

sender garlin --one

Conversation with Whitman July 24, 1974

Sender Garlin, who is now 72, joined the Communist party almost 50 years ago. He was on The Daily Worker in New York from 1927 to 1958, the year the paper suspended daily publication. He was the paper's Moscow correpondent from 1935 to 1939 and then was its cultural affairs editor and columnist for many years. He is not now a party member, having @ropped off four or five years ago, but he remains devoted to the party in principle and, of course, to Socialism. He has been a frequent visitor to the USSR and speaks fluent Russian. He has a very lively curiessity and a splendid memory. 40 words (4 lines)

Mr. Garlin first became acquainted with Chambers in Scott Nearing's study group in the mid-1920's and later worked with him on the DW in New York. He says that the staff was tiny in those days and that Chambers rewrote a part of the paper called Workers' Correspondence. Workers were encouraged to mail in accounts of their experiences in factories and mines, and Chambers's task was to recast these into acceptable English. He was sometimes absent without explanation, which irritated his fellow staffers. At times Chambers ~~was~~ also edited copy and wrote headlines, but he was never the editor of the paper nor even a high editor. (The same point was made to me by Harry Freeman, the brother of Joseph Freeman, who worked for the DW from 1927 to 1929, when he left to join TASS and who says he never thereafter saw Chambers.) 80 words (8 lines)

Mr. Garlin, who is a gregarious sort, says that Chambers departed the paper in 1929 as a Lovestonite and resurfaced perhaps about a year later, but Mr. Garlin is uncertain as to whether Chambers rejoined the party at that or any other time. He had the point that in New York, at least, party membership of intellectuals was loose. "I don't think that Mike Gold, for instance, ever attended a party meeting or ever had a party card. If you followed the party line, wrote things and helped raise money, it was taken in the party that you were a member in those days." 120 words (12 lines)

Mr. Garlin recalled that he "often" visited Chambers when he was living with Ida Dales on the Lower East Side. Ida Dales, he said, was not very good looking, but she was bright and had a fine command of German. It is possible that she helped Chambers in his translations. At the time Chambers and Miss Dales were living together, Chambers was also having an affair with a young man of no intellectual attainments.

Chambers and Miss Dales broke up in perhaps 1938 or 1931 and he shortly married Esther Shemitz, then living with Grace Lumpkin. "Esther was mannish in appearance and was certainly a psychological lesbian." At about the time of the Chambers/Shemitz wedding, Miss Lumpkin and Michael Intrator were also married. Intrator, who had very little schooling but who read widely on his own, was then active in the Furriers Union and at times during strikes served on its education squad, which meant that he raised the consciousness of scabs with pop bottles and other such objects. Intrator was also a Lovestonite, and left the party never to return. Chambers and Intrator, who was a burly, masculine man, was a very close friend to Chambers, and Mr. Garlin strongly suspects their relationship was homosexual. He notes that the two couples lived in a menage à quatre for a while.

Mr. Garlin asserted that "Chambers is a hard man to forget." Even after a lapse of 40 years, he described him as a short, rather stubby person, pudgy, with missing upper teeth, blue-gray eyes, brownish hair, high forehead, soft and almost feminine hands; and almost always slovenly dressed. He sometimes wore a Lenin-like cap. Mr. Garlin went on to say that Chambers was not one to inquire about friends' ~~affairs~~ families and wellbeing, but that even so he was "a brilliant and graphic talker, especially about literature." Chambers had read widely, chiefly fiction, and in European and Russian ~~writers~~ writers. "He had a bright, quick mind, and after a while you forgot the missing teeth and the pudginess and concentrated on what he was saying about literature and books." Chambers possessed utterly no knowledge of Marxism (theory), but he talked about politics in very simplistic, revolutionary terms. He liked to tug at his cap and to say that he was destined to become "the American Lenin," a possibility that his more political friends scoffed at.

Along these lines Mr. Garlin said that Chambers was in the habit of romanticizing himself. "He was a Baron Munchausen, and you could never tell when he was dealing in fiction or in the truth about himself or some episode he recounted."

Chambers also impressed Mr. Garlin and others in party circles by his writing ability. A story he wrote for New Masses in 1931 lifted Chambers out of obscurity and suddenly made him a big proletarian writer, one who was sought out. This, while it pleased Chambers, made him more secretive than usual. "He was always mysterious about himself and his movements, leading you to think that he lived a special life."

Sometime in early 1933 Mr. Garlin heard in the party grapevine that Chambers, then on the board of New Masses, had been detached for special work. Mr. Garlin, who had been seeing him at this time rather infrequently because their paths did not ordinarily cross, lost sight of him. ~~But~~ Between 1933 and 1935 when he went to Moscow, Mr. Garlin saw Chambers twice -- both times on 14th Street, but ~~Mr. Garlin~~ there was no sign of recognition and "I understood," meaning that Chambers was, he thought, in the underground and hence desired ~~to~~ no contact with so obvious a Communist as Garlin.

I asked Mr. Garlin how Chambers might have been chosen for special work. He said it was all conjecture on his part, but that he had heard that Max Bedacht had made the choice. Although Chambers was ~~not a well-organized Communist~~ and was outwardly grumpy, Bedacht was the type who would see that he could fit into some plan or program. In 1933, the New Deal came to Washington and lots of intellectuals came ~~with~~ with it, ~~as~~ native Americans who had all sorts of social ideas and the party wanted to make contact with them not only to find out what was going on in Washington but also to raise money and to exert party influence. Chambers was American-born and an intellectual, factors that would have influenced Bedacht.

Why would Chambers commend himself to Hiss? Mr. Garlin offered two explanations. One is that intellectuals of the period, American ones, that is, were often entranced by ill-mannered and ill-spoken people who had revolutionary credentials. They were in touch with "real workers, real Communists." Hiss could have felt this about Chambers. The other explanation is that Hiss, who was bright himself, enjoyed talking with Chambers as a fellow intellectual who expressed social-political sympathies that Hiss was in ~~general~~ general accord with.

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Mr. Garlin expressed himself as certain that Chambers ~~was~~ engaged in special work, at least in 1933. This is based on party gossip, which Mr. Garlin regards as reliable. (This accords, also, with a remark made to me several years ago by Simon W. Gerson, the now retired executive editor of The Daily World. "We all knew that Chamber's picture was turned to the wall," he said of 1933, "but with honor."