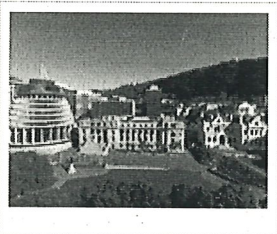


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Today in History

17 January



1853 NZ Constitution Act comes into force

The New Zealand Constitution Act (UK) of 1852, which established a system of government for New Zealand, was declared operative by Governor Sir George Grey.

The legislation created six provinces with their own elected superintendents.

At the national level, a General Assembly was established. This consisted of a Legislative Council appointed by the Crown and a House of Representatives elected every five years by males aged over 21 who owned, leased or rented property of a certain value. By British standards the property qualification was modest; it would enfranchise most male settlers.

New Zealand settlers had been demanding a say in government since the 1840s. The British Parliament had passed the first New Zealand Constitution Act in 1846. This provided a complicated three-tiered system of government for the colony. There would be elected municipal corporations and provincial assemblies, and a general assembly comprising a nominated Legislative Council and a House of Representatives chosen by and from the members of the provincial bodies. Governor George Grey suspended the Act's introduction, claiming that the settler population of 13,000 could not be trusted to pass measures that would protect the interests of the 100,000-plus Māori. This, he feared, would lead to conflict. In 1848 legislation was passed to delay for five years the implementation of the provisions of the Constitution Act relating to provincial and general assemblies.

Grey was a driving force behind the new Constitution Act of 1852. This legislation gave the Governor considerable power to determine the details of electoral administration: the timing of elections, the drawing of electoral boundaries, the process for registering voters and rules for 'the orderly, effective, and impartial conduct' of voting. On 5 March 1853 Grey issued a lengthy proclamation outlining the boundaries of the 24 electoral districts which were to return 37 general and 87 provincial members, and setting out regulations for registration and voting.

The first general election was held between July and October 1853. But Grey was criticised for calling the provincial councils to meet before the General Assembly, giving the former a five-month headstart on central government. Some believed this entrenched provincialism in New Zealand politics. When Grey left the colony for South Africa on 31 December he had still not called the General Assembly; it would not meet until 24 May 1854, more than 16 months after the Constitution Act came into force.

Internal links

The House of Representatives Political and constitutional timeline

External links

System of Government (Te Ara)

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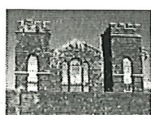
This Week in History



15 August 1951
Troop ship



17 August 1839
NZ Company



18 August 1955
20-year old



19 August 1944
Kiwi pilot's



20 August 1940
Turakina sunk



21 August 1958
Auckland

Wahine
wrecked en
route to
Korean War

16 August 1944
CORSO
formed

ship Tory
arrives

hanged for
murder

sacrifice saves
French village

by German
raider in
Tasman

pedestrians
begin 'Barnes
Dance'