

Canadian Recognition of the People's Republic of China

THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS

FROM that day in April 1949 when the Chinese Red Army entered Nanking until October 13, 1970, when the Honourable Mitchell Sharp rose in his place in the House of Commons to announce the recognition of the People's Republic of China, the state of the relations between Canada and China was rarely viewed with satisfaction in Ottawa. Successive Canadian Governments between 1949 and 1968 had examined the possibility of entering into relations with the Government in Peking, which so clearly was effectively in control.

The involvement of the People's Republic of China and Canada on opposite sides in the Korean War (which began in June 1950) made it impossible for any Canadian Government to consider establishing relations with Peking either during hostilities or in the atmosphere of bitterness that immediately followed it. Nevertheless, successive Canadian spokesmen, usually in the United Nations context, expressed various ideas intended to permit the establishment of contact with the People's Republic of China on terms acceptable not only to the Chinese but to the international community generally. In general these ideas endeavoured to meet the problem posed by the mutually exclusive claims of Peking and Taipei. To the extent that the Government in Peking paid any attention to these efforts on the part of well-disposed countries, the reactions were emphatically negative. Equally, none of these proffered formulae met with any publicly-expressed approval from the Government in Taiwan.

Canada's dissatisfaction with the Chinese relationship was indicated not only in its preoccupation with the question in the United Nations but also, in a different way, in the bilateral context. It is significant that, although Canada's foreign representation grew from 35 diplomatic missions abroad in 1949 to some 70 in 1968, the Government continued to avoid making an ultimate settlement more difficult by opening a Canadian embassy in Taipei. (The Chinese Nationalist Embassy in Ottawa, which was opened in 1942, was, of course, not affected by the move of the seat of its own Government from Chungking to Nanking to Taipei.)

Shift of Emphasis

The Canadian decision to move from opposition to an abstention on the Albanian Resolution (to seat Peking and unseat Taiwan) at the UN General Assembly of 1966 opened the way for a shift of emphasis to a bilateral approach to the problem. This was put into more specific terms by Prime Minister Trudeau in the election campaign of May 1968, when he declared that it would be his