

477 dated 1/21/49
Report from New York

RE: FRANCIS B. SAYRE

SAs THOMAS G. SPENCER
and FRANCIS D. O'BRIEN

Inasmuch as it had been ascertained that FRANCIS B. SAYRE, former Assistant Secretary of State, was returning to the United States from Europe, via the SS NEW AMSTERDAM, which was due in Hoboken, New Jersey on December 19, 1948, ~~and~~ and ~~boarded~~ boarded that vessel when she arrived at the pier in Hoboken, and interviewed SAYRE. He advised that while the ship was en route to the United States, he had received a cablegram from the HCUA, requesting his presence as a witness before that Committee on the morning of December 22, 1948; simultaneously with this interview, a Deputy U. S. Marshal served a subpoena on SAYRE for his appearance before the Grand Jury in the Southern District of New York. He observed that the latter subpoena called for his presence before the Grand Jury on the morning of December 20th next and that although he had no intention of ignoring such subpoena, he indicated a strong desire to secure an extension of time due to the volume of official business which he said he had to transact immediately in Washington, D. C.

assault

On the occasion of this interview, agents questioned Mr. SAYRE briefly on his knowledge of ALGER HISS, and the latter's activities when he was assistant to Mr. SAYRE in the State Department. Mr. SAYRE remarked that he had read in the Paris newspapers that HISS had been accused of abstracting documentary material from official State Department files, and that it would be necessary for him to review all the facts available, and particularly to study in detail the documents which HISS allegedly turned over to CHAMBERS, in order for him intelligently to discuss the matter. He repeatedly mentioned that he was most desirous of cooperating to the fullest extent in the conduct of this investigation. It was ascertained that Mr. SAYRE resides at 4853 Rockwood Parkway, Washington, D. C., telephone Ordway 3434. Inasmuch as Mr. SAYRE several times pointed out that he would be in a much better position to answer any questions and volunteer any pertinent information after he had had an opportunity to review the files, as set out above, no further attempts were made to question him on this occasion.

Miss ANNEBELLE NEWCOMB, who was formerly a secretary under Mr. SAYRE in the State Department, and who is presently his secretary in his capacity as an official of the United Nations, returned with Mr. SAYRE on the NEW AMSTERDAM, and was interviewed briefly by agents on board ship at Hoboken. She mentioned she was very upset by all of the publicity given this case, particularly as it affected Mr. HISS, and related she did

Sayre interview w/
2 FBI agents - 4 -
on Dec 21, 1948

Administratively. Mr. Sayre hastened to add that he considered both Miss Lincoln and Miss Howland entirely above suspicion.

With respect to the documents arriving on Miss Lincoln's desk for sifting and distribution, Mr. Sayre stated that within the Department of State the usual distribution of incoming cables and letters was that one copy would go to the Secretary of State, one to the Under-Secretary, one to each assistant secretary, and one copy to the geographical division concerned, with the exception that highly confidential cables were only routed to the Secretary of State. He pointed out that as a consequence documents which were under his jurisdiction and which were available to Mr. HISS were, in many cases, also available in the distribution set out above. He particularly pointed out that in the distribution set out above the original always was returned, after the mimeographed copies had been made, to the Department to which it concerned.

In noting the distribution above for Agents, Mr. Sayre stated that he wanted to particularly emphasize the fact of the availability of these documents throughout the Department of State. He wanted it known that, although documents were in the possession of his office, similar documents were also available in other offices and the fact that documents were stolen and copied could not in and of itself necessarily reflect that they had been taken from his office. He stated that he would bring out this point in greater detail further on in the interview when he would discuss the documents themselves, concerning which he had noted certain categories which he would discuss in detail.

Further enlarging upon the action taken by him administratively on documents which came into his office, Mr. Sayre related that if the documents pertained to a trade information, either Mr. Hiss or himself or both would read it as pointed out, after which they would be placed in a locked file cabinet; or if they emanated from another division they would be returned to that division. With respect to documents that pertained directly to his work, that is Trade Agreements, these would be placed in a bottom drawer of a file cabinet and were periodically destroyed by burning. Mr. Sayre in continuing the interview stated that he had first learned

of the recent developments in the Hiss case, that is the discovery of the Baltimore documents, in the Paris newspapers. Consequently after his arrival by boat from Europe he had immediately gone to Washington, D. C. in order to refresh his memory concerning certain details as well as to obtain copies of the documents in question from the State Department.

While in Washington he had refreshed himself on as many of the aspects of the case as was possible in a limited time and had been supplied by officials in the Department with copies of most of the documents which had been turned up in Baltimore both at the trial and in the pumpkin. He noted at this point that he had knowledge that there were four other documents which were in existence but which the State Department had not given him copies. He believed they were the documents which were considered extremely confidential and the contents of which had not been published. He stated that he had attempted to read all the documents in question while in Washington and enroute by train to New York but the time had not been sufficient.

At this stage he pointed out that from his knowledge of the documents certain significant factors stand out. In the first significant category he placed five series of documents which he desired to discuss. He stated that these documents which he wished to discuss had been published in the newspapers and the newspapers had claimed that they were only available to the four individuals who were employed in his office, that is, his two secretaries, Mr. Hiss and himself. He wanted to go on record in pointing out specifically that this was very much in error as the documents, which will be discussed hereinafter, were available to other divisions and could have been taken from them as well as his own.

The first document he pointed out was the Manchucko report. This document, he pointed out, had been prepared in the Far Eastern Affairs Division, which was headed by Stanley Hornbeck. This document, he added, must of necessity have been available to individuals in Mr. Hornbeck's office where it was prepared and also in the offices to which it had been distributed other than his own.

The second document which could be placed in the same category as to availability was the German Aid Memoir. This was prepared in Trade Agreements Section under Harry Hawkins. Although this Section was not in his administrative jurisdiction as Assistant Secretary, Mr. Sayre wanted to point out that prior to the Memoir's arrival in his office,

it was available for pilfering in the Trade Agreements Section itself and could easily have been taken by Wedleigh or other individuals in this Section.

Mr. Sayre also identified a memorandum dated January 8, 1938 from Mr. Hawkins to himself and also a memorandum from Mr. Darlington dated December 21, 1937 as documents which were written in connection with the draft of the Aid Memoir mentioned above.

The third he considered the list of documents dated February 14 to February 17, 1938 with the exception of the March 29, 1938 cablegram from Ambassador Kennedy. These as were the above, he stated, also available to other Sections in the Department as well as his own.

In the fourth category he placed his own memorandum of February 18, 1938 of his conversations with Vladimir Hurban, the Czechoslovakian Minister. His conversations with Hurban had taken place in the presence of Sumner Welles and although it originated in his office, would have been available in other Sections.

The fifth group he considered contained a series of cablegrams which he had not had time to review but from a quick glance at them, he would place them in the same category.

He reiterated that there were no identifying features about the above mentioned documents from which it could be authoritatively stated that they came from his office. He also pointed out with respect to the documents that the information could not be considered extremely confidential or of great importance. To his mind he considered it a conglomeration of unsorted material.

Mr. Sayre was asked whether he had any particular reason for inserting Wedleigh's name and no others when he mentioned that the material in the second group was available in the Trade Agreement Section. He stated at first that he was suspicious about Wedleigh but continued questioning revealed that there was no basis for this statement in that he could not recall Wedleigh could not describe him and could not recall him as a person. It was then

brought out that the only reason that he interjected Wadleigh's name was because his name had appeared in the newspapers as being a suspect.

It should be noted here that with respect to the documents above mentioned, Mr. Sayre had copies of some with him and referred to them as he discussed them with Agents. It was determined through interview that he had copies of all documents in the possession of Agents with the exception of the four which will be hereinafter mentioned.

Agents presented to Mr. Sayre all fifty-eight photostatic copies of the microfilm to peruse them. He noted that he had read through all of them with the exception of four documents. These four documents were four documents numbered in the photostat page 49 to 58. These were a cablegram from Hankow of Mr. Johnson's dated January 11, 1938, a cablegram from the American Embassy at Peiping and Hankow dated January 13, 1938 from Sokobin, four cablegrams from Ambassador Bullitt sent from Paris on January 13, 1938, one at 3 P.M., 3:15 P.M., 3:35 P.M. and 3:50 P.M.

Mr. Sayre stated that he had not seen these cablegrams but noted that it was significant that they all were black stamped January 14, 1938 with his office stamp which contained his name, his title, Assistant Secretary of State and the date. He also pointed out that he could note in the right hand corner of the black stamp the fine initials A.H. of Alger Hiss. It was his opinion that because of the fact that they were all black stamped the same date that some individual who had access to this material had taken them all at once which accounts for the fact that they all bore the same date. When it was pointed out to him that these documents happened to be among those that were retained by Whittaker Chambers, he qualified his statement by adding that if this was so, it could be that these were among a series of related documents and therefore, he was not as certain of his first impression. He was asked what his impression of these documents was. He stated that he attached the utmost importance to them not only from the point of view of their contents but also because of the possibility that anyone in possession of them would have been able to break the State Department code.

Document #49 which was the cablegram from Hankow dated January 11, 1938, he considered confidential both from the point of view and from the informative content. He noted that part of the cablegram was in the Gray Code and the rest in another code. In commenting on the codes, he stated that the Gray Code was used for the routine communications and was never used to carry confidential or highly secret information. He gave the impression that no great harm could have resulted if the material in the cablegram was used to break the Gray Code, more or less inferring that its construction was known to sources other than the State Department, however, with respect to the remainder of the cablegram which was in another code, he stated that he considered it extremely confidential in that the code could have been broken with a knowledge of its contents.

Photostatic copies of microfilm documents #52 and #53, #52 being from the American Embassy at Peiping and Hankow and #53 from Paris dated January 13, 1938, 3:15 P.M., he likewise considered extremely confidential both from the point of view of code information and their contents. Photostatic copies of microfilm documents #55 and #57, two cablegrams dated January 13, 1938, 3 P.M. and 3:35 P.M., he considered highly confidential for the same reasons and also placed the photostatic copy of the microfilm document #58, a copy of a cablegram dated January 13, 1938 from Paris, 3:50 P.M., in that category likewise for the same reasons.

Mr. Sayre had in his possession a group of documents which he referred to as the Baltimore documents. A check of these documents revealed that they were the photographic copies of the documents which Chambers had presented as a defense at the pre-trial examination in connection with the Hiss libel suit. It was noted that with one or two exceptions, they were the same copies as were in possession of Agents.

With respect to these documents as pointed out earlier, Mr. Sayre stated that he had not had time to review them. Due to the time element in interviewing Mr. Sayre before his appearance in the Grand Jury Room, it was not possible to go over each one of them individually with Mr. Sayre and obtain his opinion.

Mr. Sayre was shown the five handwritten memoranda of Alger Hiss. He was told that for the purpose of the record the memoranda were handwritten by Mr. Alger Hiss. He was asked for his comments as to why such memoranda should have been prepared. Mr. Sayre related that because of the great volume of work coming over the desks of the various individuals in the State Department, a number of them resorted to the practice of preparing digests or short memoranda of the contents of the documents. He believed that Alger Hiss used the same system. More explicitly, he stated, that Alger Hiss read various memoranda coming over his desk and if he found a long document therein, he would make various comments concerning it on a memorandum sheet which would be used to assist him in discussing the memoranda with Mr. Sayre if he intended to bring it to his attention or in discussing it with whatever Section head was concerned with it. He admitted that he had not seen the particular memoranda in question and could not give any explanation for them other than what he had said above. It was brought to his attention that one of the memoranda pertained to a shipment of military planes to Indochina which was a situation which his Department was not specifically concerned with. He was asked why Alger Hiss would have made a digest of such information. He stated that he could not understand why he would have done so. He was unable likewise to give any explanation as to how these memoranda could have left the Department of State and admitted, however, that if they were Alger Hiss' handwriting, which he said he recognized, they probably were prepared in his Section.

Mr. Sayre to questioning stated that it was the practice for officials in the State Department to take home work from the office in order to stay abreast of things. Prior to and during the War the volume of work was so heavy it was impossible to complete it during working hours and much of it had to be done at home. He stated that he himself indulged in this routine very frequently. He could not say specifically that he had seen Alger Hiss taking home work for the same purpose but believed that he indulged in the same practice as others. When asked whether this was in violation of State Department regulations, he stated that he would prefer that what he had just said not be known publicly as he believed that there was a regulation prohibiting the taking home of

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[REDACTED]

When asked specifically about the security regulations in the Department, he stated that he could not recall what they were if there were any. He was asked what would become of such handwritten memoranda as Alger Hiss had made. He related that such memoranda would stay with the file and would be filed with it.

In returning to the appointment of Alger Hiss, Mr. Sayre was asked whether it had been on anyone's recommendation. Before the sentence was completed, Mr. Sayre stated "I know what you're getting at. Do you mean that he was planted?" He continued by stating that he had been picked because of his record. Mr. Sayre did not recall having had any personal acquaintance with Alger Hiss prior to his meeting to discuss his taking a position in the State Department.

Mr. Sayre stated that this came as a great shock to him and that he could not believe that Alger Hiss would have let him down personally by indulging in the activities of which he is accused. He admitted that he did not know Chambers personally and had not heard of him prior to instant case.

Prior to leaving for the Grand Jury Room, Mr. Sayre stated that he wished to inform Agents that while in Washington he had been contacted by Mr. Marbury, attorney for Alger Hiss and some of the aspects of the case had been gone over with him. He also pointed out that none of the activities of which Alger Hiss is being accused had occurred to his knowledge. He added that he himself had never permitted any documents to be removed from his office by unauthorized officials.