Einstein and Marx

How Einstein "Made" the First Page

by Will Herberg

The publicity that Albert Einstein has received in the course of the last ten years certainly seems to present a curious puzzle. The least of his actions become a matter of first page notoriety. Sensational newspapers relegate divorces and murders to inside pages in order to provide room for so-called reports of his latest views and discoveries. And yet this man is an unworldly scientist—almost a recluse; while his theories on the nature of time and space and the structure of the universe are as unintelligible to the overwhelming majority of newspaper readers as the lost language of the Etruscans. Why, then, has this scientist and his theories of the universe become subjects of "human interest"?

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The case of Einstein is not an isolated one. Pre reviews of Jeans' works, reports of Eddington's radio talks, Whitehead's religious effusions, all seem to be a matter of far greater general interest than one might expect. Nevertheless, as far as "news value" is concerned Einstein easily leads the host. But the "news value" of a man or an event is never a mere accident. In general it reflects more or less accurately the outlook, the interests and the cultural atmosphere of definite classes and sections of the population. To understand the paradoxical "news value" of Einstein it is necessary to appreciate the inner significance of the man and his work in contemporary cultural development.

The structure of science erected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was directly predicated upon materialism and determinism. A profound confidence in the powers of the human mind to penetrate the secrets of the universe characterized the thought of this period. Its fundamental methodological postulate was the law of causality: that every event is the necessary resultant of the confluence of previous events and that "the same causes always lead to the same effects." It firmly believed that the totality of phenomena observable in nature (including man) can be adequately explained in terms of the behavior of matter, i.e., in terms of a substance independent of and prior to spirit or thought.

This system of materialist determinist, science, that still constitutes the proudest achievement of human culture, was the direct cultural reflex of the forward march of bourgeois civilization of which it was at the same time the sharpest ideological weapon. In the period of its historical ascendancy the bourgeoisie felt no discomfort within the "rigid" confines of determinism nor did it show any distaste for the "spiritual narrowness" of materialism. On the contrary, it gladly welcomed the "remorseless rule" of natural law precisely because the operation of the forces of nature and society promised it the inevitable fulfillment of its supreme social aspirations as well as the inevitable doom of its historical enemy. Such was the relation of bourgeois civilization in its ascendancy to natural science.

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But bourgeois economy is not immortal. In the fullness of time it passed into the stage of historical descent. With the world war and the post-war period this gradual decline turned into precipitate collapse and the growing confusion into well-nigh complete chaos. The cultural reflex of this fundamental transformation soon became quite obvious. With the change of social situation the entire attitude of the bourgeisie to natural science underwent a profound change. Facing the black future, bourgeois thought no longer has any confidence in its own powers. *Reason gives way to mysticism.* More than anything else does the bourgeoisie now fear the "remorseless rule" of natural law for the operation of natural and social forces now promises it the inevitability of its own doom. *Materialism must give way to idealism, to spiritualism; determinism, to indeterminism.* In the period of its historical decline the relations between bourgeois civilization and natural science undergo a complete dialectic transformation.

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It is precisely the historical function of the new "anti-materialist" tendency in modern science to supply moribund bourgeois civilization with the comforting assurance that the black future threatened thru the inevitable operation of natural and social forces need no longer be feared since the very foundations of science—materialism and determinism—are no more than empty illusions.

> *"The day of materialism and determinism is over!"* assures Sir Arthur Eddington. *"Room must be made for a spiritual conception of the universe and man's place in it."*
>
> *"Modern science can no longer talk of 'certainty'; it must be satisfied with 'probability' instead,"* declares Sir James Jeans ("The Mysterious Universe"). *"Because it has to speak in terms of probabilities it cannot predict with certainty which state will follow which; this is a matter which lies on the knees of the gods—whatever gods there be."*

The reversion to idealism and indeterminism on the part of current bourgeois science is fundamentally a form of collective self-deception of a decaying society. The new "anti materialist" science fulfills a profound social-psychological need of those sections of the population (especially the helpless and hopeless strata of the petty bourgeoisie of all sorts) whose historical class fate is bound up with the fate of the dying society. Fulfilling this profound need, the "new science" and its personages become objects of poular devotion and thus acquire a popularity and "news value" quite distinct from its intrinsic scientific significance.

But of all the heroes of the "new science" Einstein is easily the foremost. Here is a man who has *apparently* upset all of the cherished ideas of the dreaded materialist science. Matter is energy—energy is matter—and both are space. There are no such things as simultaneous events, and time as usually understood is a mere fiction. Mass is no longer permanent but depends upon relative velocity. The universe is finite but unbounded. All of the old certainties of science now vanish away into uncertainty and where uncertainty rules mysticism and confusion find a sure foothold. *"Idealism can find in the general theory of relativity a most powerful weapon against materialism"* (Vasiliev, "Space, Time and Motion.") And so Einstein appears as the shining champion against the dragon of materialist science lowering over contemporary bourgeois society. This is the secret of Einstein's puzzling popularity.

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But appearance is not reality. Einstein's conceptions *appear* to the interested interpreter to offer a strong support to philosophical idealism and to destroy forever the oft-destroyed materialism. But what the relations between the theory of relativity and materialist science *actually* are is an altogether different question which will be considered in future articles.

Wise Words

In deciding our line of action . . . we followed the Comintern which was categorically opposed to the theory of destroying the unions but was for winning them over. Why? Did we not equally estimate the reactionary character of the trade unions? Did we not recognize the fact of the interlacing of the bourgeois state with the heads of the trade unions? Did we not see their reactionary role? Certainly we saw all that, but we were approaching the trade unions from an entirely different point of view . . .

What is a union? A union is an organization which unites laboring masses . . . If we come out with the slogan for the destruction of the unions what will we do? The mass will not follow us because they came to the union in order to gain something real. With the tactics of destroying the unions we can only bring a couple of thousand workers out of these organizations. We may create a "pure" Communist little union, which will have the Communist virtues, but which will not embrace the masses. This is not Communist tactics.

—A. Lozovsky, The World's Trade Union Movement

CAPITALISM AND CHILD WELFARE

by Albert Epsen

At a time when millions of workers of this country are unemployed, there are over 3,000,000 children under 16 years of age who are wasting away the best years of their lives in the mills, mines, factories and fields. This only brings out one phase of the conditions of the working class children in this country. Indeed the situation of the working class children (at work or in school) is so serious that President Hoover, in his speech at the opening session of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, was forced to make some damaging admissions. Where Mr. sanitation and public health loom in every direction. Delinquency increases with congestion. Overcrowding produces disease and contagion.

"The child's natural play place is taken from him. His mind is stunted by the lack of imaginative surroundings. Home life becomes more difficult. Cheerless homes produce morbid minds. Our growth of town life unendingly imposes such problems as milk and food supply."

Hoover knows well enough about country life to realize that it does not provide a paradise for the children. He points out that the country child is handicapped by lack of cultural influences and other factors. Helplessly he says:

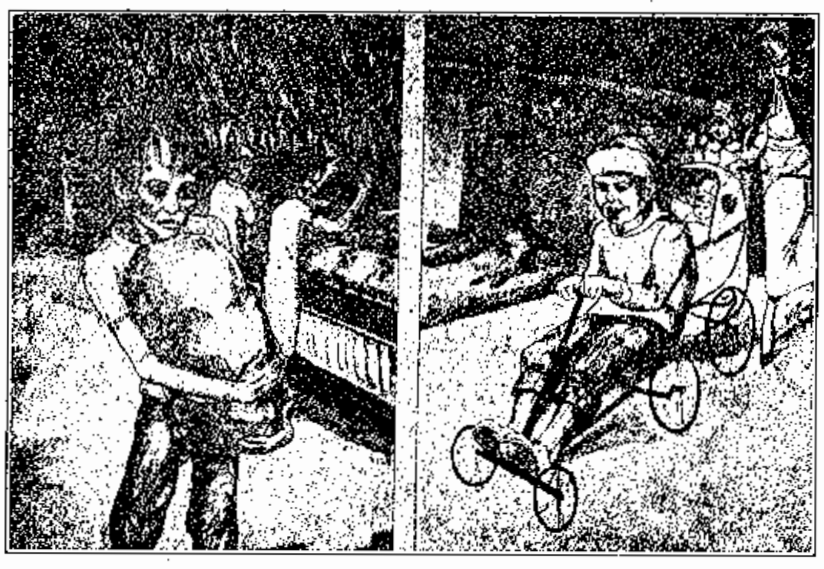
> ". . . some of the natural advantages of the country child must somehow be given back to the city child—more space in which to play, contact with nature and natural processes. Of these the thoughtless city cheats its children."

But it is not the "thoughtless city" that cheats the children out of human conditions of life but the capitalist system of society in which the children live. If the capitalists were only as liberal with their wealth as they are with their words the working class child might have received some benefit of the boundless accumulation of wealth in society. But the 1925 International Year Book of Child Care and Protection sums up, without any intention of irony, the activities of the government in child welfare:

> "The function of the federal government in child welfare has been confined mainly to research . . . ."

Hoover's speech is even more important for the facts that it calls to mind than for what it actually tells us. Taking the most conservative sources of information we learn from the census of 1920 that 1,060,858 children between the ages of 10 and 15 are at work. This amounts to 8.5% of the total children of that age in the country. In order to realize how incomplete these figures are we must bear in mind that many children under the age of 10 are at work. And since the 1920 census was taken in January, children employed in agriculture were not counted. Nor did the census takers count the children doing seasonal industrial home work or vacation work. There are well over 3,000,000 child laborers in the USA today!

The apologists of capitalism always like to take us to India and China when discussing child labor and child misery. But this is shameless hypocrisy. The worst examples of child labor and child misery are to be found in these United States of ours. That the children who work in American industry are very young is brought out by the following facts. In the beet fields of Colorado and Michigan 41% of the child workers are under 11 years of age. In some cases they begin to work at six years. In Rhode Island over 45% are under 11 and ⅞ under 14. In Connecticut the same percentages were disclosed, and in New York they are even higher!



"Equality of Opportunity" under Capitalism

Hoover does not fly off on the wings of poetry, he gives us information which is instructive if not altogether new. But coming as it does from the head of the ruling class of this country it deserves the closest attention.

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How Does Childhood Fare?

After a touching rhapsody on childhood, Mr. Hoover makes the following declaration:

> "If we could have but one generation of properly born, trained, educated and healthy children, a thousand other problems of government would vanish."

How actually does the present generation of children fare in this, the richest country of the world? One of the committees reported to the conference that of 45,000,000 children in this country

6,000,000 are improperly nourished,
1,000,000 have defective speech,
1,000,000 have weak or damaged hearts,
675,000 present behavior problems,
450,000 are mentally retarded,
382,000 are tubercular,
342,000 have impaired hearing,
18,000 are totally deaf,
300,000 are crippled,
50,000 are partially blind,
14,000 are wholly blind,
200,000 are delinquent, and
500,000 are dependent.
35,000,000 are *reasonable normal.*

But even more significant than these figures is the admission that *at least* 10,000,000 *of these deficients* (more than 80%) *are not receiving the necessary attention,* tho experience shows that these deficiencies can be prevented or remedied to a high degree by proper attention.

And how about the 35,000,000 "reasonable normal" children? Their life is certainly not a picnic, as we know from our own childhood and from the children all around us. Even in the most "prosperous" times we have the problems of crowded slums. Hoover expresses it well in the following words:

> "Perhaps the widest range of difficulties. . .grows out of this crowding into cities. Problems of

Child Illiteracy

Illiteracy is very high amongst child workers. Among the little children in the oyster and shrimp canneries of the gulf coast illiteracy is as high as 25% while for children of the whole United States it is only 4%. As child labor increases illiteracy increases, and school attendance decreases. Thus, in Woonsocket, and Pawtucket, R. I., Columbus, Ga., Columbia, S.C., Plymouth, Pa., the children do not get beyond the fourth grade on the average.

(concluded in the next issue).

In the Communist Inte

Belgian Trotskyites Split!

The French Trotskyist paper *Verite* reports on the latest developments in the Belgian Trotskyist Opposition group which culminated in a split. The split in the Belgian "Left" Opposition follows in general the lines of the split in the German Leninbund a year ago. About that time a sharp difference of opinion broke out among the Belgian Trotskyites, primarily around the following points: the perspective of Party or group, the estimation of the character of the Soviet state, the relation to the syndicalists, etc. The majority viewpoint was represented by the Executive Committee and the minority viewpoint by the Charleroi Federation. The International Buro (Trotsky) supported the point of view of the Charleroi Federation, which was the viewpoint of orthodox Trotskyism.

The central point in the dispute appears to be the estimation of the class character of the Soviet state in the USSR. The majority maintains that Thermidor has already set in (i.e., that the Soviet power is already losing its proletarian character). The minority denies this, insisting, however, that the danger of Themidor is immediate and that Stalin (the "center") and Rykoff (the "right") are the expression of this Thermidor danger. (For a discussion of the whole subject, see *Revolutionary Age,* No. 3). The second uestion deals with perspectives. The majority insists that the "Left" Opposition must function as and must aim to become the Communist Party of Belgium whereas the minority insists that it must function as a group or faction of the CP of Belgium. It is to be noted that altho Trotsky today supports the latter viewpoint, only a short time ago he defended the "new Party" position (see his letter of greeting to the *Militant* when it became a weekly.) Finally, the minority charges that the E. C. refuses collaboration with the Party membership but tends too much in the direction of cooperation with the syndicalists.

This dispute came to a head at the recent meeting of the plenum of the EC. The minority demanded the calling of a national conference to decide the disputed questions but the majority refused. The minority was backed up by a representative of the International Trotskyist Buro who was present. Finally the minority withdrew and thus the "Left" Opposition split.