

Release of grand jury transcript points again to frameup of the Rosenbergs

By Fred Mazelis
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The release of grand jury testimony by the star witness in the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg more than 60 years ago points once more, and even more persuasively, to the frameup character of the prosecution that led to their executions in June 1953.

David Greenglass died last October at the age of 92, more than six decades after sending his sister to the electric chair. Greenglass, who worked as an Army machinist in Los Alamos, New Mexico, the headquarters for the so-called Manhattan Project to build the atom bomb, testified at the Rosenbergs' trial that he had been recruited by his brother-in-law to provide intelligence on the bomb, to be passed on to the Soviet Union.

Greenglass, who received a reduced sentence in exchange for his testimony and served some ten years in prison as a co-conspirator in the case, claimed that he had delivered information to the Rosenbergs at their New York apartment, and that his sister, Ethel, had typed up his handwritten material.

His grand jury testimony on August 7, 1950, however, sealed for almost 65 years and released only after an order from US District Judge Alvin Hellerstein in May of this year, contradicts the version of events given by Greenglass at the 1951 trial.

Twice during the grand jury testimony, Greenglass denied any involvement by his sister in the alleged conspiracy to commit espionage. When asked about the Rosenbergs' connections to the Communist Party and commendations Julius had allegedly received from Moscow, Greenglass told the grand jury, "My sister has never spoken to me about this subject."

Later he was asked about a conversation in which his brother-in-law urged him to remain in the army in order to pass on more information, and about whether his sister joined in this appeal. Again, and even more forcefully, Greenglass said, "I said before, and say it again, honestly, this is a fact: I never spoke to my sister about this at all."

Greenglass changed his version apparently days before the trial, some seven months after this testimony. Then he claimed that he had not only spoken to his sister "about this subject," but that he had sat in the same room as she actively participated in the supposed conspiracy.

The 46-page transcript of the Greenglass testimony confirms the revelations contained in a 2003 book by Sam Roberts, a veteran reporter for the *New York Times*, based on many hours of interviews with the star witness, in which he admitted that he lied at the trial in order to protect his wife, Ruth Greenglass.

"My wife is more important to me than my sister," said Greenglass, some 50 years after sending his older sister to her death. Ruth Greenglass was not charged in the case, although the latest information points more strongly than ever to her likely role.

The Greenglass transcript appears seven years after Judge Hellerstein released most of the grand jury proceedings, withholding those of still-living witnesses. Following the death of Greenglass last year, the independent National Security Archive at George Washington University, a group founded in 1985 to combat government secrecy, petitioned for the release of his testimony, and this was granted over the objections of his family.

Thomas S. Blanton, director of the Archive, who wrote a book on the Iran-Contra scandal of the 1980s, said the transcript "points to perjury on the stand by David Greenglass."

As pointed out by one of the Rosenbergs' surviving sons, Robert Meeropol, if Greenglass lied about Ethel's involvement, this also points to likely perjury on his part in connection with what was the linchpin of the case against the Rosenbergs: the claim of a meeting on September 25, 1945 at which the crucial transmittal of bomb information took place.

Meeropol, who has devoted his life to exposing the

truth about his parents' case, spoke in detail to *The Record*, a local newspaper in Greenfield, Massachusetts, near his home.

“David Greenglass lied when he said Ethel did it,” said Meeropol. “It’s kind of like a giant jigsaw puzzle we put together, and an important piece fell into place today.”

Referring to previously released testimony by Ruth Greenglass as well as other information, Meeropol added, “When you put all these things together, it becomes glaringly apparent that the Sept. 25 meeting never happened... What we’ve got here is the government of the United States executing two people for something they didn’t do.”

Attorney David Vladeck, who argued successfully for the release of the Greenglass transcript, told the *New York Times* that it “underscores the likelihood that the testimony used to convict Ethel Rosenberg was, as David Greenglass later admitted, cooked up right before trial. If that’s so, and it appears to be, that is a tragic commentary on the 1950s era Justice Department.”

The Rosenberg case was the most prominent and notorious expression of the anti-communist witch-hunting hysteria in the US that lasted for the better part of a decade in the years following the end of the Second World War. Public school teachers were fired, Hollywood screenwriters were sent to prison, the FBI hounded alleged subversives out of jobs and careers and in some cases to their deaths, left-wing and socialist militants were expelled from the unions, and Red Squads in the New York Police Department and elsewhere infiltrated left-wing organizations and spied on public meetings and demonstrations.

Ethel Rosenberg was executed because she refused to lend herself to the witch-hunt by pressuring her husband to confess. Such a confession would have been a Cold War coup for the US authorities as they searched for a scapegoat to account for the successful effort of the USSR to develop its own atomic bomb for defensive purposes against an increasingly aggressive American imperialism.

The Rosenberg case was directed against the American working class, especially those who fought for socialist and left-wing views. It attempted to make use of anti-Semitism by pitting “patriotic” Jews against the many American Jews who held socialist convictions.

Key roles were played by the presiding judge, Irving R. Kaufman, and the prosecution team headed by Irving Saypol and Roy Cohn. They will be remembered for their filthy role in the frame-up and, in discussing the death

sentences among themselves, for crude violations of judicial ethics.

The Greenglass transcript also exposes the reactionary agenda of those who claimed, especially after the opening of the Soviet archives following the dissolution of the USSR, that new information proved the guilt of the Rosenbergs.

The Rosenberg sons have answered this contention. They have acknowledged that Julius was involved in low-level intelligence-gathering for the Soviet Union when it was allied with the US government, but insist that their parents were falsely accused and sent to their deaths for political reasons, as the Cold War escalated.

Robert Meeropol issued the following statement this week:

“More than 60 years after my parents’ execution, it is long past time for the government to admit that Ethel Rosenberg was not a spy and that Julius was not an atomic spy. I call for the record to be set straight once and for all:

1. My father engaged in non-atomic military espionage for the Soviet Union. He did not pass the secret of the atomic bomb to anyone.

2. My mother did not conspire to commit espionage. The government knew this; colluded with the Greenglasses to convict her; and executed her anyway.”

The Rosenberg case continues to hold important lessons today. Imperialist war scares and preparations, the fraudulent use of the “war against terror” and the encouragement of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hysteria demonstrate that the conditions that led to the Rosenberg case are by no means a thing of the past.

The author also recommends:

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