

Joseph Alsop

Signing Off With a Profession of Faith

This piece, aimed for the new year, is the very last of an interminable series of columns that began in November, 1937. Later on, I shall be writing occasionally for publication, but I shall no longer be a columnist. Hence it may not be amiss to close the series with a profession of faith.

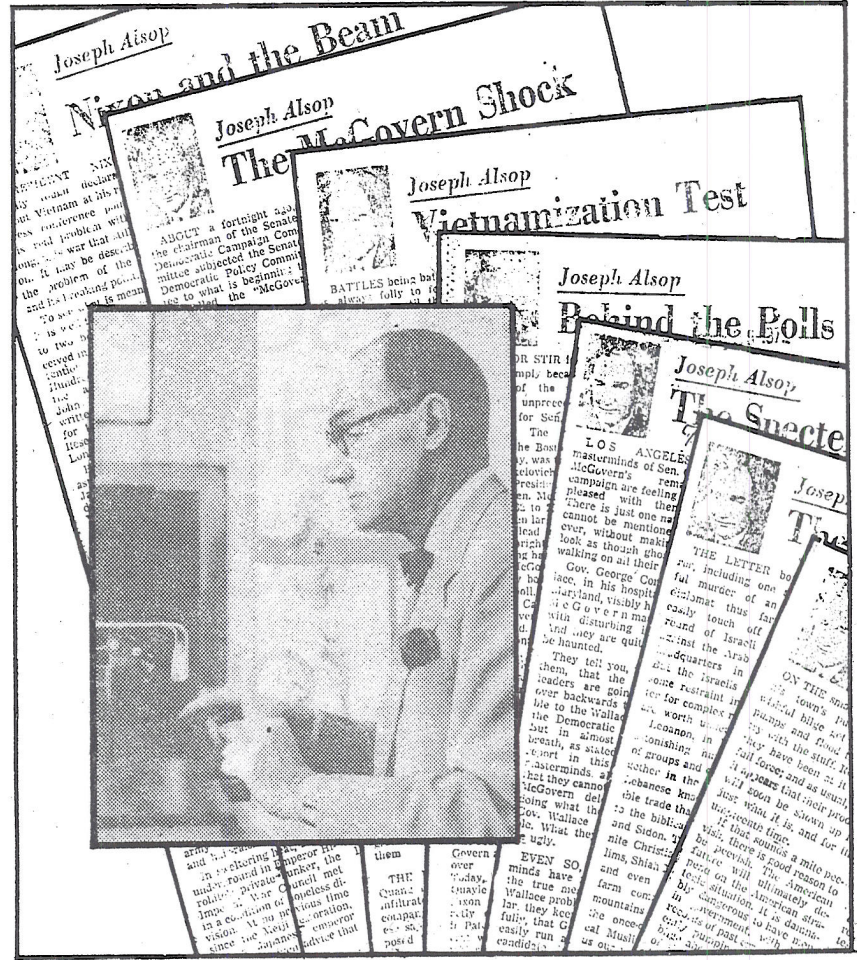
The best way of saying what I really believe is to tell a little story about myself and Governor Sherman Adams. In the days before Adams was fired by President Eisenhower for being just a bit less clean than the famous hound's tooth, the governor was all-powerful in the Eisenhower White House.

For that very reason, I had gone to see this mean, small minded man. I needed to find out whether the Eisenhower White House was finally going to go to war against the obscene Joseph R. McCarthy. The need arose because I had discovered Senator McCarthy was about to fill the headlines with facts I had long known well.

The facts showed that as supreme commander in Germany just after the big war, President Eisenhower had given assorted communists all sorts of key positions in the German media. In the insane climate of the horrible McCarthy-time; these quite unimportant facts could have been made to seem unspeakably sinister. So I told Governor Adams that I meant to publish the facts myself thereby forestalling Senator McCarthy, unless I could be assured that White House appeasement of McCarthy was finished and done with.

"We'll fight this time," said Adams, thin-lipped. I thanked him and got up to go. But he stopped me with a question: "Tell me, Alsop, do you believe in God?"

The question struck me as damnably impertinent, coming out of the blue from a man I should never have chosen as my religious confessor. It implied, too, that want of faith in the Eisenhower White House must be connected with want of faith in the Almighty. Hence I answered shortly, "I



believe in the United States." And so I took my leave.

This is now an episode that I remember with mixed emotions. I came perilously close to blackmail—albeit in a good cause. I was cross and arrogant with an older man—albeit with some provocation. Yet what I told President Eisenhower's favorite whited sepulchre remains the nearest I can get to a personal profession of faith.

As a political reporter, I have spent decades trying to puzzle out how our country really works. All sorts of people will tell you that they have key roles in America's success. At the moment, for instance, my own trade is perilously close to a bad case of swelled head, for understandable reasons.

But I can remember the McCarthy-time, when the whole American news-

paper business gave the front pages, day after day and week after week, to the fascinating question of the army promotion of a Communist dentist! In sum, no single sector of our vast, complex American society is nearly as wise or virtuous or important as that sector's leaders commonly suppose and claim.

The main point still is that somehow or other America really does work—or at least has worked admirably throughout my reasonably long lifetime. I went to work in a fiendish depression. I saw the second world war as a still young man. I watched this country shoulder the whole burden of the free half of the world, which was thrust upon us by the second world war. I have seen other wars since then.

At every turning in this long, long road, which was so often a very rough and dangerous road, every sensible American was worried about which choice our country ought to make. Sometimes it seemed to many Americans that we were making the wrong choice.

Before Pearl Harbor, for example, the renewal of the draft and lend lease only passed the House of Representatives by the merest hairline majority. As to what conservative Americans thought about the choices of the New Deal years, their language on the subject does not bear repeating.

Yet somehow or other, the right choices have been made again and again. Somehow or other, in fact, the American people have a strange way of stumbling onto solutions of the problems that face them, even when no solution appears possible and all hope seems lost.

Nor do I think it is mere luck or mere health that has caused the American success in my lifetime. I think it is the combination of courage and common sense that marks the plain, every day people of the United States. So my closing prayer is that one people's courage will not fail, nor their common sense wear thin.