Mr. Trawick has very ably described FDA's new Division of Consumer Education, of which the Consumer Consultant Branch is an integral part. The Consumer Consultant Program was FDA's first, and therefore is the oldest, of the agency's education programs. This program was created in 1953, and now 23 Consumer Consultants are serving FDA's 18 Districts. These professionally trained women are talking to a variety of women's groups across the United States. As announced in the CCI bulletin several months ago, we have actively recruited for professional women, ideally with home economics and nutritional training, to fill these positions.

Perhaps you would be interested to hear the most recent analysis of consumer comment and query which has been gathered during the past year. The appraisal included nine categories, "broken down" in the statistical order which follows: The use of chemical additives in foods; pesticides and the possible presence of residues on foods; labeling and packaging practices; interpretation of the newly enacted drug legislation; "quack" products and practices; food standards and grade labeling; the intricacies of FDA's enforcement of the food, drug and cosmetic act; cosmetic products; and last, the differing jurisdictions of the various other consumer protection government agencies.

Were it a matter of analyzing all areas of discussion, the overall subject of advertising, television commercials, etc., would have to rank high among the nine mentioned categories. Advertising, of course, comes under the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission.

Again, this information is vitally important to the FDA in conducting its present programs and planning future policies. But, at the same time, as indicated before, it is discouragingly evident that FDA's consumer education programs cannot accomplish the prescribed task alone. The assistance of people like you--professionally trained, educated to discuss sensible buying practices, wise economic attitudes and sound living habits, and in the position to reach variegated publics--is vitally needed.

However, those of us associated with the Consumer Consultant Program confess that thus far we have reached, with some few significant exceptions, only an "elite," middle, upper middle class public. Working with and through existing organizations, we have not succeeded as we would desire in reaching the under-privileged and "most-in-need-of-assistance" consumer. Thus it is that the expansion of the Consumer Consultant Program, and, in fact, the creation of an entire Division of Consumer Education is a healthy and heartening development. Hopefully with added staff and various new materials and aids, we can begin to reach wider publics--low-income groups,
labor union organizations, the Negro population, the aging, the sick, the poor.

AFL-CIO'S CONCERNS IN CONSUMER EDUCATION

by

Paul Mendenhall

Staff Representative

Community Service Activities

AFL-CIO, New York City

I am pleased to have the opportunity to tell you about the AFL-CIO's interest in the field of consumer information. While organized labor's basic interest is in securing decent wages and working conditions, we also are concerned that what is won at the bargaining table will not be lost at the bargain table.

We subscribe wholeheartedly to the "bill of rights" for the consumer as presented by President Kennedy's message to Congress on a "Consumers' Protection and Interest Program." This, as you no doubt know, was the first presidential message to Congress in history on such a matter. We are equally pleased that President Johnson has given further thrust to this program.

Before giving you a brief description of our Consumer Counselling Program I should like to make some general comments. First, we feel a consumer information program has an important part to play in President Johnson's declared war on poverty. While it is admitted that the problem of poverty is primarily one of low income it is still important in our view to help low-income families learn to live with what they have, while hopefully awaiting the day when their circumstances will improve.

In reflecting on this type of program it is my feeling that certain assumptions have been made by those working in this field, including myself, that should be subjected to careful re-examination. These assumptions are:

1. That union members and the general public are thirsting for knowledge about consumer matters. It is my belief that in too many instances, those who attend consumer information courses are not necessarily the ones most in need of assistance.

2. That people know where to go for help.

3. That knowledge of where to go for help is sufficient to lead people to seek it. People often are timid about making complaints to legal authorities, to local Better Business Bureaus, to say nothing about vendors themselves. Many may suffer feelings of guilt or inferiority for having been "taken in" by some deal and they therefore wish to avoid further embarrassment by taking their plight to another person or agency.

4. Finally, that purchasers will make decisions in their best interest if they have knowledge of sources of helpful information on products and services. I have heard literate friends of mine say they went out and bought an expensive appliance of some sort and when they got home they hastened to look up its rating in Consumer Reports.