

Persecution: Science in 20th Century Europe

The political situation in Europe in the early 20th century led to millions of people being imprisoned, deported or executed due to their ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and political views. Science was not immune to this: Albert Einstein, Fritz Haber, and Erwin Schrodinger, among others, fled their home countries to escape state-sponsored persecution.



Above: The Manhattan project was helped by refugee scientists fleeing persecution in Europe.

Below: A 1933 cartoon showing Albert Einstein shedding his pacifist wings due to the rise of the Nazi party.

During the Second World War, schemes were set up so that scientists fleeing persecution could seek refuge in "safe" countries. Often, these scientists ended up working against their home nations in the war effort - most famously in the Manhattan project which developed the first atomic bomb. We sometimes like to think that science is non-political, but is this really possible?

