

new thing. It is not what we have have had, and I am afraid it would be very difficult for me to agree, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, to the establishment of a body with independent status or authority. It would be contrary to the freedom and independence of which the Prime Minister spoke at our meeting on Monday. Therefore, it was that we did feel with Canada that there might be under a proposal of this kind, a danger to the autonomy of us all—not only us here, but the self-governing Colonies as well. In the self-governing Colonies, as with us, I need scarcely remind the members of the Conference, the basis of all British government is the responsibility of Ministers to their Parliaments; not only, as here, our responsibility to the British Parliament, but your responsibility to your Parliaments. I venture to think that to do anything to establish a body that might interpose in any way between Ministers and the Parliaments to which they are responsible might almost endanger the liberties which ought to be inviolate. I for my part find it difficult to imagine that a body in any way independent of Ministers here or in the Colonies, established in this country, could be in accordance with the principles to which I have referred. I know it is said that nothing executive is intended, and it is to be nothing but advisory. I am afraid I do not think that that entirely removes the objection. We have, even in private life, sometimes had experience of the candid friend, the man whose advice we cannot avoid listening to, though, perhaps, it does not always strengthen our hands in the process. I venture to think that there would be a relative danger, but of course under all the circumstances a much more important danger, in the establishment of a body in any way independent in connection with these Conferences; and I think I may say for my colleagues that we all think Ministers must be secured in the direct responsibility which they hold to their Parliaments.

There is another point which Sir Joseph Ward referred to, and which I would just like to touch on for a moment, and that is that we already have a constitutional link between the government of this country and the governments in the Colonies through the Governor himself. I hesitate to say much about that in the presence of my colleagues, who have had much greater experience of the working of it than I have, but I do venture to say that the Governor's position is an important one, and his influence is often very great, if I may make one personal allusion, I speak from a recollection of chapters in my own family history, and from my experience of the last eighteen months in this Office. You must recognise I am sure, every one of you, that we endeavour to send out to the self-governing Colonies men who are of a standing and calibre to fulfil those duties. A change in the relations here might make that very difficult, and there would be a danger, I think, of the influence of the Governor being destroyed, or, at any rate, his opportunities of influence restricted, and of course it would not be very difficult to make the Service less attractive to men of ability and energy. I do not wish to press that point in any way too far, but I think it is one worth bearing in mind in the discussion of this question.

In what I have said hitherto, I have, no doubt, rather assumed that I was speaking of what I imagine possibly might be the idea underlying the New Zealand resolution as to an Imperial Council in place of this Conference. I repeat that I do not think that that is practicable, at any rate in the meantime; I would not put it aside altogether. A time may come when it may be practicable. I have dwelt on the importance of the link of responsibility between governments and their parliaments. I can appeal to those here who have had experience of federations that that is borne in mind when the federation itself is called into existence. It is to a Federal Parliament that the Federal Government is responsible. If we ever in future ages come to a federation of the Empire, which is a dream that men have entertained, it must proceed, I maintain, on the same principle, and

Second Day.
17 April 1907.

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PROPOSED
IMPERIAL
COUNCIL.
(Chairman.)