

Deal programs such as the AAA. At the same time, they chafed over the continued restraints upon their actions imposed by their more conservative superiors.⁷

As the top-ranking AAA official within the Ware Group, Pressman probably helped recruit others for the network.* His interviews with the FBI in 1950 did confirm the Ware Group's existence and shed some light on its operations. Pressman told the Bureau that Ware, who "floated" around the Agriculture Department in 1934, inquired one day if he would be interested in joining "a Communist group." The group itself was small, he claimed, "and, at the outset, included Harold Ware, John Abt, Nathan Witt, and himself." (Pressman added Kramer's name to its membership while testifying before HUAC in 1950.) During his period with the Ware Group, Pressman stated, "these were the only people who attended meetings and belonged," except for J. Peters. After Ware's death in a 1935 car crash, according to Pressman, Peters "showed up, announced that he was taking Ware's place, and continued, thereafter, to act more-or-less as the leader of the group." Its activities, whether under Ware or Peters, consisted (in Pressman's portrayal) primarily of discussing Communist literature and collecting Party dues—in sum, it was a Marxist study group of four junior AAA officials and two prominent CP functionaries.⁸

Other members recalled the group as a much larger secret network of government functionaries who met not only to engage in discussions of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice, but to prepare themselves for more important roles within the New Deal and even, on occasion, to filch documentary material. This portrait of the group emerges not only from Whittaker Chambers's account, but is confirmed by another member of the cell, Nathaniel Weyl, and by novelist Josephine Herbst, formerly the wife of John Herrmann, Harold Ware's chief assistant in the CP underground from 1933 to 1935.⁹

Pressman stated in 1950 that Alger Hiss had not been a member of the Ware Group during his tenure as a member; "it was quite possible," he told the FBI, "that Alger Hiss might have been a member of this group but, if this was true, it would have been prior to the time he, Pressman, became associated with the Harold Ware group."

Pressman also "stated [to the FBI that] neither Alger or his attorneys have contacted him since the accusations," while in fact he played a demonstrated role in Hiss's campaign to discredit Chambers, serving as a

* He denied that allegation when interviewed by the FBI about underground activities two days after he first acknowledged such involvement in his August 1950 testimony before HUAC. Pressman's statement to the FBI, like his earlier comments to the Committee, was not completely candid. His statements contained certain facts that are corroborated by other evidence but also a number of distortions and untruths, and he omitted most details of his period as a self-confessed Communist.