

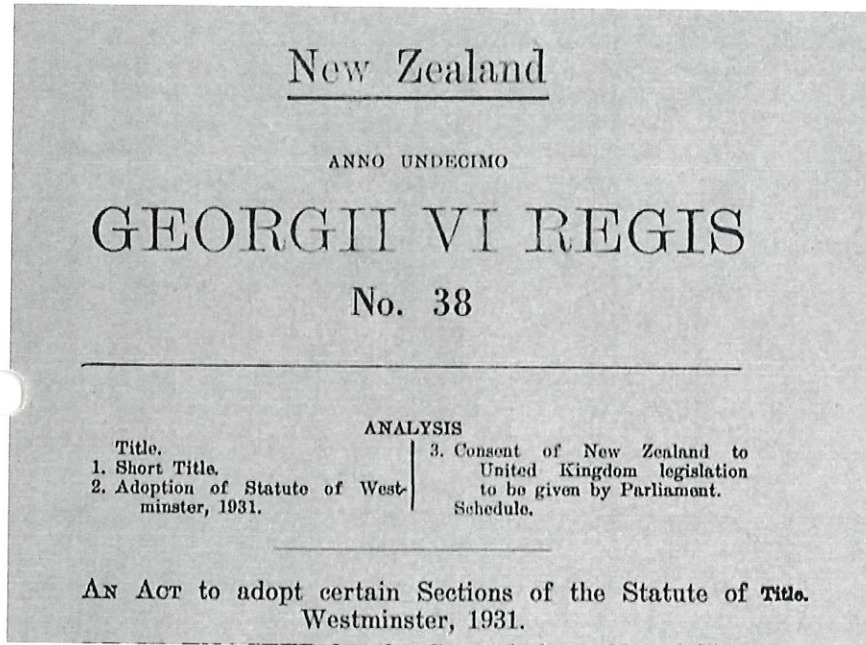
Statute of Westminster

(MCH, 2020nn)

11 December 1931

1931 p 128

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The British Parliament passed the Statute of Westminster, granting complete autonomy to its six Dominions. Australia and New Zealand held back from adopting this status, but in 1947 New Zealand became the last of the Dominions to do so.

Although this country had moved from being a colony to a Dominion in 1907, few New Zealanders then wanted greater independence from the United Kingdom. Racial affinity, language, culture, defence and trade links bound most of them to the wider 'Britannic world', which was then at the height of its prestige.

Those feelings persisted through the first half of the 20th century, even though dominion status evolved as a label for the constitutional position of the former self-governing colonies (and the Irish Free State). In 1926, after pressure from the Irish, South Africans and Canadians, the Balfour Declaration stated that the United Kingdom and the Dominions:

are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

New Zealand Prime Minister Gordon Coates called this a 'poisonous argument'. Although the British Parliament subsequently passed the Statute of Westminster, which formally removed London's right to

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legislate for the dominions unless they asked it to do so, New Zealand refused to ratify this until 25 November 1947. The Constitution Act 1986 finally removed the last faint provision for the British Parliament to make laws for New Zealand.

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What changed? – Dominion status

External links

Statute of Westminster (Solon)

From colony to nation (Te Ara)

Statute of Westminster Adoption Act, 1947 - Page 1 (Archives New Zealand Flickr)

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'Statute of Westminster enacted', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/statute-of-westminster-passed-confirming-nz-autonomy>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 23-Sep-2020