

Second Day.  
17 April 1907.

PROPOSED  
IMPERIAL  
COUNCIL.  
(Sir Joseph  
Ward.)

be invaluable. Questions which it would be to the interest of all of us to confer upon, of importance to the different self-governing countries, could, in the recess, be subjects for correspondence. I see no reason why, by correspondence upon many matters of vital concern to our countries, we should not really perpetuate the advantages that ought to accrue from the periodical meeting of practical men. My opinion is that during the recesses enormous good to our respective countries would accrue if we were able to recognise that we had all the right to communicate, confidentially if we wished, through the Secretariat upon matters that might be of immense consequence to our countries.

Our country is very anxious and willing to assist the Old Land in the event of trouble arising, to do so voluntarily by men or by money, and, I think, always would be ready to do its share in fighting for the defence of the Motherland in any portion of the world. We want to keep clear of the possibility of being drawn into what one might term Continental troubles with England itself. We want to have a distinct line of demarcation drawn in that respect between the responsibility we accept of our own free will and the responsibility that may be imposed upon us without our having had any opportunity of conference or discussion with regard to it. To my mind that is one of the matters upon which such an Imperial Conference or Council permanently established, with the understanding that the members of it would correspond with one another during the recess from time to time should circumstances require it, would be beneficial, so that we might take joint action for the purpose of helping or working together in critical times. To secure a position of that sort I regard as of very great importance, and we in New Zealand should have the benefit of the advice of a gentleman, say in the position of Sir Wilfrid Laurier himself, or of any other who might when the time comes take his place, which I hope will be a long way off. What an enormous advantage it would be for a country like New Zealand to have the opportunity of conferring with, perhaps, General Botha or Doctor Jameson, which we could do with some authority if we had a permanent institution properly established. As it is at the moment, in carrying on the Governments of our respective countries, we may have communications from the Secretary of State for the Colonies. We act to the best of our judgment; we act without consultation with the Premiers of the other self-governing countries. Occasionally the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth and of New Zealand confer as a matter of discussion beforehand, but still we act independently. With the recognition that we had some sort of—I do not say power, because power would not be the proper word—but the opportunity of consultation, if we had an organization by which we could look upon it as our right to confer with each other, then, I think a recommendation coming from us after mutual discussion and consideration, perhaps by cable, would be invaluable in arriving at a decision upon very critical and important matters.

I do not propose to take up the time of the Conference further at the moment, except to say that I do hope that we will be able to meet the difficulties or to meet the views of Sir Wilfrid Laurier on this question. I recognise, as the representative of New Zealand, that unless we have the full concurrence of the representative of the great Dominion of Canada with us upon the proposal to establish an Imperial Conference permanently, it would be quite hopeless for us to expect to arrive at anything like a working basis which would be of any use to us. For my own part I should go a long way to meet any suggestion Sir Wilfrid Laurier has to make in the hope that we may do something before we part on this occasion towards establishing an institution that ought to be not only helpful but invaluable to our respective countries in carrying on their functions. We must all be in agreement regarding the establishment of a Council or Conference.

There is a matter to which I would only allude and then I will conclude.