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The Communist Spotter

Any unbiased follower of the activities of the Dies committee will admit that since it resumed its hearings last summer it has done a far better job of producing relevant testimony than in the year preceding. This improvement has been largely due to two men, to Rhos Whitley, its counsel, and to J. B. Matthews, its director of research. Previously it had had no counsel to guide its procedure. Mr. Whitley is a former F. B. I. agent and a lawyer who knows what are relevant facts, how they should be obtained and how they should be presented. He has the title of chief investigator as well as that of counsel. And Mr. Matthews was once a Communist "fellow traveler" who told the committee when he appeared before it as a witness a year ago: "From 1932 until 1935 I was probably more closely associated with the Communist party's 'united front' movements than any other individual in this country." His testimony—the most valuable which the committee had received up to that time—established his claim, and, inasmuch as he had broken completely from his Communist affiliation, the committee later took him over. He is Mr. Whitley's right bower.

It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the opposition to the committee and its investigation should now be directed against him personally. At the hearing accorded the former chairman, the present chairman and the executive secretary of the American Youth Congress, which Mrs. Roosevelt attended, these witnesses in a joint statement assailed Mr. Matthews as "a promoter, cast out of church, labor and consumer organizations." It is a characterization of him borrowed from "The Daily Worker" and "The New Masses." Two days later Mrs. Roosevelt in her column, "My Day," criticized his examination of these witnesses (who, incidentally, had been her luncheon guests at the White House), saying "his whole attitude, tone of voice and phraseology made me feel that a prisoner considered guilty was being tried at the bar." Is it hard to understand that Mr. Matthews might show some temper under the circumstances? In any case, some one whispered in his ear, according to Mrs. Roosevelt, and he changed his demeanor.

All of which is only important as showing that Mr. Matthews, for his superior knowledge of Communist tactics and his help to the committee in spreading them on the record, has become a particular target of the committee's enemies. By the same token he needs and is thoroughly entitled to the strong support of all those of us who believe in the inquiry and want to see it continued with the effectiveness to which he has so ably contributed.

The committee requires in its councils one who from long personal experience with Communist intrigue can follow and unearth its many devious ramifications, and it could find none better than this disillusioned and thoroughly sincere intellectual.

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