

FBI to Release Alger Hiss Files

Washington

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's secret files on Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers — 53,000 pages long and perhaps holding some keys to the 25-year-old debate over the innocence or guilt of Hiss — are about to become public.

So are the secret FBI files on Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the American atom spies, who were executed June 19, 1953.

And so, to some extent, are the files on Ezra Pound, the legendary and greatly influential expatriate poet who was accused of treason but was never brought to trial.

The bureau itself is preparing to release these documents, with some deletions designed to protect its informants as well as the privacy of some individuals named in the papers. The first release is expected to come this week or next, with that delivery to a Smith College professor of the first installment of the 25,000 page Rosenberg file.

RELEASE

The bureau is releasing these documents after years of insisting that they should never be released — and in the Hiss case in particular, after fending off as recently as last spring a lawsuit designed to open up the files.

Indeed, the bureau now plans to begin processing the Hiss papers for delivery to the same Smith professor, Allen Weinstein, as soon as the Justice Department and the American Civil Liberties Union, which brought the

litigation in Weinstein's behalf, sign a consent decree in federal court here closing the suit.

The Justice Department feels "the case is mooted," assistant U.S. attorney Michael J. Ryan, said last week, because the director of the bureau, Clarence M. Kelley, agreed several weeks ago to make the Hiss papers available.

Hiss had been a government official in Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

When he left the government he became president of the Carnegie Foundation. But in the late '40s he was accused by Chambers, an admitted Communist agent, of having become an undercover Communist and of having turned over to Chambers classified State Department documents.

CONVICTION

Hiss insisted he was neither a Communist nor a spy. But he was not believed, and his insistence on his innocence was used as the basis of perjury charges. He was tried, convicted and sent to prison.

The FBI is making the files available pursuant to an order issued last July by the then attorney general, Elliot Richardson.

The order specified that even though the Freedom of Information Act exempted some government-held material from mandatory public disclosure, historians should nevertheless have access to the material.

The FBI has not decided who can qualify as a recipient. A spokesman suggested that the bureau would at least consider requests by

newspaper reporters.

SECURITY

The FBI had long resisted requests for information from its files on the grounds that disclosure would endanger its operations — identifying informants and modes of surveillance, for instance and that it would thus endanger the national security. But because of the Richardson order, the FBI set up in September a special unit in its External Affairs Division to process any requests.

Some scholars have suggested that Mr. Hiss was the victim of an "FBI conspiracy."

The controversy over his conviction in 1950 has endured in part because of President Nixon's involvement as a young congressman in the original congressional inquiry of Hiss in the 40s. Hiss, nearing 70 now, is still in demand for interviews and speeches, and this Wednesday night he will address the Washington, D.C. chapter of Americans for Democratic Action.

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