

**Matter of Fact**

By Joseph Alsop  
**ON SOCKS AND SELF PITY**  
Washington—To the returning traveler, the voice of Lyndon Baines Johnson of



Texas sounds remarkably refreshing. Along with some things that politicians naturally say in election years, the Texas Senator said a few things that badly need saying.

In particular, he made the forecast (not necessarily optimistic), that our agitated world is on the verge of "the century's most dynamic decade." He added the warning that "America must not stop, just as the rest of the world is beginning to move." And he offered the excellent summation:

"In the next decade, our capacity for leadership will be as vital as our capacity for arms. (But) we cannot lead by wringing our hands and agonizing over the decline of American character."

After a good many weeks in the Far East, peering through the bamboo curtain at the current agony of the hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants, one really hankered to hear some one or other say exactly what Senator Johnson said. It was a very curious experience indeed, spending all day, every day, talking to the pitiful refugees and escapees from the Chinese country side, and then going back to the hotel to read the orgies of self doubt and self pity in the news from home.

A MINOR academic flourish was revealed as a television quiz show. Judging by the reaction, you might have supposed that all morals and all decency were dead in the United States. There was some decline in the vast gold hoard at Fort Knox. Judging by the reaction, you might have supposed that the richest and most fortunate nation in history was tottering on the brink of total bankruptcy. And so it went.

When you have studied the present cruel enslavement of the most numerous race on earth, you cannot really believe in the hopeless immorality of kindly America. It is also a little hard to believe in the imminence of national bankruptcy, when you note that the combined family fortunes of two of the current Presidential aspirants amount to about half of the unpledged gold and dollar reserve of the British Empire.

Yet the spectacle of enforced effort and enforced sacrifice in China had its lesson, nevertheless. For example, as one crude way of measuring the sacrifice being demanded of the Chinese peasantry, I took the price on the Macao market of the average ration of food, cloth, and the like, for an able-bodied farmer in Kwangtung Province. The total cost, using low-grade rice, which is all the farmers get, amounted to the equivalent of three American cents per day.

CHINA'S townspeople, industrial workers, soldiers, and other more privileged groups live better than the Kwangtung farmers. But consider that figure of three cents a day. Remember that it is at least highly unlikely that the peasantry in other provinces live much better than the peasants of Kwangtung. For the 500 million toiling Chinese peasants, then, you get an annual maintenance cost to the state not much above \$5.5 to \$7 billions.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist state is spending 27,000,000,000 yuan a year on capital improvements. Accurate conversion is impossible, but this sum devoted to national investment is hardly less—and probably more—than half the total apparent maintained costs of China's teeming peasantry. Even if this Draconic investment policy leads to an explosion, as it may, this kind of national effort is a truly awe-inspiring phenomenon.

For surely the real source of America's self pity and America's self doubt, is a dim but growing sense that we cannot compete in the modern world without somewhat greater efforts and sacrifices. Because of our rich heritage, we can get by with far less effort and far less sacrifice than any other nation. But we cannot grow as we ought to grow, and defend ourselves as we ought to defend ourselves, and maintain our economic leadership and our political leadership, too, without rather more effort and more sacrifice than we are making now.

And the sooner we pull up our socks in the indicated manner, the sooner the walls of self pity will cease.

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