REFERENCE: Bureau letter dated December 24, 1941 (101-2668)

DETAILS: AT WASHINGTON, D. C.

I

PERSONAL HISTORY

A. Personnel records in the Department of State indicate that ALGER HISS was born on November 11, 1904, at Baltimore, Maryland. He received an elementary and high school education in the Baltimore Public Schools and at Powder Point Academy, Duxbury, Massachusetts. He received an A.B. degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1926 and an LL.B. degree from Harvard Law School in 1929. Mr. HISS is married to PRISCILLA FANSLER HOBSON HISS, and resides at 3415 Volta Place, Washington, D. C. From October 1929, to October 1930, Mr. HISS was employed as secretary to the late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES. From October 1930, to May 1933, Mr. HISS was associated in the practice of law, practicing in Boston, Massachusetts and New York, New York.

B. Personnel records indicate Mr. HISS from May 1933, to April 1935, was employed Assistant to the General Counsel and Assistant General Counsel, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, at a salary from $6,000 to $7,000 per annum. During a portion of this period, he was Legal Assistant to the Senate Committee investigating the munitions industry, in which capacity he remained until August 1935. From August 1935 to August 1936, Mr. HISS was employed as Special Attorney, Office of the Solicitor General, Department of Justice, at a salary ranging from $6,000 to $7,500 per annum. On September 1, 1936, he was appointed Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State at $5,600 per annum. On June 1, 1939, his salary was increased to $5,800 per annum. He is presently Assistant to the Adviser on Political Relations, Department of State.

II

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

On the list furnished to the Attorney General by the Special Committee on un-American Activities, House of Representatives, of which the Honorable MARTIN DIES is Chairman, the following information appears:

"Alger Hiss
3415 Volta Place, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Legal Adviser,
Department of State

$5,800

Member Washington Committee for Democratic Action."

III

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

An Agent of this office contacted the Dies Committee and ascertained that the basis for placing Mr. HISS' name as a member of the Washington Committee for Democratic Action on the list furnished to the Attorney General is the appearance of his name on a list in the possession of the Dies Committee entitled, "Washington Committee for Democratic Action". This office was advised as of December 23, 1941, that no further information concerning Mr. HISS is in the possession of the Dies Committee. A subsequent inquiry was made at the office of the Dies Committee on January 10, 1942, at which time a representative of the Dies Committee advised that no further information has been received concerning Mr. HISS.

A source of information herein designated as T-1 advised this office the name ALGER HISS does not in fact appear in the active indices of the Washington Committee for Democratic Action. However, informant advised the name of Mrs. ALGER HISS, 3415 Volta Place, N. W., does appear in the active indices of that organization.

A source of information herein designated as T-2, who is [redacted] advised that he has been [redacted] During this period, the informant stated nothing has come to his attention to cause him to doubt Mr. HISS' loyalty. T-2 stated that at one time he heard that Mr. HISS and his brother, DONALD HISS, also an employee of the Department of State, were classed as "fellow travelers". Informant stated that he is not aware of the basis for the allegations. He stated that Mr. HISS was at one time secretary to the

(b)(7)

late Associate Justice OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES of the Supreme Court. He stated that Justice HOLMES was considered "liberal" and added, "But what a liberal". In this connection, the informant stated in his opinion, Mr. HISS likely absorbed some of the beliefs of Justice HOLMES during his association with him, and that if Mr. HOLMES is classed as "liberal", his "liberalism" is likely of the same quality. T-2 stated that it has been his observation that Mr. HISS is a "stay at home", and does not get about as much as would be to his advantage. Informant knows of no activities of Mr. HISS away from his office. He stated that Mr. HISS' wife is possibly "more liberal" than her husband and may possibly have membership in "liberal organizations".

A source of information herein designated as T-3, who [redacted] advised that he is not (b)(6)(c) well acquainted with Mr. HISS, but that from hearsay and otherwise he is inclined to class Mr. HISS as a "Laski Socialist".

Persons in the vicinity of Mr. HISS' residence appeared to know little concerning his activities.

A source of information herein designated as T-4, who [redacted] of 3415 Volta Place, N. W., stated she is acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. HISS, but is limited to infrequent conversation. Informant stated that she has observed no unusual activities at the HISS residence. T-4 stated that Mr. and Mrs. HISS are not very friendly, and the informant has for that reason never engaged in conversation that would indicate their political and economic philosophies.

A source of information herein designated as T-5, who [redacted] advised that she DONALD HISS and considers him to be a loyal citizen. Informant stated that ALGER HISS appears to be a peculiar individual and expressed an opinion that there may exist some difference in political opinions between the two brothers. The informant stated she had once heard a "rumor" concerning ALGER HISS, but refused to state the nature of this rumor, advising that it was only hearsay and that the source of information may not be reliable.

A source of information herein designated as T-6, who was acquainted with Mr. HISS during the years from 1933 to 1935, [redacted], described Mr. HISS as being honorable in personal affairs, but intellectually dishonest. The informant stated that Mr. HISS, together with LEE PRESSMAN, GARDNER JACKSON, FRANK SHEA and others in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, interpreted the Agricultural Adjustment Act, not in the spirit of the law, but in a manner which would suit their beliefs and own private purposes. Informant stated that Mr. HISS and his associates surrounded themselves with employees in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration of their own choosing, whom they knew would fall in line with their social and economic theories. This informant stated that it was the definite purpose of this group to change our form of Government, and to use the instrumentality of the good offices of the Department of Agriculture to further their purposes. The informant explained that these individuals in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, instead of administering the law, as it was intended, to protect the interest of tenant farmers, deliberately used the Government's time and money in an effort to unionize share croppers and tenant farmers. Informant stated that "there was nothing of America--My Country 'Tis of Thee, in what those boys were doing."

T-6 [redacted] between Mr. HISS, LEE PRESSMAN and others during this period. Informant recalled that one of the persons involved had stated that the "Okies would be the best people to change order," and that Migrant labor was their meat." Informant stated that the use of professional agitators was made in connection with the attempt to unionize share croppers. T-6 stated that in this connection, at one time a report was made concerning share croppers in the State of Arkansas, and that the report was considered a confidential report to which the public was not entitled. Shortly thereafter, some 219 communications were addressed to the Department of Agriculture, in the nature of "Demands" that this report be made public. Informant stated that the sources of these communications were traced and were found to be organizations which could have no possible interest in the report, or information as to its existence, and in many cases

it was found that fictitious return addresses had been used. T-6 stated concerning Mr. HISS, "If he was not a Communist, he was a fellow traveler". Informant advised that Mr. HISS was one of the organizers of the Lawyers Guild and stated that he possibly had "an overdose of Harvard". T-6 further stated that he was "quite a Marxist". Informant stated that Mr. HISS is very shrewd and that due to his shrewdness he was not included in the "purge" which took place in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in 1935.

In connection with the information stated above, and attributed to informant T-6, it may be stated that T-6, maintained a diary at the time the events stated above were alleged to have taken place. This diary records the impressions of informant at the time of the activities of Mr. HISS and his associates. Quotations from this diary, which appeared to be indicative of the informant's impressions are stated below:

"Administrators, who don't happen to be lawyers are certainly at the mercy of a motley crew possessed of appalling energy."

"Meanwhile, men who have never been closer to a farm than the campus of Harvard or Columbia, may have flown to Arkansas to lend a helping hand to sharecroppers--terribly worked up over their sad plight."

"And if you go to the Capitol, you will find them like locusts swarming in Committee rooms--especially the Munitions Investigations Committee, Civil Liberties Committee, etc."

"I am sick when I see at close range men using the undoubtedly high purposes and motives of the President, to put over their fantastic ideas, financed beyond their wildest dream. And do you think the group of whom I speak could await the slow process of education in order to better conditions? That gives them a laugh."

"Honest men, in sympathy with the President's program, simply cannot conceive of the situation."

"I have no quarrel with their being anything they want to be, but I do object to the mantle of democracy being used in the way it is. And I do object to the superciliousness of this group when dealing with lawyers not of their own breed. And, as to Government service? They don't know what it means. Just say, as actually happened, that such a thing could not be done. The question shot back promptly was, 'Why'? Because there is a law which prohibits it they were told. The answer came back promptly, 'Oh, we'll change that'. And, by golly, that's what they are doing."

"For instance: In the group were Jerome Frank, with three lieutenants, Alger Hiss, Lee Pressman, Frank Shea. These men, not Mr. Frank, brought in a group of men of their own choosing. I smile when I read of political appointments. Alger Hiss gave orders not to let any Member of Congress even see Jerome Frank, because he might do what they wanted."

"I begin to believe a few less 'brilliant' lawyers, with some knowledge of agriculture, and a less socialistic viewpoint might have been able to produce laws just as unconstitutional."

"Men credited with advising the President, writing the laws, administering them, are seizing the opportunity to put forward their own half-baked ideas. That is being charitable to them. Some of them are deliberately trying to set one group against another, possibly feeling they are honest, but if so, why go to the trouble of being so plausible in disguising their motives that even sane, sensible men give them the benefit of the doubt? Why not say, what I've heard them say privately? 'Labor should run the Government' said one; 'better for all industry if it were run by the Government' contributes another; and ever and always 'down with the profit motive'."

"When the so-called 'purge' took place I'll admit I was stunned by its suddenness, but if Chester Davis had not acted then, well, he would not have been the Chester Davis whom I had known of for many years through my agricultural contacts. However, not even he, being a mere mortal, could have known all the behind-the scenes stuff. No one can work with an organization and betray it, if he has any sense of loyalty, and no one working with Jerome Frank would betray him - that is, except those in whom he placed most confidence - misguidedly. So, Chester Davis today has only the most sketchy idea of what actually happened.

However, the day after the purge, Jerome Frank's lieutenants acted according to their temperaments - they ran true to form. Pressman - faced with no job, and an opportunist at all times, made the amazing statement that he 'had been one of Jerome's severest critics' and therefore should be retained. Hiss, more suave, who was in reality a more dangerous person than Pressman because not as obnoxious personally, managed to retain his footing and became one of the lawyers most relied upon to go to the front - and how many fronts he is serving on is a tribute to the young man's amazing energy, plausibility and all around colossal nerve.

"Lets take these three men one at a time. First - Alger Hiss. For months during 1934 he served with the Munitions Investigation Committee - detailed from AAA. He worked on the 1934 amendments to the AAA on the side directing his corps of hand-picked assistants. Some of the work of the Munitions Committee found its way into the AAA office - many stenographers were engaged in assisting, at a time when we were short of help. In the fall of 1934 he was very busy, all over the place, and when February 1935 came, he managed to stay long enough, and work smoothly enough to leave in charge of the work at the Capitol one of his trusted subordinates. Hiss, it seemed, had impressed Chairman Nye - hence his selection for that work. Few people knew how close he was to the group pressing for the inquiry. After knowing that Jerome Frank had never signed an opinion without Alger's O.K.

"and moreover that Jerome signed many opinions without going into them fully, just listening to Alger's specious reasoning, and seeing that Jerome had to stand the gaff while Alger landed into the counsels of the mighty, I'm willing to give the young man credit for anything, including hypnotic powers."

"Alger Hiss had a force working under him for a solid year to prove that all landlords were crooks - to stir up sharecroppers, and as one agriculturist in a southern State commented - 'into the opinions of the Legal Division there are being included more and more, provisions designed to overthrow the land tenure system of the South'. The sharecropper difficulties were publicized through the medium of farm organizations which sprang up in New York overnight; Leagues for this and that; but the real crew worked right in our office. Lawyers who never came closer to a farm than the campus of Harvard and Columbia, were all wrought up over matters in Arkansas."

T-6 was furnished a copy of a letter from the Director of the Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of Tennessee, dated February 12, 1935, in which the following appears:

"Much of the dissatisfaction that is being stirred up among tenants and sharecroppers against landlords is by professional agitators, from organizations of rather liberal tendencies. These agitators, never worked any cotton in their life, and know little about agriculture. I have gotten the impression from contracts for the 1935 programs that the Legal Division may be somewhat deceived by the propaganda that is appearing in the newspapers. It is highly important in my judgment that the Legal Division not be deceived by much of this agitation which in this state is from relatively few."

A source of information herein designated as T-7, who was [redacted] to observe Mr. HISS during his employment there, stated that Mr. HISS was not one of the persons requested to resign from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in the "purge" of 1935. This

informant stated that he had no doubt whatever that some members of the staff were "extreme left-wingers", and stated that he always felt like GARDNER JACKSON might even carry a Communist Party card. He stated, however, that he had never considered ALGER HISS in the same light and had no doubt at that time as to his loyalty. He stated that Mr. HISS resigned from the position because he, HISS, felt officials of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration no longer had the confidence in him, which so far as the informant was concerned was not the case.

T-7 recalled that one of the chief difficulties that arose in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was the attempt of the Legal Division to interpret the Act, not according to the intent of Congress, but in accordance with their own views. In this connection, informant stated that he confronted ALGER HISS with the fact and HISS stated the law might be subject to more than one interpretation.

A source of information herein designated as T-8 furnished this office with a pamphlet entitled "Leninism-Lewisism", in which it is stated that the National Republic magazine has certified evidence concerning the Communist connection of LEE PRESSMAN.

A source of information herein designated as T-9 advised that members of the Communist Party on the West Coast referred to Mr. PRESSMAN as Comrade PRESSMAN. This same informant quoted a member of the Communist Party as saying "Comrade PRESSMAN goes to bat with anything we of the Communist Party want to know".

A source of information herein designated as T-10, who professes to have been at one time a member of the Communist Party advised that he was not acquainted with ALGER HISS during the time of informant's membership in the Party. He stated he understands certain New York Communists have a connection at the State Department, through whom certain considerations can be received, but was unable to state the source of his information.

A source of information herein designated as T-11, who professes to be familiar with subversive activities among Government employees, advised that the name of ALGER HISS is unknown to the informant.

A source of information herein designated as T-12, [redacted] concerning subversive activities in the District of Columbia, advised that his files contained no information concerning Mr. HISS other than mention of his name as an employee of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration at the time of the "purge". (b)(7)(C)

On February 14, 1942, Mr. HISS on invitation appeared at this office, and after being duly sworn, made the following voluntary statement, the original of which is being retained in this office. Copies of this statement are being included with copies of this report. Mr. HISS declined to return to this office and sign the statement, stating that he saw no necessity for doing so, inasmuch as he felt certain the statement would be typed as he had dictated it.

Washington, D. C.
February 14, 1942

Statement of Alger Hiss made in the presence of Special Agent C. D. King, Jr., and Stenographer Zona McArthur, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Questions are by Mr. King.

Q. Are you Mr. Alger Hiss employed as an Assistant to the Advisor on Political Relations of the Department of State?

A. I am.

Q. Mr. Hiss, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been empowered by the 77th Congress of the United States under Public Law No. 135 to investigate the employees of the Federal Government who are alleged members of subversive organizations or who advocate the overthrow of the Federal Government and report these findings to the Congress. The purpose of this interview today is to allow you an opportunity to answer questions regarding information which has been received by the Federal Bureau of Investigation concerning alleged activity on your part. The questions I am about to ask you may be answered if you so desire, and you will be given an opportunity to include any statement which you feel is necessary to fairly present your side of this inquiry. A copy of the report of this investigation will be furnished to the agency which employs you. In order that the statement may have particular credence, you will be placed under oath. Do you have any objections to that?

A. Not at all.

Q. Will you stand please and raise your right hand? Do you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

A. I do.

Q. Mr. Hiss, what is your present home address, please sir?

A. 3415 Volta Place, Northwest, Washington, D. C.

Q. And would you tell us please how long you have been employed by the Department of State?

A. About five and one-half years, I think.

Q. Mr. Hiss, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Washington Committee for Democratic Action?

A. I have not.

Q. Have you ever attended any meetings of that organization or received any of its literature to your recollection?

A. I certainly have never attended any meeting, and I have no recollection of receiving any of its literature.

Q. Mr. Hiss, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

A. I am not and never have been.

Q. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Young Communist League?

A. I have not and never have been.

Q. Have you ever attended any meetings or received any literature to your recollection of these two organizations?

A. Not to my recollection have I received any literature, and I know I have never attended any meetings.

Q. Mr. Hiss, do you now or have you ever advocated the overthrow of the present form of Government which we enjoy in the United States?

A. I certainly have not. There is only one Government that I want to overthrow and that is Hitler's.

Q. Mr. Hiss, have you ever advocated disloyalty to our present form of Government?

A. I have not.

Q. At this time, Mr. Hiss, you may have the opportunity of making any statement you deem pertinent to this inquiry you so desire.

A. Well, that is a big order. I think the best statement I can make is really a question. This all comes as a great surprise to me, and I'd like to find out what it is all about if it is proper to ask. I have always been a staunch supporter of the Roosevelt administration ever since it came in.

Q. As I informed you at the beginning -- possibly then you didn't quite grasp, not knowing what was coming later -- that under Public Law No. 135 which was passed by the 77th Congress, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was empowered by that Congress under that Law to investigate the employees of the Federal Government who are alleged members of subversive organizations.

A. It was the word alleged that I was addressing myself to. I wondered what the allegations were, because it was news to me. I think the purpose of the resolution is laudable.

Q. I am not at liberty to furnish you the information from the files.

A. But if you could give me some indication of what it was you had in mind, I would know what to address my statement to.

Q. I couldn't give you any indication. The only indication is by the questions I have already asked you as to what the allegation could possibly be. That is all I am at liberty to furnish you.

A. As far as the statement is concerned, not knowing the allegations which were referred to in the Statute, I don't know what particular kind of statement would be

helpful. My background and record, I assume, are available to you anyway. I am a lawyer by training. I have been employed by the Federal Government half of the time since I graduated from law school, and the rest of the time I was employed in a private law firm in Boston and New York. I came down here in 1933 at the behest of the Government. I remained according to my statement at the behest of the Government. I think I could have made a good deal more money if I had stayed in the private practice of law in New York. My reason for coming to Washington was not to make money, but to be helpful to the country. As a lawyer, I don't ascribe any significance to self-serving statements, but without knowing what specific kind of things you have in your files, which it is not proper for you to disclose, I really don't know what to say that would be helpful to you in the way of a statement.

Q. Well, this is not a hearing. This is purely a voluntary interview, and the interview is made a part of the investigative report in our file. Is there anything further you wish to say?

A. I'd like to ask whether I am at liberty to inform my immediate superior of the Department of State of the fact that you called me in here.

Q. That is entirely up to you.

- C L O S E D -

INFORMANTS

(b)(7)(D)

T-1 [redacted]

T-2 [redacted]

T-3 [redacted]

T-4 [redacted]

T-5 [redacted]

T-6 [redacted]

T-7 [redacted]

T-8 [redacted]

T-9 [redacted]

T-10 [redacted]

T-11 [redacted]

T-12 [redacted]