

If Dulles responded to Hiss's explanation and plea for support, the letter has not survived. Answering a request made the following day by Philip C. Jessup, a fellow Endowment board member and friend of Hiss's, that the board formally "express their confidence in the President," Dulles remained noncommittal. He avowed that he had just finished reading the transcript of Hiss's testimony and had heard from another board member and friend of Hiss's, James T. Shotwell, about the "excellent impression" Hiss had made. Dulles, however, appreciated the political dangers involved for him in a blanket endorsement of Hiss at this uncertain moment; he flatly rejected Jessup's suggestion. "It seems to me better," he responded coolly, "to defer decision until after the present Hearings have been concluded."²⁷

AUGUST 7: The Chase

From his Columbia days in the early 1920s onward, Whittaker Chambers had worked diligently to separate personal life from career obligations. Even during his years as a Communist underground agent he not only succeeded in creating a family life for his wife and two children that was reasonably detached from his work as a courier, but he managed to maintain friendships with non-Communists without the knowledge of CP superiors. Since joining *Time* in 1939 he had divided his week almost equally between days of intense activity in New York—often working through the night—and days of retreat in Westminster, Maryland, where he and his wife farmed with the aid of their children and hired hands. The schedule was grueling; twice during these years—in 1942 and 1945—he suffered heart attacks and spent months of enforced rest at the farm. But it allowed him the privacy and close connection with family that he believed essential to emotional well-being.

Chambers had "resolved not to read any news stories about my testimony, or to listen to radio broadcasts," and so, he claimed, it was only through a phone call from a Committee investigator that he learned of Alger Hiss's testimony. Chambers offered to return to Washington for another round of questioning, but instead was asked to appear at the Federal Court House in New York City on Saturday, August 7, to meet with the HUAC subcommittee.

Nixon immediately laid bare the central issue at the executive session:

Mr. Chambers, you are aware of the fact that Mr. Alger Hiss appeared before this committee . . . in public session and swore that the testimony which had been given by you under oath before this committee was false. The committee is now interested in questioning you further concerning your alleged acquaintanceship with Mr. Alger Hiss so that we can determine what course of action should be followed in this matter in the future.

When had he known Hiss? Roughly "between the years 1935 and 1937." Did he know him under his real name? Yes. During that period did Hiss know him as Whittaker Chambers? "No, he did not." (Hiss had stated repeatedly on August 5 that he did not know "a man named Whittaker Chambers.") By what name had Hiss known Chambers? "He knew me by the party name of Carl." Regarding Hiss and the Communist underground:

MR. NIXON: This entire [underground] group with which you worked in Washington did not know you by your real name? . . . All knew you as Carl?

MR. CHAMBERS: That is right. . . .

MR. NIXON: I understood you to say that Mr. Hiss was a member of the party.

MR. CHAMBERS: Mr. Hiss was a member of the Communist Party.

MR. NIXON: How do you know that?

MR. CHAMBERS: I was told that by Mr. Peters . . . [who] was head of the entire underground, as far as I know . . . [of] the Communist Party in the United States.

MR. NIXON: Do you have any other evidence, any factual evidence, to bear out your claim that Mr. Hiss was a member of the Communist Party?

MR. CHAMBERS: Nothing beyond the fact that he submitted himself for the two or three years that I knew him as a dedicated and disciplined Communist.

MR. NIXON: Did you obtain his party dues from him?

MR. CHAMBERS: Yes, I did . . . [for] two or three years, as long as I knew him.

MR. NIXON: Party dues from him and his wife?

MR. CHAMBERS: I assume his wife's dues were there; I understood it to be. . . . Mr. Hiss would simply give me an envelope containing party dues which I transferred to Peters. I didn't handle the money.

MR. NIXON: How often?

MR. CHAMBERS: Once a month. . . . I must also interpolate there that all Communists in the [Ware] group in which I originally knew him accepted him as a member of the Communist Party.

MR. NIXON: Could this have possibly been an intellectual study group?

MR. CHAMBERS: . . . Its primary function was not that of an intellectual study group . . . [but] to infiltrate the Government in the interest of the Communist Party. . . . No members of that group to my knowledge ever had party cards, nor do I think members of any such group have party cards.

MR. NIXON: The reason is—

MR. CHAMBERS: The reason is security, concealment.²⁸

Nixon then asked a series of questions about the Hisses' private lives, aimed at testing whether Chambers had ever known them well. Specifically, Nixon later noted, he had tried to determine "What should one man know about another if he knew him as well as Chambers claimed to know Hiss?"

Responding to queries from subcommittee members and staff—Nixon, Hébert, Stripling, and Ben Mandel—Chambers apparently remembered a great deal. More than a decade had passed since his described friendship with the Hisses, and Chambers later admitted inaccuracies in his original August 3 testimony and in some statements at the August 7 hearing. Thus he met Hiss in 1934, not '35, and his defection from Communism came in