

Recognition Is Not Approval

The Department of State is now confronting a most difficult diplomatic problem which nevertheless urgently demands decision. The issue is whether or not to recognize the Communist government of China.

All the obvious arguments are against recognition. The Red regime in China has imprisoned our official representatives, confiscated American property, flouted and insulted us in a dozen different ways. To extend formal recognition to such a government would seem to condone all this humiliation. It would seem more pusillanimous than our failure to uphold the dignity and honor of our flag.

But the problem is not as one-sided as that.

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There is good reason to believe that the Communist high command in Moscow does not want us to recognize the new Communist government of China. And Secretary Acheson must ask himself whether he will be playing Stalin's game by withholding recognition.

Unfortunately, Chinese communism would be in no way weakened by complete American withdrawal from that country. Instead, such action would help Russia to strengthen its commercial and cultural contacts with China at American expense.

Moreover, if we refuse to recognize Red China it is difficult for the British to do so. Then the Chinese Communists will find it easier to take over British properties and Asiatic trade. Thus, irritation between London and Washington is encouraged—in the Russian interest.

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The Communist objective in the Far East does not stop short with the conquest of China, now accomplished. Red China is an ideal base for further advances—in Japan, the Philippines, southeast Asia, even India. To withhold recognition from China means that we get no inside information on the preparation of these plans.

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Finally, there is an obvious absurdity in continuing diplomatic relations with the high command of communism, in Moscow, while refusing to have any dealings with the underlings, in Peking. It seems idle to resent the youth who throws a baseball through your dining room window, if you continue to play poker with his father.

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This diplomatic problem is made the more difficult by abandonment of a fundamental principle of our foreign policy—the automatic recognition of every government able to maintain order in the territory under its control.

That policy was laid down by Thomas Jefferson, thus: “We surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded—that every one may govern itself according to whatever form it pleases, and change those forms at its own will.”

In other words, diplomatic recognition does not imply approval of a foreign form of government, any more than riding in a street car implies approval of all your fellow passengers.

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But in recent years we have mixed up diplomatic recognition and moral approval. The absurd result is that we now recognize Russia and not Spain, and are at present opposed to recognizing China even though we fear that may be cutting off our nose to spite Stalin’s face.