

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Correspondence intended for this section should address issues previously raised in *Isis*. It will be published at the editor's discretion.

TO THE EDITOR:

A POSTSCRIPT ON EINSTEIN AND THE FBI

In a recent note in *Isis* Richard A. Schwartz mentioned an "informant whose identity was unknown even to the FBI" who had claimed that Soviet agents had used Einstein's office in Berlin as a message drop in the late 1920s and early 1930s ("Einstein and the War Department," *Isis*, 1989, 80:281-284, on pp. 281, 284; cf. Schwartz, "Dr. Einstein and the F.B.I.," *The Nation*, 1983, 237:168-173). Although the exact source for this claim remains unclear to me, I recently found out the identity of a hitherto anonymous informant who had claimed that Einstein was a communist. Because of striking similarities between passages in the FBI files cited by Schwartz and published papers by the informant I have identified, it seems plausible that these two are one and the same.

Before FBI files are released, that is, declassified from "secret" or "confidential" status, all names of informants are scratched out or otherwise made illegible. Thus the identity of informants usually remains unknown. But several decades later it is of historical interest to find answers to such questions as, What kind of sources did official intelligence agencies rely on? Which testimonies did they accept as a basis for their inquiries?

In the case of one document in the FBI files on Einstein, dated 4(?) Sept. 1953, traces indicating the identity of the informant still remain, despite the declassification procedure. A copy of the document (Sign. 70-938, released on 5 June 1980) is filed in the duplicate archive of the *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* in Boston (the permission of Hebrew University to publish an extract is gratefully acknowledged). In it we find the following paragraph, with capitalization and underlining as in the original, and the informant's name blacked out:

In 1919, according to ———, the German left-wing press hailed EINSTEIN as a great scientist. At about that time also, he claims, EINSTEIN started meetings in Berlin university and embarked upon philosophical discussions. As a result of these discussions, ——— claims he told EINSTEIN that he was not a scientist or a philosopher, but was a politician and would bring the German people to anarchism and communism. In replying, ——— claims, EINSTEIN attacked him through the editorial column of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and, in an article that appeared, as far as ——— could recall, sometime between August 20 and 25, 1920, EINSTEIN made a statement that he had been accused of being a communist. . . . EINSTEIN continued that he admitted that he was a communist.

The document then continues with a report about the unsuccessful attempts of the informant to locate a copy of this newspaper article in American libraries, mentioning the informant's "unfamiliarity with library procedures . . . and with the language," and thus "in making himself clearly understood."

The last fact immediately reveals that this person was neither a born American nor a native English speaker; furthermore, his reports about personal contacts with Einstein (then residing in Berlin) around 1920 immediately suggest that he was of German origin. Because the document was typewritten, the length of the blacked-out name can be measured: it is consistently seven letters long. This in itself does not identify him, but the information about Einstein's antagonistic article against the informant in the *Berliner Tageblatt* leaves no further doubt about his identity. On 27 August 1920, that is, only two days after the vague five-day estimate given much later by the informant, Einstein published a now famous article against the "Anti-Relativity Company, Ltd.," precisely in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (pp. 1-2). The only person specifically mentioned by name in this article was a somewhat obscure propagandist called Paul Weyland, who had organized antirelativistic lectures in Berlin's philharmonic hall that same year. Later, in 1921, Weyland was the editor of the *Deutsch-Völkische Monatshefte*, but only one issue of this extreme right-wing journal

appeared. After the war, Weyland lived in the United States. The paragraph quoted from the FBI document obviously refers to this article by Einstein, from which it directly follows that the informant could only be Paul Weyland, whose last name consists of precisely seven letters. (Incidentally, Andreas Kleinert of the University of Hamburg is preparing a study of Weyland.)

The following topoi are part of the standard repertoire of all of Weyland's antirelativistic publications from 1920 on:

- complaints about exaggerated "propagandist" articles eulogizing Einstein in so-called "Jewish" newspapers, and
- objections to the "unfair" identification of serious arguments against the theories of relativity with anti-Semitism.

It is revealing to find both topoi in the FBI and War Department files. The undated two-page "biographical sketch" cited by Schwartz, for instance, contains the following sentence: "The Berlin conservative press at the time featured this, but the authorities were hesitant to take any action, as the more radical press immediately ac-

cused these reporters as being Anti-Semites" (p. 282). A sentence like this one was either picked up from the German radical right-wing press (e.g., *Völkischer Beobachter*), in which incompetent propagandists like Weyland published their polemical articles, or suggested by informants originating from these nationalistic circles.

In summary: During the McCarthy era, the Federal Bureau of Investigation accepted statements picked up from extreme right-wing newspapers and the testimonies of obscure propagandists as serious sources of politically incriminating material against troublesome left-wing scientists like Einstein. The striking continuation of antirelativistic argumentation reminds me of the German proverb:

Der Ort ist gut, die Lage neu—
der alte Lump ist auch dabei.

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