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From Fellow Traveler to Anticommunist: The Odyssey of J. B. Matthews

by Nelson L. Dawson

> Dr. J. B. Matthews, who has at once gained and lost so much from his past, was talking one afternoon about the autobiographies of ex-radicals. A visitor wondered aloud why so many ex-communists recount the events of their youth in terms repeating a common experience and then draw from it conclusions which seem so contradictory. "Who," asked J. B. Matthews, "can explain his own past?" [1]

In our secular age, conversion often has political rather than spiritual significance. Debates over blueprints for the secular city have largely superseded concern over citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. The secularization of religion has been balanced by the sacralization of politics. Moscow became a mecca for disillusioned Western intellectuals, particularly in the 1930s. The expansion of communist influence in the West has produced a great polemical literature, including testaments of disillusionment.[2]

Disillusioned communists have reacted to their pasts in various ways. Some have sought an unobtrusive reentry into the social mainstream, while others have explained their change of mind in irenic terms. Still others, however, have sought not only to explain their pasts but also to warn others of the danger of communism.[3] Among those in this category is a native Kentuckian

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Dr. Dawson serves as editor of *The Filson Club History Quarterly*. Among his publications is *Louis D. Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, and the New Deal* (1980).

The author wishes to thank Ruth Inglis Matthews for her assistance in locating the photographs which accompany this article.

[1]Murray Kempton, *Part of Our Time: Some Ruins and Monuments of the Thirties* (New York, 1955), 301.

[2]There is a growing literature analyzing the susceptibility of Western intellectuals to communism. See, for example, David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (New York, 1973), and Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba* (New York, 1982).

Sidney Hook calls the literature of disillusionment with communism "a distinct genre of writing in contemporary letters." See Sidney Hook, "Communism and the Intellectuals," *American Mercury* (February 1949), 133. The best-known anthology is Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York, 1949).

[3]Undoubtedly, the best-known example is Whittaker Chambers. Arthur Koestler

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whose dramatically varied ideological loyalties testify to the political tensions of the twentieth century.

Joseph Brown Matthews was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, on 28 June 1894. He was the third of the seven children of Burrel Jones Matthews and Fanny Wellborn (Brown) Matthews. Both parents were Republicans and Methodists.[4] The young Matthews eagerly explored the physical and social aspects of his western Kentucky environment. He recalled "tramping as a boy over the mountains of western Kentucky encountering a 'blind tiger' or a patch of delicious blue huckleberries." After Burrel Matthews acquired several quarries in Powell County, some of Matthews's boyhood summers were spent in eastern Kentucky, exploring the region around Natural Bridge, where there were few roads and "blind tigers and old-fashioned mountain feuds flourished at the turn of the century."[5]

Matthews became increasingly aware of his social as well as his physical environment. In the summer of 1900, for example, a quarrel between two black Powell County laborers led to a grisly knifing. The murderer was acquitted, largely because of indifference. Matthews "sensed vaguely the existence of an unwritten code to which this special kind of murder was not a very grave concern." The young Matthews witnessed another type of violence when he saw two feudists blast away at each other at arm's length one Sunday at Natural Bridge: "Every bullet took effect, but both men survived."[6]

Against this somber background of folly and violence, religion became significant to the Matthews family. Burrel Matthews organized a Sunday school and tolerated no levity regarding religious matters. The various disharmonies of young Matthews's environment had their solution in the acceptance of the old-time religion: "Everything dark was as simple as sin, and men needed

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is supposed to have told Chambers, after reading his searing account *Witness* (New York, 1952), "You have not returned from hell empty-handed."

[4]*Current Biography 1943* (New York, 1943), 513. In his autobiography Matthews recalls that his father had been a Hopkinsville sewing machine salesman who later became a businessman and police chief. See *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler* (New York, 1938), 34, 40-41 (hereafter *Odyssey*), and Hopkinsville *New Era*, 17 July 1953.

[5]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 21, 41. The juxtaposition afforded a contrast between the beauty of nature and the often-sordid highland saloons.

[6]*Ibid.*, 43-45.

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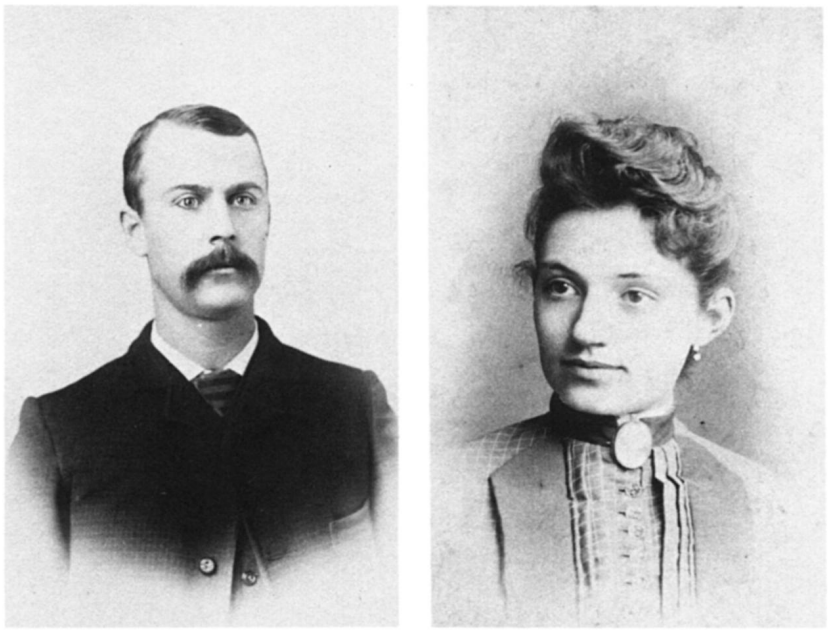

J.B. Matthews received thorough training in religion from his parents, Burrel Jones and Fannie Wellborn (Brown) Matthews.

only to repent and be saved in order to set everything right.''[7]

Indeed, there is no evidence that Matthews's early years were troubled with awkward questionings. He seems to have been comfortably integrated into his environment. Undoubtedly, some broadening of horizons occurred after the family moved to Lexington around 1905.[8] His father engaged in railroad contracting as well as in real estate and insurance; he also became proprietor of the Lexington Taxicab Company. Back in eastern Kentucky by 1912 he represented Estill and Powell counties in the legislature. This rise in worldly station probably strengthened the conventional lifestyle of Matthews's parents. His father, for example, was prominent in fraternal circles, climbing to particular heights in the Knights of Pythias of Kentucky.[9]

[7]*Ibid.*, 44, 46. Matthews recalled receiving the ''severest thrashing'' of his boyhood for laughing when a circuit rider ''appeared one hot summer day in white flannels.''

[8]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 14 April 1984.

[9]The elder Matthews's obituary appears in the Lexington *Leader*, 28 October 1915. See also the various references in Kentucky *House Journal* (1912) and Lexington *Leader*, 28 October 1915.

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Between 1910 and 1915, Matthews attended Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, and there received his A.B. degree. He majored in Greek and Latin, demonstrating a gift for languages that was to characterize his academic career. Matthews became a dynamic student leader; he participated in literary and debating societies, played basketball, and wrote school songs. The college yearbook described him as "one of old Kentucky's brilliant sons. An orator after the type of Henry Clay." His parents both died while Matthews was in college.[10] Up to this time Matthews had not given any evidence of incipient radicalism.[11] It is hardly surprising that during his Asbury days Matthews embraced his "first panacea," which was essentially an outgrowth of his upbringing — the call for the evangelization of the world in one generation.[12]

After graduation Matthews went as a missionary to Java to teach in a school for indigenous Chinese nationals. Although he later had little to say in his autobiography of his missionary career, he did recall pursuing his linguistic interests. This six-year period constituted a transition between the "naive panacea rooted in the Kentucky mountains" and other naive but more revolutionary panaceas "rooted in the universal political and social turmoil of my time."[13] For good or ill, he was "outgrowing" his Kentucky heritage.

In Singapore in 1917, Matthews married Grace Ison, the daughter of a Methodist minister, whom he had known in Lexington even before they became college sweethearts in Asbury. They had four children, three born overseas.[14]

[10]*Current Biography*, 513; Matthews, *Odyssey*, 45-46; *Asburian* (1915), 43 (quotation). Burrel J. Matthews died in October 1915, his wife in May 1914. Records of the Lexington (Ky.) Cemetery Company.

[11]His school songs expressed fervent conventionality. One stanza reads: "To Thee [Asbury College] whose light doth shine afar/ O'er waters deep, on alien strand/ Who, like unto Judea's star/ Doth lead to Christ from ev'ry land/ We pledge our loyalty." *Asburian* (1915), 25.

[12]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 46.

[13]He translated Methodist hymns into Malay and proudly remembered pausing one night "to listen to the singing of one of my translations, Cardinal Newman's 'Lead Kindly Light.'" Matthews, *Odyssey*, 54-55.

[14]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 14 April 1984. Matthews's first two marriages, to Grace Ison and to Dr. Ruth E. Shallcross, ended in divorce. In April 1949, he married Dr. Ruth Inglis. See *Current Biography*, 516; Ruth I. Matthews to author, 14 April and 20 November 1984. In 1983, Mrs. Matthews (Ruth Inglis Matthews) gave the Duke Univer-

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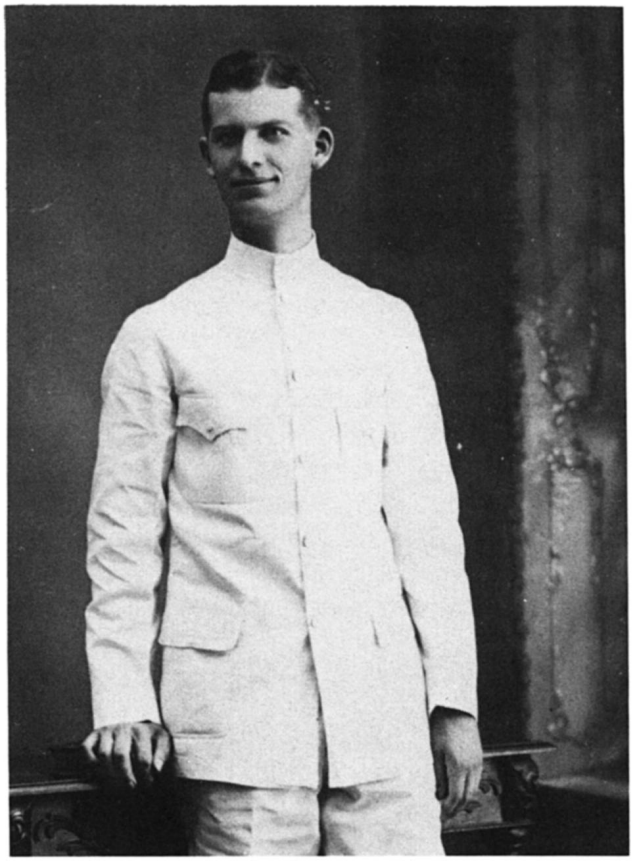

Following his graduation from Asbury in 1915, Matthews spent six years as a missionary to Java.

When Matthews returned from Java in 1921, he went back to school and began a remarkable period of academic achievement. He received a B.D. from Drew University in 1923, a S.T.M. (magna cum laude) from the Union Theological Seminary in 1924, and, that same year, an A.M. from Columbia University, where he studied Oriental literature.[15]

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sity library voluminous papers concerning political activism in the period from 1920 to 1960. She is preparing to write an analytical biography of Matthews.

[15]Joan N. Rimbault, Drew University, to author, 12 July 1984; Mildred Weisbart, Union Theological Seminary, to author, 18 July 1984; Ruby Hemphill, Columbia University, to author, 13 July 1984. Though he is sometimes referred to as "Dr. Matthews" (as in the introductory quotation), he apparently did not have an earned doctorate. Mrs.

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In graduate school Matthews encountered the various forms of progressive thought then current among the liberal thinkers of academia. He was particularly attracted to the Social Gospel movement with its theological progressivism, an effort to apply the teachings of Jesus directly to current social problems. The Social Gospel movement, in turn, constituted a transition for Matthews to secular political radicalism. Some of the movement's leaders were "militantly anticapitalist."[16]

Matthews began teaching in 1924 at Scarritt College, a Methodist school in Nashville, Tennessee, where he soon succeeded in raising numerous eyebrows. He supported Robert LaFollette's Progressive crusade that year, consorted with Unitarians, delivered political speeches on Sunday, advocated pacifism, and, as if all this were not enough, "took an advanced position on the question of race relations in the South." In 1927, aware that his behavior had turned the administration of the college against him, Matthews resigned rather than wait to be fired.[17] His abortive career in neighboring Tennessee demonstrates that his alienation from the mores of Kentucky was complete.

While looking for another job, Matthews continued to be active in progressive, mainly pacifist, causes. In summer 1929, he received two job offers on the same day. He was invited to become an executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, "the largest pacifist organization in the United States." Several hours after he accepted, he was offered a teaching position in an eastern school. Matthews later speculated about how differently his career might have developed had the sequence of offers been reversed.[18]

It is sometimes difficult to determine precisely what Matthews believed and, indeed, when he believed it. His remark about the significance of the sequence of job offers indicates that in 1929 his political convictions were still in transition. It seems that external circumstances played a part in the development of

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Matthews is now researching the status of his postgraduate work in the School of Oriental Languages at the University of Vienna.

[16]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 56-57; George E. Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912* (New York, 1962), 29 (quotation).

[17]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 56-57, 64-65.

[18]*Ibid.*, 66-69.

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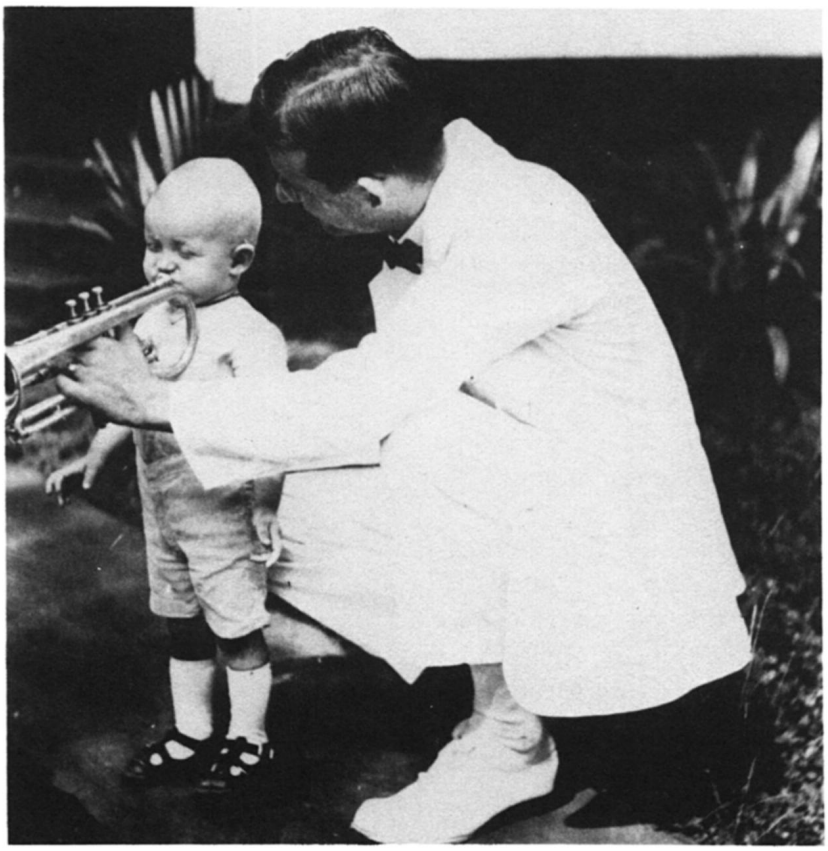

Matthews with his son Joe, Jr., in Java, ca. 1920.

his ideas, yet his personality appears to have been of the type that seeks wholeness by radicalism in whatever course is selected. He was not content with compromise or half measures.

So Matthews worked diligently for the Fellowship of Reconciliation for more than four years. He joined the Socialist party in November 1929 and, predictably, threw himself into a hectic schedule of travel and lecturing. Eventually, however, his socialist and pacifist convictions collided over the issue of class warfare. Matthews's advocacy of violent socialist revolution cost him his job with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the fall of 1933.[19]

[19]*Ibid.*, 69, 72, 78. In 1929, Matthews wrote a pamphlet entitled *Youth Looks at Peace: A Story of the First World Youth Peace Congress* (New York, 1929). The essay discusses the World Youth Congress which was held in Holland in August 1928. It is an amateurish work burdened with great naivete and many exclamation marks.

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A *New Republic* editorial supported Matthews's position by stating that "the lessons of Italy and Germany, to name only two, show that if radicals won't fight, conservatives will — and will win."[20]

Still, it is clear that he was moving steadily in a more radical direction. Beginning in 1928, Matthews became a sympathetic pilgrim to the Soviet Union. In five trips he showed the credulity so gratifying to Soviet authorities. "On the whole," he recalled, "I did what all visitors to the Soviet Union do — I went where I was taken and believed what I was told, which included the entire set-up in the Soviet Union." On his last trip in the summer of 1932, however, he traveled to the famine-stricken Ukraine, where he saw "such appalling sights of poverty as would move the coldest heart."[21]

Nevertheless, the processes of rationalization soon convinced him that, despite the evidence of his own eyes, there could be no famine in "the fatherland of the working class," and he later denied the existence of a Ukrainian famine.[22] In an article for a socialist magazine Matthews alluded cautiously to "food shortages in the Ukraine" caused by bad weather and administrative error. He went on, however, to laud "fifteen years of progress in Russia" and "the extreme sensitiveness of the authorities to conditions throughout the Union."[23]

By 1930, Matthews had become a dedicated revolutionary socialist who was willing to use violence to destroy the capitalist system. He was, furthermore, an "ecumenical" radical who had

[20]*New Republic* (27 December 1933), 180. Germany and Italy were controlled by those well-known "conservatives" Hitler and Mussolini. The use of smear tactics is not confined to the right wing.

[21]*Hearings Before a Special Committee of Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Fifth Congress, Third Session on H. Res. 282* (12 vols., Washington, D.C., 1938), 1: 870 (hereafter *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*); Matthews, *Odyssey*, 91-92.

[22]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 93.

[23]Matthews, "Ukraine Wheat and White Coal," *World Tomorrow* (19 October 1932), 376. The Ukraine famine is one of the great, largely unreported, atrocities of the twentieth century. See Marco Carynnyk, "The Famine the Times Couldn't Find," *Commentary* (November 1983), 32-40. In an equally naive article, Matthews cited the resettlement of Toystoyan pacifists (at Kuznetsk in Siberia 2,200 miles east of Moscow!) as proof that Soviet authorities had adopted "a genuinely magnanimous attitude toward the community and its principles. . . ." See Matthews, "Toystoyans Migrate to Kuznetsk," *World Tomorrow* (16 November 1932), 468.

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no enemies, including communists, on the Left. Indeed, Matthews anticipated the popular front movement at a time when the communists were still denouncing socialists as "social fascists" and socialists felt deep enmity for communists.[24] Matthews was never officially a communist, although for a time he was "probably more closely associated with the communist party's united front than any other individual in this country."[25] Matthews had a flair for the dramatic, and if he had ever been a communist he would undoubtedly have announced the fact boldly. Still, he was willing to cooperate with them against the common capitalist foe.

The problem was that in 1930 neither communists nor socialists were ready for the popular front cooperation which came only after the rise of Hitler. Matthews's pro-Soviet stance caused him difficulties with the socialists. In 1931, he made a speech at a Fellowship of Reconciliation conference in which he failed to mention that thousands of socialists were in Soviet prisons. He was ordered to make this assertion in future speeches about communism. In 1933, he was reprimanded after he gave a speech in Madison Square Garden under communist auspices. The final crisis came when Matthews became chairman of the United States Congress Against War, a communist front organization which was also supported by Norman Thomas's League for Industrial Democracy. Matthews was charged with various pro-Soviet activities and suspended from the Socialist party for a year.[26]

Matthews's suspension, however, did not cause him to reduce his radical activities. While his revolutionary ardor seems to have peaked in 1934, he continued to write for such radical publications as *The New Leader, World Tomorrow, Revolt, Labor Action, Fight, New Masses*, and *Soviet Union Today*. In fact, there were few significant leftist causes or organizations with which he was

[24]For an analysis of the evolution of the Party line from the harsh stance of the Sixth World Congress (1928) to the Popular Front blandishments of the Seventh World Congress (1935), see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984), 11-17, 169-70.

[25]*Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1:869.

[26]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 84; *Current Biography*, 514. Soviet mistreatment of socialists and anarchists concerned many of the Left. In 1934, Matthews wrote pamphlets which were published by the League. One tract, *Traffic in Death — A Few Facts on the International Munitions Industry*, denounced the arms industry. In another, *Fascism*, Matthews denounced American militarism and argued that the New Deal was preparing for fascism by perpetuating the economic frustrations.

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not involved. The heart of his autobiography and the basis of his testimony before the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities was his knowledge of such organizations.

Matthews's range of information may have been, in part, superficial, but his wide affiliations had a definite purpose. He was convinced that

> the triumph of Marxism depended in large measure upon the achievement of genuine unity among the Marxists. This may have been a stupid notion possible only to one of immense political ignorance, but it was hardly sinister from the standpoint of the movement. I had friends and set about to make more among all leftist groups — Socialists, Stalinists, Lovestonites, Musteites, Trotskyists, and even the I.W.W. and the Socialist Labor Party.

Matthews was seeking to alter the climate of opinion in America. He was not involved with revolutionary conspiracy or espionage and had no direct contact with those who were. His mission, rather, was to put "the leaven of revolution into American public opinion."[27]

Matthews's full-throttled involvement in leftist causes — he did nothing by halves all his life — could not, however, prevent mounting disillusionment. His trips to Russia had thrust upon him unwelcome evidence of communist oppression. To this was added, beginning in 1933, evidence of communist callousness and divisiveness. For all his education and experience Matthews remained very much a naive idealist; to him, communists were genuinely concerned about human welfare. A series of painful experiences eventually caused him to think otherwise.

In summer 1933, Matthews had been invited to join the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, which he knew to be a communist front, to investigate labor conditions in the fur industry. Hoping for an impartial investigation, he was disillusioned to discover that the communists seemed interested only in seizing power in the Furrier's Union. Matthews did not sign the rubber-stamped report because, as he wrote later, he had "no intention of becoming a factional tool of the communist party." The report, nevertheless, appeared with his name on it, and his attempt to disclaim it was ignored in the radical press.[28]

[27]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 199, 95, 97.
[28]*Ibid.*, 186-87.

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An even greater disillusionment occurred in early 1934. Matthews had become the first chairman of the American League Against War and Fascism, a front organization. In February 1934, the socialists organized a rally in Madison Square Garden on behalf of their Austrian comrades, oppressed, they said, by Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. The League took part. The communists, however, created a disturbance which made speeches impossible and broke up the meeting.[29]

Communist party leader Earl Browder disingenuously told Matthews that communist hatred for several of the sponsors of the rally was so great that he could not control all of the party members. Matthews resigned from the League in protest, even though he did not abandon his belief "in the need for a genuine united front of all Marxist and near-Marxist groups."[30] Nevertheless, the incident was troubling, and it undoubtedly contributed to Matthews's ultimate disillusionment. Benjamin Gitlow, a former communist and later anticommunist activist, recalled that, in 1934, Matthews characterized communist tactics as divisive. The Madison Square Garden incident disillusioned other radicals as well, including John Dos Passos and John Chamberlain.[31]

The years from 1935 to 1937 were transitional in Matthews's evolution from united front Marxist to anticommunist activist. The transitional loyalty was the consumers' movement. In 1934, Matthews became a vice-president of Consumers' Research, a public service organization which sought to help the hard-pressed consumer during the depression years.[32]

The early New Deal years saw the emergence of a "new economic panacea — consumerism." Consumers' Research had been established by F. J. Schlink, a physicist and mechanical engineer. Schlink had worked for the Bureau of Standards and had writ-

[29]*Ibid.*, 176. Matthews is described at this time by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., as "a garrulous and unstable figure." See his *The Politics of Upheaval, 1935-36* (Boston, 1960), 199. He does not share with his readers the basis for this unflattering description.

[30]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 176, 180, 182; *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1:910.

[31]Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth about American Communism* (New York, 1940), 578-79. See also John P. Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York, 1975), 85, and David Martin, "John Chamberlain: Odyssey of an Honest Man," *Human Events* (24 July 1985), 5.

[32]*Current Biography*, 515; Ruth I. Matthews, "Activist Ideological Change: From Radical Socialism to Conservatism and the Struggle for American Public Opinion" (unpublished memorandum, 1984), 3.

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ten *Your Money's Worth* with Stuart Chase in 1927.[33] Murray Kempton described Consumers' Research as "an agency both to emancipate the consumer from the hypnosis of the advertiser and to advise him of the relative value of various products contesting for his dollar."[34]

In 1935, Matthews and Ruth E. Shallcross wrote *Partners in Plunder: The Cost of Business Dictatorship*, which was published under the auspices of Consumers' Research. Matthews believed that business and government were joined as partners in the plunder of the American public. The New Deal, he asserted, was blatantly probusiness. America was, therefore, threatened by fascism because fascism is a menace to societies with faltering economies.[35]

Having stated this shaky general thesis, the authors went on to denounce nearly every aspect of the American business culture. Advertising was dismissed as a sinister manifestation of "germinal fascism," and they denounced a variety of profit-making gadgets with ascetic disdain. Businessmen were considered to be protofascists, while even the American Federation of Labor was depicted as little better than reactionary. In the light of his later stance, Matthews's criticism of the church as the reactionary, probusiness bulwark of a corrupt capitalism was particularly ironic.[36] Despite a questionable thesis and considerable exaggeration, the book was, on the whole, well written and in some places persuasive; only the most naive would presume to defend every aspect of the American business system.[37]

[33]Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston, 1958), 129, 355.

[34]Kempton, *Part of Our Time*, 163.

[35]J. B. Matthews and Ruth E. Shallcross, *Partners in Plunder: The Cost of Business Dictatorship* (New York, 1935).

[36]Matthews and Shallcross, *Partners*, 57, 70-88, 211, 304, 335-82. A year earlier Matthews and Shallcross had linked the New Deal at least indirectly with fascism by arguing that while Roosevelt's administration was not actually fascist "the spirit of economic orthodoxy which animates it is just the sort of economic fundamentalism which is the mainstay of fascism." See Matthews and Shallcross, "Must America Go Fascist?" *Harper's Magazine* (January 1934), 6.

[37]*Partners* received considerable attention, mostly negative, in some of the major journals of opinion, such as the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Christian Century*, and the *New Republic*. The critical consensus was that the book was overwrought muckracking. The irascible Hugh Johnson, former National Recovery Administration director, attacked the book as irresponsible exaggeration exposing only the minor faults of an essentially healthy system and offering only one solution — "call in the Soviets." See *Saturday*

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In summer and fall 1935, Consumers' Research was threatened by a strike which, ironically, pitted Matthews against some aggrieved employees and which may well have decisively altered the course of his career. The pretext for the strike action was the dismissal of three temporary employees. The union demanded their reinstatement, and the case ultimately went to the newly created National Labor Relations Board. Matthews, a member of the Consumers' Research board of directors, interpreted the strike as an effort by the communist-fellow-traveler faction, headed by Arthur Kallet and Susan Jenkins, to exploit consumer issues on behalf of Soviet interests; it was, for him, a "so-called" strike.[38]

The strike undoubtedly presented Matthews with a painful dilemma which compelled him to choose between Schlink and the strikers in the united front. Matthews had earlier been able to mediate between Schlink, a consumer activist, and the strikers, some of whom were "intimate communist fellow travelers."[39] Matthews now sided with Schlink, though probably not without some misgivings. As a result, he found himself in the uncomfortable position of being denounced by his former friends, who conducted a kind of public show "trial" to convict him of betraying the cause of revolution. Matthews became the target of a "general boycott . . . which shut him off from almost all the platforms he had adorned so tirelessly so long."[40] The harshest view of Matthews's actions is that he ruthlessly turned against hard-pressed workers who were seeking only a modest salary increase and the right to join the American Federation of Labor.[41] A self-proclaimed former friend asserted that Matthews refused reasonable negotiations and that after the dissidents formed the rival Consumers' Union, he was left "an embittered man with a completely reversed outlook."[42]

Review of Literature (9 February 1935), 469-71. Johnson was even quoted as suggesting that the book might be banned from the mails. New York *Times*, 7 February 1935.

[38]*Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 3: 2191; Matthews, *Odyssey*, 101, 260-61, 265-66. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., described the strike as "a Communist attempt to organize the operation." See *Coming of the New Deal*, 359.

[39]Kempton, *Part of Our Time*, 166.

[40]*Ibid.*, 61, 166.

[41]George Seldes, *Witch Hunt: The Techniques and Profit of Red-Baiting* (New York, 1941), 133-35.

[42]Paul Hutchinson, "The J. B. Matthews Story," *Christian Century* (29 July 1953),

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The Consumers' Research strike is best seen as the final stage in a series of disillusionments. It was not until "many months later" that Matthews finally concluded that "collectivism — whether of the right or the left — would, if it continued its march, usher in a new dark age for mankind."[43] Matthews recalled later that the process of detachment "extended over a period of something like 2 years." During this time he experienced "an ethical revulsion against the Communist movement."[44]

Matthews asserted that his abandonment of radicalism hurt him economically. Although he did remain with Consumers' Research until June 1938 and was able to supplement his income by writing and lecturing, he observed that "the opportunities for lecturing are greatly diminished when one ceases to be a radical in this country."[45] This seems exaggerated; there was a conservative as well as a radical lecture circuit, as Matthews eventually discovered. In fact, he probably profited, at least in the long run, by his break with radicalism, since he certainly had not prospered as a fellow traveler.[46]

Matthews's writings soon reflected his changing perspective. He continued as a consumer advocate after the Consumers' Research strike, but his philosophy evolved. In his 1936 book *Guinea Pigs No More*, he shifted ground. While he continued to criticize many aspects of the American business system, particularly mass advertising, he also attacked the Communist party and the Soviet economy. In a central passage Matthews denounced the idea that economic justice can be achieved through a change of property ownership as "the supreme illusion" of all contemporary workers' movements. He attempted to demonstrate that goods manufactured in the Soviet Union were as defective

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[43]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 183.

[44]*Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 3: 2165. This obvious explanation is seldom accepted by some who seek to analyze the behavior of ex-communists.

[45]*Ibid.*, 3:2196.

[46]Thomas C. Reeves in his generally judicious biography of Joseph McCarthy described Matthews as a "highly paid anti-communist 'expert' for the Hearst organization." Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1982), 248. The fallacy lies in the assumption that results prove motivation. Heywood Broun gave classic expression to the greed theory in Matthews's case in his editorial "Shoot the Works," *New Republic* (25 January 1939), 339-40.

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as those made in the United States.[47]

After a long chapter indicting the business system, Matthews turned to possible solutions; they are, however, a banal series of suggestions for consumer action crowned by a proposal to establish a cabinet-level Department of the Consumer.[48] He argued that "private competitive enterprise, with all its faults, appears to be the best available servant of consumer interests."[49] Having given up on revolution, Matthews fell back on piecemeal reforms.[50]

Guinea Pigs No More did not attract nearly as much attention as *Partners in Plunder*. The most important review, printed in the *Nation*, was unfavorable. The reviewer asserted that the book had "little to offer of sound social theory" because it did not deal with the basic issue of "the production and distribution of wealth." Matthews was described, probably for the first but certainly not for the last time, as "a rabid anti-communist."[51] *Guinea Pigs No More* provides an interesting contrast with *Partners in Plunder*. It focuses on specific abuses rather than on structural flaws and so moves away from the total rejection of capitalism.

By 1938, Matthews had clearly broken with his radical past. In December his autobiography, *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler*, was published. It is a strange book in many ways — rambling, disorganized, unindexed, and poorly documented. Yet, given the fact that Matthews was a published author and a figure of some

[47]Matthews, *Guinea Pigs No More* (New York, 1936), 36, 47-54. By way of signaling his changing convictions, Matthews described the Soviet regime as "a great historical accident" and denounced the American Communist party for its "servile obedience to the dictates of Moscow" (pp. 33-34).

[48]*Ibid.*, 226-46, 263-64.

[49]J. B. Matthews, "The Cooperative — An Experiment in Civilization," *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1936), 714-15. He also denied the desirability of consumer cooperatives, dismissing them as a spurious panacea "for everything from political flat feet to diplomatic dandruff." Matthews, "Consumer Cooperatives? No," *Rotarian* (May 1937), 59-60.

[50]It was fashionable in the 1930s to disparage "mere" reform as inadequate for the crisis of the depression. For a classic exposition of this view, see John Chamberlain, *Farewell to Reform: The Rise, Life, and Decay of the Progressive Mind in America*, 2d ed. (Gloucester, Mass., 1958; orig. pub. 1932). Chamberlain, like Matthews, moved from radicalism to conservatism. He now writes regularly for William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *National Review*.

[51]Ruth Brindze, "More Books for Guinea Pigs," *Nation* (18 March 1936), 356-57.

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prominence, it is peculiar that the book, defective as it is, attracted so little attention. There are, for example, no references to it in the *Book Review Digest*.

Matthews received much more national attention as a result of his testimony before the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities.[52] George Sokolsky, an anticommunist activist, had brought Matthews to the attention of committee chairman Martin Dies.[53] It has been difficult for commentators to maintain evenhandedness in the evaluation of either the committee or of Matthews. Matthews was denounced as a "political psychopath," an "industrious fanatic" who became embittered after being "compromised and abandoned by the communists": "Matthews has come a long way. The former fighter for Negro rights is a henchman of poll-tax congressmen; the former professor of Hebrew is a friend of anti-Semites; the former pacifist, Socialist, and communist works with fascists."[54]

This diatribe, however, is not justified by an examination of Matthews's testimony before the committee. His remarks focused on his own career and on the united front, subjects about which he could reasonably claim considerable knowledge. He said almost nothing about espionage, mentioning in passing only the name of one State Department employee who was alleged to have been a communist without asserting that he was a spy. Matthews emphasized influence, not espionage. He was concerned about the effort of the communist fronts to influence American public opinion and actually seemed cautious about accusing people of being communists, although he did so on occasion.[55] Although

[52]The House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities was established by Congress to study fascist, communist, and Japanese subversion in May 1938. It was popularly known as the Dies Committee after its chairman, Martin Dies, a conservative Democratic congressman from Texas.

[53]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 13 November 1984.

[54]Richard H. Rovere, "J. B. Matthews — The Informer," *Nation* (3 October 1941), 314-15. George Seldes described Matthews as "the chief tattletale of the Dies redbaiting committee." George Seldes, *Witch Hunt*, 208. Eric Bentley even asserts that Matthews, "one of the most influential anti-communists of the whole epoch," had much to do "with the very creation of HUAC in 1938, being Martin Dies' most fertile source of 'information.' " Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1945* (New York, 1971), 727.

[55]*Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 3: 2172; 1: 871. In his testimony (*ibid.*, 1: 868-927; 3: 2163-2206; 4: 3020-24), Matthews called forty-six people communists. A check of each name in Klehr's *Heyday of American Communism* reveals that Klehr does not

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people, like himself, who belonged to many such organizations were justifiably suspect: "Any person in this class is almost certain to bob up at a number of places in the whole maneuver — as I have told you. I bobbed up in 20 places myself, and no intelligent American could possibly be excused from knowing that I was functioning as a united front leader for the communist party."[56]

It is certainly possible to criticize Matthews's testimony, and that of other ex-radicals as well, for being vague, imprecise, and inferential. Yet it is important to realize that communist tactics helped create a murky atmosphere. The rise of the fronts

> represents, among other things, the culmination of the use of deception as a weapon. The Popular Front Communist is almost impossible to identify unless identified by a "renegade". . . . For numbers of these smooth professionally competent hard-working deceptive partisans of the Popular Front, the future began when they entered the employment of the Federal government in the thirties. The discovery of their pasts in the late forties was to create a controversy of historical bitterness.[57]

At times Matthews certainly indulged in glib generalization and fuzzy exposition. In discussing Roosevelt's policies, for example, Matthews was asked by Dies Committee member J. Parnell Thomas whether the New Deal had "in any way" been "planned or recommended" by the communists. Matthews replied:

> Congressman, I would not say that. But it is clear, I think, from the examination of Communist literature at the moment that the immediate interests of certain administrative measures and the Communists coincide. . . . The Communist tech-

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mention sixteen of the the people named. Of the remaining thirty, however, Klehr characterizes twenty-six as communists and asserts that the remaining four were active in radical circles. Matthews is reliable on this very significant issue.

[56]*Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1: 874, 883, 917. Theodore Draper maintained that in the 1920s communist influence in fronts was fairly obvious. In the 1930s, however, the communists "maintained their control in a much more surreptitious manner." See Draper, *American Communism and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1960), 185. Earl Latham observed that the era of greatest deception began in 1935: "The two faces of American Communism . . . are the traditional masks of the theater — the saturnine realism of the programs for the inner party and the strength-through-smiling-joy themes of the mass organization manipulated by party members." See Latham, *Communist Controversy in Washington from the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, 1966), 62.

[57]Latham, *Communist Controversy*, 96-97.

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nique involves cooperation with almost any group with which at the moment its interests coincide.[58]

This equivocal answer avoids specific charges while conjuring an aura of suspicion. It is an example of perhaps the weakest aspect of Matthews's anticommunist stance — that of what might be called the fallacy of false convergence. It is wrong to assume that communist support of any individual or group proves complicity in communist purposes. The communists, for example, decided for their own purposes to embrace Roosevelt and the New Deal after 1935. But this was a tactical decision, based on party self-interest, and it was easily reversible. Roosevelt himself did not encourage communist support.[59] Unfortunately, Matthews fell into this fallacy on other occasions also. He asserted that the sit-down strike was "unquestionably" a communist technique and that the party supported many of the reforms also advocated by liberal clergymen.[60]

Matthews's testimony was neither as reliable as his supporters claimed nor as false as his opponents charged.[61] His statements attracted much attention both to himself and to the committee; the New York *Times*, for example, featured regular reports on his appearances during August and November 1938. Matthews's testimony impressed Dies, for the witness was an insider — articulate, educated, and knowledgeable. "Chairman Martin Dies had the reaction of stout Cortez upon the peak at the endless vista which Matthews spread before him," Murray Kempton observed. "He hired this new Prophet as soon as he was able and anointed him with the nickname 'Doc', an honorary degree reflecting the semiliterate's awe of the scholar."[62]

As a result, Matthews made a quick transition from star

[58] *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1: 890.

[59] Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 201-6.

[60] *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1: 896-98.

[61] Some of the criticism was obviously biased. Matthews was widely ridiculed for having called Shirley Temple a communist. He had stated only that she had unwittingly helped the communist cause by sending greetings to a French communist newspaper. See *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 1: 918-19. Thomas Reeves argues that Matthews "cast doubt upon the patriotism of scores of people, including child movie star Shirley Temple." See Reeves, *McCarthy*, 208. The record clearly shows that Matthews was questioning political judgment, not patriotism.

[62] Kempton, *Part of Our Time*, 172.

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witness to director of research for the committee, a position he held from late 1938 until 1945. During this time he curtailed outside speeches and writing, although he did some ghostwriting for various congressmen.[63] He was "a workaholic for anti-communism" by building up the Dies Committee's files and by publishing its appendixes, including the famous Appendix IX, "which reproduced letterheads and other documents of specific Communist fronts including an index of the names of persons affiliated with them."[64]

This portion of Matthews's career is inevitably connected with the Dies Committee. It is difficult to evaluate Matthews's role in these years without evaluating the committee as a whole, a task beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, it seems possible to make some generalizations.

In the light of Matthews's reputation as an obsessive anti-communist zealot, it is instructive to recall that the Dies Committee did not confine itself to communist activities in these years but investigated fascist and pro-Japanese organizations as well. Indeed, the phrase "Un-American Activities" was itself "a concession to the Left," an attempt to counter the suspicion that a conservative Congress would focus on communism while ignoring other hostile groups.[65] From 1938 to 1945, in fact, the committee devoted considerable attention to Nazi and pro-Japanese groups. Matthews occasionally questioned people suspected of such activities although his primary interest was clearly communism and the front organizations.[66]

Any evaluation of Matthews's performance as director of research for the Dies Committee must begin with a study of the

[63]Ruth I. Matthews, Unpublished Memorandum, 1984, 3. Among his ghostwriting projects was Martin Dies's *The Trojan Horse in America* (New York, 1940). Ruth I. Matthews to author, 13 November 1984.

[64]Matthews, Unpublished Memorandum, 1984, 3. David Caute observed that Appendix IX "became virtually a bible for intelligence officers in the witch-hunt era. It was of course a mine of misinformation and mis-insinuation." See Caute, *Fellow Travellers*, 325. He provides no evidence to support this assertion.

[65]William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Committee and Its Critics: A Calm Review of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York, 1962), 25.

[66]The committee questioned 145 people in connection with Nazi activities, 402 in connection with communist activities, and 46 in connection with pro-Japanese activities. Matthews participated in the questioning of 25 (17.2 percent) in the first category, 94 (23.4 percent) in the second category, and 9 (20 percent) in the third category. The committee focus was on communism.

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committee hearings. In general it seems fair to say that the tone of Matthews's questioning was mild, even in the face of severe provocation. Earl Browder, general secretary of the American Communist party, was questioned on 5-6 September 1938. Among other things, Browder denied the existence of any relationship, direct or indirect, between the Communist International and the Soviet government. He denied that the party conducted either propaganda or espionage and depicted it as a peaceful and democratic organization. Matthews remained unruffled; his tactic was to quote communist literature against Browder, who was forced to seek refuge in a series of monumental evasions and equivocations.[67]

This is not to say that Matthews was always in command of the situation. Raymond Ogden, a close and generally objective authority on the Dies Committee, detected variation in the quality of his interrogations. He gave Matthews high marks for his questioning of Emil Revyuk, head of a Ukrainian fascist group, and says that his questioning of Joseph Lash was "orderly and fair." On other occasions, however, Ogden found Matthews's questioning deficient and asserted that his report on consumer organizations was "a blot on the record of the Committee and an illustration of how the investigative process can be perverted."[68]

Matthews left the Dies Committee in 1945, and the last twenty-one years of his life were lived, for the most part, out of the national limelight. He continued his anticommunist activities until ill health intervened in 1964. During that time, he lectured, wrote many anticommunist articles, testified before various investigative committees, and worked as a consultant to the Hearst Corporation in New York City. From 1949 to around 1960, Matthews and his wife Ruth "ran a modest salon" in their apartment "where anticommunists gathered, socialized, and exchanged ideas."[69]

But Matthews did not always remain out of the public eye. In 1953-54, he wrote a number of articles for the *American Mercury*, whose editor, John A. Clements, was also associated with

[67] *Hearings . . . Un-American Activities*, 7: 4275-4520, 4395-4520.

[68] Ogden, *Dies Committee*, 133, 171, 135, 137, 142, 148, 173.

[69] Matthews, Unpublished Memorandum, 1984, 3. Matthews was not on the Hearst payroll directly but was retained by John A. Clements Associates, the Hearst public relations firm. Ruth I. Matthews to author, 13 November 1984.

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the Hearst Corporation.[70] The essays demonstrate an impressive knowledge of a large number of politically active individuals and groups, but they also contain facile generalizations and betray evidence of hasty preparation.[71]

One of Matthews's *American Mercury* articles had considerable impact on public opinion and on his own career. In a news report headlined "Veteran Red Hunter Joins McCarthy Unit," the New York *Times* announced on 19 June 1953 that Matthews had joined Senator Joseph McCarthy's staff as executive director of the Senate Investigating Committee.[72] The next month an article by Matthews entitled "Reds and Our Churches" appeared in the *American Mercury*. It began with a controversial assertion: "The largest single group supporting the Communist apparatus in the United States today is composed of Protestant clergymen."[73] This sentence, admittedly an assertion of considerable audacity, provoked a storm of protest.[74] Editorials in a variety of influential publications denounced Matthews's article. The editorials in *Christian Century* were particularly critical; one asserted that Matthews's writing was "its own best refutation. Its charges are venomous; its proofs puerile."[75] His article was debated in Congress, where he was both attacked and defended vigorously.[76] Prominent clergymen leaped into the fray to defend themselves and to denounce Matthews, sometimes harshly.[77]

[70]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 13 November 1984.

[71]See "Communists in the White House: Footnotes on the Shameful Years," *American History* (February 1953), 8-16; "Communism and the Colleges," *ibid.* (May 1953), 111-44; "Moscow's Medicine Men," *ibid.* (October 1953), 58-62; "World Communist Apparatus for Scientists," *ibid.* (March 1954), 17-28; "World Council of Churches," *ibid.* (August 1954), 21-28.

[72]New York *Times*, 19 June 1953.

[73]"Reds and Our Churches," *American Mercury* (July 1953), 3-13.

[74]Matthews did not say that all Protestant clergymen constituted the largest single group supporting communism; many of his critics, oblivious to nuance, appear to have believed that he did.

[75]*Christian Century* (15 July 1953), 810. A later editorial called Matthews McCarthy's "hatchet man." *Ibid.* (22 July 1953), 834. Other religious publications which denounced Matthews's charges include *America* (18 July 1953), 389, and *Commonweal* (24 July 1953), 383-84.

[76]*Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 99, pt. 6: 8278-79, 8298, 8472; pt. 10: A3904-6; pt. 12: A9243, 4250, 4457-60, 4481, 4485, 4519-20, 4616, 5007.

[77]For example, G. Bromley Oxnam and Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Real Dupes are on Congressional Committees," *Look* (17 November 1953), 33-37, and also John A.

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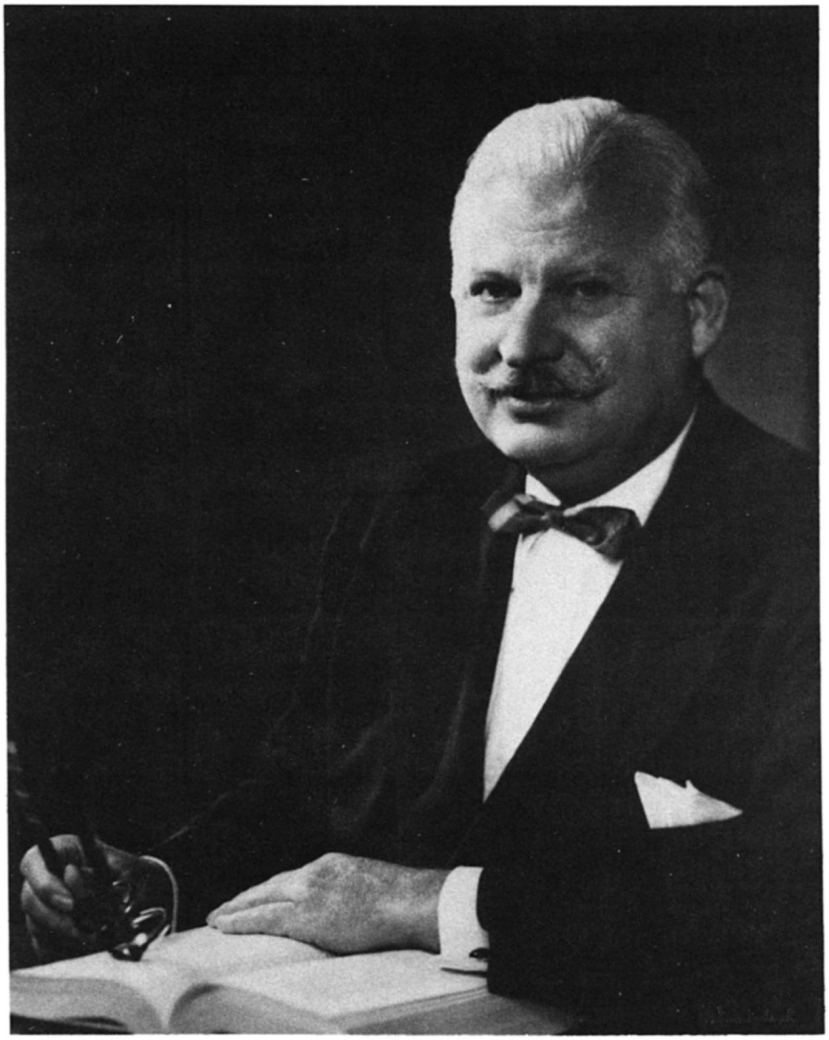

J.B. Matthews (1894-1966). Photograph by Fabian Bachrach, ca. 1962.

At length the pressure on Matthews and McCarthy became too great to resist. Perhaps the deciding factor was President Dwight Eisenhower's telegram to the National Conference of Christians and Jews in which he denounced "generalized and irre-

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McKay, New York *Times*, 12 July 1953. Even J. W. Storer of the Southern Baptist Convention called the article "much ado about nothing." New York *Times*, 5 July 1953.

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sponsible attacks,'' which are ''alien to America'' and ''portray contempt for the principles of freedom and decency.''[78] Matthews resigned while continuing to defend his article; McCarthy accepted his resignation ''very reluctantly.''[79] The liberal political publications quickly indulged in some rather unseemly gloating over the resignation. Paul Hutchinson, the self-proclaimed former friend, described Matthews as an ''embittered man'' with ''deep flaws.''[80]

Matthews's clergy article, even with its sweeping generalization in the first sentence, brought forth extreme reaction. Even an editorial in *Commonweal*, a publication not noted for its sympathy with anticommunism, observed that some of Matthews's critics had ''gone much too far out on a limb'' by asserting that ''there never was a Protestant minister anywhere, at any time, who followed the Party line or belonged to one of the fronts controlled by the Party.'' Ironically, Matthews's departure from public life resulted from the kind of media campaign, orchestrated criticism, and political pressure more usually associated with McCarthyism.[81]

With the end of Matthews's public career, what can be said in summation about it? Some writers have argued that ex-communists are alienated people. In fact, they are doubly alienated. It is clear that they are estranged from the communist ideology. But they are also alienated, in some measure, from certain aspects of mainstream culture. A loss of political innocence makes a complete reintegration extremely difficult.

Complete reintegration for ex-communists would be possible only if everyone heeded their message, awakened to the perceived dangers of communism, and, furthermore, accepted in detail their particular perspective. The problem is that things do

[78]*Cong. Record*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 99, pt. 6: 8279. It seems clear that Eisenhower seized this opportunity to strike at McCarthy, his bitter enemy, through Matthews.

[79]New York *Times*, 10 July 1953. Matthews denied, unconvincingly, that Eisenhower's statement led to his resignation. See also Matthews, ''Communism and the Protestant Clergy,'' *Look* (17 November 1953), 33-35.

[80]See, for example, *New Republic* (20 July 1953), 128; *Nation* (18 July 1953), 43; and Hutchinson, ''J. B. Matthews Story,'' 864-66.

[81]*Commonweal* (14 August 1953), 455. William F. Buckley, Jr., gave a conservative estimation of the incident: ''The Liberal press thundered after Matthews's scalp. And so it was given them. Matthews was forced to resign.'' William F. Buckley, Jr., *Up From Liberalism* (New York, 1959), 20-21. Even the most jaundiced observers of Matthews's activities, who might be tempted to conclude that he only got what was coming to him, must concede that such tactics help erode the integrity of public debate.

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not work out that way. Society is often unresponsive to the dangers which seem so clear to the disillusioned. The ex-communists become bearers of bad news, political prophets calling for recognition of the totalitarian threat. Even anticommunists often seem to lack the intensity to satisfy the ex-communist's sense of urgency. Arthur Koestler once told Richard Cossman: "It's the same with all you comfortable, insular, Anglo-Saxon anti-communists," he observed. "You hate our Cassandra cries and resent us as allies — but, when all is said, we ex-Communists are the only people on your side who know what it's all about."[82]

Matthews did manifest some symptoms of alienation from an America which, from his perspective, was dangerously complacent about communists. Yet he never soured into despair, bitterness, or the moral superiority of the self-proclaimed martyr. He had a spiritual tolerance inconsistent with the stereotype of the crabbed anticommunist zealot. There is an almost lyrical chapter in his autobiography entitled "Reminiscence," written just after his break with the Left, in which he revels in happy memories of a surprising variety of friends and acquaintances, including the socialist Graham Wallas, the "gentle Fabian . . . and also a never-to-be forgotten friend."[83] These are not the words of an ideologue.

Matthews also enjoyed a rich family and social life. His marriage to Ruth Inglis Matthews was a long and happy one. They lived busy, productive lives filled with research projects, political activity, and good friends. Matthews was a happy, expansive man who loved good cooking (much of which he did himself), good jokes, and good company.[84]

The Matthewses had a wide circle of friends in the anticommunist movement. Indeed, they operated "the nearest thing to an anti-communist salon that ever happened in the alien territory of New York City."[85] Ruth Matthews recalls that they threw parties when anticommunist visitors came to their city: "We introduced Joe McCarthy to our New York friends with a number of parties. Usually not large. But one I remember included over

[82]Crossman, ed., *God That Failed*, 1-2.
[83]Matthews, *Odyssey*, 23.
[84]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 8 July 1985, 27 September 1985.
[85]"J. B. Matthews, R.I.P.," *National Review* (9 August 1966), 763.

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100 guests. J. B. was up, cooking, most of the previous night.''[86]

Matthews did not, however, escape from his tumultuous past wholly unscathed. Despite a rich personal life, he did experience a degree of alienation from the mainstream of American life in general and his native state in particular. As a young, politically active man, Matthews had believed himself to be too liberal for Kentucky. His postcollegiate turn to the Left certainly set him apart from the conservative political consensus of Kentucky, and there is no reason to think that his college teaching career would have fared any better in Kentucky than it did in Tennessee. Yet, later in life, after he gained notoriety as an anticommunist activist, Matthews seems to have believed that he had become too controversial on the conservative side for Kentucky, or at least that portion of Kentucky represented by his alma mater, Asbury College. In the 1950s, Matthews exchanged letters with various people connected with Asbury. Leland S. Miller, director of public relations, assured Matthews that ''your Asbury friends follow your work with great interest.''[87] But such assurances had little effect. In spring 1955, Matthews wrote E. D. Hinkle, an old friend who was active in Asbury alumni affairs, that he was ''far from sure'' that he would be ''welcome in Asbury generally'' because ''Asbury people'' had little interest in his anticommunist activities.[88] He followed this letter with one to W. W. Harned, secretary of the Asbury Alumni Association, in which he expressed even stronger misgivings: '' . . . I cannot think of any place on the globe where I would be less welcome than at Asbury.'' He went on to say:

> Nevertheless and notwithstanding this dim view, I wish to go on record as stating that I treasure — in my heart of hearts — the memories of my days at Asbury. A mere boy of 16, I matriculated at Asbury in the fall of 1910. That was 45 years ago. The next five years — formative years — were spent on a campus that looked much more like a cornfield than a site of learning.[89]

[86]Ruth I. Matthews to author, 27 September 1985. The anticommunist salon could well be the subject of another article. Some of the more prominent of the anticommunist luminaries included Ludwig von Mises, Alfred Kohlberg, Eugene Lyons, and Westbrook Pegler.

[87]Leland S. Miller to J. B. Matthews, 25 March 1954.

[88]Matthews to E. D. Hinkle, 3 May 1955. Hinkle had written Matthews 21 April 1955 to invite him to the fortieth anniversary of Matthews's class of 1915.

[89]Matthews to W. W. Harned, 20 May 1955.

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Sketch of J.B. Matthews by L.E. Schneider.

These letters evoked responses from both Harned and Hinkle. Harned's was the smooth reply of a public relations man. E. D. Hinkle, however, wrote a frankly approving letter in which he stated that he believed Matthews would be welcome at Asbury: "I know that your work has been controversial. I have followed it with a great deal of interest and appreciation of you. Had it not been for you I shudder to think what a hold communism might have on this country now."[90] Alienation, however, is in

[90]W. W. Harned to J. B. Matthews, 24 May 1955; E. D. Hinkle to J. B. Matthews, 25 May 1955.

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considerable part a matter of perception, and there is no doubt that Matthews paid a price for his activism in a sense of isolation, perhaps to a greater degree than the situation warranted. Relations with Asbury apparently remained strained.[91]

Matthews's varied career made him Kentucky's answer to Tallyrand. Perhaps he succeeded at least in reflecting, more than any other Kentuckian, the bewildering political cross currents of the twentieth century. The only other figure who seems at all comparable is Herndon Evans, who began his public career in the 1920s as a crusading conservationist and then defended conditions in Harlan County in the 1930s from the accusations of the American Civil Liberties Union.[92] But Evans stayed in Kentucky and did not touch as many of the wider political currents as Matthews.

After years of incessant activity, Matthews was finally slowed by Parkinson's Disease, which he contracted around 1960. He died 16 July 1966 at the age of seventy-two. The convolutions of his career made it difficult for him to explain his own past. He had indeed traveled far in time, space, and ideology from his Kentucky home. In death, however, he returned from his impassioned odyssey to be buried in the family plot in the Lexington Cemetery, near the grave of Henry Clay.[93]

[91]In 1958, he wrote Zack Johnson, president of Asbury, regarding "the pro-Communist connections of Dr. John A. MacKay," who was scheduled to appear at Asbury. J. B. Matthews to Zack Johnson, 16 January 1958.

[92]Philip D. Supina, "Herndon J. Evans and the Harlan County Coal Strike," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 56 (1982): 318-35.

[93]"J. B. Matthews, R.I.P.," 763-74; New York *Times*, 17 July 1966; Kempton, *Part of Our Time*, 301; Ruth I. Matthews to author, 14 April 1984; records of the Lexington Cemetery Company.

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