

Political Effects of the Gold Rushes

Miners' Grievances

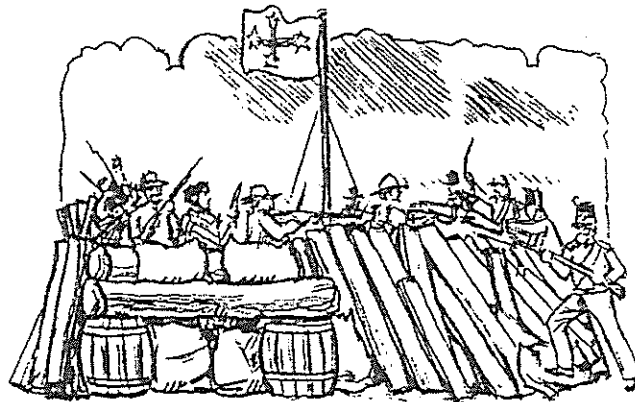
The gold fields were boisterous places, but most people were law-abiding. There were, however, thieves and bushrangers about, and not many policemen. Most people carried guns to protect themselves and their gold.

The colonial governments licensed miners, to raise revenue and control mining. Most miners could not afford to pay the monthly fee of 30 shillings. Twenty thousand miners attended a protest meeting at Bendigo when the government attempted to increase the fee in 1851. In 1853 some Bendigo miners joined the Red Ribbon Movement and wore a red ribbon, which signified that they would pay only ten shillings per month.

Most miners paid the licence fee, but objected to the method of spot searchers by armed troops for licences. Many of the policemen were violent ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land.

Miners argued that they no longer could make a living from mining, yet could not take up farming because the squatters leased large areas of the best land. They claimed that they should be entitled to vote in elections and have political representation.

Miners claimed the government was not putting their licence money to good use. The gold fields administration was over-staffed and overpaid. Officials lived in good conditions, but the miners lived with poor roads, few amenities and lack of police protection from bushrangers.



Eureka Stockade

Late in 1854, rebel miners built the Eureka Stockade and swore under the Eureka flag to fight to defend their rights and liberties. When troopers attacked the stockade early in the morning, 30 miners and 5 soldiers were killed.

Changes in Rights

Even though the miners lost, licence fees were dropped to ten shillings a month after the protests.

The squatters had been very powerful in the early colonies. Only men who owned land were allowed to vote. Women and Aborigines were not allowed to vote. The new immigrants wanted the right to set up businesses, settle on the land and have a say in the governing of the colonies. They resented the control the squatters had over land use, the law, parliament and the economy.

South Australia (1856), then Victoria (1857), and then New South Wales (1858) were the first colonies to give all non-Aboriginal males the right to vote and to stand for parliament. Non-Aboriginal women received the vote at different times in the different states, between the years of 1894 (South Australia) and 1908 (Victoria). Aboriginal people had to wait much longer, not being granted the official right to vote until 1962.

