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No. 1.

The Earl of ONSLOW to Lord KNUTSFORD.

(Received 2nd March, 1891. Answered by No. 5.)

MY LORD,—

Wellington, 23rd January, 1891.

I have the honour to inform your Lordship that, acting on the advice of my Ministers, I have summoned the following gentlemen to the Legislative Council of New Zealand, viz.: Mr. John Blair Whyte, Auckland; Mr. Francis John Davies Ormond, Hawke's Bay; Mr. Charles John Johnston, Wellington; Mr. Charles Christopher Bowen, Canterbury; and Messrs. James Fulton and William Downie Stewart, Otago.

No fresh appointments have been made to this body since the year 1887; in fact, since the present Ministry have been in office.

On the other hand, several deaths and resignations have taken place, reducing the number of Councillors from forty-eight, at which it stood on the 8th October, 1887, to thirty-nine to-day, and of these it may safely be said that, from extreme age, absence from the colony, or other reasons, the effective strength barely exceeds thirty.

My Ministers have repeatedly expressed their desire to effect a reform in the Council—to reduce the period of service to seven years instead of for life, and to limit the number to one-half of those in the House of Representatives. At the same time they considered it to be essential that the whole of the members should be able, willing, and efficient for the performance of their duties.

In 1887 they introduced a Bill with this object; but it was discharged before it reached the second reading.

Last session a Bill, embodying the principles declared to be those entertained by the Government, was introduced into the Legislative Council by a private member; was amended by the Attorney-General to meet the views of the Government, and cordially supported by the Government in the Council; but was rejected by that body; and, in the face of that opinion, my Ministers concluded that it would be futile themselves to submit to Parliament a measure on similar lines.

My Ministers refrained from offering me any advice as to strengthening the Council before the expiration of the Parliament and the general election.

The result of that election has been, as I apprised your Lordship in my despatch of the 18th December, 1890 [not printed], to make a great change in the *personnel* of the House of Representatives, and, in the uncertainty as to the political views of the new members, I have, as I have already informed your Lordship, summoned Parliament at the earliest convenient date.

I had before me the statement of Ministers that it was necessary to summon Parliament, in order that they might ascertain the feelings of confidence towards them entertained by the new representatives of the people, and I therefore hesitated before accepting their advice to make these appointments. I thought it my duty to demand from them an assurance that the advice was tendered less with a view to reward party services than for the purpose of strengthening the efficiency of the Upper House. That assurance has been given me, and I have, therefore, accepted the advice.

Petitions, numerously signed, have been presented to me requesting me to defer these appointments till after the meeting of Parliament. It is urged in them that—(1) The present Ministry are in a minority; (2) Sir H. Atkinson has pledged himself not to advise fresh appointments till the numbers were reduced below one-half of those constituting the House of Representatives; (3) the Legislative Councillors now exceed by three or four half the number of the House of Representatives.