

Second Day.
17 April 1907.

PROPOSED
IMPERIAL
COUNCIL.
(Chairman.)

with all respect; they have received support from several Colonies, but Mr. Lyttelton himself, after the despatch which came from the Canadian Government, agreed that these proposals must be deferred at any rate until they had been discussed here by the Conference which is now assembled. All therefore that I would say with regard to them is this, that no doubt the resolutions which are on our paper for consideration to-day, do take up both sides of the proposal which Mr. Lyttelton put forward, and that, therefore, we have in a sense these proposals as well before us. Now it appeared to me when I first saw these resolutions that there were considerable differences between the views taken by those who proposed them. In the first place I came to the conclusion, and I am glad to have it confirmed by what Mr. Deakin has said, that the object of the Government of the Australian Commonwealth was to preserve the chief characteristics of the Conferences as they have hitherto existed, but I was not quite so sure with regard to the resolutions from New Zealand and the Cape, and I thought that it was possible to read in them a proposal to establish in place of the Conference a permanent body or Council, which was, of course, an entire alteration from the principle under which we assemble. But from what Sir Joseph Ward has said, and I think also from what Dr. Jameson has said, I may assume that that is not the intention of those Governments; they do also, as Mr. Deakin has put it, desire to preserve these Conferences—I will not say exactly on the same basis, but at any rate on the same principle on which they have existed hitherto as Conferences, as the Prime Minister described them, between the Imperial Government and the self-governing Colonies through the representatives of the Imperial Government and the Prime Ministers of the Colonies. I notice, again, that the Australian resolution does say distinctly that the representatives of the self-governing Colonies should be chosen *ex officio* from their existing administrations, and I think I gathered from Mr. Deakin that by that he does mean the Prime Ministers essentially.

Mr. DEAKIN : The phrase "*ex officio*" was used only because it might be physically impossible for the Prime Minister to be here, in which case a second Minister would take the place of the Prime Minister and speak for him.

CHAIRMAN : Quite so. New Zealand does not enter into any qualification; but I do not wish to press that, or any other difference between the resolutions, unduly. I quite expected to have, as we have had, full explanation from the representatives of the Colonies when they came, and I do not understand that on that point there is any difference between Sir Joseph Ward and Mr. Deakin.

Now I come to a very important matter indeed, and that is the functions of what is called, in the resolutions, the Imperial Council, but which, from what I have already said, really means the Conference. New Zealand, again, gave no definition of the functions, but the Australian resolution did define them and defined them in a very interesting manner, because it puts it very distinctly that the objects of the Council are to discuss at regular Conferences matters of common Imperial interest, and went on to say : "and to establish a system by which members of the Council shall be kept informed during the periods between the Conferences in regard to matters which have been, or may be, subjects for discussion." Discussion at the Conferences is at the root of the whole business. I venture to think that the point is of importance, for this reason, that on the one hand, so long as we are dealing with the question of the methods by which we may improve the machinery of the Conference system, we are doing one thing, but as soon as we begin to discuss any question of establishing a body with powers independent of the Conference, we are doing a perfectly different thing. That second thing is a