

# The Einstein File: J. Edgar Hoover's Secret War Against the World's Most Famous Scientist **FREE**

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Physics Today 55 (9), 60 (2002);  
<https://doi.org/10.1063/1.1522219>



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a theory with such profound philosophical consequences continued and continues to generate some simmering opposition—but their views were not getting into print, even when argued from the position of Marxist ideology. Instead, the official philosophers proclaimed a perfect agreement between dialectical materialism and Einstein's relativity, while in actual practice they were adapting Marxist philosophy of nature to modern science, rather than the reverse. To the extent that Einstein was protected from criticism and received only praise, respectful commentary, and quotations of his work, he effectively became a part of the Soviet ideology.

The big change came with Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika. The new freedom of the press permitted Einstein's detractors to publish their views. At the same time, the collapsing Communist regime began to be accused not only of its real past crimes, but of virtually all bad things, including opposition to Einstein's relativity. In the new ideological climate, it became almost impossible to see or say that such good scientists as Vavilov and Fock had formulated the official Soviet position on Einstein; their role, according to the conceptual logic of anticommunism, could only be conceived as resisting the evil regime. On the other hand, the motley band of critics of Einstein were retrospectively assigned bogeyman status, as representatives of the "official Stalinist orthodoxy," despite their actual relatively minor roles in Soviet society.

The story was thus recast in the familiar terms of evil ideology oppressing good science, an idiom so appealing and so often repeated that it generates strong belief, despite all the contradictory factual evidence. Even Vucinich, otherwise a critical and thoughtful scholar, was partially taken in by this powerful myth and accepted it as the main interpretive frame for his book. Fortunately, his study also contains a wealth of other information about Soviet scientists' actual contributions, including perhaps the greatest development ever added to Einstein's general theory of relativity—A. A. Friedmann's concept of the nonstationary universe and its path to receiving general recognition as the foundation of modern cosmology. There, in the works of Fock, Friedmann, and Vavilov, rather than in those of a few marginal opponents, one finds the really important Soviet engagement with Einstein's physics and philosophy.

## The Einstein File: J. Edgar Hoover's Secret War Against the World's Most Famous Scientist

▶ Fred Jerome  
*St Martin's Press, New York,*  
2002. \$27.95 (358 pp.).  
ISBN 0-312-28856-5

It is not surprising that Albert Einstein's outspoken political views earned him the enmity of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. The documentary record may be found in Einstein's 1800-page FBI file, now available to the public in largely unexpurgated form. In *The Einstein File*, science writer Fred Jerome has undertaken to interpret this file and put it in the context of its times.

Jerome is explicit about the baggage he brings to this project. He is a so-called "red-diaper baby," the son of one of the American Communist leaders imprisoned under the Smith Act in the 1940s. In the interest of fairness, I should disclose that I share a similar background.

This book has two declared goals. The first is to discredit Hoover and the FBI. The second is to show that, in the political arena, Einstein was far from the "otherworldly sage" of popular myth, but a committed exponent of carefully considered political and social beliefs. He also had a good sense of when to husband and when to spend the political capital derived from his scientific reputation and his widespread celebrity.

Einstein harbored no illusions about the nature of the Soviet regime, but this did not lead him to renounce his own positions just because they were supported by Communists. He did take pains to avoid association with organizations he regarded as under Communist control.

The first entry in the file predates Einstein's emigration to the United States. It is a lengthy document prepared by the "Woman Patriot Corporation," an organization of eastern establishment "bluebloods." It offers a litany of Einstein's subversive ideas, including the theory of relativity itself, which it claims was deliberately constructed to leave "... the laws of nature and the principles of science in confusion and disorder."

Much of the material in the file from the 1930s and 1940s is of similar character: unsupported allegations of dubious provenance. The rest

is a recital of meetings attended and causes supported, from civil rights to aid for Spanish loyalists and pleas to admit more refugees from Europe. The meetings and causes were, of course, all perfectly legal and above-board, but they proved sufficient to lead the US Army to deny Einstein clearance to work on the Manhattan Project. The navy, given the same information, did clear him and used him as a wartime consultant.

The information was used in Hoover's characteristic manner, through summaries leaked to favored political and media figures under strict conditions of nonattribution. Hoover, a consummate bureaucrat, was not about to risk public denunciation of a popular public figure. Less prominent individuals could be subject to more direct harassment.

The situation changed in 1950, in the wake of the public hysteria over Soviet nuclear espionage. For the five remaining years of his life, Einstein was subjected to a full-dress FBI campaign, complete with wiretaps and "bugs" intended somehow to connect him with espionage.

An attempt to show that atom spy, Klaus Fuchs, had obtained his position at Los Alamos National Laboratory through Einstein's influence foundered on multiple errors of fact. Einstein was in no position to exert such influence, and the basis for Fuchs's posting to Los Alamos as a member of the British contingent was well understood. The source for the Einstein-Fuchs allegation, Fuchs's sister Kristall, was at that time confined to a mental institution in an advanced delusional state and would hardly have made a credible witness.

An even more far-fetched allegation was that, in the early 1930s, Einstein had allowed the use of his personal Berlin cable address as a "drop" for Soviet spies in the Far East. Extensive FBI field work failed to disclose any evidence for this. A bit of spade work by Jerome reveals that, in fact, Einstein never had a private cable address in Berlin. That misinformation is but one of many examples that cast doubt on the competence of the FBI.

The feeble onslaught notwithstanding, Einstein died in 1955 with his reputation intact. The book adds little to the already well-documented story of his life. But it may serve as another timely reminder of the outrages to our liberties that can arise in a period of paranoia over national security.

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