

## BUILDING DEMOCRACY Arenas of European Politics

Text by Michael Monninger and Photos by Jorg Hempel



The plenary hall of the Bundestag building in Bonn

In antiquity legislators and architects still belonged to the same professional class. The enclosure of the public forum also determined the arena of political actors. Aristotle viewed legislator and architect as craftsmen: both of them ordered civic life through the planning and construction of a town, whose foundation was the law.

Then, however, for centuries the buildings of state and government were not centres of communal activity, but the home of autocratic rule. Thus, today states are faced with the difficult task of giving representative democracies representative architecture that is impressive but not imposing.

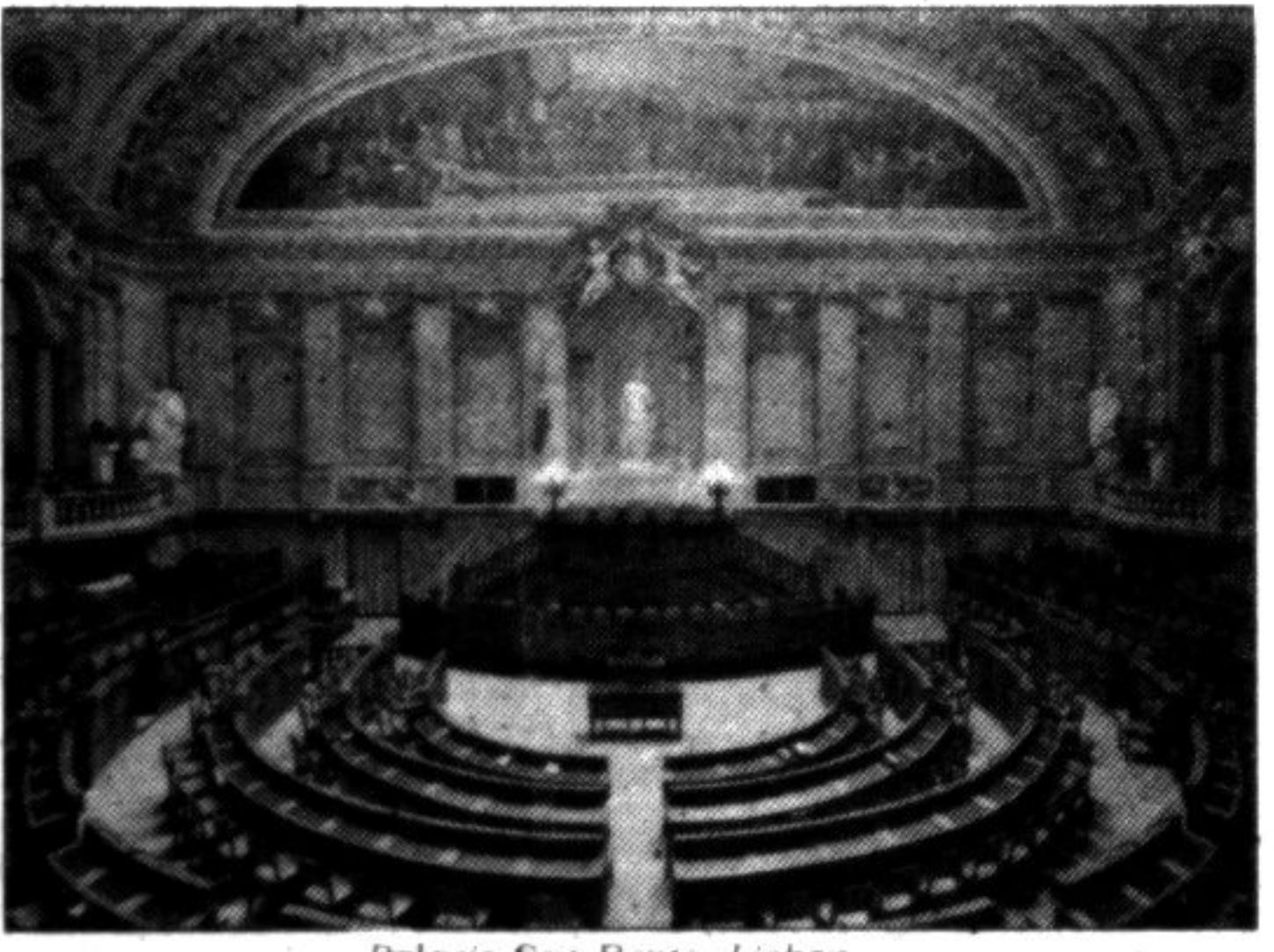
### Architectural representation of democracy

Today modern parliaments either reside in converted old palaces, for example, in Italy, France, Denmark, and Greece, or they have erected new buildings for this purpose, as in Great Britain, America, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands and Germany. Alongside the Netherlands' modern parliament building in The Hague, the German plenary hall on the Rhine is the world's youngest and clearest modern representation of a democratic commonwealth.

Planning the development of the parliament district in Bonn took over twenty years. Three chancellors, six con-



The House of Commons, London



Palacio São Bento, Lisbon

struction ministers, eleven state secretaries, seven Bundestag presidents, four federal construction directors and thousands of deputies all had a hand in it. With such a complex group responsible for the building, it really should be considered something of a miracle that any tangible results were achieved at all.

The Bundestag building is an angular house made of bullet-proof glass with gliding levels and fading wings, with sloping terraces and a roof open to the sky, in which the view is unrestricted, permeating the entire building only to find a place of rest in the expansive bed of Old Father Rhine.

### Transparency as a symbol

The Bundestag building designed by the Stuttgart-based architects Behnisch and partners is fluid of structure. The slender, bright and airy new building does not present itself on a pedestal, but glides downward at ground level towards the Rhine where the plenary hall forms the deepest point of the complex. Sparkling chrome forms, metal panelling and naked concrete floors radiate the best German industry and thoroughness. However, as one enters further the cool

material turns into artificial stone and then becomes parquet flooring in the plenary hall — a simple, but convincing representation of welcome and warmth. The plenary hall was positioned in the long building as a free-standing glass shrine with the lobby wrapped around it, which increases the transparency of the outer mantle even further. In eleven circular steps the plenary hall descends gently towards its centre like an amphitheatre. The fifty-four chairs for the federal government and the Bundestag are only distinguished horizontally, divided into their own circle segments — vertically they are at the same level as ordinary members of parliament. Here it is impossible to cut oneself off and look down on others from above.

Instead of historical patterns, the new building embraces layered forms: tiles which nowhere come together in closed shapes, parapets and sunshades that are subdivided into countless independent elements. There is no handrail that has not been made of several pieces, no room divider that also functions as a supporting wall. Everything declines plastic distortion, everywhere the strength of au-

thority details represents a sign of integrity and freedom. Concentric seating arrangements like those found in the Bonn parliament building stretch back to classical circus, theatre and cult buildings and continue to influence the protestant church architecture of north America even today. The supreme example of these communal rotundas is the amphitheatre of the Congress in the Capitol in Washington. However, at the same time it is also possible to detect the architectural model of the inverted funnel, the form of the lecture theatres for anatomy found at old universities, halls that demanded the greatest possible visual proximity to the dissecting table.

### Between opera house and theatre

The parliamentary stage in Bonn, although an enormous rotunda with 1,200 square metres, takes up the ideas of both the theatre and the anatomy hall. The building is the first in the history of parliamentary architecture to close the theatre semicircle to a full circle of 360 degrees. Instead of confrontation, this parliamentary ring aims at achieving equal communication, it is oriented towards cooperation rather than antagonism. The hall provides each of the 662 deputies a roomy place to sit. Instead of sitting on egalitarian benches as in some historic parliament buildings, each deputy is enthroned on a top-quality blue armchair. By comparison, in former times the Reichstag building in Berlin only provided a plenary hall of 638 square metres for its 589 deputies.

The French National Assembly building in Paris represents an example of the direct adoption of the architectural form of the theatre or opera. Between 1722 and 1728 Louise-Francoise de Bourbon, a legitimate daughter of Louis XIV, had the Palais Bourbon built according to plans by Lassurance, Gabriel and Aubert. Its entrance was situated on the Rue de l'Université and its garden pointed towards the Seine and the later Place de la Concorde. As the property of emigres, the house was confiscated in 1792 and converted into the parliament building by de Gisors and Leconte. Following the proclamation of the Third Republic in 1871 and numerous modifications — above all, the Corinthian peristyle as a contrast to Madeleine Church north of the Seine — the building has been the seat of the "Assemblée Nationale". The semicircular parliamentary chamber takes up the arrangement of the Ionic columns in Gabriel's opera house in Versailles. The front presents magnificent statues of liberty and public order. The rostrum is decorated with a marble relief on which history and fame are grouped around the bust of liberty.

### Parliament as a church chapel

By contrast, the architectural form of the world's liveliest parliament, the British House of Commons with its two opposing benches, is derived from church architecture. From 1547 the House of Commons had met in St Stephen's Chapel at the Royal Palace of Westminster. After

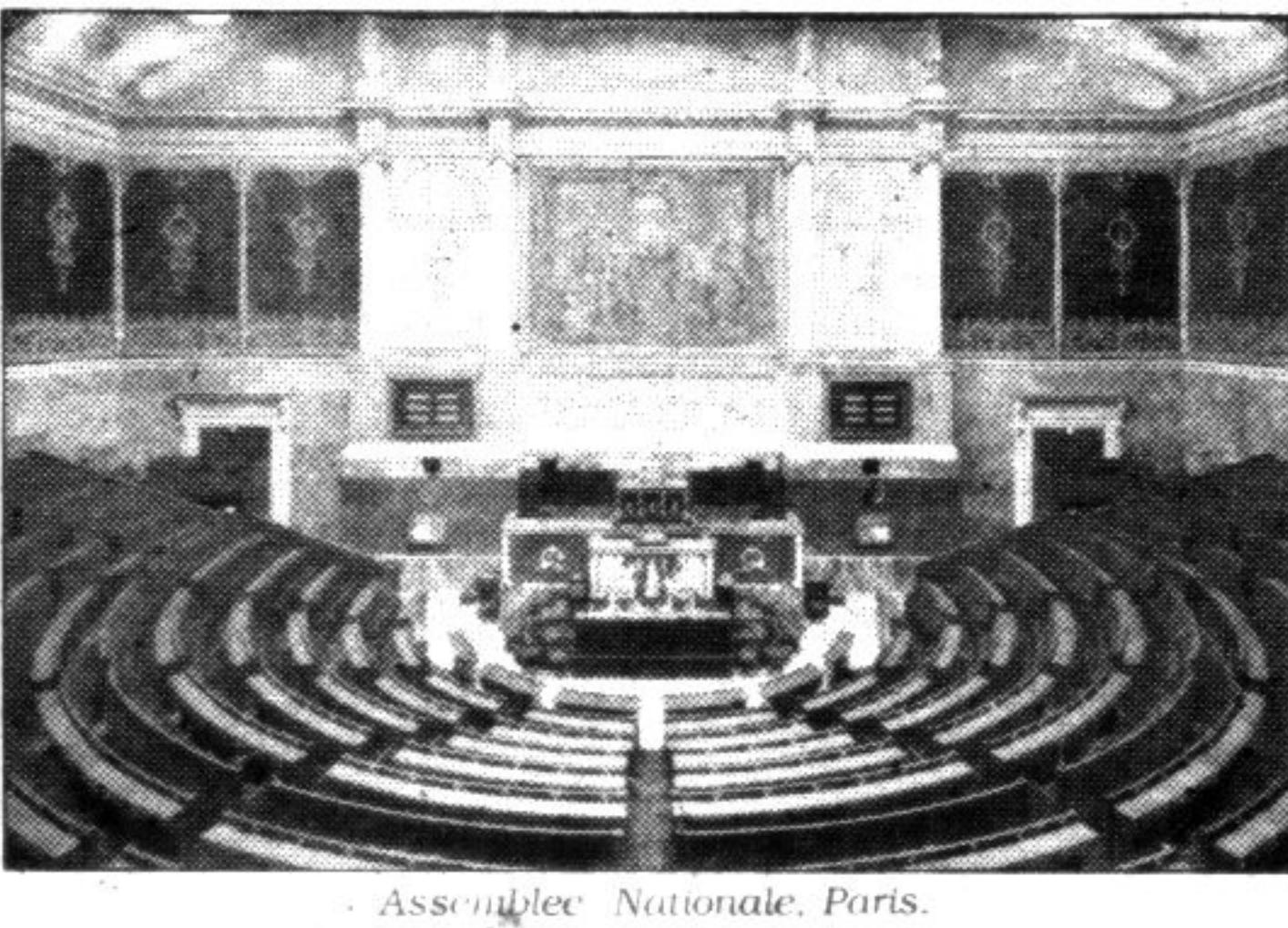
nificent neo-Gothic structures. The building was inaugurated in 1870. However, the remarkable seating arrangement of the lower house, which originated from the choir seating of St Stephen's Chapel, has been retained out of respect for tradition — even though the honourable members never tire of complaining that there is only room to seat two-thirds of their number in the almost 300 square metres of the hall.

In Rome, on the other hand, an old papal palace was turned into the parliament building. The design for the Palazzo Montecitorio was created by Bernini in 1650 for Pope Innocent X as the seat of various papal offices. The building with portal and clock tower was completed by Carlo Fontana. Since 1871 the palace has been the seat of the Camera dei Deputati.

The first debating chamber was the covered courtyard of the palace, a rather provisional arrangement. Around 1900 the government erected an enormous Jugendstil building, covered by a glass roof. The opera-like circles are so high that members of parliament sometimes have to use opera glasses to study the faces of the speakers.

### Distance to monarchy

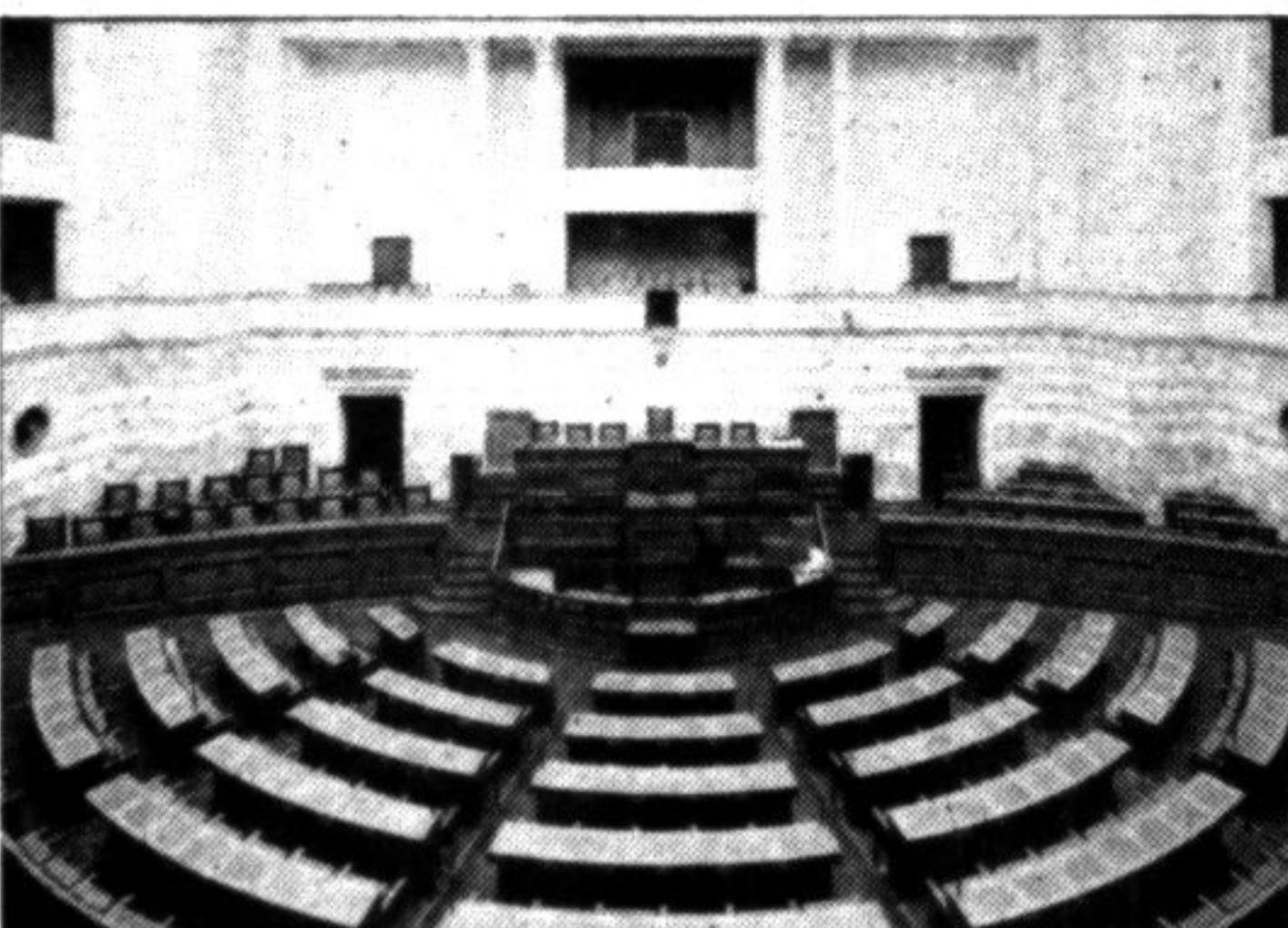
The Spanish parliament is also housed in a historic palace. However, this time it was not converted, but purpose built. The "Palacio de las



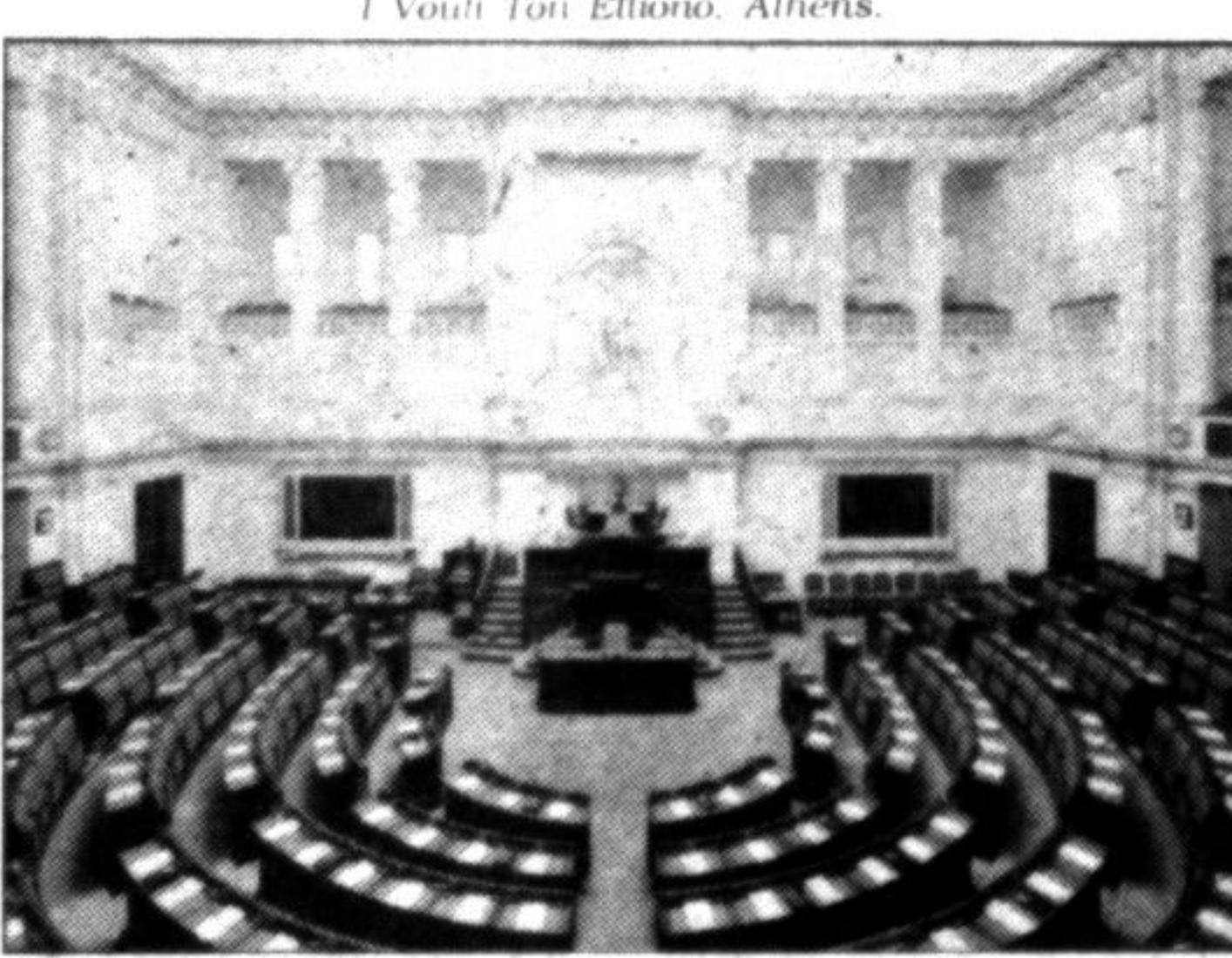
Assemblée Nationale, Paris

Cortes Espanolas" was built on the grounds of the demolished Convent of the Holy Ghost between 1843 and 1850. Mariscos Pascual y Colomber, a classicist architect of the Academia de S. Fernando, also oriented the design towards the opera house form. The building was built in a dry academic fashion following the model of an Italian quattrocento palace and is located in

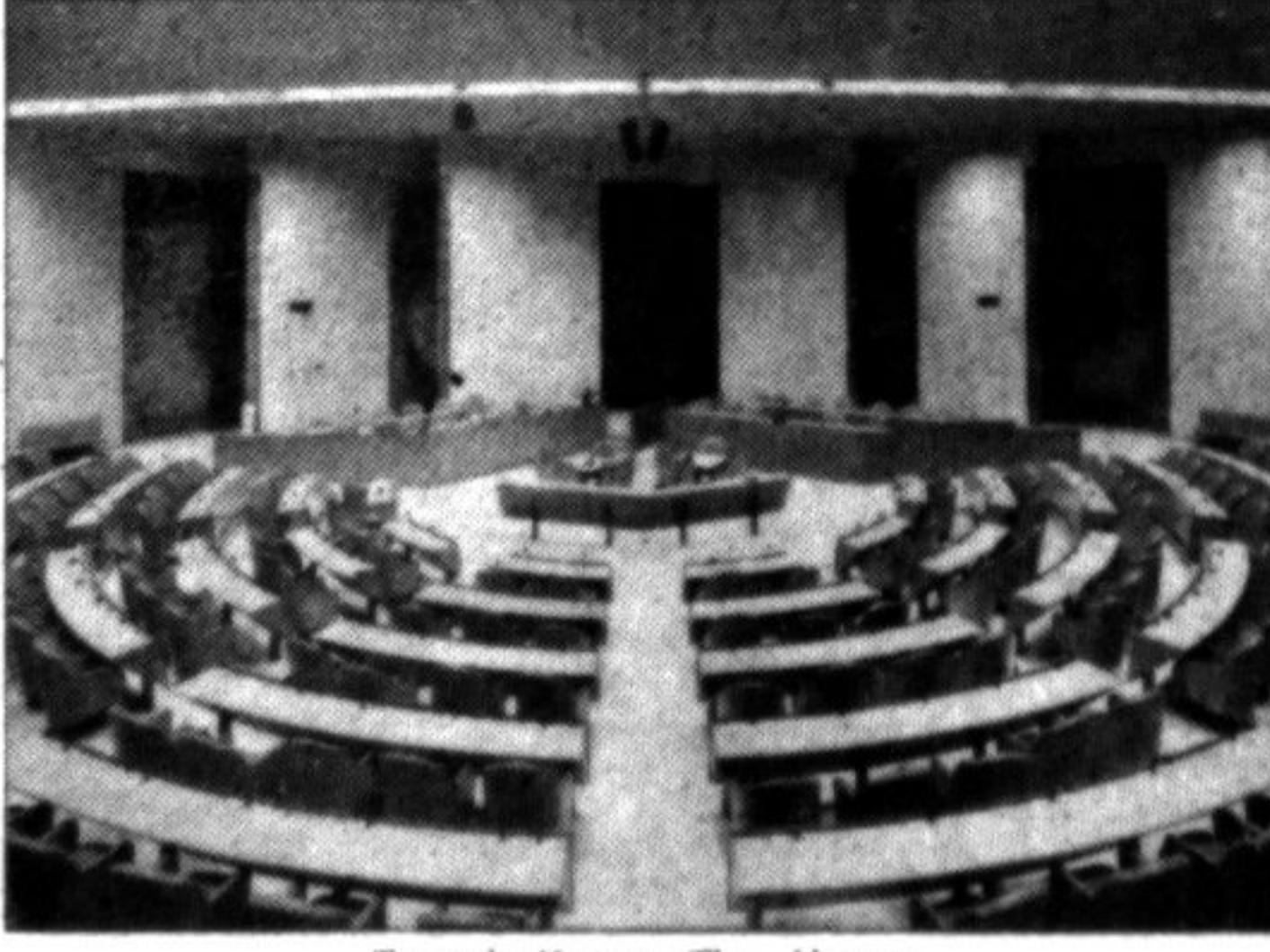
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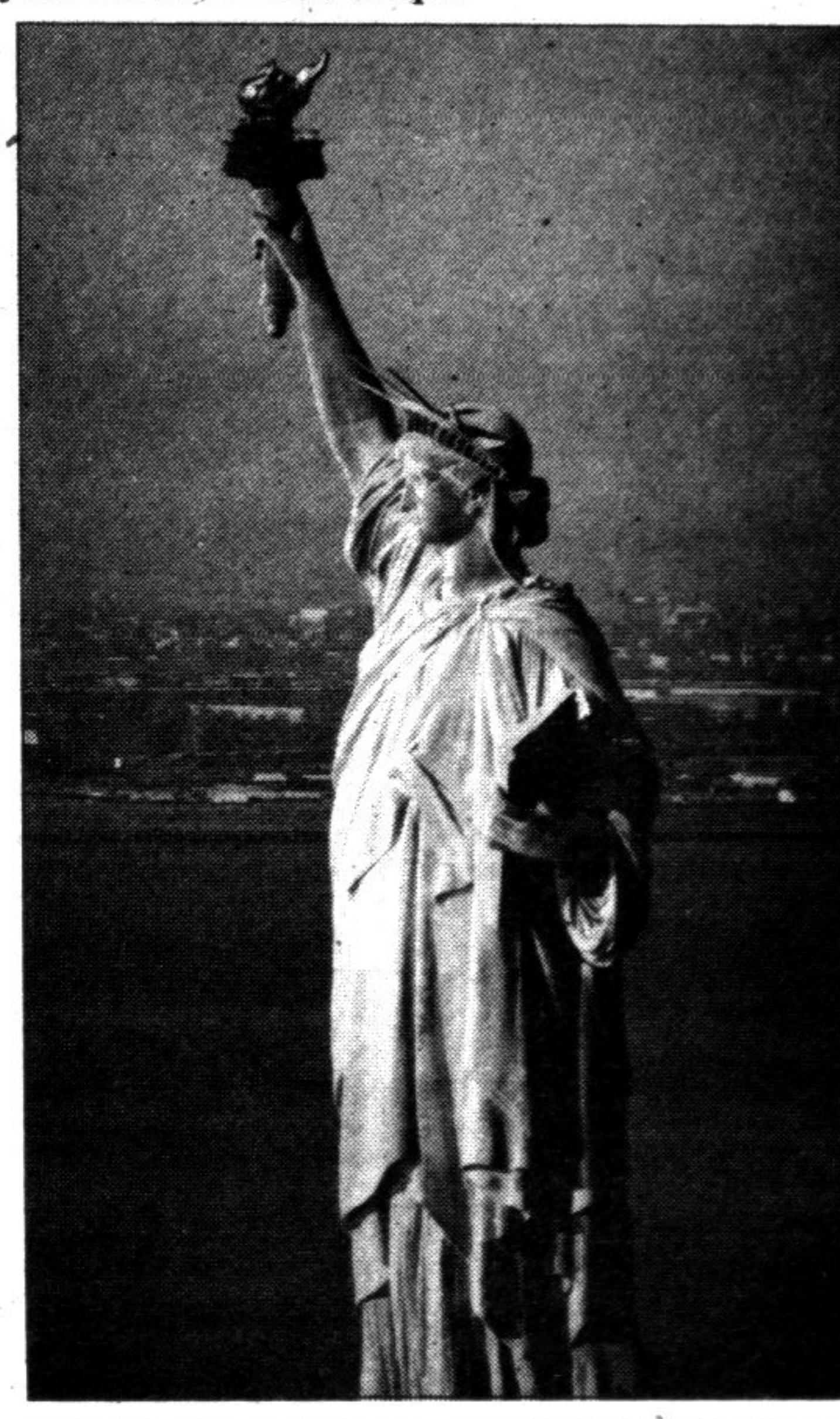
Chambers des Representantes, Brussels



Tweede Kamer, The Hague

## The Statue of Liberty A Beacon of Promise

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque



FOURTH July, 1994 was the 118th birthday of the Statue of Liberty, the great national monument of the Americans. Every year millions of tourists and Americans make a voyage through the Hudson River to the Liberty Island to visit the Statue of Liberty which is the premier symbol of lofty ideals, maintaining dignity and stature as an American symbol of pride.

### Beacon of Promise

The Statue of Liberty is a powerful symbol of freedom. Last month, I visited this unique monument and was enchanted with its spirit. Its lofty ideals reverberate through the open air. She was at first christened as Liberty, Enlightening the World, but later on she was called The Statue of Liberty, Beacon of Promise. She rises 151 feet high above the pedestal on Liberty Island in New York, with the Manhattan skyline in the background. She stands within direct sight of all entering the New York city through the Verrazano Narrows, and seems like the gateway to America. She is an statue of an imaginary classical goddess in a Greek robe wearing a crown of seven rays, signifying the seven continents and the seven seas. She carries a tablet of law inscribed in Roman numerals with the date of 4th July, 1776, which is the date of American Independence. At her feet are the broken shackles of oppression and in her right hand she holds the Torch of Freedom for all to see. At night a luminous halo shines from her head to the far off waves of the ocean, thus acting as a "Beacon of Promise."

### History of Construction

The pathetic struggle for fund for the construction of this grand national pride, the Statue of Liberty, is a deeply emotional story of the monument is a gift of everlasting and universal — value made by the French people to the Americans on the occasion of the centennial celebration of their Independence on 4th July, 1876. Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, a career artist of Alsace, France, was the designer of this grand statue. The great success of democracy in America inspired him to present a statue of a heroic woman representing a lofty ideal. Laboulaye, a French historian, while boasting the democracy of the Americans, suggested to his guests the idea of such a monument to American Independence as there existed a general feeling of sympathy and a shared commitment to the principles of liberty between the French and the Americans. Bartholdi, a guest of that party, was inspired with the concept of such a magnificent scope and grandeur as this might inspire their own countrymen to fight for democracy in France. Their original plan was that the French would fund for the construction and shipping and the Americans would contribute for the building of the pedestal.

### Site Selection

Frederic Auguste Bartholdi arrived in New York Harbour in the spring of 1871. He was enchanted with the scenic view of the Bedloe Island (previous name of the Liberty Island) with the arduous of glowing life of Brooklyn and Manhattan in the background.

He selected that small island in the middle of twelve acres as the site for the statue. Today it is the gateway of all the immigrants of America throughout history. It would provide an unobstructed view of the Statue all around. He made a sketch of his vision of a statue on that island and travelled all over the United States to generate enthusiasm to collect funds, but failed. It was thought to be a wild scheme of an idealistic Frenchman. Some said that the rich New Yorkers should pay for it, if they wanted it in their harbour. Some argued that Philadelphia was the site of Declaration of Independence while Washington was the capital and why should the people of the entire country subscribe to put up a monument in New York? As the island was a national territory and thus belonged to all the states, Bartholdi thought that it would be the perfect site.

### Fund Collection

For want of fund, construction of the statue could not

begin until 1875. In November 1875, an organisation named Union Franco-Américaine was formed with Edward de Laboulaye as its president, to publicise and raise funds for the project of "Liberty Enlightening The World". The committee raised the equivalent of \$400,000 in France. But the other half, the American committee had raised only \$180,000, mostly as donations from luminaries like Barnard and Carnegie, by the time the statue was complete and awaited shipment. The vastness of the territory and the diversity of interest of the population made it difficult to generate enthusiasm for what was thought to be a useless venture. In March 1885 the committee published a desperate appeal for more funds; as follows:

"If the money is not now forthcoming the statue must return to its donors, to the everlasting disgrace of the American people, or it must go to some other city, to the everlasting dishonour of New York. Citizens of the state, citizens of the metropolis,

We ask you .... to prevent so painful and humiliating a catastrophe: Joseph Pulitzer, the indomitable publisher of the New York world took a desperate attempt. In his blistering front page editorial in the world he denounced the failure of the wealthy New Yorkers to pay for constructing a pedestal for the invaluable gift of the friendly French. He urged the common people to come forward and promised to publish in his newspaper the name of each donor, no matter how small the contribution. Within five months of Pulitzer's appeal the people raised the needed \$100,000 to make the pedestal.

### Centennial Ceremony

America celebrated the 100th birthday of the Statue of Liberty in great splendour. It was called Liberty Weekend — 1986 — a 4th of July celebration which lasted for four days. Two hundred and fifty visiting ships and 33 massive warships sailed into the harbour with President Ronald Regan, President Mitterrand of France and other dignitaries. The American President declared,

### Construction of the Statue

Frederic Auguste Bartholdi was mesmerised by the timeless influence of the ancient wonders of Egypt. The Pyramids, the Rosetta stone, the Sphinx, and the other ancient monuments along the Nile inspired him to create a monument of similar great magnitude. In 1875, he had made a water colour showing his vision of the statue. Next he made a clay model of four feet high, and it was enlarged and reproduced again and again. By using an intricate system of measurement the last model was created in sections which, when added together, would produce a glorious lady. The skin of the statue was made of the purest copper available which would withstand a century of salt air and Atlantic storms. The statue was built in Paris in a workshop of Gaget, Gauthier and Company, by using repoussé technique of ancient times. In this technique, thin sheets of metal are pounded from inside into negative moulds created from plaster or clay models. Thus a

button that sent a laser beam across the water toward the statue. It touched off a spectacular coloured-light show that unveiled the statue and her new torch. Elegant and exuberant fire works followed from a French company. The luxury liner "Queen Elizabeth II" and 30,000 vessels filled the calm water of the harbour. Over six million people assembled in lower Manhattan. President Regan cruised down the Hudson River aboard the battleship Iowa signalling the start of the main event: Operation Sail, 1986. The two

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