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Protokoll einer außerordentlichen Sitzung der Handelskammer Kanton um 10 Uhr abends am 21. März 1839

Protokoll

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Abdrucke: Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the General Chamber of Commerce at 10 o'clock P. M., Canton, 21st of March, 1839, in: John Slade (Hg.), Narrative of the Late Proceedings and Events in China, Kanton 1839, S. 42–46

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Regest:

Die Mitglieder der Handelskammer Kanton treffen am 21. März 1839 abends um 10 Uhr zu einer außerordentlichen Sitzung zusammen, bei der zeitweilig auch die Mitglieder der Cohong-Gilde chinesischer Kaufleute anwesend sind, um zu besprechen, wie sie mit der ultimativen Aufforderung des Sonderbeauftragten des chinesischen Kaisers zur Bekämpfung des illegalen Opiumhandels, LIN Zexu, umgehen sollen, ihre sämtlichen Opiumbestände an ihn auszuliefern. LIN Zexu war am 10. März 1839 in Kanton eingetroffen, hatte innerhalb weniger Tage große Mengen des Rauschgifts bei chinesischen Händlern beschlagnahmen und öffentlich zerstören lassen und die ausländischen Kaufleute am 19. März 1839 in ihren Faktoreien festgesetzt. Er droht nun damit, zwei Mitglieder der mit den ausländischen Kaufleuten kooperierenden Cohong-Gilde am nächsten Morgen hinzurichten, sollten diese seiner Aufforderung nicht nachkommen. Sie beschließen widerstrebend, 1.000 Kisten Opium an LIN Zexu zu übergeben.

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General Chamber of Commerce:

Canton, 21st of March, 1839.

MINUTES of an extraordinary meeting of the General Chamber, convened 10 o'clock P. M. Present: Messrs. Green, Forbes, Matheson, W. Dent, D. Rustonjee, Wallace, Fox, Daniell, Astell, D. Furdoonjee, T. Gemmell, Bell, Delano, Low, Adam, Thomas, Gray, Braine, G. Smith, W. C. Hunter, W. S. Wetmore, L. Dent.

The chairman, Mr. Wetmore, stated, this meeting had been so suddenly called together in consequence of an interview with the hongmerchants. The resolution and letter of the meeting held this morning had been presented by them to the high commissioner, whom, according to their report, nothing would satisfy but the surrender of the opium; if this order was not complied with, he had announced his determination to sit in judgment on the hongmerchants in the morning, and to order the decapitation of two of their body. The question now to be put on the meeting was, whether the resolution of this morning shall be adhered to.

On the suggestion of Mr. Dent, the deputy chairman, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Green, were requested to go to the hongmerchants and ascertain from whom they received the communication, and whether they had seen the high commissioner himself, in presenting the chamber's letter.

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On their return, Mr. Fox, said they had seen the merchants, and that they had solemnly declared that they had seen H. E., the high commissioner; that the communication was from himself, beyond a doubt, and unless opium was given up, *they felt assured two of their number would be deheaded in the morning.*

On the motion of Mr. Dent, it was put and carried that the hongmerchants should be sent for to appear personally; and Mr. Forbes and Mr. S. Fearon were requested to convey to them the wishes of the meeting.

In a short time the following hongmerchants arrived; namely: Howqua, Mowqua, Puankhequa, Samqua, senior and junior, Poonhoyqua, Mingqua, Gowqua, Saoqua, Yetuck, Fontai, Kiuqua; and the following enquiries were made and replied to.

Question. – What took place during your interview with the high commissioner to day?

Answer, – We took the words of your letter to him and he gave them to the Kwangchowfoo to examine. On hearing them read, he said, “you are trifling with the hong merchants, but you should not do so with him; he declared that if opium was not delivered up, he should be at the Consoo hall tomorrow at 10 o’clock, and then he would show what he would do.

Q. – How many chests do you require?

A. – About one thousand.

Q. – What security can you give that he will be satisfied with that quantity?

A. – None; but we think if the opium is given up, he will be satisfied that his order has been obeyed; but whether more will be required, or not, we cannot answer. If you give up one thousand chests to satisfy the mandarins, though we should lose our heads, we will still thank you.

Q. – If one thousand chests are given up, what security can you give that the ships may proceed without molestation?

A. – We refer to the edict, and cannot answer.¹

Q. – If we can arrange among ourselves to subscribe money to pay for this opium, in what way can it be sent to the ships?

A. – That story cannot deceive the merchants, though it might do for the mandarins.

Q. – If the opium is delivered up, when will the money be refunded?

A. – We can only trust to your kindness; if it were known we had agreed to pay for the option, we should lose our heads.

Q. – If agreed to, how is the party who signs the order to be free from responsibility?

A. – No fear, but we cannot guarantee.

Q. – What does the commissioner mean, when he promises to[3. Seite, 44] memorialize the emperor, imploring him to devise some means of bestowing his imperial rewards, if all the opium be given up?

A. – Some degree of honour; it has no reference to pecuniary consideration.

Q. – Is it intended to carry out the edict word for word.

A. – As H. E. says, so will he act.

Q. – Seriously and solemnly are you in fear of your life?

Answered by the hongmerchants, separately and individually questioned, in the affirmative.

The hongmerchants then withdrew to the room adjoining, and, after some discussion, Mr. S. Fearon was directed to put the following.

1 Gemeint ist die Aufforderung LIN Zexus an alle ausländischen Kaufleute Kantons, ihre Opiumbestände vollständig auszuliefern und die damit verknüpfte Ankündigung, er werde Mitglieder der Cohong-Gilde enthaupten lassen, wenn dies nicht geschehe. Vgl. zum Kontext: *Platt*, Imperial Twilight, S. 341–372.

Question. – If the foreigners deliver up the opium now outside, which is their own property, will the commissioner rest satisfied, and permit the unmolested departure of the vessels with the portion belonging to non-residents?

Answer. – We cannot give a definite reply to this question; but we have no doubt but that the delivery of opium belonging to residents will so mollify the anger of H. E., as to render our urgent prayers, and the intercession of the governor and commissioner of the maritime customs (which we shall endeavour to procure), successful in obtaining H. E.'s permission for the ships to depart.

The chairman then put the question – shall be opium required be delivered up? – and an animated discussion took place; in which Messrs. Braine, Bell, Matheson, Dent, Fox, Green, and others took part.

Mr. Braine observed, – That the real question before the meeting was, whether we were or were not to rescind at 12 o'clock at night the resolution agreed to at 12 o'clock that day. We had come to a determination in the morning that we could not be hurried into any decision on such important questions without adequate time for deliberations; and it was now proposed that twelve hours [die versehentliche Wiederholung der Passage von „Mr. Braine observed ..“ bis „... twelve hours“ wird hier ausgelassen] after this resolution we should really decide on agreeing to obey the commissioner's orders. It was idle to say that we had merely met to determine about giving about giving up a certain quantity of opium; for it was reasonable to conclude this concession as to 1000 chests would inevitably lead to giving up the whole.

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Mr. Bell considered that we had not evidence of any such necessity existing as to render it proper for us to alter our resolution of this morning.

The assertion of the hongmerchants, that their heads were in danger, was mere assertion and might originate in groundless fears, or in anxiety to work on the feelings of foreigners. Besides, he contended that we could not give up property belonging to others, because the hongmerchants believed themselves in danger.

Mr. L. Dent considered that we had come to a solemn resolution in the morning that we must have time for deliberation, and he objected to alter that determination.

Mr. Green maintained that the only question before the meeting was whether we could give up 1000 chests of opium to save the lives of the hong merchants; and he was decidedly of opinion that we were bound to give up that amount of property.

Mr. Fox agreed with Mr. Green and begged the meeting would hear the evidence of Mr. Thom and Mr. W. C. Hunter, who, from their knowledge of the Chinese language and intercourse with the natives, could show the extreme danger of rousing their feelings against us.

Mr. Hunter assured the meeting, that from the conversations he had recently with several Chinese, he was convinced if opium were not given up, some of the hong merchants would be beheaded; and that the lives of all foreigners would be in considerable danger from the exasperation which it might occasion.

Mr. Thom expressed himself to nearly the same purport.

Mr. Dent, Mr. Bell, and Mr. Braine, objected to altering the resolution of the morning on the very insufficient evidence before the meeting; but as the sense of the meeting was evidently in favour of agreeing to give up opium, they should not press their objections to a division; and to show that the objection was a matter of principle, and not a pecuniary question, they were willing to subscribe if it were determined to give up the quantity.

The following resolution was then moved by Mr. Bell, seconded by Mr. Fox, and unanimously carried.

RESOLVED. – That the personal communication having been made to the chamber by the entire body of hongmerchants, in consequence of a communication from the commissioner, – that unless a quantity of opium, not less than one thousand chests, be immediately promised to be given up to him, not only their own lives would be endangered but those of the Foreign community also, as well as their property rendered liable to confiscation: – it was, therefore, resolved to supply the quantity of opium by joint contribution of the community, under solemn protest hereby made and recorded.

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The hong merchants were then called in and made acquainted with the nature of the resolution, and the chairman passed his word for the quantity of opium required, after which the meeting adjourned at half past one o'clock on Friday morning.²

Extracted from the records. A true copy.

(Signed.) WILLIAM SCOTT

Secretary.

2 LIN Zexu stufte das Angebot zur Auslieferung von 1000 Kisten Opium als völlig unzureichend ein; er forderte die chinesischen Angestellten der Faktoreien nach Kenntnisnahme des Angebots zum Verlassen des Konzessionsgebietes auf und verhängte danach ein Embargo gegen die rund 350 dort lebenden Ausländer. Vgl. *Platt*, *Imperial Twilight*, S. 354f.