

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



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RECOGNITION OF CHINA

Statement by the Prime Minister in the
debate on External Affairs in the House
of Commons, March 25, 1954.

Mr. Speaker, I find myself at this moment in a position where I have to ask your indulgence and that of the House for a few minutes to speak of at least one of the unfortunate results of my trip around the world that has been referred to in so generous terms by my colleague, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson). International affairs are of such importance that any imprecision or ambiguity in language used about any of their aspects is apt to have very unfortunate consequences, and I have to appear at this time before my colleagues in the position of a repentant offender asking the indulgence of his colleagues for his regrettable transgression on the basis of a humble confession of his error or mistake or lapse and on the basis of his genuine desire to clarify the situation and to dispel any of the anxieties or undesirable consequences resulting from the interpretation of too loose language he was unfortunate enough to use.

I am sorry that any of the things I am reported to have said in the East about China have given concern and caused controversy in this country. I am not going to attempt to say that I have been misquoted. I know that the gentlemen of the press who were there were honestly doing their best to report accurately and objectively the many questions in many forms that were put to me, sometimes with almost machine-gun rapidity, at press conferences or at the airfields as I alighted from the plane or was walking towards the plane to re-enter it. I am sure that they did attempt to reproduce what they understood me to have given as my answers and what they understood those answers to mean. I must and I do take the responsibility for any misinterpretation or misconstruction that could be put upon them because of their imprecision or their ambiguity.

There is one thing, however, about which I do feel quite sure that there was an inaccuracy. There was one report that I had said that I was sure we would have to recognize the present government of China as the government the people of China wanted. I feel quite sure I never would use those words intentionally because I never had that feeling about the present government of China. But I must have used some almost like them since so many of these reporters have come out with that as their version of what they heard and understood, that I felt we would have to be realistic and recognize the government of China "as the government the people wanted".

I should not have said "the government the people wanted". What I had in mind was that, in spite of our dislike of any form of communist or totalitarian government, we could not expect to have to deal with the kind of government, representing the people on the other side, we would like them to have the kind of

government we would want them to have, but that we would have to deal with the government they had as a matter of fact, the government that was in control of the forces that were participating in the happenings that were causing such tension and such anxiety in the international field. That is what I meant. That is what I should have said in words that could not be mistaken or interpreted in any other way because I think that with such a statement there would have been little or no concern and little, if any, controversy about it in this country or anywhere else.

I am not going to read to the house the many editorials that have been published, but I take one that appeared in the Ottawa Journal of March 12, 1954, which, in part at least, I think would be fairly representative of what was and would be the feeling of the public generally in that regard. The editorial is entitled "About Recognizing China". It reads in part as follows:

"A Tokyo dispatch now quotes Prime Minister St. Laurent as saying with respect to recognition of communist China that 'it is only the common sense, realistic approach that allied countries eventually deal with communist China as the government in effective control of the China mainland.'"

This is better, more sensible, than what Mr. St. Laurent was reported to have said earlier at Seoul, namely:

"I do feel that some day we are going to have to be realistic. We are going to have to admit the present government of China as the government the people want."

I feel quite sure, in spite of my respect for the journalists who were there and who were doing their best to report what they heard and what they understood, that I did not put it that way because I never had it in my mind in that form. It was the contrary form I had in my mind, that in spite of our dislike of communist or totalitarian governments we could not expect to have the kind of government we wanted. It would be the kind of government--and I must have said this--that they wanted. I should not have said "they wanted". I should have said the kind of government they had actually in control of the forces we are opposing. The article goes on to say--and I think everyone would agree with this:

"No country can ever know with certainty whether the government possessed by some other country is the government its people want. And the fact is that Canada now recognizes any number of countries without being at all sure that their government is what their people want. There is Russia, and Czechoslovakia, and Poland, and Spain; possibly others.

"What Canada does, and must be compelled to do, and what all other countries must be compelled to do sooner or later, just because it is the only sensible practicable way, is to recognize the government of a country which is in effective control--which exists in fact."

I would not go quite that far because I would now be very chary about using the word "recognition". It has for so many different people so many different connotations. There is what is sometimes called the concept of legal recognition. Others refer to it as diplomatic recognition. I think perhaps it is better to use some other word that cannot have so many

significations. When I was using it I was using it in its broadest sense, that we just had to avoid closing our eyes and had to see, to recognize that the government that was in control, and with whom we had to deal if we expected to make any kind of arrangement that would be implemented, was the government that was in fact in control of the forces that we were opposing. But the article goes on to say:

"We must and should recognize the present government of China, not because we approve of it, not because we do not detest and condemn some of the crimes it has committed, but simply because of the inescapable fact that it is the only government there--the only government exercising authority. Such recognition need not come at this moment;

With that, I fully agree. I would even go so far as to say, instead of "need", we might well say "should" not come at this time. The editorial continues:

"--perhaps should not come while Red China remains an aggressor, nor until we see what emerges from Geneva. We must respect--certainly not flout--the opinion of our allies. But for heaven's sake let us not take the impossible position that recognition of China cannot come while China has a communist government--"

Then, the article goes on:

"It is a pity--"

I think it is a pity..

"--that the question of Canada's "recognition" of China should have come up in the uncertain way of press conference statements. Mr. St. Laurent doubtless was asked the question a dozen ways, and it is understandable that, in the east, he desired to indicate Canada's open mindness on this vexed subject. But upon his return to Canada parliament should be given a clearer explanation, though the shadow of the Geneva conference will compel restraint."

Of course the shadow of the Geneva conference not only compels restraint but I think is going to be something more than shadow. It is going to be something that will, to a certain degree, project light into the future. At the present time I was not expressing government policy, but I was expressing frankly my own feelings about it. I was really happy at having heard that there was going to be a Geneva conference at which the government which in fact controls the forces whose conduct have had such a disturbing effect on world peace would be represented and would be talking over the possibility of removing the uncertain conditions of this cease fire with two impregnable lines of soldiers opposite each other in Korea. Perhaps the conference would be able to do something about the situation which is of grave concern to the whole world, that is the fighting that is going on in Indo-China.

I had the distinct impression that most of the embarrassment felt by French leaders with respect to the European army was a consequence of the drain upon their human and material resources as a result of the fighting going on in Indo-China. I felt that these questions that were being thrown at me arose out of this invitation that had been extended by the four great powers to the representatives of the only government that exists on the mainland

of China to come to this conference. The invitation was coupled, of course, with a rider that it is understood that neither the invitation to nor the holding of the above-mentioned conference shall be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition in any case in which it has not already been accorded. But it does constitute an admission that that is the government that is controlling the forces that we have been resisting; that is the government that can agree to and admit that we have demonstrated that aggression is not going to be allowed to be profitable and that they cannot impose their will upon the free world through aggression.

It may be that something more permanent than this cessation of firing across the no-man's-land between the two forces that are still there will come out of the Geneva conference. If that comes out of the Geneva conference, it may indicate that by negotiating with the same people other causes of world unrest and of uncertainty about the future can be eliminated. So long as that is the only government on the mainland of China, it is only through discussions with that government that any results can be achieved.

Now, when will there be sufficient results achieved to make it desirable to consider whether there should be what amounts to diplomatic recognition? That is something this government is not considering at this time. When I say "at this time", I am not using evasive language. I am not trying to have my language just comply with the facts. I do not mean just at this moment. Under the present conditions I do not see any reason why we should consider diplomatic recognition of China. But those conditions may change and I think it would be most unfortunate, just as the editor of the Journal feels it would be most unfortunate, to tie ourselves down by declarations and commitments that would make it impossible for us at any time to come to the conclusion that even the diplomatic recognition of China would not be helpful to peace and security in the world. We are not in that position at the present time, and when I said there was no consideration being given by the government to that kind of recognition at this time I did not mean, as I saw suggested in at least one newspaper, that it was just something that had not yet come officially before the cabinet as a cabinet. I meant that I was not thinking of it and I did not know of any of my colleagues who were thinking in terms of diplomatic recognition of China under present conditions.

But I felt that none of us were thinking in terms that would make it impossible for us to make the right kind of a decision when, under changed circumstances, a decision had to be made. Of course, that decision would have to be made in such a manner as would not involve flouting the opinion of our allies. We have many allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and we have others whom we can, I think, regard as allies, on the United Nations. It would be something of world concern. I would hope the position taken by Canada would be a position that would be of benefit to the peace and stability of the whole world. We should not attempt to make decisions that do not have to be made. The position at this time is that we are not, under present conditions, contemplating diplomatic recognition of China. We have not, and I do not think we should say at this time or at any other time, that there may not be a situation in the future when a government we do not like, a government the complexion of which is quite contrary to all our democratic ideals, and a government which according to the information we have obtained by hearsay--of course we have to rely for our

information on what we get by hearsay--seems to have been guilty of many things that we would not condone, may nevertheless have to be recognized. There are other governments with whom we have at the present time diplomatic relations who, we think, have done things we could not condone. But they are the government of those lands and the only governments with whom any dealings in respect of their populations can be had.

I think we all hope that there will be, even between these apparently incompatible worlds, the free world and the world made up of countries with communist regimes, some kind of a modus vivendi which will in fact allow us to live, and allow them to live. That would take place, without our interference, without our approval, without our responsibility, in any way in the lands we regard as unfortunate, because they are under such regimes. If we do not look upon that as possibly, we then have to look upon this state of cold war as something of very long duration, with always the possibilities of its flaring up into something worse than a cold war.

Once again I am sorry that I was not more careful in the language I used, and that it was the kind of language that could give rise to this concern and to this controversy; but as far as policy is concerned, I was not speaking about policy. And now I do venture to say that the policy of the Canadian Government at the present time is to keep an open mind as to whether or not at any time, under any conditions which may develop in the future, there should be recognition of the government which at that time will exist as a matter of fact in China. That again is something that I should not have put in exactly that language. We should keep an open mind as to when if ever conditions may be such that it will be in the interest of peace and stability in the world to recognize diplomatically whatever government happens to be in control of the forces of China.

That I think is the preferable position; but in the meantime whenever there does appear to be an opportunity to remove some of the tension from the international situation by discussions, by meetings and by discussions like that which are called for April 26 in Geneva, I think it is only realistic to feel that the government which is in fact in control of affairs in China has to be there if there is going to be anything accomplished that will produce beneficial results.

Mr. Coldwell: Will the Prime Minister permit a question? There was one other matter which caused some concern when he was overseas and that was the reference to the armaments and the supplying of military aid by the United States to Pakistan. There seems to be a conflict in the reports and the inference there was that the Prime Minister gave his approval to United States military air to Pakistan.

Mr. St. Laurent: I refused to express any opinion. I said that as far as we were concerned no such question could arise, because we had pledged to the NATO organization everything we could do in the form of aid and forces to maintain peace in the world, and that no government that expected to remain the government of Canada should ask for more than had been pledged by us to the NATO organization. I did also say that I felt quite satisfied in my own mind that the aid provided, or that might be provided, by the United States to Pakistan was not designed to be used against India, and that I felt quite sure that had there been any impression that it was going to be used against India there would not be one per cent of the United States people who would have supported it.

Perhaps there is one other point. I do not know that it was raised in our press here--I have not seen it--but there was a question put to me about conflicting reports on something I said in Tokyo as to the neutrality of India in the event of a war there. What I did say was that I did not know whether, in the event of a war, India could remain neutral or not, but that if they did not remain neutral I would expect that they would be on our side rather than on the side of our enemies.

Now, there was another report, and it was an erroneous one, possibly made in good faith. My hon. friends here know the atmosphere of press conferences. It was reported that I said I did not think India could remain neutral in the event of war. No matter what I may have been thinking, I did not say that. I said that I did not know whether India could remain neutral or not in the event of war, but if India found that she could not remain neutral I would expect that she would be on our side and not on the side of our enemies.

S/C