



<http://gdc.gale.com/archivesunbound/>

AMERASIA AFFAIR, CHINA, AND POSTWAR ANTI-COMMUNIST FERVOR



The *Amerasia* Affair was the first of the great spy cases of the postwar era. Unlike Alger Hiss or the Rosenberg cases, it did not lead to an epic courtroom confrontation or imprisonment or execution of any of the principals. The *Amerasia* Affair sheds light not only on debate as to who "lost" China, Soviet espionage, McCarthyism, and the loyalty program, but also on the bureaucratic intricacies of anti-communism in Washington.

Date Range: 1945-1973

Content: 14,164 images

Source Library: Federal Bureau of Investigation Library

Detailed Description:

The *Amerasia* Affair was the first of the great spy cases of the postwar era. Unlike Alger Hiss or the Rosenberg cases, it did not lead to an epic courtroom confrontation or imprisonment or execution of any of the principals. Today it is far less known or remembered than the others. Nevertheless, it prompted several congressional investigations, stirred-up partisan controversy and threatened to destroy the political reputations of several important government officials. It was the first public drama featuring charges that respectable American citizens had spied for the Communists. The *Amerasia* Affair contributed heavily to the creation of McCarthyism in American life. Thanks to the availability of these FBI records, most of the *Amerasia* story can be uncovered. The *Amerasia* Affair sheds light not only on debate as to who "lost" China, Soviet espionage, McCarthyism, and the loyalty program, but also on the bureaucratic intricacies of anti-communism in Washington.

What came to be called the "Amerasia Affair" began when Kenneth Wells, an analyst for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), noticed that an article printed in the January 26, 1945, issue of the magazine *Amerasia* was almost identical to a 1944 report he had written on Thailand. OSS agents investigated by breaking into the New York offices of *Amerasia* on March 11, 1945, where they found hundreds of classified documents from the Department of State, the Navy, and the OSS.

The OSS notified the State Department, which asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to investigate. The FBI's investigation indicated that Jaffe had probably obtained the

documents from State Department employee Emanuel Larsen and Andrew Roth, a lieutenant with the Office of Naval Intelligence. Free-lance reporter Mark Gayn was also a suspect, as was State Department "China Hand" John S. Service.

FBI surveillance recorded that during this investigation Jaffe met with Service several times in Washington and New York, reporting that at one meeting, "Service, according to the microphone surveillance, apparently gave Jaffe a document which dealt with matters the Chinese had furnished to the United States government in confidence."

An FBI summary reported that Jaffe visited the Soviet consulate in New York, and two days after a meeting with Service had a four-hour meeting in his home with Communist Party Secretary Earl Browder and Tung Pi-wu, the Chinese Communist representative to the United Nations Charter Conference.

In carrying out its investigation, the FBI illegally broke into the offices of *Amerasia* and the homes of Gayn and Larsen, and installed bugs and phone taps in the *Amerasia* offices and in Larsen and Jaffe's homes. Six people were arrested on June 6, 1945: Jaffe, Mitchell, Larsen, Roth, Gayn and Service. Simultaneously, the *Amerasia* offices were raided and 1,700 classified State Department, Navy, OSS, and Office of War Information documents were seized.

Because no evidence was found indicating that any documents had been forwarded to a foreign power, the Justice Department decided not to seek an indictment under the Espionage Act. Instead, an indictment was sought against the six for unauthorized possession of government documents. A grand jury ultimately indicted three of the six: Jaffe, Larsen, and Roth. Before the trial began, Larsen's defense attorney learned of the FBI's illegal break-in to Larsen's home. Faced with the possibility that more of the illegal investigative techniques used by the FBI would become known and that the cases would be lost at trial as a result, the Justice Department arranged a deal whereby Jaffe agreed to plead guilty and pay a fine of \$2,500, while Larsen pleaded no contest and was fined \$500. The charges against Roth were dropped altogether.

Despite the anticlimactic outcome, the *Amerasia* Affair continued to attract attention. In the growing atmosphere of McCarthyism, many saw the case as an indication of the danger of both Communist espionage and Communist influence on the government, particularly the State Department. Senator Joseph McCarthy would often speak of the case in these terms, maintaining it was a security breach and cover-up of immense proportions.