



Wynyard

Grey

Sewell

Vogel

Reeves

Seddon

Ward

Massey

PARLIAMENT THROUGH A CENTURY

THE inauguration of the New Zealand Parliament on May 24, 1854, was the happy culmination of many years of agitation on both sides of the world. Edward Gibbon Wakefield's theory that the only way to manage colonies of settlement was to let the colonists govern themselves was stoutly opposed by the Colonial Office and by the strong missionary bodies. In each of the settlements of the New Zealand Company the demand for self-government was urged by the best brains and the sharpest pens in the Colony. When the British Parliament in 1846 granted a constitution the gift was snatched away by Governor Grey almost before the colonists were aware of it. He tried to placate the colonists by setting up provincial legislatures in which most of the members were his own nominees, but this only intensified the bitterness; henceforth the nominee members were lampooned in every paper in the settlements.

At last, in 1852, the Constitution Act was passed. This provided for six provincial councils and a General Assembly. This meant that the white colonists, numbering fewer than 30,000, would have to choose about 100 of their number to legislate for them. The elections were held in 1853, and on the last day of the year Grey sailed from New Zealand, after gazetting enough nominees to make up the Legislative Council to 15. All of the provincial councils were in operation, but Grey left to his successor the ticklish task of convening the General Assembly. The Senior Military Officer, Colonel R. H. Wynyard, of the 58th Regiment, automatically became administrator of the Government. He was also superintendent of the province of Auckland, and thus held three key positions.

The birthday of Queen Victoria, May 24, seemed an auspicious day for the inauguration of Parliament. Some of the members had to travel 1000 miles, by horse, schooner and a few by steamer; yet all but two of the 37 in the House of Representatives were able to keep their tryst at Auckland. Dr. Featherston, superintendent of Wellington, was ill, and William Sefton Moorhouse (Canterbury) was on the goldfields of Victoria.

The First Session

Two-thirds of the elected members were Englishmen, the rest Scots and Irish. The oldest man in the House was William Field Porter (70), of Auckland, and the youngest the Hon. James Stuart Wortley (21), of Canterbury. There were seven graduates of the older universities, and six who had come through the Inns of Court. Ten members of the House were classified as lawyers, seven as farmers, or settlers, five as merchants,

MONDAY NEXT, May 24, is the 100th anniversary of the inauguration of parliamentary government in New Zealand, and the occasion is to be marked at Auckland—where Parliament first assembled—by a State luncheon which will be broadcast direct by Stations 1YA and 2YA. On this page DR. G. H. SCHOLEFIELD, formerly Parliamentary librarian and Dominion archivist, surveys the history of the Legislature over its first hundred years.

three as soldiers, and so on. The average age was just over 40 years.

In the Legislative Council were Dillon Bell and Frederick Whitaker; in the House Dr. Featherston, James Edward Fitzgerald, David Monro, T. S. Forsaith, James Macandrew, Moorhouse, Samuel Revans (father of the New Zealand press), William Barnard Rhodes, Henry Sewell, Frederick Weld and the two Wakefields, father and son. The father and Sewell had hurried out from London to get on the rolls here and into the House.

The elective House chose as Speaker Charles Clifford, who was already Speaker in Wellington Province. It was appropriate that a member from Otago, James Macandrew, should ask Parliament, as their first act to acknowledge their debt to the Divine Being and supplicate His favour on their future labours. Nobody objected to that in principle, but they feared the mere suggestion of a State religion. To give time for thought the local vicar (Rev. J. F. Lloyd) said prayers for that day, and was paid off with the thanks of the House. A committee comprising two Church of England members, two Roman Catholics, one Presbyterian and one Congregationalist, took time to formulate a prayer in innocuous language for Mr. Speaker to read at each day's sitting.

It was not till May 27 that the Administrator delivered his speech from the throne: a 12-page document which for subject matter, form and style, has not often since been excelled. The words of Colonel Wynyard were so plainly enunciated that they could be heard by the crowd outside the hall.

Most of that first session was devoted to the demand for responsible government which was pressed throughout in several debates of a very high standard. The Administrator was quite in accord with Parliament and duly received on June 14 the first New Zealand administration under representative government. The Ministers were Fitzgerald, Weld and Sewell, three of the brightest stars of our early days. But sitting with them in the executive were the permanent officials of 1841 (Swainson, Sinclair and Shepherd) still administering their departments. Responsible government in this form was considered a mere sham, and the Ministry resigned. Wynyard

would not ask the officials for their resignations until he received authority from Home. He appealed to Wakefield for advice, and the archpriest willingly offered it, as he had done to Sir Charles Metcalfe in Canada. But this was quite outside the conventions, and when T. S. Forsaith appeared in the House as the leader of a Ministry two days old he was angrily defeated by 22 votes to 10. Unable to do any more Wynyard begged the House to put the estimates through, and this done he prorogued Parliament.

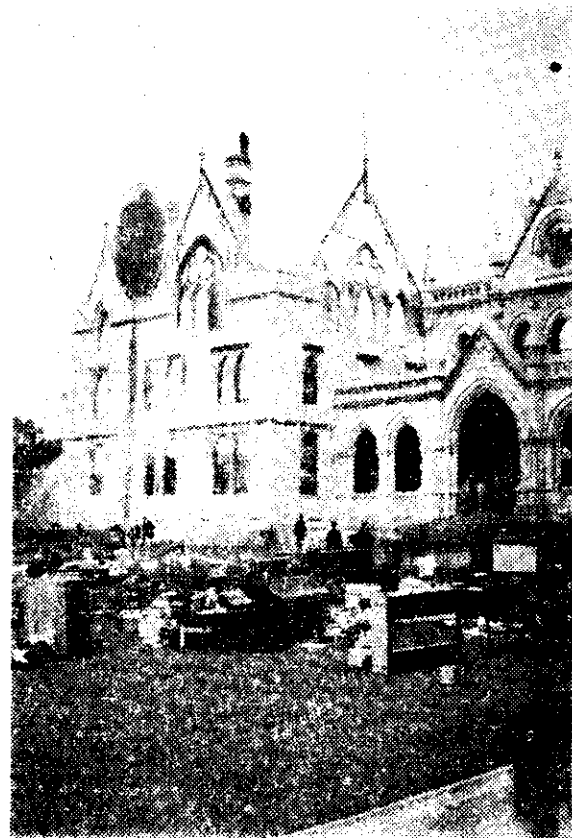
Fresh elections brought some noteworthy figures upon the scene—Fox, Stafford, Domett and Richmond included. The new Governor (Colonel Thomas Gore Browne) arrived at the same time and in the next session (1856) he benignly presented the gift of full responsible government. Sewell was the first Premier, with Bell, Whitaker and Tancred as his colleagues.

Wellington as Capital

With the passing of the years, the character of Parliament was slowly modified. In the sixties the dominant factor in politics, the Maori wars, tended to separate in sentiment the people of the North and Middle islands. Weld introduced his self-reliant policy in 1864, and three eminent Australians decided on Wellington as the point on Cook's Strait to which Parliament desired to move the seat of government. This profoundly affected the political scene, by making the government more accessible and real to the people of the South Island, who outnumbered the North by 106,000 to 65,000. The first session in Wellington was held

in 1865 in commodious provincial buildings erected in 1857 for the dual purpose. In 1867 the Maori Representation Act brought four Maori members into the House.

As the Vogel economic policy of 1870 gained momentum the last hopes of the provincialists were legislated out of existence (1875), and two years later a National Education Act replaced the varied school systems of the provinces. During the seventies many of the older statesmen disappeared—notably Weld, Fox, Stafford, Sewell, Domett, Donald McLean and Fitzgerald. Even Grey, the proconsul of the forties, shrank from the front of the stage, leaving a batch of liberal measures to be passed by Sir John Hall. Soon a new generation of native-born New Zealanders educated in the national schools was becoming conscious of its responsibility. Party alignment became more definite in the late eighties. Public feeling was so deeply affected by economic distress and the maritime strike that Lord Onslow (the



THE smouldering shell of the old Parliament Building, Wellington, photographed the morning after the fire of December, 1907

Lamball Library Archives

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 21, 1954.