

June 5, 1953

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Bureau of Prisons

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL:

Re: Report on Interview with Rosenbergs

On Tuesday, June 2, I interviewed Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the death house at Sing Sing. I talked first with Julius in an interview room which was made available to me by the Warden. Following a short preliminary conversation about his health and the status of his case, I told him that it was part of my official duty to arrange for any visits he might care to request with Government officials familiar with the details of his case. I told him that there seemed to be a feeling on the part of some Government agencies that he was in possession of information which would be helpful in solving some as yet unanswered questions. I stressed the importance of early disclosure of any such information he might have and giving Government agents an opportunity to check on whatever statement he might make in view of the fact that the execution date was only two weeks away.

I had scarcely made known the purpose of my meeting when Julius launched on a quite emotionally charged tirade to the effect that he and his wife were the victims not only of a gross miscarriage of justice but a "deal" by the Government on the one hand and his brother and sister-in-law, David and Ruth Greenglass. He asserted that Attorney General McGrath was the architect of the plot and had somehow influenced the selection of Judge Kaufman as the trial judge and was generally responsible for the outcome. He is very bitter also toward his sister-in-law, Ruth Greenglass, and lays great stress on the fact that she got off scot-free while his wife Ethel gets the death sentence.

I questioned some of his statements and repeatedly told him that he ought somehow to be able to disabuse those familiar with the case of the feeling he had failed to make a full disclosure and had not been cooperative. Each time he protested his innocence. He also claims that he was convicted on the basis of perjured testimony and trickery on the part of the prosecutor. For instance, he laid considerable stress on the fact that his brother-in-law, David Greenglass, was supposed to have made the drawings involved from memory. He says that it was impossible for a person of as little education and experience and knowledge of engineering as his brother-in-law David to do this. He said this in the course of his request that he and his wife be given another opportunity to appear in court so that all of the facts could be brought out. He somehow apparently believes that if he could have another opportunity for public trial he could vindicate himself.





The third part of his conversation consisted of a denunciation of Judge Kaufman and the sentence he gave. How, he asked, could it be possible under any circumstances that a death sentence be meted out to him and his wife in the face of the sentence of thirty years given to Harry Gold and fifteen years to David Greenglass, who were admittedly arch-conspirators in an espionage plot. He contended that he was in no sense guilty of espionage and that the sentence was savage in the extreme.

Julius lacked the detached calmness and self-assurance that characterized my former conversations with him. He no longer seems to have the attitude of the martyr, which I felt marked his conversation the last time I saw him. Notwithstanding the fact that he told me several times that he understood I was not there to make any deal with him or put him on the rack, as he phrased it, he nevertheless was quite belligerent, excitable and made some statements that on questioning he was willing to modify. He talked much of Fascist tactics used in his case and inferred the sentence was not what one could expect of a great democracy, that he and his wife were of such small importance peoples abroad would never be able to understand our action in condemning them to death.

I next went to the women's cellblock where I saw Mrs. Rosenberg. I followed about the same approach in telling her that the purpose of my visit was to see how she was getting along and also to ascertain whether she by any chance desired me to put her in touch with the proper Government agents so that she could have an opportunity to make any statement or give any information about her case that would be helpful to the Government in solving some unanswered questions relating to the whole matter. Evidently she and Julius had anticipated some such inquiry because her attitude and her statements were substantially the same as those of her husband, although she wasn't quite as verbose or excited as he was. She said that obviously the Government could not prove whatever suspicions they had about certain aspects of the case or we would not be turning to her for cooperation and that she had no intention of putting her finger on somebody else or giving false or misleading information even though it might have the effect of staying her own execution. She said that if the Government wanted her testimony on any matter she would have to be brought into open court.

Realizing that I wasn't getting anywhere, I asked the Warden to bring in Julius and to be present while I again repeated the purpose of my presence in the institution and told him that I would appreciate it if he would transmit promptly any message that either Julius or Ethel wished to have brought to the attention of the Department. Both Julius and Ethel again protested that they would have no messages and no information and that the only thing I could do for them would be to present to the Attorney General a recommendation that their sentence be commuted. My final word





to Julius was that I would be around the institution for an hour or so and that if he wished to see me again before I left to notify the guard. He said that he only wished to see me in the event I had some good news for him.

In the course of the interview Julius asked me if I had consulted his attorney or advised him of my visit. When I told him I had not he requested me to do so which I did later. I informed Mr. Bloch by telephone as soon as he could be reached, which was about 6 P. M., June 2, of my visit and my offer to expedite any request the Rosenbergs had bearing on a further explanation of the facts involved in their activities. Mr. Bloch expressed surprise that he had not been informed of the visit and invited to be present. I told him I was merely acting as intermediary and in my official capacity as the one to whom responsibility for their safekeeping had been delegated. He made no further protest and merely said something to the effect that he would see the Rosenbergs the next day about some new legal moves he had in mind.

Director

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