

HONGKONG.

## DESPATCH RESPECTING GAOL EXTENSION.

*Laid before the Legislative Council by Command of His Excellency  
the Governor, on the 1st June, 1893.*

HONGKONG,  
No. 53.

DOWNING STREET,  
24th March, 1893.

SIR,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch No. 340 of the 13th of December enclosing the Report of a Committee which you had appointed with a view to working out a scheme of Prison extension on the principles laid down in my predecessor's despatch of the 7th July, together with a protest from the Unofficial Members of Council against the measures proposed.

I have also received and considered your despatch No. 16 of the 20th of January, enclosing a representation from leading members of the Chinese Community, in which, as I understand, they argue that no extension of the Gaol should be undertaken. As these gentlemen take a different, and somewhat stronger line than the Unofficial Members of Council, it may be convenient that I should deal with their representation first.

I have perused their remarks with interest, but am unable to accept their views, and would most emphatically point out, that in urging the extension of the Gaol, Her Majesty's Government have not been influenced by any desire to lessen the punitive character of imprisonment. They have pressed for prison extension, mainly because, while objecting to the evils inherent to the association system, they believe that the cellular system is the only practicable basis of a deterrent prison discipline.

As regards the protest of the Unofficial Members of Council, and the Report of the Committee on which it is based, I would observe, that my predecessor's despatch appears to have been somewhat misunderstood, and to have been thought to involve larger extension than his Lordship had in mind. If his despatch is referred to, it seems plain that he would have been content with a prison accommodating 546 persons, of whom not all would have been in separate confinement. But the Committee have put forward a scheme providing for 612, and it is rather against this scheme than against my predecessor's despatch, that the protest must be taken to be directed. If I rightly understand the 12th paragraph of the protest, the Unofficial Members themselves are willing to concur in a very appreciable extension of the Prison accommodation, and this being so, it appears to me that they, and my predecessor, were more nearly in accord than they assumed. Further, the gratifying decrease in the average prison population during the last two years, seems to justify me in making some reduction in the minimum of 546 laid down by my predecessor. I am anxious as far as possible, consistently with the public interest, to meet the views of the Memorialists on this question of prison accommodation; and the following scheme appears to me to be adequate for the necessities of the case, and will, I hope, be generally accepted as a compromise, and be received in the friendly spirit in which it is offered:—

- (1) The 92 existing separate cells should continue to be primarily available for European prisoners, of whom there is an average of over 40, the rest being used for Chinese criminals.
- (2) 51 of the existing three-prisoner cells should be divided off into 102 separate cells.
- (3) A new site should be acquired adjoining the Gaol, on which should be built a three-storey block containing about 150 separate cells.
- (4) Separate accommodation being thus provided for 344 prisoners of the more criminal types, 60 three-prisoner cells, or small wards, would remain for the accommodation of 180 miscellaneous prisoners of the less criminal types. I note that according to the figures for 1891 the prison population was divided into,

Criminal, .....	333
Non-criminal or petty criminal, .....	176

Total average, .....	<u>509</u>
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The scheme which I propose leaves therefore some small margin in the case of each class.

Further, I consider that it would be advantageous in the case of the remaining associated cells, that where possible, two or three of them might be thrown into one, thus facilitating supervision by night, and possibly increasing their practical capacity for accommodation of prisoners at times of exceptional pressure.

Subject to the requirements which I have indicated, I leave all questions as to the re-arrangement and improvement of buildings and other structures on the existing site, to the discretion of your Government. I cannot of course but regret that the Unofficial Members of Council have felt unable to assent to the policy of my predecessor, but, as there seems reason to hope that the proposals which I now make will meet with general assent from the Members of Council, I refrain from entering on controversial matter.

I agree with the opinion expressed in the 5th paragraph of your despatch No. 340, that the suggested free emigration of ex-convicts to newly explored or thinly peopled countries is quite impracticable, and I await with interest your further report on the question of transferring the juvenile inmates of the Gaol to the Roman Catholic Reformatory, as recommended by the Unofficial Members of Council.

You may communicate this despatch to those gentlemen, either, by laying it before Council or otherwise as you may see fit.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble Servant,

RIPON.

Governor

Sir W. ROBINSON, K.C.M.G.,

*§c.*      *§c.*      *§c.*