

News reporting in the *Nelson Examiner*, 1842 – 1874

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Charles Elliott took as the guiding principle of his editorial policy for the *Nelson Examiner* a quotation from De Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, the assertion that journals are necessary not only to secure liberty but also to maintain civilisation.¹ After justifying systematic emigration to New Zealand as a national characteristic of the British motivated by the lure of money and adventure, Elliott stated his editorial policy as follows:

It only remains for us to state that, with respect to the New Zealand Company, under whose direction this settlement has been planted, we are wholly independent of its influence. It is indeed satisfactory to know, that the opinions, as well as the interests of that association, are, in all matters of importance to the colony, the same as those of the majority of our fellow-colonists. If, however, questions affecting the public welfare should arise, on which we cannot conscientiously support the Company, we shall call upon the public to redeem a pecuniary obligation to that body, under which we are known to be, for the means of establishing this journal:—This course we can conscientiously adopt—it can involve no breach of faith. We have made no stipulation to advocate any interests at all: we shall assuredly advocate none but those of the community.

With this, then, we commit our paper to the public, that, by the principles we have here asserted, we will stand or fall. By these we desire to be judged—to these we shall steadfastly adhere. So long as we defend these honestly, we shall deserve support: we are content to lose it when we desert them. Freedom of trade, freedom of the subject, freedom of the press,—these, and the liberty which passes these, that liberty which our fathers fought for in the old time before us, and suffered and perished to maintain—freedom to worship God according to conscience—these are the ends we shall endeavour to secure. If we succeed, our purpose will be our guerdon: it will be our consolation if we fail.²

Elliott believed that the only way to uphold the stated socio-political responsibilities of the press was to pursue the truth vigorously in all matters of individual and social importance: journalistic reporting that required close surveillance over the activities of the governed as well as governors and other forms of constituted authority. Many of the leading articles in the *Nelson Examiner* were therefore designed to arouse and sharpen public opinion with the aim of preventing 'the leprosy of bad government' so very prevalent in colonial societies.³ Aside from rededicating his journal occasionally to the fight against misgovernment, Elliott often editorialised on the role of the press and