

*Telegrams and Correspondence respecting the Armaments of the  
Forts at Hongkong.*

*Presented to the Legislative Council by Command of  
His Excellency the Governor.*

(1.)

TELEGRAM.

*Governor Sir G. F. Bowen to the Secretary of State.*

*2nd January, 1885.*

Legislative Council unanimous in voting the amount estimated for expenditure on works of Military Defences, on the understanding that Imperial Government provides armament of latest pattern breech-loading heavy Ordnance, capable of resisting heaviest modern Ironclads. Despatch by Mail.

(2.)

*Governor Sir G. F. Bowen to the Secretary of State.*

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
HONGKONG, *2nd January, 1885.*

MY LORD,

Referring to much previous correspondence on the subject, I have the honour to report that on the 31st ultimo, the Legislative Council unanimously voted the special contribution of fifty-five thousand six hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling (£55,625), required by Her Majesty's Government from this Colony to meet the cost of the new Defence Works.)

2. I have this day telegraphed to your Lordship to the above effect.

3. The terms of the vote, which were arranged by the Finance Committee of the Council, are as follows:—

“This Council now vote the sum of fifty-five thousand six hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling (£55,625), required as the contribution of this Colony to the effective defence of Hongkong; it being understood that the armament to be provided by the Imperial Government, will be of the best and latest pattern of breech-loading Ordnance, and capable of resisting attacks by the heaviest modern Ironclads.”

4. It is my duty to report that there is a very strong feeling in this community—a feeling fully shared by the principal Naval and Military Officers on this Station—that it would be worse than useless (as leading to a false sense of security), to erect fresh Defence Works here, unless they are armed with Ordnance of the

latest and most approved pattern, capable of resisting the attack of the heaviest modern artillery. It was perceived from the Parliamentary Papers that it was originally proposed that the very insufficient sum of only £37,500 should be provided for the armament of the new Forts at Hongkong; and the un-official members of the Colonial Legislature gave energetic expression to the dissatisfaction generally felt on this point. However, I drew attention to the fact that, from the latest Parliamentary Papers, it appears that this question had been reconsidered by the Military Authorities in England; that the sum proposed for the new armament at Hongkong had been doubled; and that the letter from the War Office to the Treasury of the 1st November ultimo, contains the following paragraph: "At the time the earlier Parliamentary Estimate was framed, it was intended to provide wrought iron guns as possessing sufficient power for the work they would be likely to be called upon to perform. The armaments of the Forts, however, are required to resist the present power of foreign ships which may attack them, and consequently must be of a more formidable nature than was at first contemplated; therefore, some of the guns have been chosen from the latest pattern of breech-loading Ordnance, which has greatly increased the cost."

5. After some discussion the special contribution of £55,625, required by Her Majesty's Government, was voted by the Legislative Council unanimously;—an important point, for obvious reasons, in a matter of this nature.

6. I earnestly recommend, on grounds alike of Imperial and of Colonial Policy, that, in the terms of the Vote cited above, "the armament to be provided by the Imperial Government should be of the best and latest pattern of breech-loading Ordnance and capable of resisting attacks by the heaviest modern Ironclads."

7. It will be recollected that, in addition to this special vote for Defence Works, Hongkong pays an annual Military contribution of £20,000, which has already amounted to an aggregate sum of above £400,000. Moreover in my despatch No. 380 of the 17th November ultimo I wrote as follows:—

"It is generally urged here by the few Civil British residents (who do not exceed 800 in number, including men, women, and children) that the position of Hongkong is analogous to that of Gibraltar, and that this important naval and military station and great emporium of British trade is maintained chiefly for Imperial rather than for local objects. It is further pointed out that the heads of the Commercial houses, and other principal owners of the vast amount of shipping and other property which it is proposed to protect, are, for the most part, persons resident in England, and not at Hongkong. In fact there is no permanent British population here; and it is felt that there is no analogy between this Imperial Station, with its local revenue of little more than £200,000 on the one hand, and on the other hand, the great self-governing Colonies in Australia and Canada with their large, permanent, and fast growing British population, and their rapidly increasing revenues of many millions sterling, which already far exceed the revenues of several European Monarchies."

I have, &c.,

(Signed) G. F. BOWEN.

The Right Honourable

THE EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,

*ſc.*

*ſc.*

*ſc.*

(3.)

## TELEGRAM.

*From the Secretary of State to Governor Sir G. F. Bowen.*

21st January, 1885.

Referring to your telegram of 2nd January, new Guns being provided cost more than eighty thousand pounds sterling.

(4.)

*Secretary of State to Governor Sir G. F. Bowen, G.C.M.G.*

DOWNING STREET,

14th February, 1885.

SIR,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your Despatch No. 3 of the 2nd of January respecting the character of the guns to be provided for the new Defence Works of the Colony; and to inform you that that despatch has been communicated to the Secretary of State for War.

You will have learned from my telegram of the 21st ultimo that Her Majesty's Government have decided to provide new Guns at a cost of more than £80,000.

I have, &amp;c.,

(Signed) DERBY.

Governor Sir G. F. BOWEN, G.C.M.G.

(5.)

*Governor Sir G. F. Bowen to the Secretary of State.*

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,

HONGKONG, 31st January, 1885.

MY LORD,

In continuation of my despatch of the 2nd instant respecting the new Defence Works of Hongkong, I have the honour to forward herewith a copy of a question on the subject asked in the Legislative Council by the Honourable THOMAS JACKSON, one of the Un-official Members:—

“The Honourable THOMAS JACKSON, pursuant to notice, asked if it is true that the funds of this Colony are at present being spent upon the construction of a fort in the Liimun Pass, covering the proposed minefield, upon which it is intended to mount old 40-pounder guns which have been obsolete for nearly twenty years, and which would prove utterly useless against modern Ordnance.”

2. I annex also a report of the speech Mr. JACKSON made on this occasion :—

“Your Excellency, recently when we were called upon in this Council to pass a vote towards the cost of the fortifications of this island, I had grave misgivings about the sufficiency of the measures then proposed, and my fears were realised when it came to my knowledge within the past ten days that a fort is at present being constructed at the Liūmun Pass, which is to be armed with 40-pounders mounted on old naval slides. I would require to be possessed of a good deal of that sort of faith which would enable me to believe to be true what I knew to be false if I believed that such a fort would be efficient or was a fit and proper expenditure of our funds. I have heard it stated there is some doubt whether the funds to be expended on that fort are imperial or colonial funds, but considering that many of us, I think I may say all of us, and not only those who are here but many others in the colony, contribute not only to the colonial but also the imperial funds, I equally protest against imperial funds being wasted. An eminent Royal Engineer has stated that insufficient fortifications are worse than no fortifications at all; they are sufficiently strong to invite attack, and not strong enough to resist it. Such, sir, I hold the fortifications now in progress to be, and it appears to me the whole scheme of defence for this most important port will have to be reconsidered. Nothing less than making Hongkong impregnable will be sufficient. It has been said the coaling stations are to be protected in such a manner as that they may be able to resist surprises. I think there can be nothing more foolish. I hold that Hongkong ought to be entirely independent of the Navy. If unhappily we are involved in war with any of the great powers I have no doubt the Navy will find ample work elsewhere than in Hongkong, and I hope we will all be spared the sight of a British Admiral loitering in Hongkong when our commerce on the seas stands in need of protection. I hope the Admiral will be out seeking the enemy, finding him, and hammering him as in days of yore. Providence and the strong right arms of our ancestors have handed down to us in the British empire as it at present exists a noble inheritance, at once the pride and glory of British subjects of every race, and either the admiration or envy of the rest of the world. I hold it is a sacred duty to maintain, defend, and if need be extend this empire, and in insisting upon the proper fortification of Hongkong, and making this gem of the eastern seas a place to which ships may resort for safety, we are doing our part towards this desirable end. Recent events in the Southern Pacific conclusively prove that nobler and more statesmanlike views of imperial policy can be taken by the colonies themselves than by the mother country, where the energies and abilities of statesmen are so much occupied in domestic legislation and party strife, and where so many of our foremost men appear to be devoted to paddling their own canoes in the troubled waters of English party politics.”

3. After consultation with Lieut.-General SARGENT, I replied in the following terms :—

“With reference to the question of the Honourable Gentleman, I desire, in the first place, to take this opportunity of informing the Council that, on the 2nd instant, I forwarded by telegraph to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the vote passed unanimously, on the 31st ultimo, viz.:—

‘This Council now vote unanimously the sum of fifty-five thousand six hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling (£55,625), required as the contribution of this Colony to the effective defence of Hongkong; it being understood that the

armament to be provided by the Imperial Government will be of the best and latest pattern of breech-loading Ordnance, capable of resisting attacks by the heaviest modern Ironclads.' To this I have received the following reply:—

'Referring to your telegram of the 2nd January, new guns are being provided at the cost of more than eighty thousand pounds sterling (£80,000).' It will be remembered that this is more than double the cost (viz. £37,500) of the guns originally proposed for the new Forts at Hongkong.

"With regard to the terms of the Honourable Gentleman's question, I am unable to say, if 'the Funds of the Colony are at present being spent upon the construction of a Fort in the Liiumun Pass.' I have ascertained that the military works here are being carried out under the immediate direction of the War Office in England, and that it is not known as yet whether the cost of the battery at the Liiumun Pass, which will not exceed one thousand pounds sterling, (£1,000), will be set down to Imperial Funds, or to the Colonial contribution. Of course, if it is so desired, I will forward the question of my Honourable Friend to the Secretary of State.

"With respect to the other points of the Honourable Gentleman's question, I am informed that heavy Ordnance will probably be mounted at the Liiumun Pass, so soon as it can be procured; but that the primary object of the new work there is to protect the Submarine minefield against the attack of armed boats and steam-launches; and that for this purpose lighter and rapidly-firing guns are indispensable; such as breech-loading 40-pounder guns, which the Military Authorities declare are not obsolete, or ineffective."

4. In my despatch of the 2nd instant referred to above, I drew attention to the strong feeling prevalent in this community on the subject of the armament to be provided for the new Defence Works.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) G. F. BOWEN.

The Right Honourable

THE EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,

&c.,

&c.,

&c.