Alien Red Hearing

Messersmith Admits He Wrote Letters In Behalf Of Eisler

WASHINGTON —(AP)— George S. Messersmith, then Assistant Secretary of State, acknowledged today that he wrote the American Consul General at Havana in 1939 urging prompt and personal consideration of Hanns Eisler’s application for a visa to reside in the United States.

Testifying before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Messersmith also said he sent the Consul General a copy of a letter that Sumner Welles, then Undersecretary of State, had written Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt who had expressed interest in Eisler’s case.

The committee is investigating the question whether high Government officials have knowingly permitted Communists to come to this country in violation of immigration laws.

JOINED PARTY

Eisler, now a Hollywood songwriter, testified yesterday that he joined the Communist Party in his native Germany in 1926, but declared he was never active and is not now a Communist.

Messersmith took vigorous exception when Rep. Rankin (D-Miss.) called the letter “almost a directive” for the Consul General to give Eisler a visa.

The former State Department official declared it was not intended as a directive at all.

Rep. J. Parnell Thomas (R-N.J.), committee chairman, commented:

“If you can explain yourself out of this, you’re good.”

Messersmith said the letter to Coert Dubois, the Consul General at Havana, was “merely to make it clear to him that this was a case that had angles requiring careful consideration and personal attention.

At one point, the letter said: “If, when Mr. Eisler should call at the consulate at Havana, he definitely states that he does not hold views for which he could be excluded under our immigration laws, I do not believe that a visa could be withheld unless the consul has evidence which would disprove his statements.”

Robert Stripling, committee counsel, has asserted that at that time the State Department had information from a Labor Department report that Eisler was a Communist.

Stripling sought to develop that Messersmith knew of the reports Eisler was a Communist.

“Under his questioning, Messersmith said his attention first was called to the Eisler case by Dorothy Thompson, newspaper columnist, in a telephone conversation.

COLUMNIST INVOLVED

While he could not recall details of the conversation with the columnist, Messersmith said, “she apparently thought the Department of State could do many things for refugees that it could not do.”

Eisler sought admission, as a German refugee.

Messersmith said he wrote to Miss Thompson that the State Department files contained “considerable evidence that Eisler is a Communist.”

Eisler did not obtain a visa at Havana, but subsequently got one at Mexico City, Mexico, through the consul general there.

In response to questions, Messersmith said he was aware, at the time he wrote the letters to Miss Thompson and to Dubois of the existence in State Department files of a summary claiming Eisler was a Communist.

A copy of the Eisler summary was sent to Dubois, Messersmith said.

Thomas remarked to Messersmith that his letter to Miss Thompson and his later letter to Dubois showed “there was a big reversal of position on your part after Mrs. Roosevelt got in touch with Mr. Welles.”

The committee developed yesterday that Mrs. Roosevelt wrote Welles early in 1939 suggesting reopening of the Eisler case and saying a “perfectly honest” friend of the composer had told her that Eisler was not a Communist.

Rankin interrupted the questioning to comment that Mrs. Roosevelt wrote an article recently for the Lady’s Home Journal.

The Mississippi Congress member called the article “the most insulting Communist propaganda ever thrown in the face of the women of America.”

When Mrs. Roosevelt “interfered”