

days working in corporate practice. Hiss resigned from the IJA when he left for Washington in 1933. Another member of the group, Jerome R. Hellerstein, recalled:

The members of the Association in 1932 were men of "liberal" points of view. Some few of them were probably out and out Communists. These included Carol King and Joseph Brodsky, who was then attorney for the Communist Party. However, there were many other liberals who were not Communists. . . . Lee Pressman and Nat Witt also were active in the group. They were not Communists, at least at that time. . . . Alger's only contribution was to write a few articles for the bulletin and to attend a few of the open forum meetings. Hellerstein recalls one meeting at the New School related to foreclosure of farm mortgages at which Alger made a speech. . . . Hellerstein says that the Association was not Communist dominated. . . . [He] knew Alger fairly well in 1932, visited at his house in New York, met and liked Priscilla. He knew that she was a member of the Socialist party. He, Hellerstein, was not.⁵⁴

But one of the Communists mentioned by Hellerstein, Carol King, did not share, in later discussions with Hiss's attorneys, his assessment of the IJA.

. . . Mrs. King thought that Hiss made a mistake in denying membership in any Communist Front organization [in HUAC testimony]. She said that the International Juridical Association is on the Attorney General's list, that this seems rather silly since the organization was dissolved in 1941, but that Hiss was a member of it [in 1932-3] and that his name appeared on the letterhead of the National Committee of this organization. She said that she knew Alger and Priscilla Hiss and liked them very much.⁵⁵

It is doubtful that Hiss became either a Socialist or a Communist during this period. But, influenced both by Priscilla's Socialism and by the more radical perspectives of friends such as Pressman and King on the IJA, Alger's beliefs shifted leftward.

Priscilla's Socialist commitment seemed much stronger than Alger's at the time. It went beyond merely voting and provisioning soup kitchens into organizing new coalitions of American radicals. While Alger spent his free hours working for the IJA, Priscilla helped found a new group called the American Labor Associates, an organization of dissidents from the traditional parties of the left, which described itself as "a cooperative, non-profit making research, study, publishing, and distributing organization, created . . . to study, analyze, and interpret factual developments and the movement of ideas in the American social order and their bearings on the course and the aims of the labor movement."⁵⁶

During the spring of 1932 the ALA held several meetings to gain supporters and raise funds for a monthly magazine. The group's "Advisory Board," listed on the American Labor Associates' letterhead, included Communists, Socialists, and non-affiliated radicals—including Priscilla Hiss. On June 15, 1932, the ALA held a planning session. The agenda for

discussion, a document entitled "Next Steps in Radicalism: An Outline," included standard militant rhetoric of the time such as this passage:

Revolutions do not, by themselves, come out of depressions, however severe. . . . Two basic pre-conditions of a revolutionary overturn are essential: the existence of *an organized purposive revolutionary movement*, and *a revolutionary situation* with a progressive impairment of the governmental machinery of the ruling class.

The document concluded that "the task of revolutionary radicals in this situation seems to be that of building a revolutionary movement. . . ." "Radicals" were urged to "be active in the conservative unions, the Socialist Party, the Communist organizations . . . and in various lay organizations where social and economic issues come to a head."⁵⁷

One participant at the American Labor Associates' agenda meeting was a non-member, the radical philosophy teacher Corliss Lamont, who wrote Sidney Hook:

Enclosed is agenda of meeting I attended Wed. night. Persons checked on letterhead present, as well as others making about 40 in all. . . . Discussion was interesting *and* futile. I don't see how you can get 40 people of this type to agree on a program for a magazine.

Among the names checked on the ALA letterhead by Lamont, indicating that she attended the meeting, was Priscilla Hiss's.⁵⁸ Her active membership in the ALA and her work within the Socialist Party indicate a strong commitment to radical social change during the 1932-3 Depression years when the Hisses lived in New York. Both Alger and Priscilla had already been considerably "radicalized" long before the election of a Democratic reform administration caused the couple to move from New York City to Washington.

Whittaker: The Prodigal Communist

"Is there still a Communist Party?" Clifton Fadiman asked when Whittaker told him about his ideological conversion. When Chambers decided to join the Communist Party in 1925, most of his friends and former Columbia classmates were apolitical and interested mainly in the arts and their own careers. None of them could even help Whittaker make contact with a CP member to arrange for his own initiation; to them the Party seemed a haven largely for foreign-speaking immigrant workers and not an appropriate place for an educated American WASP with literary talent such as their brooding, secretive friend. But Whittaker's habit of self-dramatization had long since become familiar to Columbia intimates, and most viewed this move toward Communism as merely his latest "mystification," in Meyer Schapiro's word. Schapiro, Fadiman, Trilling, Zukofsky, Van Doren, and the others to whom Chambers announced his plan found it odd but unsurprising.