

as a consultant to the Department of Agriculture. The Ware Group was to form the base for Hiss's entry into secret intelligence work for the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup>

In retrospect, Hiss's metamorphosis from a follower of avant-garde culture to a committed political reformer was remarkably swift. But at another level it was not altogether unexpected. Hiss had entered the employment market at the very time that the first effects of the economic turmoil of the 1930s were beginning to take shape. Even before moving from Boston to New York, Priscilla had exhibited an attraction to collectivist politics. Once Alger came to the conclusion that the Depression was a result of moral and political failure on the part of "decrepit social structures," popular-front collectivism seemed an attractive alternative. The Soviet Union, which the United States government was officially to recognize in 1933, had yet to begin its Stalinist purges, and the darker side of Fascist collectivism was not yet visible. The International Juridical Association itself seemed an example of how liberals and collectivists of different stripes could join in work designed to help casualties of the Depression.

Alger's commitment to political reform may have seemed all the more attractive because it took him down a path that served to separate him and Priscilla more decisively from the network of his family. No one in the Hiss household had participated in politics. The engagement of Alger and Priscilla with reformist political programs served to give their household an identity quite distinct from that of the Baltimore Hisses. Further, Alger for the first time had become the center of his household's pursuits. He had left Baltimore and Boston on Priscilla's urging, accommodating her personal and professional needs. Now it was she who followed him to Washington, where he became simultaneously involved as a New Dealer and a member of Harold Ware's group.

By as early as 1934 Hiss had begun intelligence work for the Soviets. There are hints of what may have made him take that step. A combination of frustrations he encountered at the AAA and during his years as a designated custodian and "good boy" in the Hiss family made achieving a position of independence and mastery, that would boost his self-esteem, even more important. Although his marriage to Priscilla had been an act of defiance to Minnie and the accumulated weight of family responsibilities, it had at the same time been a taking on of a new set of burdens. Alger continued to search for something that would set him apart and allow him to exercise his unique talents. Participating in the New Deal, even if it had been the culmination of a new political awareness Priscilla's interests may have engendered,