

Arnold Brecht on His Personal Association with the Workers' Leaders (Retrospective Account, 1966)

Abstract

The temporary unifying of all political camps during World War I had stirred hopes among the Socialist workers' movement to be able to end the political and social marginalization they had previously experienced in class conscious Imperial Germany. Since domestic policy did not see any fundamental reforms until Germany became a parliamentary democracy in October 1918, however, their hopes were fulfilled only in part. Despite the cooperation between Social Democrats, politicians representing the middle class (particularly in the Weimar Coalition), and government officials following the revolution of 1918/19 and the trend towards greater social equality it triggered, separate social milieus and the political camps aligned with them largely continued to exist. This brief excerpt from the memoirs of high-ranking government official and staunch republican Arnold Brecht (1884-1977) illustrates how two previously separate worlds now met in the Weimar government.

Source

My personal association with the workers' leaders also contributed to changing my way of thinking, which had so long been rooted in the abstract, theoretical, and aesthetic. I came to feel deep respect for them. Their seriousness, conviction, and character impressed me. This was above all true of the craftsman type of Social Democrat, best represented by Ebert, the former saddler; or Severing, a former metalworker; or the former printer, Otto Braun. Lawyers like Landsberg and Haase, or intellectuals like Breitscheid, were less of a new world for me than those who had sprung from the class of manual workers.

It had been a habit of mine, as is the case with many intellectuals, to pepper my conversations with ironic comments. I soon discovered that in discussion with these men this habit was disturbing and confusing. They expressed their opinions frankly and wanted to learn mine without any unclear overtones. I began to talk to them in as straightforward a manner as they did to me and was ashamed of my ironic frivolities. Only now did I become a man, it seemed.

Source: Arnold Brecht, *The Political Education of Arnold Brecht, An Autobiography 1884-1970*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 125.

Source of original German text: Arnold Brecht, *Aus nächster Nähe, Lebenserinnerungen 1884-1927*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966, pp. 214-15.

Recommended Citation: Arnold Brecht on His Personal Association with the Workers' Leaders (Retrospective Account, 1966), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:document-3825>> [March 16, 2026].