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Spirit of Life Fellowship  
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## **EUREKA! THE POLITICS OF POWER VERSES GOLD**

It was still drizzly wet.

Most of the miners had gone home leaving about 150 or so  
in the roughly slab-built stockade on Bakery Hill, Ballarat.

And due to the rain the day before the Creswick miners heading to Ballarat,  
had only reach the rounded-mound-like hills called Bald Hills  
before they turned round and went back home.

At around 3.52am on the Sunday morning of 3 December 1854  
276 troopers of the 12th Regiment, leave the Government Camp and attack the stockade at dawn.  
The attack starts when a digger fires the first shot at 4.35 am.  
The battles finished by 4.55am.

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Let me take a couple of steps back.

The colony of Victoria was created when the Port Phillip District  
separated from New South Wales in July 1851.

Then less than a month later gold was discovered in Ballarat,  
at Poverty Point, in August 1851 sparking Victoria's famous gold rush.

Thousands of diggers arrived each week for months, seeking their fortune.  
Ballarat was considered the world's richest alluvial goldfield  
during its peak between 1852 and 1853.

At the time of Eureka the population of Ballarat was reported as being  
24,600 men, 4,000 women and 4,410 children.

Discontent on the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s was alive and well.  
In June 1854 Sir Charles Hotham (1806-1855) replaced Charles La Trobe  
as Lieutenant Governor of Victoria.

Within three months, due to both government overspending and unrest on the goldfields,  
Hotham ordered twice-weekly licence hunts  
“to increase the proportion of diggers paying for their licences and to boost government  
revenue”.

Weeks later, on 7 October 1854, James Scobie, a digger, was murdered...  
Struck on the head with a shovel during a fight - outside Bentley's Eureka Hotel,  
after he and a friend, Peter Martin, tried to gain entry for an after-hours drink.

But two other events stoked the diggers anger further:  
(i) Most people believed Bentley had killed Scobie.

But Bentley and three others were acquitted of Scobie's death.

While an inquest was held on the body by Police Magistrate Dewes, it was considered a farce.

Dewes was thought to be in partnership with Bentley in the Eureka Hotel.

In an act of revenge the Hotel was looted and burned to the ground.

(ii) There is a major robbery on the Bank of Victoria in Ballarat with up to £15,000 of gold money, stolen.

Shortly before the attack a small delegation of diggers

(Black, Carboni and Catholic priest Father Smythe)

went to the Government Camp asking Commissioner and Sheriff, Robert Rede (1815-1904) not to launch any more gold licence hunts.

But Rede, who had been publicly humiliated during the burning of Bentley's hotel, was determined to teach the miners 'a fearful lesson'.

Neither had there been any response from the Government to the Ballarat Reform League's petition for reform...

“to protest high license fees, police mistreatment, lack of representation, and shortage of land”,

The Reform League's Charter wanted:

1. full and fair representation (in Parliament);
2. male suffrage;
3. the removal of the property qualification for Members of the Legislative Council;
4. salaries for members; and
5. a shorter duration of Parliament

The 3 December 1854 attack lasted 20 minutes at most.

Although official records are uncertain as to the final death toll, it is generally believed that 22 diggers and 5 troopers were killed.

Irish-born Peter Fintan Lalor (1827-1889), member of the Reform League, was the diggers commander in chief.

Although wounded during the battle, losing an arm, he escaped and remained in hiding until amnesty was declared.

The resultant trials ordered by Hotham were a farce.

While the rebel diggers were charged with treason, none was convicted.

'Not Guilty' said the non-Irish juries on each occasion.

Hotham was “shaken in health and confidence”.<sup>1</sup>

One of the acquitted, John Manning, a former school teacher, wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Keneally, **Australians**, 554

“The future history of Australia will remember them with honour, and prosperity will exalt with a laudable pride that, in even the darkest and gloomiest moments of their history, their ancestors had been found to the very last, true to their post”.<sup>2</sup>

When the Report of the Commission on the Goldfields was finally tabled, it condemned ‘the resort to arms’.

*The Age* newspaper wrote that Hotham had

“brought the good faith in the government into disrepute by systematic breach of contract... and a disgraceful system of espionage.”<sup>3</sup>

And in a letter to *The Age*, Lalor wrote asking why

“nothing had been done to fix affairs before this bloody tragedy took place.”

He continued:

“Is it to prove to us that a British government can never bring forth a measure of reform without having first prepared a font of human blood in which to baptise that offspring of their generous love?... Or is it to convince the world that where a large standing army exists, the Demon of Despotism will have frequently offered at his shrine the mangled bodies of murdered men.”<sup>4</sup>

After the Eureka uprising, most of the miners’ grievances were redressed.

- The Miner’s Right abolished the old licence system to grant a parcel of Crown land for a digger to live on and cultivate.

Having the right to make a residential claim led to the development of towns across Victoria.

- The Gold Rush resulted in significant social and political growth.

The economic boom built the city of Melbourne and benefitted the generations that followed.

- The Goldfields Law Act introduced local courts with its members elected by the public to resolve disputes and claims within the community.

- The holder of a Miner’s Right removed the prerequisite of property qualifications for members of parliament, resulting in universal male suffrage in the Victorian Legislative Assembly.

- The miners had achieved the right to be recognised and judged on merit, rather than by birth or past deeds.

- The secret ballot came into effect after the introduction of the Victorian Electoral Act in 1856.

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<sup>2</sup> Keneally, *Australians*, 555

<sup>3</sup> Keneally, *Australians*, 555

<sup>4</sup> Keneally, *Australians*, 555

Following the expansion of the Victoria Legislative Council to include representatives from the goldfields, Lalor was one of the first elected in 1855.

Likewise, Carboni was elected to the Ballarat Local Court and then later stood unopposed to represent Ballarat in the Legislative Council. Hotham resigned in November 1855 and died one month later, aged 49 years.

When the Legislative Council moved that one thousand pound be expended on a monument in his memory, Lalor protested: “... that Sir Charles had a sufficient monument in the graves of those slain at Ballarat.”<sup>5</sup>

A new state Constitution came into force in 1856.

As Leah Murray suggests:

“The Eureka Stockade was much more than a rebellion of miners against the oppressive tyranny of the government, it was, in fact, where Australian Democracy was born. The battle that occurred in Ballarat in 1854 has also become an important Australian legend, which embodies the Australian people’s sense of national identity.”

Third (3rd) of December is a date which should be remembered by all Australians. Future generations need to know the historical facts that surround these events, and develop a deeper understanding of how much influence individuals can have in deciding how they are governed.

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The flag of the Ballarat Reform League, the ‘Southern Cross’, now more commonly known as the ‘Eureka flag’, was first flown at a large meeting of around 12,000 people held on 29 November 1854 at Bakery Hill, Ballarat. It was again flown during the Eureka uprising. Miners swore an oath to the flag as a symbol of defiance. Flag dimensions: 2600mm wide x 3240mm high.

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<sup>5</sup> Keneally, **Australians**, 556

The November meeting was called to hear the results of the Ballarat Reform League's deputation to Governor Charles Hotham. The anger of the meeting when they heard of Hotham's dismissal of their Charter led to a call to burn mining licences.

It is widely believed the flag was designed by a Canadian miner, Henry Charles Ross. There are also suggestions it may have been sewn by three women – Anne Withers, Anne Duke and Anastasia Hayes but there are alternative claims: that it was made by local tentmakers Edwards and Davis. Neither of these stories have been proven.

It is made from wool and cotton and consists of a dark blue field with a central white symmetric cross consisting five eight-pointed stars, representing the Crux constellation. The white cross behind the stars is Celtic.

The original flag is held at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery although currently it is on loan to the Eureka Centre, located at the Eureka Stockade Memorial Park, considered to be the site of the 1854 Eureka Stockade where the rebellion took place.

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