how beneficially people can be influenced by the conviction that they are poised on the threshold of a new age. At such a moment their environment appears to be still entirely unfinished, capable of the happiest improvements, full of dreamt-of and undreamt-of possibilities, like malleable raw material in their hands. They themselves feel as if they have awakened to a new day, rested, strong, resourceful. Old beliefs are dismissed as superstitions, what yesterday seemed a matter of course is today subject to fresh examination. We have been ruled, says mankind, but now we shall be the rulers.

Around the turn of this century no other line from a song so powerfully inspired the workers as the line: 'Now a new age is dawning'; old and young marched to it, the poorest, the down-and-outs and those who had already won something of civilisation for themselves—all felt young. Under a house painter the unprecedented seductive power of these selfsame words was also tried and proved; for he too promised a new age. Here the words revealed their emptiness and vagueness. Their strength lay in their very indefiniteness, which was now being exploited in demoralising the masses. The new age—that was something and is something that affects everything, leaves nothing unchanged, but is also still only unfolding its character gradually; something in which all imagination has scope to flower, and which is only restricted by too precise description. Glorious is the feeling of beginning, of pioneering; the fact of being a beginner inspires enthusiasm. Glorious is the feeling of happiness in those who oil a new machine before it is to display its strength, in those who fill in a blank space on an old map, in those who dig the foundation of a new house, their house.

This feeling comes to the researcher who makes a discovery that will change everything, to the orator who prepares a speech that will create an entirely new situation. Terrible is the disappointment when men

discover, or think they discover, that they have fallen victims to an illusion, that the old is stronger than the new, that the 'facts' are against them and not for them, that their age—the new age—has not yet arrived. Then things are not merely as bad as before, but much worse because people have made immense sacrifices for their schemes and have lost everything; they have ventured and are now defeated; the old is taking its revenge on them. The researcher or the discoverer—an unknown but also unpersecuted man before he has published his discovery—when once his discovery has been disproved or discredited is a swindler and a charlatan, and all too well known; the victim of oppression and exploitation, when once his insurrection has been crushed, is a rebel who is subject to special repression and punishment. Exertion is followed by exhaustion, possibly exaggerated hope by possibly exaggerated hopelessness. Those who do not relapse into indifference and apathy fall into worse; those who have not sacrificed their energies for their ideals now turn those selfsame energies against those very ideals. There is no more remorseless reactionary than a frustrated innovator, no crueller enemy of the wild elephant than the tame elephant.

And yet these disappointed men may still go on existing in a new age, an age of great upheaval. Only, they know nothing of new ages.

In those days the conception of the new is itself falsified. The Old and the Very Old, now re-entering the arena, proclaim themselves as new, or else it is held to be new when the Old or the Very Old are put over in a new way. But the really New, having been deposed today, is declared old-fashioned, degraded to being a transitory phase whose day is done. 'New' for example is the system of waging wars, whereas 'old,' so they say, is a system of economy, proposed but never put into practice, which makes wars superfluous. In the new system, society is being entrenched in classes; while old, so they say, is the desire to abolish classes. The hopes of mankind do not so much become discouraged in these times; rather, they become diverted. Men had hoped that one day there would be bread to eat. Now they may hope that one day there will be stones.

Amid the darkness gathering fast over a fevered world, a world surrounded by bloody deeds and no less bloody thoughts, by increasing barbarism which seems to be leading irresistibly to perhaps the greatest and most terrible war of all time, it is difficult to adopt an attitude appropriate to people on the threshold of a new and happier age. Does not everything point to night's arrival and nothing to the dawning of a

new age? So shouldn't one, therefore, assume an attitude appropriate to people heading towards the night?

What is this talk of a 'new age'? Is not this expression itself obsolete? When it is shouted at us, it is bellowed from hoarse throats. Now indeed, it is mere barbarism which impersonates the new age. It says of itself that it hopes it will last a thousand years.

So should one hold fast to the old times? Should one discuss sunken Atlantis?

Am I already lying down for the night and thinking, when I think of the morning, of the one that has passed, in order to avoid thinking of the one to come? Is that why I occupy myself with that epoch of the flowering of the arts and sciences three hundred years ago? I hope not.

These images of the morning and the night are misleading. Happy times do not come in the same way as a morning follows a night's sleep.

[Dated 1939; not revised by Brecht. From Werner Hecht (ed.): *Materialien zu Brechts 'Leben des Galilei,'* Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1968, pp. 7ff.]

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DRAFTS FOR A FOREWORD TO *LIFE OF GALILEO*

The *Life of Galileo* was written in those last dark months of 1938, when many people felt fascism's advance to be irresistible and the final

collapse of Western civilisation to have arrived. And indeed we were approaching the end of that great age to which the world owes the development of the natural sciences, together with such new arts as music and the theater. There was a more or less general expectation of a barbaric age 'outside history.' Only a minority saw the evolution of new forces and sensed the vitality of the new ideas. Even the significance of expressions like 'old' and 'new' had been obscured. The doctrines of the socialist classics had lost the appeal of novelty, and seemed to belong to a vanished day.

The bourgeois single out science from the scientist's consciousness, setting it up as an island of independence so as to be able in practice to interweave it with *their* politics, *their* economics, *their* ideology. The research scientist's object is 'pure' research; the product of that research is not so pure. The formula $E=mc^2$ is conceived of as eternal, not tied to anything. Hence other people can do the tying; suddenly the city of Hiroshima became very short-lived. The scientists are claiming the irresponsibility of machines.

Let us think back to the founding father of experimental science, Francis Bacon, whose phrase that one must obey nature in order to command her was not written in vain. His contemporaries obeyed his nature by bribing him with money, and so thoroughly commanded him when he was Lord Chief Justice that in the end Parliament had to lock him up. Macaulay, the puritan, drew a distinction between Bacon the scientist, whom he admired, and Bacon the politician, of whom he disapproved. Should we be doing the same thing with the German doctors of Nazi times?

Among other things, war promotes the sciences. What an opportunity! It creates discoverers as well as thieves. A higher responsibility (that of the higher ranks) replaces the lower (that for the lowly). Obedience is the midwife of arbitrariness. Disorder is perfectly in order. Those doctors who combatted yellow fever had to use themselves as guinea pigs; the fascist doctors had material supplied them. Justice played a part too; they had to freeze only 'criminals', in other words those who did not share their opinions. For their experiments in using 'animal warmth' as a means of thawing they were given prostitutes, women who had transgressed the rule of chastity. They had served sin; now they were being allowed to serve science. It incidentally emerged that hot water restores life better than a woman's body; in its small way it can do more for the fatherland. (Ethics must never be overlooked in war.) Progress all round. At the beginning of this century politicians of

the lower classes were forced to treat the prisons as their universities. Now the prisons became universities for the warders (and doctors). Their experiments would of course have been perfectly in order—'from a scientific point of view', that is—even if the state had been forced to exceed the ethical bounds. None the less the bourgeois world still has a certain right to be outraged. Even if it is only a matter of degrees it is a matter of degrees. When Generals von Mackensen and Maltzer were being tried in Rome for shooting hostages, the English prosecutor, a certain Colonel Halse, admitted that 'reprisal killings' in war were not illegal so long as the victims were taken from the scene of the incident in question, some attempt was made to find the persons responsible for it, and there were not too many executions. The German generals however had gone too far. They took ten Italians for every German soldier killed (not twenty, though, as demanded by Hitler), and dispatched the whole lot too quickly, within some twenty-four hours. The Italian police, by an oversight, handed over several Italians too many, and by another oversight the Germans shot them too, out of a misplaced reliance on the Italians. But here again they had ransacked the prisons for hostages, taking criminals or suspects awaiting trial, and filling the gaps with Jews. So a certain humanity asserted itself, and not merely in the errors of arithmetic. All the same, bounds were exceeded in this case, and something had to be done to punish the excess.

It can none the less be shown that, in this period when the bourgeoisie has gone completely to pieces, those pieces are still made of the same stuff as the original polished article.

And so in the end the scientists get what they want: state resources, large-scale planning, authority over industry; their Golden Age has come. And their great production starts as the production of weapons of destruction; their planning leads to extreme anarchy, for they are arming the state against other states. As soon as he represents such a threat to the world, the people's traditional contempt for the unworldly professor turns into naked fear. And just when he has wholly cut himself off from the people as the complete specialist, he is appalled to see himself once again as one of the people, because the threat applies to him too; he has reason to fear for his own life, and the best reason of anybody to know just how much. His protests, of which we have heard quite a number, refer not only to the attacks on his science, which is to be hampered, sterilised, and perverted, but also to the threat which his knowledge represents to the world, and also to the threat to himself.

The Germans have just undergone one of those experiences that are so difficult to convert into usable conclusions. The leadership of the

state had fallen to an ignorant person who associated himself with a gang of violent and 'uneducated' politicians to proclaim a vast war and utterly ruin the country. Shortly before the catastrophic end, and for some time after it, the blame was attributed to these people. They had conducted an almost total mobilisation of the intellectuals, providing every branch with trained manpower, and although they made a number of clumsy attempts to interfere, the catastrophe cannot be ascribed to clumsy interference alone. Not even the military and political strategy appears to have been all that wrong, while the courage of the army and of the civil population is beyond dispute. What won in the end was the enemy's superiority in men and technology, something that had been brought into play by a series of almost unpredictable events.

Many of those who see, or at any rate suspect, capitalism's shortcomings are prepared to put up with them for the sake of the personal freedom which capitalism appears to guarantee. They believe in this freedom mainly because they scarcely ever make use of it. Under the scourge of Hitler they saw this freedom more or less abrogated; it was like a little nest-egg in the savings bank which could normally be drawn on at any time, though it was clearly more sensible not to touch it, but had now, as it were, been frozen—i.e., could not be drawn on, although it was still there. They regarded the Hitler period as abnormal; it was a matter of some warts on capitalism, or even of an anti-capitalist movement. The latter was something that one could only believe if one accepted the Nazis' own definition of capitalism, while as for the wart theory one was after all dealing with a system where warts flourished, and there was no question of the intellectuals being able to prevent them or make them go away. In either case freedom could only be restored by a catastrophe. And when the catastrophe came, not even that was able to restore freedom, not even that.

Among the various descriptions of the poverty prevailing in denazified Germany was that of spiritual poverty. 'What they want, what they're waiting for, is a message,' people said. 'Didn't they have one?' I asked. 'Look at the poverty,' they said, 'and at the lack of leadership.' 'Didn't they have leadership enough?' I asked, pointing to the poverty. 'But they must have something to look forward to,' they said. 'Aren't they tired of looking forward to such things?' I asked. 'I understand they lived quite a while on looking forward either to getting rid of their leader or to having him lay the world at their feet for them to pillage.'

The hardest time to get along without knowledge is the time when knowledge is hardest to get. It is the condition of bottom-most poverty, where it seems possible to get along without knowledge. Nothing is calculable any longer, the measures went up in the fire, short-range objectives hide those in the distance, at that point chance decides.

[From Werner Hecht (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 16 ff. These different items are given in the same order as there, though they appear to date from after the Second World War and not, as there suggested, mainly from 1938-1939.]