



# THE QUEEN SUMMONS THE COMMONS

ON the afternoon of Tuesday, January 12, 1954, the Usher of the Black Rod announced the presence of Royalty in the Council Chamber of Parliament Buildings, and to the fanfare of trumpets the Queen advanced to her throne. It was a different figure from the gracious and smiling visitor who has mingled with her people and acknowledged their acclamation. She was clad as a Queen in her coronation gown; and it was emphatically as their Queen that she now appeared to New Zealanders. She was the first reigning sovereign to tread New Zealand soil, and thus she stepped out of the bustle of 1954 to forge quietly and with precision a new link for a chain seven hundred years old.

The opening of Parliament is, in fact, a solemn re-enactment, repeated countless times, of the age-old story of British liberties. Over the centuries the actors have, of course, changed beyond recognition. In the beginning we might

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find, for our young Queen, a mature personal ruler; Edward I, for example, was in his own person crusader, legislator, ambitious statesman and shrewd business man. Around him, in place of sober-clad politicians, would be a group headed by brilliantly robed warrior-lords, proud and cantankerous, stiffened by the ranks of princely churchmen, no less brilliant of aspect and scarcely easier for a king to dominate. On the fringes of this assembly, and only on special occasions, we would find a handful of commoners, knights from the shires and burgesses from the boroughs. They would be, by comparison, soberly clad, ill at ease in the presence of king and lords and over-awed, yet here and there tinged with that obstinacy which, Lord Acton has hinted, is per-

haps the most valuable political quality of Englishmen. It would be hard to find individuals more different in appearance and ideas from the well-groomed, loyal but confident gathering of New Zealanders that met in the Legislative Council Chamber on that Tuesday afternoon. Yet in form and in essential character the scene did actually represent those proceedings of 600 or 700 years ago when sovereigns called into counsel the wise and the wealthy among their subjects.

The story goes back to the beginnings of British society, when the king was squarely saddled with the personal duty of defending his people and of enforcing justice amongst them. Balancing this duty was his right to call upon the help of his subjects, primarily those lords

spiritual and temporal who held their lands from him. They were bound to give him their counsel, their armed support, and upon occasion, money. Thus there grew up round the king his court of personal followers and the council of advisers who helped him to govern his kingdom. These were the great men of the kingdom. Seven or eight hundred years ago, however, it became clear to the ablest of our kings that something was lacking. The common people, even those able and prosperous men who managed local affairs in town and country, had no part in national affairs. Yet it was clear that, as a group, they were often more reliable than the magnates, and they controlled a high proportion of the country's wealth and enterprise. The remedy was clear: to summon to the presence of king and council representatives of these middling people, explain to them in outline the problems facing the kingdom, and ask for help in solving them. Out of these small beginnings years ago grew the power of the House

AT top of page: The Prime Minister hands to Her Majesty the speech which she will read from the Throne.