

Viewpoints

Some people in New South Wales saw **Governor Bligh** as a dangerous, power-mad leader who threatened people's lives and twisted the laws to suit himself. They felt that by standing up to Bligh, John Macarthur was defending **justice** and freedom. However, others believed that Bligh had done no wrong, and that Macarthur was determined to destroy the legal government so he could hold on to his power. The following extracts show these two different points of view.

The rebels

John Macarthur and his supporters claimed they had to act against Bligh to uphold freedom and justice in the **colony**. They wrote to William Bligh and accused him of committing crimes:

“... it appears that you (Governor Bligh) have been acting upon a settled plan to subvert (undermine) the laws, to terrify and influence the Courts of Justice, and to ... (take away from) every person who had the misfortune to be obnoxious (offensive) to you ... their property, **liberty** and lives.”

Nicholas Bayley and others in a letter to William Bligh, 28 January 1808



After his arrest, the New South Wales Corps circulated this cartoon of Governor Bligh hiding under the bed to make him look foolish and try to justify their actions.

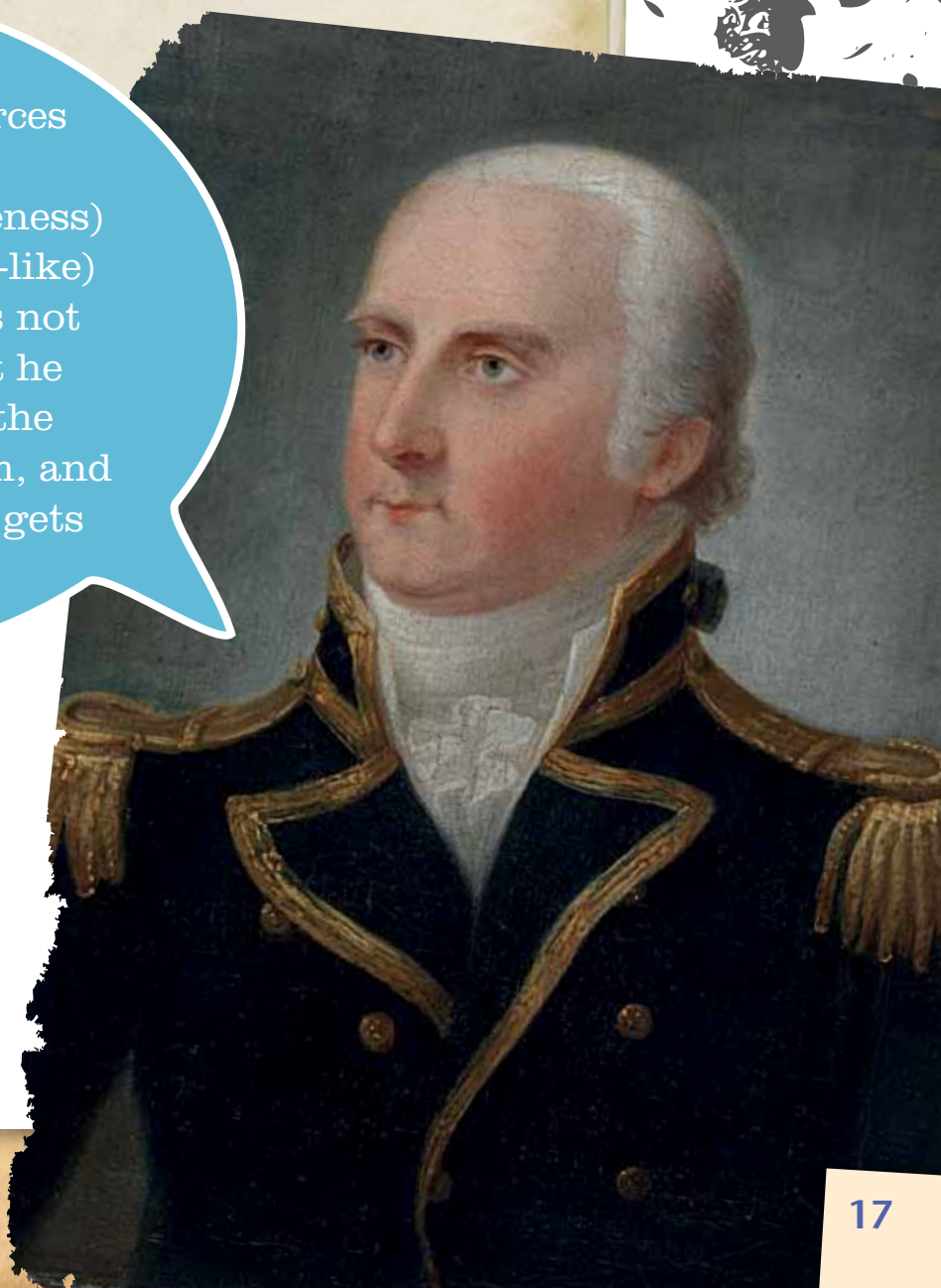
Philip Gidley King, governor of New South Wales, 1800–1806

Philip Gidley King was governor of New South Wales before Captain Bligh arrived. Like Bligh, King tried hard to limit Macarthur's trade in **rum** and weaken his power. However, Macarthur plotted to have King removed by writing letters of complaint to the government in England. Governor King believed Macarthur was an evil, greedy man who would stop at nothing to get his way. He wrote this letter to the Duke of Portland complaining about Macarthur:

“... there are no resources which art, cunning (sly cleverness), impudence (rudeness) and a pair of basilisk (snake-like) eyes can afford that he does not [use] ... to obtain any point he undertakes ... one half of the colony already belongs to him, and it will not be long before he gets the other half.”

Philip Gidley King, 1801

Like Bligh, Governor Philip Gidley King believed John Macarthur would stop at nothing to get his way.



Rebellion in the Corps

Macarthur had ended his own trial and threatened the chief judge. The other magistrates backed Macarthur and refused to work with Judge Atkins. It was open rebellion! Major Johnston, the army commander, was torn between loyalty to his friends in the Corps and his duty to Governor Bligh.

Morning, 26 January 1808

Major Johnston's house

I SHOULD HELP BLIGH ... BUT HE'S MAD WITH POWER!

Johnston felt bad about defying Bligh. But then ...

Afternoon

SIR, BLIGH HAS CHARGED YOUR OFFICERS WITH TREASON.

THAT MEANS HANGING!

GET MY HORSE AND CART.

5 p.m.

Johnston decided to go and ask Macarthur what to do.

ARMY BARR

BLIGH THREATENS OUR LIVES AND PROPERTY.

HE MUST BE STOPPED!

BUT HOW?

Macarthur wrote a statement calling for Johnston to replace Bligh.

... every man's property, liberty and life are endangered... [we beg you] to place Governor Bligh under arrest and... [take] command of the colony.

ARREST BLIGH!

HOORAY! YES!

GOD'S CURSE, WHAT AM I TO DO, MACARTHUR?

THE ONLY THING LEFT ... IS TO DO IT.

6 p.m.

Johnston gathered his troops ...

I HOPE I'M DOING THE RIGHT THING.

More than 300 soldiers lined up.

6.30 p.m. 26 January

Major Johnston and the Corps marched on Government House to arrest Bligh.

HOORAY!

Inside Government House, Bligh didn't know that the troops were coming to arrest him.

SIR, THE CORPS IS COMING!

THEY'RE ARMED!

WHAT??

QUICK ... I MUST HIDE THE GOVERNMENT PAPERS.

Without official papers, the rebels couldn't govern the colony.

Meanwhile, Bligh's daughter Mary rushed outside.

HOW DARE YOU THREATEN MY FATHER!

STAND ASIDE!

SURROUND THE HOUSE!

YOU'LL HANG FOR THIS!

YOU'RE ALL UNDER ARREST!

... but Bligh wasn't there.



WHERE'S BLIGH?

I DON'T KNOW.

SEARCH THE HOUSE.

Meanwhile, upstairs ...



THEY WON'T GET THEIR HANDS ON THESE!

HE'S NOT HERE.

The soldiers searched for two hours, then ...

Bligh destroyed as many papers as he could.



I'LL HIDE THE PAPERS HERE.

AHA!



GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!

They took Bligh downstairs.



HE WAS HIDING UNDER A BED!

HA HA!

26 January 1808
You are charged ... [with] crimes that [make] you unfit [to be **governor**] ... I require you ... to resign ... and to submit to ... arrest ...
Lieutenant-Governor George Johnston



THIS IS TREASON, JOHNSTON!

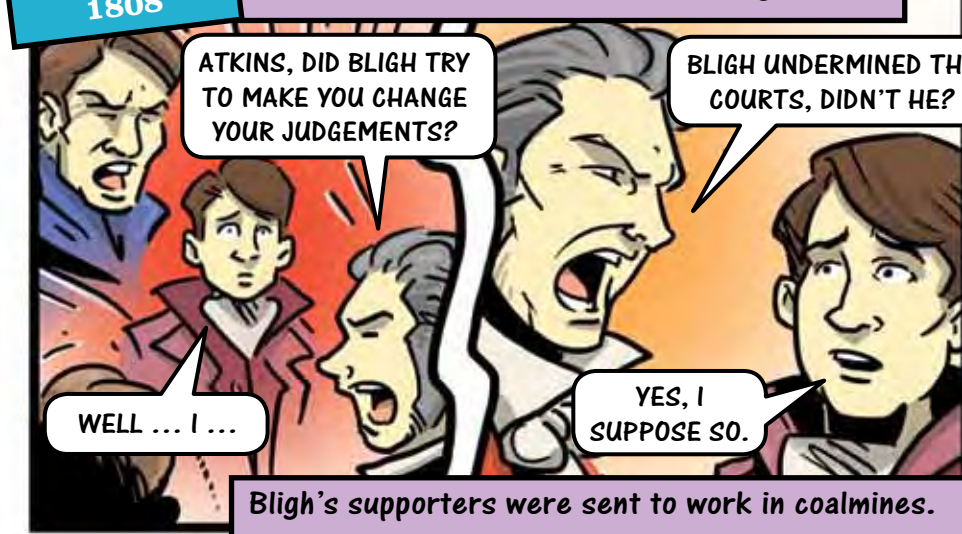
SILENCE! YOU ARE NO LONGER GOVERNOR!

9 p.m.

The troops left, putting Bligh under house arrest. He was a prisoner in his own home.

27 January 1808

Next day, Macarthur held trials of Bligh's men.



ATKINS, DID BLIGH TRY TO MAKE YOU CHANGE YOUR JUDGEMENTS?

BLIGH UNDERMINED THE COURTS, DIDN'T HE?

WELL ... I ...

YES, I SUPPOSE SO.

Bligh's supporters were sent to work in coalmines.



The rebels gathered evidence to show they had done the right thing.

IF JOHNSTON HADN'T TAKEN CHARGE, THE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE RIOTED.

THANK YOU, CAPTAIN ABBOTT.

Next day, Government House.



YOUR FRIENDS HAVE ADMITTED YOUR CRIMES.

DIABOLICALLY FALSE!



SAVE IT FOR YOUR COURT CASE.

YOU CAN'T TRY ME! I ANSWER ONLY TO MY KING.

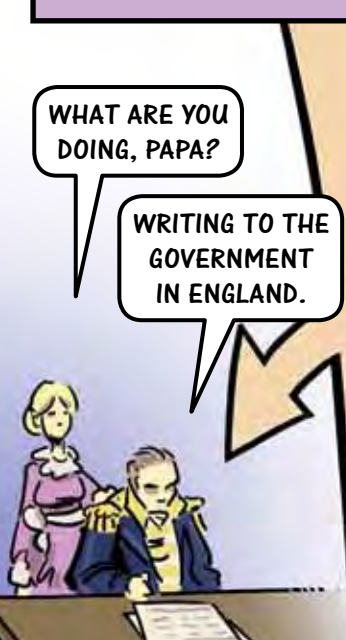


BLIGH WILL MAKE TROUBLE, MACARTHUR.

DON'T LET HIM SPEAK TO ANYONE.

They kept Bligh locked up in Government House.

Inside Government House



WHAT ARE YOU DOING, PAPA?

WRITING TO THE GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND.

... the **colony** [is] in the hands of the **military** ... Nothing but calamity (disaster) upon calamity [is] to be expected, even massacre and secret murder.



BUT HOW WILL YOU SEND IT?

I'LL FIND A WAY.