

Eureka and the editor: A reappraisal 150 years on

By Rod Kirkpatrick

Editors of colonial newspapers in the Australian provinces in the 1850s were foolish if they did not keep one eye on the cash flow while the other focused on the copy flow. Survival was the priority. Many country papers in the 1850s and 1860s were as short-lived as the rushes for gold to the districts where some papers were established. Rare was the country newspaper that did not engage vigorously in promoting the material and social advancement of its town and district. This boosterism tended to dilute editorial vigour in other directions, such as attacking the Establishment when appropriate. This paper deals with an exceptional editor in exceptional circumstances: an editor confronted with an increasingly explosive situation on goldfields several days from the seat of government. The developing crisis was fuelled by a belligerent and arrogant authority and an increasingly resistant mining community that saw no hint of a fair go in how its members were being treated. This paper reappraises, 150 years on, the performance of the local editor in the events that led to and followed what is known simply as “Eureka”, a bloody battle provoked by an arrogant and uncaring administration.

One hundred and fifty years ago a stockade at Eureka, near the Victorian gold-mining town of Ballarat, was the scene of what has been loosely termed the only civil rebellion seen on Australian soil. History has given little credit to the editor of the only Ballarat newspaper for his role in the events that led to the Eureka uprising on 4 December 1854, although there is endless acknowledgment of the struggle the diggers waged against a belligerent, arrogant and unthinking authority. Eureka, however, also has much to say about courageous editorial leadership on behalf of an oppressed people, even though fourth-estate concepts of the press had been explicitly expressed in detail only two years earlier (Boyce 1978: pp. 19 and 23-25). Through a recounting of the events of Eureka, consideration of the issues and reflection on the editorial responses, this article examines the role that the *Ballarat Times* and its editor, Henry Erle Seekamp, played before, during and after Eureka.

James Harrison, proprietor of the *Geelong Advertiser*, had tried unsuccessfully to launch a newspaper in the Ballarat district in October 1851 (Kirkpatrick, 2003). Henry Seekamp succeeded on 4 March 1854 when he established the *Ballarat Times, Buninyong and Creswick's Creek Advertiser*.¹ Seekamp soon became one of the key propagandists in the campaign that led to Eureka. As a result, he was jailed for sedition. His wife said that if ‘Peter Lalor was the sword of the movement, my husband was the pen’ (Johnson, 1995: p. 40). He used his newspaper as a means of telling the colonial authorities how they should improve their performance. Seekamp, born in England in 1829, arrived in Ballarat in 1853 and tried his hand at prospecting, possibly successfully, for in early 1854 he was able to pay the enormous freight costs associated with bringing some basic printing equipment to Ballarat. He was an educated man who had an ‘Arts Bachelor’ degree from an unnamed university. He married a Dublin widow, Clara Maria Duvall, in December 1853. Seekamp believed Ballarat was not going to become just another transient mining site and that proper planning was vital if the town was to survive (Cooper, undated).

¹ Many early issues of the *Ballarat Times* are missing from the files (only eleven of forty-four are extant for 1854 and only three for 1855; Clara Seekamp is quoted as saying, ‘I do wish I hadn’t lost my file of the *Ballarat Times*’). The first extant issue is Vol. 1, No. 27, Saturday, 2 September 1854. The paper was appearing weekly (No. 33 was 14 October 1854). A countback indicates the paper began on 4 March 1854.

A change in the administration of Victoria helped shape the events that led to the Eureka uprising. In June 1854, Sir Charles Hotham, a naval commander, replaced the long-serving Governor La Trobe. At Geelong, en route to the goldfields to meet the diggers, Hotham pronounced publicly that ‘all power proceeds from the people’ and at Ballarat, he told the miners: ‘... I shall not neglect your interests.’ *Times* editor Seekamp wrote of a new era: ‘a bold, vigorous and farseeing man has been amongst us, and the many grievances and useless restrictions by which a digger’s success is impeded will be swept away’ (*Ballarat Times*, 26 August 1854 and 2 September 1854).²

Hotham soon showed a different face to the diggers, although one significant concession he made was to more than halve the diggers’ licence fee. Against all advice, however, Hotham instituted from 13 September twice-weekly searches for licences, thus incensing the diggers. Through the *Times*, Seekamp drew attention to the lessons of a crisis at Bendigo in 1853 and warned Hotham to proceed constitutionally, to ‘govern well and wisely’, or the paper would be a thorn in his side. He warned there were ‘such vast elements of ignition in this community ... whose slumbering might and impulsive power it would not be judicious to evoke’ (*Times*, 23 September 1854: p. 2; Molony, 1989: pp. 34-35, 41; Bate, 1978: pp. 55-56).

Commenting on the Governor’s speech to the Legislative Council, the *Times* found him inconsistent and double-dealing. Seekamp was correct in suggesting that, despite protestations of giving the diggers a fair go, Hotham had secretly ordered the police to invigorate the search for unlicensed miners. ‘Hunting the digger’ now became the chief sport of the Camp gentry (*Times*, 30 September 1854).

Soon a series of incidents occurred that demonstrated that the coin of justice had been devalued severely. There was the death, apparently from neglect, of a digger who had fallen on a jagged bottle and been taken to the Camp hospital and then the lockup. The diggers’ demand for an investigation was not satisfied. Then came the apparent murder of a Scottish digger, James Scobie, early on 7 October 1854 after a night on the town with his mate, Peter Martin. They had just been turned away by James Francis Bentley’s Eureka Hotel, after having accidentally smashed a window near the front door, when Martin was struck with a shovel, fell to the ground, rose and ran. When he returned he found Scobie silent – dead or dying. The affair that would be known as Eureka had begun. At the inquest on 9 October, an inexperienced coroner seems to have confused and thwarted the jury. It brought in an open finding, but nine of the twelve jury members wrote to the *Times* expressing disagreement with their own decision. A judicial inquiry was held before Police Magistrate D’Ewes (who was suspected of being a part-owner of the Eureka Hotel), Resident Commissioner Rede and Assistant Commissioner Johnston. Publican Bentley, an ex-convict, faced a judicial inquiry but was discharged, much to the embarrassment of Johnston (Molony, 1989: pp. 45, 46, 50; Bate, 1978: p. 58).

A flagrantly corrupt administration was pushing the diggers beyond the limits of their patience. And Seekamp had decided that instead of criticising the troopers and constables, he should be attacking the people giving the orders: ‘... we will feather our shaft for higher game’ (*Times*, 14 October 1854). James Scobie had been buried, but there were some diggers, principally on Eureka, determined to see that the death was avenged by due process of law. During a meeting on 17 October 1854 at the place where Scobie was killed, Henry Westerby, a digger widely known as ‘Yorkey’, struck the Eureka Hotel with his fist and declared: ‘I propose that this house belongs to the diggers.’ Small boys began throwing stones, one of which broke the outside lamp of the hotel. Things were soon out of hand. Soldiers and police were called in, but the hotel caught fire after flames had leapt from the adjacent bowling alley. The prestige of the Camp was ‘gone forever’ (Molony, 1989: pp. 58-62; *Times*, 14 and 21 October 1854; Bate, 1978: p. 59). The *Times* (21 October 1854) had ‘never witnessed a more terrible demonstration of popular feeling’.

Authority had been flouted on the highest scale. Eggs and refuse had been thrown at Commissioner Robert Rede. The police had shown how ineffective they were and, even

² The *Ballarat Times* is hereinafter referred to as the *Times*.

worse, the military had taken no more than a perfunctory role in the whole affair. The incident led the moderate Welshman John Basson Humffray, through the *Times*, to warn that the authorities had to recognise that they were dealing with men who were fully aware of their rights as citizens; men, furthermore, who knew that they had ‘the power to enforce’ those rights, preferably legally and peacefully, but, if not, by other means. It was time for Hotham, and all those whom he led, to recognise that three paramount issues remained unresolved – the land, the licence system and the lack of digger representation (*Times*, 21 October 1854; Molony, 1989: pp. 62-64; Bate, 1978: p. 60).

Commissioner Rede saw the need to salvage fragile government authority and sought troop reinforcements before making more arrests. On Sunday, 22 October, a crowd estimated at from ten to fifteen thousand gathered on Bakery Hill, resolved to collect funds for the defence of McIntyre and Fletcher; to protest the daily violation of personal liberty at Ballarat; and to lay the blame for the burning of Bentley’s hotel upon the Camp officials, whose partiality and maladministration were mentioned in each of the resolutions. For more than a week at the end of October, the Camp was barricaded and soldiers and police, heavily reinforced, stood at their posts each night. Attempts to put right a glaring miscarriage of justice had led to a dangerous confrontation (Bate, 1978: pp. 61-62). A meeting of 4,000 men in Canadian Gully on 24 October petitioned the governor to remove Commissioners Rede and Johnston, Inspector Evans and the coroner, Dr Williams. But the authorities ‘brazened out their inadequacies’, and virtually forced a seditious response from those who believed in justice (Bate, 1978: p. 63).

The newspapers condemned the administration as though with one voice, although the *Age*, *Argus* and *Geelong Advertiser* were milder than the *Times*. Seekamp’s forthright editorialising in the *Times* in 1854 had ensured that agitation and the press were spoken of in the same breath. He condemned (*Times*, 28 October) the administration of Ballarat in the strongest terms and spoke prophetically of the uprising that was only thirty-six days away.

No one who ponders over the present aspect of affairs at Ballarat, and indeed of all the other mining districts of the country, but must see that something is radically wrong in the administration of affairs to cause such general dissatisfaction, and such determined opposition to the Government by the mining community, and so great and settled a determining to have that wrong redressed.³

Seekamp could not bring himself to believe that the destruction of the Eureka Hotel had been anything other than ‘a mark of disapprobation of the manner in which the entire proceedings connected with the murder of Mr Scobie, and the trial of his supposed murderers’ were conducted rather than a desire to injure Bentley himself. Describing the management of the affair as ‘underhand’, Seekamp said (*Times*, 28 October 1854) the Ballarat miners would not lie down to allow ‘the corrupt tools of a tyrannical government to ride roughshod over them’. The miners knew their strength and ‘unless immediate attention be paid to their just demands by our nominee *mis*government, a terrible settlement will soon be enforced; and then woe to the unjust debtor!’ Seekamp raised issues for resolution similar to those Humffray had detailed in his letter. ‘We want the abolition of the miners’ tax; we want representation in [the Legislative] Council; and, above all, we want justice.’

Hotham announced on 30 October the terms of reference for a special board of officers to inquire into the conduct of the Ballarat camp generally and more particularly into the burning of Bentley’s hotel, Scobie’s murder and charges of corruption against officials. The board sat from 2 to 10 November and interviewed fifty-eight men. Its sittings may have led the informal committee, which was meeting at the Star Hotel, to formalise its operations and expand them into the Ballarat Reform League, which began to take shape after a mass meeting on 1 November. The *Times* (18 November 1854) saw something ominous in the word ‘League’ at a time of such feverish excitement. (Indeed, there was something ominous in the

³ Bate (1978: 63) says that, with hindsight, Seekamp’s editorial reads as strong but justified criticism; at the time it seemed an insurrectionary manifesto.

whole editorial for it became one of four articles that gave rise to charges of seditious libel against Seekamp.)

This league is nothing more or less than the germ of Australian independence. The die is cast, and fate has cast upon the movement its indelible signature. No power on earth can now restrain the united might and headlong strides for freedom of the people of this country ... The League has undertaken a mighty task, fit only for a great people – that of changing the dynasty of the country.

The *Times* said it was not for it to say what part the paper had played in ‘rousing up the people to a sense of their own wrongs’. That would be left to the public. The *Times* had been stigmatised as corrupt by the government, and the board of inquiry in particular. Certain charges had been made against officials in police reports in the *Times*, and the police reporter had substantiated to the board the truthfulness of his reports upon solemn oath.

Ours indeed has been a painful task throughout, for, baring our arm, we have hurled defiance in the teeth of the Government in our espousal of the people’s cause... the result of our continuous appeal to the people on their own behalf is the formation of the Reform League... Would the potent voice of a high-minded, intelligent people echo the loud thundering of the Press, if that Press were, as the Government would represent it, truthless and corrupt?

It had never been the *Times*’ desire to embarrass the government, but ‘when the government involves itself, it is our duty, as an independent journalist, to make clear statements of facts, without fear, favor, or partiality’. Though the government should ‘foam with rage, and fret itself into a passion, this, it is our intention, to continue to do’. The League, not a board of inquiry, would henceforth investigate the grievances of the people. ‘Did the Government imagine, indeed, that the so-called Board could, in the short space of eight days, hear the million grievances and wrongs of this most injured but strangely patient people?’ (*Times*, 18 November 1854)

Yet the report of the board, dated 17 November, told a staggering tale of corruption. Hotham acted quickly, sacking some officials, but ignored the general grievances, despite the strongest possible recommendation by the board that the licence fee be abolished and the police be diverted to more normal work. He adopted the sweep-it-under-the-carpet device of a royal commission to undertake a general inquiry, with no prospect of an early report. The elements of confrontation remained at Ballarat and Rede retained the power to provoke with a licence hunt. The issues disturbing diggers at Ballarat continued to gather momentum in the final weeks of November and some diggers burned their licences in open protests. Rede learned of the mounting tension and sent to Castlemaine and Melbourne for more troops (Bate, 1978: p. 67).

In the short term, Rede’s policy broke the alliance between moral-force men such as Humffray and exponents of direct action such as Vern and Kennedy. The licence hunt on Thursday morning, 30 November, so angered the most militant that they armed themselves and went unsummoned to the meeting point at Bakery Hill. The Reform League’s leaders failed to appear, and so the militant diggers accepted the leadership of men who had for some time believed that it was futile to beg for justice from a government dead set against reform. Peter Lalor, an Irishman, a Eureka digger, a positive, independent thinker, but no democrat, mounted a stump, proclaimed ‘Liberty’, and called for volunteers to form companies. He swore them in there and then, heads bare, hands raised, under the Southern Cross, with a vow to hazard all in the defence of their rights and liberties. His initiative made him their leader. A council of war held that night included only two League representatives, Friedrich Vern and Timothy Hayes. Already about a thousand men had been enrolled and had marched behind the Southern Cross to Eureka, their names and those of their captains having been noted. The disintegration of the Reform League hastened a less rational stance. Even as Lalor was swearing in the faithful, Humffray, a short distance away, was twice threatened with death. Constitutional aims were dropped. All that remained was emotion, the desire to hit back,

whatever the odds. Rumours reached the Camp that an assault could be expected at 4am on Friday, 1 December. Nothing came of it (Bate, 1978: pp. 67-68).

On the Saturday the more radical diggers constructed a slab palisade among shepherded holes at Eureka, with a smithy in the middle where crude weapons such as pikes were made. It seems to have begun as an expression of defiance rather than as a fortification, somewhere to drill perhaps, but mainly a place from which to resist the promised licence hunts. On Saturday night, H.R. Nicholls, a reluctant rebel and the editor of the recently defunct *Diggers' Advocate*, slipped away to his tent, appalled by the lack of discipline. There was no plan of campaign (Bate, 1978: pp. 68-69). At the Camp, the tension had been mounting. For three nights all the soldiers slept in their clothes and the cavalry lay on the ground, their bridles in their hands. How long could this continue? 'What can we expect from such a crew [the officials]? the *Times* asked. 'What can they expect from us but mutiny?' If the most active reformation of the management of the goldfields did not take place immediately, the *Times* said, those men who had the power and could exercise it would take the law into their own hands and enforce their principles where the Government now little expected (*Times*, 2 December 1854, cited in *Argus*, 24 January 1855: p. 5).

Rede and his leaders hatched a secret plan that Saturday night to attack the stockade early on the Sunday. The troops, 176 infantry and 100 cavalry, were silently assembled at 2.30am on Sunday, 3 December, and they headed for Eureka, supported by the police. Dawn was breaking when they sighted the rebel position. There was no reading of the Riot Act, no intention of calling for a surrender. At the first shot from the stockade, the bugle sounded skirmishing order and the government force moved forward rapidly. In the ensuing fifteen-minute engagement, five of the attackers died and twelve were seriously wounded, and twenty-four diggers were killed, about half of them after the fortification had been overrun and the flag pulled down. A picture of brutal killing of some of the rebels emerges from various reports. The government force won the battle, but lost the war. The Governor's reputation was in tatters and the Colonial Secretary, Foster, resigned in disgust. The licence policy lay in ruins at Bendigo and Castlemaine, with large public meetings refusing further payment. Licence hunts were soon suspended and the government leaders in Ballarat were shifted elsewhere (Bate, 1978: pp. 69-71; Clark, 1978: pp. 78-79).

Ballarat wept tears of grief and anger amid the cries of some of the women whose tents had been subject to attacks that Sunday morning. Loved ones lay smashed, homes were in ruins, and belongings were strewn about and charred or covered with blood. About a hundred prisoners, cast into a crowded hut, were stripped of their belongings and subjected to the abuse of a group of drunken soldiers until early on Monday when Commissioner Rede moved them to a larger place. Editor Seekamp was added to their number on Monday morning, charged with sedition. The day after the battle, Seekamp was arrested at his office, allegedly with £105 in his pocket and about to depart for Bendigo. He was allegedly busy setting the type for a special edition of the *Times* (Molony, 1989: p. 170; Clark, 1978: p. 79). The editorial was to have ended as follows: 'This foul and bloody murder calls to High Heaven for vengeance, terrible and immediate.' The difficult-to-read, black-bordered special edition of the *Times* of 3 December 1854 carries the following late insertion: 'The Editor of the *Ballarat Times* has been arrested since the above was written!'

His wife, Clara, ran the paper in his absence and won publicity for her outspokenness, with one editorial containing her manifesto described as startling in its tone, and energetic in its free use of the words 'sedition', 'liberty', and 'oppression' (*Argus*, 31 January 1855: p. 5).⁴ In January 1855 the Seekamps changed the full name of their newspaper to the *Ballarat Times and Southern Cross*, a title they used until the end of March 1855 when it became simply the *Ballarat Times* (Cooper, undated).

Henry Seekamp was tried on 23 January 1855 on charges of publishing four articles containing seditious libels on 18 and 25 November and 2 December 1854 in the *Times*. The

⁴ The *Argus* report from its Ballarat correspondent was dated 29 January; also see imprint of *Ballarat Times*, 1 January 1855 (the only extant issues for 1855 on microfilm are 1 January, and 12 and 15 September).

Chief Justice, Sir William à Beckett, effectively told the jury that it must find Seekamp guilty, which it did but with a recommendation for mercy because it had not been proved that he had been the writer nor that the articles had been published with his knowledge or consent (Molony, 1989: p. 182; *Argus*, 27 January 1855: p. 5). Seekamp, in a letter published in the *Argus* (27 January 1855: p. 5) ‘most emphatically’ asserted that the articles were ‘none of my production, as I was prepared to prove in court’. When he appeared for sentence, Seekamp expressed regret that the articles had been written. His counsel read two affidavits, filed by George Dunmore Lang and John Manning, stating that they had written the seditious articles without Seekamp’s knowledge or consent when he was absent in Melbourne. Seekamp said he had been taken into custody, lodged with 113 other prisoners in a stone cell, without any cover over him, and had had to submit to insults from soldiers. The Chief Justice said he wanted to give Seekamp the opportunity to state all the facts on affidavit and would reserve the judgment of the court until the sittings beginning on 21 March. He gave Seekamp to understand distinctly the Manning and Lang affidavits would avail him little unless the Court could also be satisfied by clear and direct testimony that he had done all that lay in his power, not only to prevent the appearance of the articles in question, but had also taken such steps as he was able to counteract the effect of them after they had appeared. Seekamp was released on bail (*Argus*, 6 February 1855: p. 5, and 24 March 1855: p. 6).

Despite all manner of delay, he failed to recant the articles about which he said he had known nothing. The Chief Justice said Seekamp had ‘clothed himself with sedition so long as it paid, so long as he found it warm and comfortable; but when he found the garment intolerably hot, he dropped it’. On 26 March Sir William à Beckett, his patience with Seekamp exhausted after the various delays since the original verdict two months earlier, told him that no sane mind could doubt the ‘grossly seditious character’ of the libels. It was a legal doctrine – and it seemed to him a reasonable one – that the editor of a newspaper should be responsible for its contents. Sir William sentenced Seekamp to six months in jail (*Argus*, 24 March 1855: p. 6, and 27 March 1855: p. 5).

The Ballarat correspondent of the *Geelong Advertiser*, Samuel Irwin, commented that most people agreed that the articles said to be seditious were ‘rather exciting’, but it remained ‘a matter for speculation, independent of the turn which affairs took, how far the articles referred to are seditious’. The second charge really accused him of giving publicity to the prospectus of the Reform League, although the indictment phrased it otherwise. Irwin said: ‘If I mistake not, nearly if not all the principal public journals are equally guilty in this respect’ (cited in *Argus*, 30 January 1855: p. 5). At Sandhurst, was Haverfield, the editor of the *Bendigo Advertiser*, any less ‘seditious’ – or irksome to Hotham – on occasions, than Seekamp? Haverfield wrote (*Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 August 1854: p. 2) that the licence laws had made poverty a crime. It was a great wrong to suffer industrious men to be driven from the work by which they were deriving their daily bread, to be hunted by horse and foot, and marched felon-like to jail. ‘A tax that can only be collected by armed bodies of men will never be long tolerated by a civilized people.’ He described the Government’s determined opposition to the will of the people on the goldfields as a ‘fatal persistence’ whose consequences were not difficult to foresee, though not for him to predict (*Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 October 1854). Haverfield was prominent in publicising official incompetence and tyranny on the goldfields, but the tone of his editorials was less inflammatory than those of Seekamp. (Mackay, 1891: p. 146; Kwasitsu, 1989: p. 145).

Seekamp was released from prison on 28 June 1855, precisely three months early, but he had lost little of his boldness in editorially condemning those in authority (*Argus*, 30 June 1855: p. 5). Earlier the Governor had decided to proceed with charges of high treason against thirteen of those arrested after the Eureka conflict. Each was committed for trial. The first, Joseph, was found not guilty, and so was the second, John Manning, who claimed to be the author of some of the ‘seditious’ material in the *Times* (*Age*, 2 March 1855: p. 5). The ‘State Trials’, as they were commonly labelled in newspapers, were then suspended while jury lists were redrawn, a ‘gross perversion of justice revealing the fixity of purpose of the Governor and his judiciary’. There was widespread resentment throughout the Victorian community, with even the *Argus* joining in the condemnation (Molony, 1989: pp. 183-185). Commenting

on the verdicts, the *Age* (2 March 1855) said the heart of the people was sound; the heart of the government rotten. The trials continued: the third defendant was found not guilty, and the fourth, and the fifth. Stuart Macintyre (1999: p. 90) summarised the situation:

Juries in Melbourne refused to convict the leaders put on trial for high treason; a royal commission condemned the goldfields administration; the miners' grievances were remedied and even their demands for political representation were soon conceded, so that within a year the rebel Lalor became a Member of Parliament and eventually a minister of the Crown.

Peter Mansfield (1989), a Ballarat librarian in the 1980s, studied the Eureka uprising closely and concluded that one of the most obvious features of the press of the time was the durability of its opinion.

We have a good idea of what Carboni, Vern, and Lalor said at the mass meetings, what Father Patrick Smyth said to his parishioners and how Robert Rede choked with indignation at the diggers' demands... But we know *precisely* what Seekamp said in his newspaper.

Even as the trials proceeded, rival newspapers were springing up on the Ballarat fields, with the first, the *Creswick Chronicle*, beginning on 22 March 1855. The *Leader* followed on 26 May. Both were short-lived, but the *Star*, established on 22 May 1855 became a worthy competitor and outshone the *Times* in the years ahead (Kirkpatrick, 2002). If Seekamp enjoyed a golden era in late 1854 and early 1855, his luck deserted him in 1856, the year of his unfortunate involvement with Irish dancer Lola Montez in the notorious incident when she took to him with a whip. Opinions vary on what it meant for history's opinion of Seekamp. One observer regretted that Lola had in a moment destroyed the popularity of a man who had been a tribune of the people, but opinions differ on the actual damage to Seekamp's reputation (Seymour, 1996: p. 344; Mansfield, 1989). Seekamp's health deteriorated so greatly in the second half of 1856 that he allowed lawyer Henry Cuthbert to take a minor interest in the paper and then convert that into the sole proprietorship from 23 October 1856. Seekamp died from excessive drinking at Clermont, Queensland, on 19 January 1864, aged thirty-five (Fulwood, 2002).

Conclusion

History has not dealt kindly with Henry Erle Seekamp. His lack of moderation in editorial comment, his unseemly involvement with the dancer Lola Montez and his early death because of drunkenness provide a platform for condemnation rather than congratulation. Carboni called Seekamp 'this wild elephant whose trunk, it was supposed, had stirred up the hell on Ballarat'. The board of inquiry into Eureka rebuked him for tending to show little disposition to 'support authority and good order' (cited in Molony, 1989: p. 76). Yet if Seekamp could speak from the grave, there is much for which he could claim congratulation. And, in effect, he can speak to us from the grave – if we take the trouble to listen. His editorials speak powerfully on his behalf. Read them in the context of the complex events and the injustices that were being perpetrated in 1854, and you cannot fail to be stirred by the courage, the conviction and, generally, the correctness of the central argument that Seekamp presented, or allowed to be presented. Here was an editor angry on behalf of the many diggers who were suffering because of the licence tax and the way it was being enforced. Here was an editor prepared to take a new Governor at his word and write warmly of him. Here was an editor who turned fiercely against the Governor when the man's actions did not match his words, when the liberal on the surface turned out to be a tyrant underneath. Here was an editor who became the public spokesman for the thousands of ordinary colonists who believed that justice had failed. Here was an editor using his position in a way that was unique in Australian history – he was intent on shaping history. Mansfield (1989) concluded that if the armed clash had occurred in some secluded part of the Victorian goldfields, the

diggers would have lost both the military and the political battle. 'Seekamp and the other newspapermen ensured that the political battleground was much larger and subject to public scrutiny – a process we now take as a natural right.' The final word on Seekamp comes from wife Clara who said, years later, that 'if he's sinned, it was with the single-minded aim of bettering the people' (Johnson, 1995: p. 42).

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