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# Albert Einstein

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THE BERLIN YEARS:  
WRITINGS, 1918–1921

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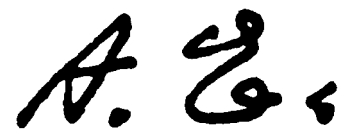
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On Reporters

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## 61. On Reporters

[10 August 1921]<sup>[1]</sup>

[p. 1]

### Einstein und die Interviewer

Einem Privatbriefe von Prof. Einstein entnehmen wir folgende amüsante Partie.<sup>[2]</sup>

Wenn man öffentlich zur Rechenschaft gezogen wird für alles was man gesagt hat, sei es auch im Spass, in übermütiger Laune oder im momentanen Aerger, so ist es zwar eventuel fatal, aber doch bis zu einem gewissen Grad vernünftig und natürlich. Wenn man aber öffentlich zur Rechenschaft gezogen wird für das, was andere für einen sagen, ohne dass man sich dagegen wehren kann, dann ist man in einer erbarmungswürdigen Lage. „Wer ist aber so schlimm dran“, wirst du fragen: Nun, jeder der genügend Popularität hat, um von Interviewern besucht zu werden. Du lächelst ungläubig, aber ich habs zur Genüge erlebt und werde Dirs erklären.<sup>[3]</sup>

Stelle Dir vor, eines Morgens kommt ein Reporter zu Dir und ersucht Dich freundlich, ihm etwas über Deinen Freund N zu berichten. Im ersten Augenblick fühlst Du wohl so etwas wie Entrüstung über eine solche Zumutung. Aber schnell merkst Du, dass es da kein Entrinnen gibt. Denn wenn Du die Auskunft verweigert, schreibt der Mann: „Ich fragte einen von N.'s besten angeblichen Freunden über ihn. Aber dieser wich wohlweislich aus. Der Leser mag aus diesem Verhalten selbst die unvermeidlichen Schlüsse ziehen.“ Es gibt also kein Entrinnen, und Du gibst folgende Auskunft:

[p. 2]

Herr N. ist ein frohmütiger gerader Charakter, beliebt bei allen seinen Freunden. Er weiss jeder Situation die gute Seite abzugewinnen. Er ist unbegrenzt unternehmend und arbeitsam; sein Beruf nimmt seine Arbeitskraft voll in Anspruch. Er liebt seine Familie und legt seiner Frau alles zu Füßen, was er besitzt. . . . .

Wiedergabe des Reporters:

Herr N. nimmt nichts besonders ernst und hat die Gabe, sich bei den Leuten beliebt zu machen, zumal er sich stets eines ausgelassenen und einschmeichelndes Wesen befleissigt. Er ist dermassen Sklave seines Berufes, dass er nie zum Nachdenken über überpersönliche Gegenstände oder zu einer ausserberuflichen geistigen Bethätigung kommt. Seine Frau verwöhnt er unbegrenzt, er ist ein willenloser Diener ihrer Wünsche. . . . .<sup>[4]</sup>

Bei einem wirklichen Reporter würde es noch viel pikanter klingen, aber für Dich und Deinen Freund N. ist es wohl ausreichend. Er liest Obiges und noch

einiges Folgende am nächsten Morgen in der Zeitung und sein Grimm gegen Dich kennt keine Grenzen, so heiter und gutherzig er auch von Natur sein mag. Die ihm zugefügte Kränkung schmerzt Dich unsäglich, zumal Du ihn wirklich gern hast.

Was thust Du nun in diesem Fall, mein Lieber? Wenn Du's herausgefunden hast, teile mirs rasch mit, damit ich Deine Methode schleunigst kopieren kann.

AD. [28 011]. The document consists of two unnumbered pages, the first of which is on letterhead of Hotel Commodore, New York. Page numbers are here provided in the margin in square brackets. Ilse Einstein has written "August 1921" at the head of the document, which is published in *Einstein 1934a*, pp. 47–49, without the first sentence. An English-language typed translation [73 323-3 and 323-4] that may have been intended for publication (see note 3) is preserved.

<sup>[1]</sup>Dated by the reference in Ludwik Silberstein to Einstein, 4 September 1921.

<sup>[2]</sup>The recipient of the private letter was Ludwik Silberstein (1872–1948), Professor of Physics at the University of Rochester (see Ludwik Silberstein to Einstein, 4 September 1921).

<sup>[3]</sup>This document is an attempt to counter the unfavorable reception in the United States of an interview that Einstein gave at the end of June 1921. En route to the United States in spring 1921 and during his two-month visit there, Einstein had been deluged with requests for interviews and had granted most. On his return to Berlin he gave one on 29 June to a correspondent of the Dutch-language newspaper, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (Appendix D, sec. I). Published on 4 July, the interview made a number of disparaging comments about life in the United States. An excerpted translation was published in German in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 7 July 1921, Morning Edition, p. [2] (Appendix D, sec. III), and the German version was cabled to the *New York Times* the same day. An English translation of extensive quotes from the *Berliner Tageblatt* was reprinted the following day in numerous American newspapers, eliciting "indignant protests from Chicago women"; *New York Times*, 9 July 1921, p. 7, and "adverse public criticism"; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 July 1921, p. 6.

Albert A. Michelson (1852–1931) and many other scientists at the University of Chicago where Silberstein was offering a summer course were deeply shocked by the contents of the article, which "had provoked much 'bad blood'" ("viel 'schlechtes Blut' provoziert hatte"), while others like Robert A. Millikan (1868–1953) were convinced that the article was a figment of the correspondent's imagination. Silberstein sought assurances from Einstein that this was indeed the case, as "your American friends would like to rectify the matter" ("Ihre Amerikanischen Freunde die Sache berichtigen möchten"; Ludwik Silberstein to Einstein, 13 July 1921).

Einstein had already moved to repair the damage at home. His shock on reading the interview in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on 7 July may have been as great as Michelson's the following day. An envelope [43 245] addressed to Einstein from the correspondent "Mrs. Nell Boni Genthinerstr. 13 Villa G., Berlin W.," postmarked 7 July 1921, and with the typed designation that it contained printed matter, may have been his first inkling of the breaking news. On 8 July, well before learning of the displeasure of his American colleagues, Einstein placed a note in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Morning Edition, p. [2], claiming that the interview contained "flagrant distortions" ("grobe Entstellungen"). He sought to smooth the waters further by arranging a second interview with another large Berlin daily (see Georg Bernhard to Einstein, 9 July 1921). Published in the *Vossische Zeitung*, 10 July 1921, Morning Edition, Supplement 1, p. 1 (Appendix E), this second interview was cited and paraphrased in the American papers two days later (see, e.g., *New York Times*, 12 July 1921, p. 12), apparently at least in part at Einstein's instigation (see Einstein to Zioniburo, 14 July 1921, IsJCZ, Z4/2971/IV, register no. 1699). The second interview was less a retraction of his earlier comments than a description of the circumstances surrounding the original one.

Concerned that the *Berliner Tageblatt* might have the last word with its claim that it had faithfully translated the original Dutch interview (see *Berliner Tageblatt*, 12 July 1921, Evening Edition, p. [2]), Einstein requested in mid-July that he be allowed to publish a final note in this newspaper (see Einstein to Redakteur, 14 July 1921, and accompanying undated aide-mémoire, probably in the hand of the editor: "Anlässlich der Notiz über ein entstelltes Interview . . ." [43 243]). To placate concerned Zionists in America and elsewhere, Einstein also cabled twice to the Zionist Organization's central

office in London, disclaiming responsibility for unauthorized reports of his view of America (see Einstein to Zioniburo, 14 July 1921, register nos. 1699 and 1700). The telegrams were translated and published, e.g., in the *Jewish Independent*, 22 July 1921, p. 7.

For Silberstein and his Chicago colleagues, the report of the second interview apparently sufficed. One week after its appearance, Silberstein reported relief that the affair had been much ado about nothing (see Ludwik Silberstein to Einstein, 18 July 1921), indicating that his colleagues at the University of Chicago were mollified. Thus, by the time that Silberstein received a version of this document sometime after 10 August, the storm had passed. At the beginning of September, after informing his Chicago colleagues of its contents, Silberstein announced that “the matter is resolved in the best possible manner” (“die Sache ist bestens erledigt”), though Millikan and a Chicago colleague, Henry G. Gale (1874–1942), suggested that a translation be made available to the editors of *Science*. Silberstein assured Einstein in any case that the contents of this document would be widely distributed in scientific circles (see Ludwik Silberstein to Einstein, 4 September 1921). Einstein acceded to the request for publication, pointing out, however, that, by constantly returning to it, too much weight might be ascribed to this “disagreeable matter” (“leidigen Sache”); Einstein to Ludwik Silberstein, 4 October 1921).

<sup>[4]</sup>Translated excerpts from his interview with the *Berliner Tageblatt* had appeared under the title “Einstein Declares Women Rule Here. Scientist Says He Found American Men the Toy Dogs of the Other Sex.” *New York Times*, 8 July 1921, p. 9.