

It's Red to Be Thrifty

A characteristic performance of the Dies Committee was the report by its "investigator" J. B. Matthews smearing numerous consumer agencies. No hearings were given to the accused. The report was presented to a subcommittee consisting of nobody but Chairman Dies himself, and was published without previous knowledge or consent on the part of the other members of the committee. Mr. Matthews had a personal grudge against some of those whom he attacked, for he was an executive of Consumers' Research during the strike against that organization which resulted in the formation of Consumers' Union. Mr. Matthews tried to break the strike by calling it a Communist plot, but the Labor Board upheld the strikers.

According to Mr. Matthews, Consumers' Union and other sympathetic agencies are Communist plots to discredit advertising and upset capitalism, which he says is based on advertising. Most of the persons whom he accuses of being Communists or fellow travelers deny it; but that is not the important point. The point is what Consumers' Union does. It inspects competitive products and tells its subscribers which are the "best buys," which are "also recommended," and which are "not recommended." There is no evidence that its advice is not impartial or competent. Many of the articles it recommends are widely advertised, and nearly all are the products of highly capitalistic enterprise. If this injures advertising, it injures only the kind that is mendacious ballyhoo. And we can imagine no activity more suitable to make capitalism work better; the very theory of capitalism traces much of its virtue to competition and intelligent choice by consumers.

Mr. Matthews' slander is miraculously timed to coincide with the drive of certain advertising agencies against the consumer movement, and with the defense of Hearst's Good Housekeeping Magazine against the Federal Trade Commission's charge that it is guilty of misrepresentation in its advertising pages.