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Edited by David E. Rowe & Robert Schulmann: Einstein on Politics

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The First World War and Its Impact, 1914–1921

Einstein arrived in Berlin in 1914 at the age of 35, a scientific prodigy but innocent of the world of politics. The outbreak of the war was a rude awakening for him and led to his first tentative grappling with political issues. What he retained was the sensibility and vocabulary of a citizen of the republic of letters, not of someone prepared to engage in public debate or political action at close quarters. In the very first months of the war, moral outrage triggered his collaboration in a countermanifesto protesting the solidarity of German intellectuals with the army in its violation of Belgian neutrality. He continued, however, to devote most of his time to his scientific passions for which he sought out and embraced isolation. To a colleague he wrote in January 1915 that “in spite of the troubling, disgusting war I work quietly in my room” (CPAE 8A, Doc. 44). A police report in early 1916 offers corroboration. After mentioning his membership in the pacifist New Fatherland Association, the report noted that Einstein had not yet made his mark politically (Gülzow, 234). Perhaps his harshest critic in this regard was Einstein himself. In the last year of the war he revealed to a friend that he was unsure whether or not to rebuke himself for his own passivity (CPAE 8B, Doc. 537). The friend was Georg Nicolai. A physiology professor in Berlin, confidant of Einstein’s cousin and future wife Elsa, Nicolai had drawn up the first draft of the countermanifesto which Einstein signed at

the outbreak of the war. In the summer of 1915, he was working on a manuscript to be published two years later as *The Biology of War* (Nicolai; for commentary, see Zuelzer, 52–57). Many of its salient points are strikingly similar to the themes in Einstein’s essay on the psychological roots of war, which was written in autumn 1915. Both authors emphasize that the survival of the human race depends on cultivating social impulses and channeling aggressive instincts to ends that benefit the entire community.

The fact that Einstein composed his essay on the origins of war at the same time that he was struggling with the final stages of his general theory of relativity suggests that the recluse was engaging, however hesitantly, with a world beyond his single-minded devotion to science. The crystallizing event that brought him at least partially out of his seclusion was his induction into the New Fatherland Association in summer 1915, presumably at Nicolai’s prompting. Membership in this pacifist organization opened to him in Berlin a network of like-minded intellectuals, their politics stretching from the center to the left, whose selfless dedication and refusal to accept blind authority struck a resonant chord (Goenner 2005, 75–88). Only months later he wrote that “these times show us that everyone must do his part for the organization of the whole” (Vol. 8A, Doc. 152). In this endeavor, he also found colleagues farther afield in neutral Europe. They included the forensic physician Heinrich Zangger and the prominent pacifist Romain Rolland in Switzerland, as well as the physicists Hendrik A. Lorentz and Paul Ehrenfest in the Netherlands. Though the New Fatherland was closed down by the authorities in early 1916, Einstein retained an affinity for the camaraderie he had experienced there. Still cautious, he was nevertheless concerned enough about the sad state of wartime politics a year later to lay out concrete steps for an international pacifist union of sovereign states.

Five years after his arrival in Berlin, the German Empire lay in ruins and a hopeful new Weimar Republic struggled to find its footing. Meanwhile Einstein had vaulted to international fame. His cautious testing of the political waters during the war gave

way to an increasingly urgent engagement with social and political issues. Two factors determined his greater access to and interest in the political realm. One was thrust on him in late 1919 after a British solar expedition confirmed his general theory of relativity. Now a world figure, pronouncements on public affairs came to be expected of him. The other was a conscious redefinition for himself of the role of the intellectual who has access to the media in the mass society of the twenties.

Dearest to his heart in the first phase of his political involvement were the issues of a Jewish homeland—a theme taken up at length in chapter 3—and the need for international reconciliation, as well as for revitalizing scientific research and cooperation across national borders. In dealing with these matters he confronted the need to find a balance between empathy for specific constituencies, such as his fellow scientists in Central Europe and his Jewish brethren, as opposed to his overarching commitment to internationalism. This was firmly rooted in his faith in the transnational character of science as well as his instinctive distaste for parochial nationalism. Particularly offensive in this regard was the enmity between Germany and France, which could only be overcome, he thought, by a passionate commitment to the principle of human solidarity.

After he became ever more engaged in political concerns, Einstein remained without partisan political affiliations. Though he called for the founding of the liberal German Democratic Party, he took pains to deny publicly that he was a member. Eager to educate the German public about the events of the war and to counter feelings of revenge against the Allies, he joined a nonpartisan private commission to evaluate German war guilt. He proved equally evenhanded in assessing blame for the turmoil of the early Weimar years. More significantly, the political novice was developing a discerning eye for domestic and foreign affairs.

On the home front he expressed his distrust for the extremes of right and left, though he saw the greater danger from the former, particularly after the military putsch of March 1920. Still, he

defended the Germans as a whole against charges of innate belligerence, asserting that “on average, the moral qualities of a people do not differ very much from country to country” (CPAE 9, Doc. 80). Most worrisome for him were the ravages of the rapidly spreading economic malaise and its consequences for maintaining the high standards of German science.

Turning his attention abroad, he took the Allies to task for the punitive Versailles Treaty imposed on the defeated Germany, damning them with the faint praise that they were the lesser of two evils. Alternating between optimism and pessimism about the prospects for the newly formed League of Nations, he calculated coolly that the venture was doomed without the participation of an internationally minded America.

Initial Moral Outrage

Einstein experienced “a mixture of pity and disgust” at the outbreak of the First World War, an instinctive recoiling from “Europe in its madness” (CPAE 8A, Doc. 34). Two months later, insult was added to injury when ninety-three German intellectuals published a “Manifesto to the Civilized World” (also known as the “Manifesto of the 93”) declaring that “the German army and the German people are one” (Böhme, 47–49). Einstein was outraged by this appeal to a narrow nationalism, a declaration he found even more offensive because it was proclaimed from the ranks of a cultural elite, to which he himself had recently been recruited. In response and in collaboration with Nicolai and two others, he drew up a countermanifesto reaching out to all Europeans.

MANIFESTO TO THE EUROPEANS, MID-OCTOBER 1914

NICOLAI, 9–11; CPAE 6, Doc. 8

While technology and commerce clearly compel us to recognize the bond between all nations, and thus a common world culture, no war has ever so intensively disrupted cultural cooperation as

the present one. Perhaps our acute awareness of the disruption that we now sense so painfully is due to the numerous common bonds we once shared.

Even should this state of affairs not surprise us, those for whom a common world culture is the least bit precious should redouble their efforts to uphold these principles. Those, however, of whom one should expect such conviction—in particular scientists and artists—have thus far only uttered things which suggest that their desire for maintaining relations has vanished simultaneously with their disruption. They have spoken with an understandable hostility—but least of all of peace.

Such a mood cannot be excused by any national passion; it is unworthy of what the entire world has until now come to understand by the name of culture. It would be a disaster should this mood pervade the educated classes.

Not only would it be a disaster for civilization, but—and we are firmly convinced of this—a disaster for the national survival of individual states—in the final analysis, the very cause in the name of which all this barbarity has been unleashed.

Through technology the world has become *smaller*; the *states* of the large peninsula of Europe today move in the orbit of one another much as did the *cities* of each small Mediterranean peninsula in ancient times. Through a complex of interrelationships, Europe—one could almost say the world—now displays a unity based on the needs and experience of every individual.

Thus it would appear to be the duty of educated and well-meaning Europeans at the very least to attempt to prevent Europe—as a result of an imperfect organization of the whole—from suffering the same tragic fate which befell ancient Greece. Should Europe too gradually exhaust itself and collapse in fratricidal war?

The struggle raging today will likely produce no victor; it will probably leave only the vanquished behind. Therefore, it seems not only *good*, but rather bitterly *necessary*, that *intellectuals of all nations* marshal their influence such that—whatever the still uncertain end of the war may be—the *terms of peace shall not*

become the cause of future wars. The fact that through this war European relationships have to some extent become *volatile and malleable* should rather be used to make of Europe an organic entity. The technological and intellectual prerequisites are given.

How this European order is to be brought about should not be discussed here. We wish merely to emphasize as a matter of principle that we are firmly convinced that the time has come when *Europe must act as one in order to protect her soil, her inhabitants, and her culture.*

We believe that the will to do this is latently present in many. In expressing this will collectively we hope that it gathers force.

To this end, it seems for the time being necessary that all those who hold European civilization dear, in other words, those who in Goethe's prescient words can be called "*good Europeans*" join together. After all, we must not give up the hope that their collective voice—even in the din of arms—will not trail off entirely unheard, especially, if among these "*good Europeans of tomorrow,*" we find all those who enjoy esteem and authority among their educated peers.

First it is necessary, however, that Europeans get together, and if—as we hope—enough *Europeans in Europe* can be found, that is to say, people for whom Europe is not merely a geographical concept, but rather a worthy object of affection, then we shall try to call together a union of Europeans. Such a union shall then speak and decide.

We wish only to urge and appeal; and if you feel as we do, if you are similarly determined to *lend the most far-reaching resonance to the European will,* then we ask that you sign.



The countermanifesto was circulated among a large number of academics, but aside from its three authors, only one graduate student was

prepared to sign. Wartime censorship in Germany consigned it to three-year oblivion, from which it only emerged in 1917. In that year the countermanifesto was published in neutral Switzerland in the preface to Nicolai's *Biology of War*.

Nicolai was only one of a number of colleagues with whom Einstein felt a growing kinship of the like-minded. Another was his former colleague at the University of Zurich, Heinrich Zangger, a professor of forensic medicine with excellent political ties to the Allied camp. A third was Romain Rolland, the most prominent pacifist of his generation, who, though a French national, was living in exile in Switzerland.

LETTER TO HEINRICH ZANGGER, CA. 10 APRIL 1915

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 39-662; CPAE 8A, Doc. 73

You have the patience of an angel not to be cross with me because of my silence. But I console myself with the fact that your memory is not adequate to determine reliably the degree of my negligence. I'm now beginning to feel comfortable in the mad turmoil of the present, in conscious detachment from all things that occupy the deranged public. Why should one not live enjoyably as a member of the madhouse staff? All madmen are respected as those for whom the building in which one lives is constructed. To a certain degree the institution can be freely selected—but the difference between them is less than what one in younger years expects. Romain Rolland, who currently lives in Geneva, recently sent me a proposal, which—to continue the metaphor—leads to an organization of the sane staff of all madhouses for the purpose of not becoming deranged as well. Moreover, he has hopes that such an organization might more or less cure the inmates. The optimist! If you have the opportunity, look after him; he is being persecuted for his internationalism. . . .



The “organization of the sane staff” to which Einstein referred was not just an idle metaphor. Established recently in the Netherlands as the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, it was dedicated to working toward a stable postwar Europe. Einstein joined its executive council a half year later.

In an attempt to build bridges to more conservative intellectuals, Einstein put aside resentment against colleagues, including the eminent physicist Max Planck, who had signed the Manifesto of the 93 in October 1914. At the same time, he appealed to the internationally respected Dutch physicist Hendrik A. Lorentz to initiate an effort to restore the bonds of cooperation among intellectuals from the belligerent states. In the letter that follows, Einstein bemoaned his lack of political contacts in Berlin, though he had, only a month earlier, become a member of the pacifist New Fatherland Association.

LETTER TO HENDRIK A. LORENTZ, 21 JULY 1915

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 83-432; CPAE 8A, DOC. 98

Recently I spoke with Planck, and we both gloomily recalled the bitter division that has arisen between us and our highly esteemed foreign colleagues as a result of the unfortunate war. Whatever errors in deplorable political agitation may have been committed on either side, it is never too late to change. It is certain that we academics are all innocent of the war and that the present miserable circumstances ought to induce us even more to solidarity; whatever occurred before has to be regarded simply as not having happened.

What to do? If I did not live in Berlin, I would write personally to our closest colleagues in France and England with the request that they pull back from the general misfortune, in order that earlier friendly relations within our community can be restored. I would ask them to assemble, completely voluntarily and unofficially, at an appropriate location (Holland or Switzerland) now during this vacation, primarily to nurture personal contacts.

But I live in Berlin, have few contacts, and also have little skill in communicating with people. That is why I am confiding in you

in the hope that you will be able to transform all this, which I can only dream of, into reality. Would you not enjoy devoting some time to this worthwhile mission? Planck encouraged me very much to do everything that was in my power; he also would do everything to restore the good relations. This is all the more important as there are signs that the official relations among the learned societies and academies could rupture; for there is a great surge of nationalistic blindness. But I note here that especially the most highly regarded are fighting against it with all their might and this will surely be the same in other countries as well . . .



Though Planck and Emil Fischer, another colleague in the Prussian Academy, had signed the Manifesto of the 93, Einstein sought to reassure Lorentz that they and many other German intellectuals had given their assent hastily and regretted it. One example of Planck making partial amends was his signing in July of a petition opposing annexationist war aims. On the other hand, he was not prepared to retract publicly his signing of the Manifesto, a rebuff of Lorentz's suggestion in spring 1915 that German intellectuals might take the sting out of that document if they were to declare publicly that they recognized the equality of other cultures. Lorentz, in turn, was not interested in playing host to the gathering suggested by Einstein in the letter above.

LETTER TO HENDRIK A. LORENTZ, 2 AUGUST 1915

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 16-438; CPAE 8A, DOC. 103

Your negative reply did not come as a surprise, as I already had indications of the mood of our colleagues abroad. It is strange in Berlin. Professionally, scientists and mathematicians are strictly internationally minded and guard carefully against any unfriendly

measures taken against colleagues living in hostile foreign countries. Historians and philologists, on the other hand, are mostly chauvinistic hotheads. The well-known and notorious “Manifesto to the Civilized World” is deplored by all levelheaded people here. The signatures had been given irresponsibly, some without prior reading of the text. That is how it was for Planck and Fischer, for example, who have supported upholding international ties in a very resolute manner. I am going to talk to Planck about your suggestion. But I believe that these persons cannot be prompted to retract their words.

I must admit that the narrow nationalistic sentiment even of people of high standing is bitterly disappointing to me. Moreover, I must say that my respect for the politically more advanced states has diminished significantly on perceiving that they are all in the hands of oligarchies that own the press and wield the power and can do what they like. A malicious person has altered a fine proverb thus

“vox populi, vox ox.”

Add to this that the perceptive and powerful have no feelings for the many; there you have the sad picture of what is revered as the “fatherland” by those who belong to it. This does not change on the other side of a frontier, but is everywhere essentially the same. And must relations between persons who have come to respect one another privately and professionally pale before this threadbare ideal? It is beyond belief and unacceptable. It seems that people constantly need a fantasy for the sake of which they can hate one another; earlier it was religious faith, now it is the state. . . .



During a visit to his estranged family in Zurich, Einstein was invited to meet with Romain Rolland in Switzerland. Assuming that he would

not find the time, Einstein put his thoughts to paper, writing “Confidential” at the head of the letter.

Reiterating the regrets of many of his colleagues in signing the Manifesto of the 93, Einstein commented on the fate of the New Fatherland Association, a pacifist group he had joined some months earlier. A campaign of official intimidation against it had recently been signaled by an article in a newspaper associated with the government accusing pacifist organizations of delivering “bullets in the back.” In part the authorities were emboldened by the collapse of the Russian army on the Eastern Front. Right-wing allies of the government in the Prussian Academy of Sciences were similarly heartened. In reaction to a French academician’s call to resist the German dream of “making Germany the center of a world that is organized like a battleship” (*Déclarations*, 5–7), the Prussian Academy deliberated on retaliatory measures against French intellectuals. Planck, with the assistance of Fischer, was able to win approval in the Prussian Academy to postpone any action against foreign institutions until after the war. All but three scientists voted for Planck’s compromise, whereas more than half of the humanists were against it. The speech to the Academy of Sciences that Einstein mentions and attributes to the physicist Jules Violle was presumably given by the mathematician Paul Appell, a member of the Academy.

LETTER TO ROMAIN ROLLAND, 15 SEPTEMBER 1915

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 33-006; CPAE 8A, DOC. 118

Your cordial invitation to visit you in Vevey [on the shore of Lake Geneva] has whetted my appetite for making the acquaintance of one of the rare conciliatory Europeans. Well, my various obligations do not leave enough time for this trip; so I am going to use my time in Switzerland at least to send you an uncensored letter. The New Fatherland Association is going through quite difficult times; it is being harassed by the authorities and being condemned (on the whole) by the press. It looks as if the military successes

in Russia have given the pro-military party and the pan-Germans increased influence with the government. On the other hand, those among my acquaintances who are most discerning in economic matters are not particularly optimistic; this seems to be due to a shortage in certain raw materials. Strangely enough, beside a quaint egotism, one finds in Germany a love for France and its population, whereas great animosity against England is quite universal. Among the uncritical masses there is general confidence in victory and an equally prevalent greed for annexation. It is strange how the man on the street can feel compensated for his heavy sacrifices by the seizure of territory, from which he certainly benefits little personally. I hope it does not come to that! A decisive victory for Germany would be a misfortune for the whole of Europe, but especially for itself.

One of the most disheartening phenomena of this terrible time is that in many cases intellectuals have completely lost their perspective. I regret to say that the unfortunate and ridiculous war of words in Berlin has already begun. You have certainly been amazed that so many men, who in times of peace were justifiably regarded as sensible, signed the notorious "Manifesto to the Civilized World." Condemnation of this step is now quite universal in Berlin as well. Incidentally, the best among them had in fact given their approval *over the telephone*, without having read the appeal! Recently there was a great furor at the Prussian Academy, because someone responded to Violle's Academy speech by submitting a petition to sever all ties with French academies. Then a curious thing happened: almost all the historians, philologists, etc., supported the petition, while most scientists and mathematicians worked avidly to maintain international ties. Thank God, the latter won, if only by a small majority; Planck (a physicist) and Fischer (a chemist) deserve particular credit for their great resolve and firmness. . . .



One day after writing Rolland, Einstein did meet with him. As Rolland's diary entry for that date indicates, most of the themes raised in the letter were discussed (Rolland, 510–515).

Only five weeks later Einstein was asked to contribute an essay to a patriotic commemorative volume entitled "The Land of Goethe 1914/1916." The heirs of the greatest German poet were called upon to defend German culture. Instead, Einstein seized the opportunity to display his visceral feelings on the phenomenon of war in general. When the editors of the volume deemed portions of the essay too unpatriotic and requested that Einstein delete the fourth and fifth paragraphs, he agreed. Yet he could not resist pointing out that he was only reiterating Tolstoy's comparison of patriotism to a mental disorder. The article was published the following year without the offending paragraphs (Einstein 1916, 30). Presented here in its entirety, it makes public the thoughts Einstein had penned at the end of the previous year to his friend Zangger: "What drives people to kill and maim each other so savagely? I think, in the end, it is the sexual aggressiveness of the male that leads to such wild explosions from time to time. . . . The special calamity of our times, however, is that bestial instincts together with the available technologies are leading to genuine destruction" (CPAE 10: Vol. 8, Doc. 41a).

The timing of the essay's composition is more than of passing interest: Einstein wrote it just as he was struggling with the final versions of his gravitational field equations submitted on four consecutive Thursdays to the Prussian Academy beginning 4 November. The final form of the paper, submitted on 25 November, provides the capstone of what is known as the general theory of relativity.

MY OPINION ON THE WAR, LATE OCTOBER,
EARLY NOVEMBER 1915

EINSTEIN 1916, 30; CPAE 6, Doc. 20

The psychological roots of war are—in my opinion—biologically grounded in the aggressive nature of the male. We "lords of creation" are not the only ones who sport this crown: some

animals—the bull and the rooster—surpass us in this regard. This aggressive tendency comes to the fore whenever individual males are placed side by side and even more so when relatively close-knit societies have to deal with each other. Almost without fail they will end up in disputes that escalate into quarrels and murder unless special precautions are taken to prevent such occurrences. I will never forget what honest hatred my classmates felt for years for the first-graders of a school in a neighboring street. Countless brawls ensued, resulting in many a gash in the heads of the boys. Who could doubt that vendetta and duelling spring from such feelings? I even believe that the *honor* that is so carefully cultivated by us derives its major nourishment from such sources.

Understandably, the more modern organized states have had vigorously to push these expressions of primitive virile traits into the background. But wherever two nation states are neighbors and do not belong to a supranational organization, those traits from time to time generate tensions that lead to the catastrophes of war. By the way, I consider so-called aims and causes of war rather meaningless, because they are always to be found when passion requires them.

Subtle intellects of all times have agreed that war is one of the worst enemies of human development, and that everything must be done to prevent it. Notwithstanding the unspeakably sad conditions at present, I am convinced that it is possible, in the near future, to form a supranational organization in Europe that prevents European wars, just as now war between Bavaria and Württemberg is impossible in the German Reich. No friend of intellectual advancement should fail to vouch for this most important political goal of our time.

One can ponder the question: Why doesn't an individual in peacetime—when the state suppresses almost every expression of manly rowdiness—lose the capabilities and motivations that enable him to commit mass murder in wartime? The reasons seem to me as follows. When I peer into the mind of a decent average citizen, I see a dimly lit comfortable space. In one corner stands the

pride of the man of the house, a lovingly cared for shrine, to the presence of which every visitor is loudly alerted and upon which is written in huge letters the word “patriotism.” It is usually a taboo to open this cabinet. In fact, the man of the house scarcely knows, or not at all, that this shrine contains the moral requisites of bestial hatred and mass murder, which when war is declared he dutifully takes out and uses. You will not find this shrine in my parlor, dear reader. I would be happy if you would consider placing a piano or a bookshelf in that same corner of *your* parlor. Either would be a more fitting piece of furniture than the one you tolerate only because you have grown accustomed to it since childhood.

I have no intention of making a secret of my internationalist sentiments. How close I feel to a human being or a human organization depends only on how I judge their intentions and capabilities. The state, to which I as a citizen belong, has no place at all in my emotional life; I consider affiliation with a state to be a business matter, somewhat akin to one’s relationship to life insurance. From what I have said above, there can be no doubt that I must seek the citizenship of a country that will in all likelihood not force me to take part in a war.

How can a powerless individual creature contribute to reaching this goal? Should everyone perhaps devote a considerable portion of his abilities to politics? I really believe that the intellectually more mature people in Europe have sinned in their neglect of general political questions; yet I do not regard the pursuit of politics as the path to an individual’s greatest effectiveness in this area. I rather believe that everyone should act privately in such a way that those feelings, which I have discussed in detail earlier, can no longer represent a curse to society.

Every individual who is conscious of acting to the best of his knowledge and ability should feel a sense of honor, without consideration of words and deeds. The words and actions of others or of other groups cannot *offend* one’s personal honor or that of one’s group. The thirst for power and greed should, as in the past,

be treated as despicable vices; the same applies to hatred and contentiousness. I do not suffer from an overvaluation of the past, but in my opinion we have not made progress on this important point; on the contrary, we have declined. Every well-meaning individual should work hard at improving himself and his personal surroundings in this regard. Then the grave afflictions which plague us in such terrible fashion today will vanish.

But then again, why so many words when I can say all in one sentence and in a sentence very appropriate for a Jew: Honor your Master Jesus Christ not only in words and hymns, but above all by your deeds.



After the German authorities disbanded the New Fatherland Association in February 1916, Einstein lacked a public venue for expressing antiwar sentiments. Privately, as he confessed to Zangger some months later, “I shut my eyes as best I can to the insane goings-on in the world at large” (CPAE 10: Vol. 8, Doc. 232a). Though he was increasingly wary of publishing his views, he did not hesitate to make his feelings known within the German physics community. In an obituary for Ernst Mach written the following month, he praised the humanitarian impulse in Mach’s works, which “made him immune to another disease of our time from which today few are spared—national fanaticism” (CPAE 6, Doc. 29). In the last two years of the war he restricted his political musings almost exclusively to private correspondence, but the care and seriousness with which he grappled with such concerns are evident in the very concreteness of the proposal that he set out below. His deliberations also make clear that his earlier contacts with confidants Heinrich Zangger, Romain Rolland, and H. A. Lorentz had borne fruit. In the following letter, Einstein suggested a strategic plan for peace that anticipated many of the features of Wilson’s League of Nations.

LETTER TO HEINRICH ZANGGER, 21 AUGUST 1917

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 89-523; CPAE 10: VOL. 8, DOC. 372A

. . . I have given much thought in recent days to the political situation and have arrived at a more optimistic view. I have something in mind that I would like to submit to you here for critical consideration.

While the war continues, that is, at this very moment, a pacifist organization consisting of as many states of the Entente as possible and maybe drawn also from neutral states should be founded on the following principles:

1) a court of arbitration to resolve disputes between these treaty states;

2) a common institution to decide to what extent these states shall and may apply the principle of universal military conscription. Collective deployment of troops outside the home countries. Reduction of the standing army in keeping with the possibilities afforded by the external relations of the treaty states;

3) in tariff policy, a most-favored-nation principle among the treaty states, linked with the tendency eventually to abolish tariff walls between them;

4) any state can become a member of the union if it fulfils the following conditions:

a) a parliament elected according to democratic principles;

b) ministers who are dependent on a parliamentary majority (such ministers naturally to be in complete control of the executive authority);

5) military alliances with states not belonging to the union are impermissible and will result in the loss of membership in the union;

6) the union guarantees the territorial defense of each treaty state against external aggression.

Essentially, the advantage to this proposal is that even a union that does not begin to comprise *all* states can be very useful, in that it guarantees the territory of its members at the price of

renouncing territorial ambition. The more states join, the greater the reduction in the individual military burden. Should the Entente bring about such a union, which encompasses the United States, England, France, and Russia, it can without concern make pacts with Germany, which would be compelled economically to seek admission to the union without it being said that its “national honor” had been slighted. . . .



In the following letter to his pacifist colleague Rolland, written hard on the heels of the one above, Einstein reiterated in more general terms his proposal for an international alliance of democratic states (omitted here). His interest in current events was clearly conditioned by sensitivity to Germany’s recent past. He placed much of the blame for its great-power vainglory at the feet of propagandists like the historian Heinrich von Treitschke, whose account of successes in the Franco-Prussian War had instilled a misguided sense of triumphalism in German intellectuals.

LETTER TO ROMAIN ROLLAND, 22 AUGUST 1917

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 84-166; CPAE 8A, Doc. 374

I am touched by the cordial interest you have in a person whom you have met but once. I would definitely not neglect to visit you if my health were a bit more stable; but the smallest undertaking often takes its toll afterwards. The bad experiences that we have had in the meantime with the actions of others have actually not made me *more* pessimistic than I was two years ago. I even find that the surge of an imperialistic mentality, which dominates influential sectors in Germany, has subsided somewhat. Yet I still find that it would be extremely dangerous to form a pact with Germany as it is today.

Due to military victory in 1870 and successes in the fields of commerce and industry, this country has arrived at a kind of

religion of power, which has found fitting and by no means exaggerated expression in Treitschke. This religion holds almost all intellectuals in its sway; it has eradicated almost completely the ideals of Goethe and Schiller's time. I know people in Germany whose private lives are guided by virtually unbounded altruism, but who were awaiting the declaration of unlimited submarine warfare with the greatest impatience. I am firmly convinced that this aberration can only be curbed by hard facts. These people must be shown that it is necessary to have consideration for non-Germans as worthy equals, that it is essential to earn the *trust* of foreign countries, in order to be able to exist, that the goals that one sets for oneself cannot be achieved through force and treachery. Even combating the goal with intellectual weapons seems hopeless to me; people like Nicolai are characterized with genuine conviction as "utopians." Only facts can dissuade the majority of the misled from their delusion that we live for the state, and that its intrinsic purpose is to accumulate at any price the greatest power possible. . . .



Confined to his apartment with an abdominal ulcer for three months beginning Christmas 1917, Einstein was unable even to attend the weekly meetings of the Prussian Academy. Soon after returning to his normal routine in early April 1918, he helped organize another appeal by German intellectuals of an internationalist stripe. As with the countermanifesto of October 1914, the idea was Friedrich Nicolai's brainchild, though it was Ilse Einstein, his stepdaughter and secretary, who broached the suggestion to Einstein directly. In a letter to the eminent mathematician David Hilbert written about the same time as the following one, Einstein asked for the names of others who might be interested in the project, saying that Hilbert was the only one among the mathematicians and physicists of Germany whom he could approach.

LETTER TO DAVID HILBERT, BEFORE 27 APRIL 1918

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 13-115; CPAE 8B, DOC. 521

In these sorry times of widespread infatuation with nationalism, men of science and the arts have on countless occasions published declarations, which have damaged incalculably the solidarity cultivated so hopefully before the war among those dedicated to nobler and freer ends. The clamor of hidebound priests and vassals of the odious principle of might rises to such a level, and public opinion is so misled by the purposeful gagging of all publications, that well-meaning individuals, feeling their bleak isolation, dare not raise their voices. Daily the danger grows that those who until now have clung with conviction to the ethical ideals of a happier phase of human development gradually lose heart and fall victim to the general malaise of the spirit. This grave situation places a responsibility on those who by virtue of their intellectual accomplishments have achieved great prestige among their colleagues in the entire civilized world. This responsibility, from which they may not shrink, consists of making an open declaration that may serve as support and consolation for those who in their lonely existence have not yet abandoned their faith in moral progress.

I suggest the following. In a brief essay—no more than ten printed pages—each of us publicly acknowledges that which is intended to have the effect discussed above. These essays, which may serve as a testimonial to internationalism, are to appear in the book trade as a small volume, perhaps first in the neutral countries. In order to emphasize their international character we might try to convince individuals from the countries presently at war with one another and from neutral countries to contribute essays as well. . . .



Hilbert's initial reaction was positive. On closer reflection, however, in apparent acknowledgment of the indifferent if not hostile reception accorded the countermanifesto almost four years earlier, he advised Einstein to let the matter drop. Not only would the word "international" raise hackles, publication of such an appeal would be counterproductive until such a time as the "hurricane of madness had blown over" (CPAE 8B, Doc. 530). Einstein agreed, though he said that he had never conceived of the enterprise as a political one. It merely allowed each of the signatories to declare that "I am first of all a civilized individual [*Kulturmensch*] and secondarily a German or a Frenchman" (CPAE 8B, Doc. 548).

Until the end of the war Einstein would take an even more conservative stance. In response to a request to sign an appeal shortly after the emperor's abdication on 9 November, he counseled academics to "Keep your trap shut!" ("Maul halten!"); CPAE 8B, Doc. 653), advice he applied to himself as well.

Into the Fray

The collapse of the empire also spelled the end of Einstein's self-enforced isolation. His convergence with the new world of politics occurred almost immediately. On the same day that the emperor abdicated, 9 November 1918, Einstein and two friends attempted to free a number of professors of the University of Berlin who had been placed under arrest by students. Einstein delivered a speech to their revolutionary council, which had convened in the Reichstag. He described the situation some twenty-five years later to Max Born, who had accompanied him: "Do you recall . . . when we took a tram to the Reichstag building, convinced that we could really help turn those fellows into honest democrats? How naive we were, for all our forty years! I have to laugh when I think of it. Neither of us realized how much more powerful is instinct compared to intelligence. We would do well to bear this in mind or the tragic errors of those days may be repeated" (letter to Max Born, 7 September 1944).

Less than a week later Einstein sought to defend the idea of a parliamentary democracy against calls by the left for a government of revolutionary workers', soldiers', and students' councils. The following speech, one of a number, was made before the newly reconstituted New Fatherland Association. More than a thousand people attended.

Einstein deleted the last two paragraphs in the original manuscript, as well as a clause in the middle of the text. All are included below. (A facsimile of the first page of the address can be seen in Plate 1.)

ON THE NEED FOR A LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,
13 NOVEMBER 1918

EINSTEIN ARCHIVES 28-001; CPAE 7, Doc. 14

Comrades!

As an old-time believer in democracy, one who is not a recent convert, may I be permitted a few words.

Our common goal is democracy, the rule of the people. This is only possible if the individual holds two things sacred: faith in the salutary judgment and healthy will of the people, and a willing subordination to the will of the people, as expressed in the electoral process, even when this popular will is at odds with one's own personal will or judgment.

How can we attain this goal? What has been achieved so far? What must still be done?

The old society of caste rule has been abolished. It collapsed of its own sins and by the liberating acts of the soldiers. For the time being, we must accept as the organs of the popular will their swiftly elected Soldiers' Council, acting in concert with the Workers' Council. In this critical hour we owe these public authorities our unconditional obedience and must support them with all our might, whether or not we approve of their decisions in detail.

On the other hand, all true democrats must be vigilant lest the old class tyranny of the right be replaced by a new class tyranny of the left. Do not be tempted by feelings of vengeance to the fateful view that violence must be fought with violence, that a temporary

dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary in order to hammer the concept of freedom into the heads of our fellow countrymen. Force breeds only bitterness, hatred, and reactionary activity.

We must, therefore, unconditionally demand of the present dictatorial authority, whose directives we must willingly follow, that, irrespective of party interests, it immediately prepare for the election of a legislative assembly, so that all fears of a new tyranny may be dispelled as soon as possible. Only after such an assembly has been convened and has satisfactorily completed its task, only then can the German people state with satisfaction that they have achieved freedom for themselves.

Our current Social Democratic leaders deserve our unqualified support. Full of confidence in the appeal of their program, they have already decided in favor of convening a legislative assembly. Thus they have shown that they respect democratic ideals. May they succeed in leading us out of the grave difficulties in which the sins and half measures of their predecessors have mired us.



A legislative-representative system did triumph, and elections to the National Assembly in mid-January 1919 legitimized the political ascendancy of the Social Democrats and their moderate allies, the Catholic Center and the German Democratic Party. Einstein's own inclination was toward the latter grouping, a liberal, middle-class party whose founding manifesto he had signed immediately after the armistice though he never joined its ranks.

Hopes that a government elected by parliament might control the political situation were, however, dashed. When successive left-wing revolts in early 1919 threatened to turn some cities, including Berlin, into bastions of the proletarian dictatorship, the Social Democratic government called in right-wing militias to crush them. Einstein wrote to his close friend Paul Ehrenfest in late March 1919, describing

