

'By recognising Mao, the British hope to safeguard their interests in China' from Corriere della Sera (7 January 1950)

Caption: On 7 January 1950, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the recognition of Mao Tse-Tung's Communist China by Great Britain and describes the position taken by the United States towards the Communist leader's accession to power.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 07.01.1950, n° 6; anno 75. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Gli Inglesi riconoscendo Mao", auteur:Sansa, Giorgio , p. 5.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

By recognising Mao, the British hope to safeguard their interests in China

The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Christopher Mayhew, declares that London does not approve of the Communist regime

From our correspondent

London, 6 January, night-time.

Mao's China received Britain's official recognition today, with the British Consul in Peking handing a note to this effect to the Chinese Communist Government. According to this document, the British Government 'is prepared to enter into diplomatic relations with China based on equality, common interests and the mutual respect of territory and sovereignty.'

This recognition had been expected and came as no surprise. But the Ambassador of Nationalist China in London, Chen Tien-hsi, the very picture of a philosopher of olden times, saw fit to comment on the matter, and did so with as much serenity as vigour. 'Britain', said Dr Chen Tien-hsi, 'has repeatedly declared that it would not intervene in the Chinese war. There is, however, no intervention more deadly than the recognition of the Communist regime at this time. It is tantamount to burying us alive. History will be able to relate that China received the coup de grâce not from its enemies but from its friends and long-standing allies. Paying tribute to power is always very risky ... but the day will come when you will need us again, and on that day you will find us again at your side.' Reporting Chen's words, one newspaper pointed out that British interests in China amounted to 300 million pounds sterling; as a result the British public can understand the motives behind today's decision more clearly and will not be moved by the reproving tone of a diplomatic Confucius.

Great Britain is the first Western power to recognise Mao. The United States, as has become clear, will not recognise him 'prematurely'. In the United Nations Security Council today, there are nations that recognise Mao and six that do not recognise him, as well as the representative of Chiang Kai-shek, the subject of dissension. An organisation, therefore, whose very aim is to end international controversy has itself become infected by today's most bitter controversy and nobody is able to devise a way of reconciling the views of two groups of nations with such conflicting concepts of what the legitimate government of China should be. There is also no way of foreseeing how the Security Council will respond to the Nationalist China delegate's right of veto. Will a constitutional reform of the UN perhaps become necessary? And will the Security Council remain paralysed until such a reform comes about?

All this would have generated deep pessimism had it not been for yesterday's American about-turn. Even if chaos is expected to ensue in the legal camp, in the political camp the air is a little clearer. Although it does not recognise Mao, the Government in Washington does not intend to let itself get involved in the war between Mao and Chiang Kai-shek either. America will limit itself to providing economic aid to the Nationalists. This news has been interpreted in London as a victory for British diplomacy. The dangers inherent in the attitude that Washington assumed a week ago, when the military chiefs held the upper hand over the Department of State, were certainly not small; and now that the Department of State, helped by the pressure from Britain, has taken its timely revenge, the dangers have been partly warded off. Formosa, Chiang Kai-shek's last refuge, is legally not Chinese territory, but is still Japanese, just as part of today's Poland is legally still German and not Polish territory. In both cases this is because no peace treaty has been concluded. But it is precisely because of the United States' recognition of Formosa as part of China that certain risks might arise. If Chiang lawfully resides in Formosa inasmuch as the island is Chinese territory, he is implicitly recognised as having a right to govern the whole of China, including Mao's part. This would lead to a desperate war to conquer the mainland. Truman's withdrawal on the economic aid front therefore means that a grave risk has been kept at bay. Had the US promised military support, who knows what might have happened.

Another risk that could not easily have been averted if the British and American points of view had not converged was the naval blockade that Chiang Kai-shek, possessor of the Chinese fleet, has established

around Mao's China. Great Britain already protested repeatedly when its merchant vessels were stopped. What would have happened if America had granted Chiang Kai-shek's government military support and offered weapons and advisers? Britain and America, allies in the North Atlantic Treaty, would have indirectly been at war with each other in the Pacific. The whole Atlantic Alliance would have suffered and, with the Alliance, the West's capacity to resist.

Recognising Mao, it is repeated in London today — and, what is more, has been stated by the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Christopher Mayhew — does not mean approving of his regime. It is merely acknowledging the facts. First of all, Britain has its own interests in China; secondly, it cannot simply ignore the views of Commonwealth countries such as India and Pakistan; thirdly, its policy, despite the recognition, is aimed at containing the expansion of Communism in Asia. In other words, this attitude means that, for the British, Asian Communism has now reached the extreme limits of its expansion and must go no further. But fighting it beyond these limits does not mean, it has been said, having to fight even before it has tried to cross them. There is no point in trying to unscramble an omelette to recover the eggs. The American reversal will reinforce Ernest Bevin's position in Colombo and support the objectives of the conference. During his sea voyage from Suez to the island of Ceylon, Bevin has been unable to get as much rest as he had hoped. He has taken an active part in the discussions with America, and the radio aboard the cruiser *Kenya*, on which he is travelling, has not remained idle for a minute.

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