

The Time Has Come To Talk, Says New York Magazine

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The third great force in China was the Communist Party. It was the latest to arrive on the scene, and the extent of its influence is difficult to assess. Like the Nationalist Party, it analysed the situation and decided that China needed unification, modernisation and power. But it went further and, in effect, asked: Who will organise China and for whose benefit? The basic Communist answer is clear: China is to be organised as Russia was, not by the rich, and well-born, and the educated, but by the peasantry and the working class. With these theses sharply etched into its programme, conflict with the Nationalists could not be resolved except by recourse to arms.

On occasion the two parties could and did co-operate. They co-operated in 1925-27 in the first great counter-attack



CHIANG KAI-SHEK
"The only possible leader"

against imperialism and warlord anarchy; their agents jointly marshalled the great mass movement that surged from the south and overwhelmed all central China and the bastions of foreign influence.

Three Against Japan

In China to-day, in 1944, we have a loose association of three forces against the Japanese invasion. Central Government, Communists, and warlords alike are all more or less committed to the war against the enemy. This war has gone on for seven years. But whereas it started in the closest and most inspiring alliance of all three groups against the invaders, to-day this association for a common end has sadly changed.

The over-all picture of China to-day is compounded of three interwoven problems: blockade, inflation, political deadlock.

No country in modern times has ever been blockaded as China is now. Since the Burma Road closed in the spring of 1942, the Chinese have lived almost on their own. When the road closed, it was estimated that there were perhaps 15,000 trucks operating on China's roads. Now, two years later, there are perhaps 5000 trucks that can operate regularly in the country. The others have worn out. The difference between these two figures spells tragedy. It means

that when there is a famine such as has taken place in Honan or Kwangtung, no trucks are available to move food in or people out, and people die on the roads and dogs eat them and villages are abandoned. It means that there is no facile way of getting raw materials to factories. It means that centralised control over the provinces dwindles from day to day, and the various generals at the front conduct themselves more and more like independent satraps. It means that decisions and orders of the Central Government are denatured and vitiated with every mile and every hour's distance from the capital.

Armies on Foot

The Chinese armies march on foot. They move divisions 1500 miles on foot, and only one who has seen the barefoot, under-nourished and under-clothed soldiers slog the rocky roads over the mountains and through the rice-paddies knows what misery means. There are no food supplies along some of the routes of march, and sometimes the soldiers may not eat all day. In some cases, the soldiers sell their blankets to buy food from villagers, and at night in the mountains they sleep rolled up all together, huddled to each other's bodies against the cold.

The transportation situation means that even if the Government could organise an efficient quartermaster corps in the rear, there would be no way of getting meats, fresh foods and beans to the front in quantity to feed the soldiers. The glory of the Chinese armies lies not in their battles, for they have fought few battles in the past three years, but in the fact that they exist at all. The soldiers of China are hungry. They get 24 ounces of rice a day, some salt, some oil, and some vegetables. They rarely eat meat. These soldiers suffer from malnutrition, disease and starvation.

The Forges Are Hungry

The breakdown of transportation is the first and primary incidence of blockade on Chinese life, but blockade has other effects more direct and just as pernicious. China lacks copper, lacks alloy steels, lacks electro-generative equipment. All figures on production are rightfully secret, but it is impossible for any man who has not suffered under the naked impact of the figures themselves to conceive of the difficulty of fighting a war in China. The figures on small-arms ammunition production—bullets for rifles and machine-guns—are so pitifully small that no sane Western staff could conceive of sending troops into battle with so small a national reserve. The result of these shortages is seen in a desire, that has now become almost a habit, to avoid battle under any circumstances. Arms and ammunition are more important than territory, and each general stores up his bullets and shells behind his lines against the day of crisis.

Under such circumstances, a Westerner might rightly ask how China stays in the war at all. China has been kept in this war as a united nation by the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Up to now, whatever its other faults, this leadership has been unswervingly, unflinchingly, and heroically anti-Japanese. It is Chiang Kai-shek who, at the darkest moments of China's

loneliness, has held his Government and his people to their destined task. In this sense he, more than any other man, represents the entire corps of unnumbered and nameless devoted men in every branch of the national life subordinating all their personal future to victory and offering leadership, however limited, to the masses behind them.

Food and Sons

This leadership, however, would be a sterile and sickly thing were it not based on the enormous stability given Chinese society by her peasantry. The equations the budgeteers and statesmen make with paper figures are phantom equations. The real equation of Chinese resistance is simple enough. The peasant produces two things: he produces food and he produces sons. The Government takes food from him by its voracious grain tax, and with the food it feeds the civil servants, the factory workers, the army. The Government takes sons from him and keeps the weak cadres at the front replenished. The peasant is the great raw material of war in China. Even nitrates for the explosives that fill shells and bullets are sometimes processed from human excreta. If the rains fall and the sun shines, the peasants eat. No blockade can interpose itself between him and the land he cares for.

Inflation, Corruption, Cynicism

The second great problem of China is inflation. There are no real sources of revenue left in the country—no great taxable incomes, no industry to produce profit. China finances her war by the printing of paper currency. Last year approximately 40,000,000,000 dollars of Chinese currency were dumped into the circulatory stream of the nation. This year the figure will be greater.

This inflation is a serious menace to national resistance—not because of purely economic reasons, but because of its moral consequences. Corruption, official and private, monetary and moral, exists throughout the length and breadth of the land. Since money means so little, people come to have little respect for it, or the means by which it may be accumulated. In the counties where the peasant meets the Government, there is corruption in the collection of his grain tax and corruption in the recruitment of his sons. If you know the right people, you can buy your way out of the army. The weighing-in of the grain tax, the storing of the grain and its distribution, are all filthied with extortion. In one case, an American relief representative was attempting to transport a large quantity of grain over the Hunan-Kwangsi railroad for the relief of the famine sufferers in Kwangtung. He found it impossible to get freight cars on the railway until he had found the right official and paid the "tea money," which ran to thousands of Chinese dollars.

Corruption stems directly from inflation. It is unavoidable. But the most terrible effect of inflation is the cynicism engendered among the honest and decent elements of Chinese life. Civil servants who try to live on their salaries suffer more bitterly than white-collar workers of any other nation at war. Thousands upon thousands of Chinese civil servants are honest and decent, and refuse to cut the easy corners. They sell their clothes and valuables, live in unheated houses and work in unheated offices, borrow money from friends and try desperately to keep themselves

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