

Speaking in the British House of Commons (21 May, 1900) in favor of the Australian Commonwealth Bill, Mr. Blake said:

"I ask myself by this transaction in which we are engaged, are we really facilitating the management of Imperial problems between ourselves and Australia? I say we are, and why? Because this transaction, entered into at their instance, strengthens the only real ties of union between the great Colonies and this Kingdom—the ties of good-will, the sentiments of affection and contentment, pride, and patriotism, springing no doubt in great part from common blood, but really maintained and strengthened, mainly everywhere and exclusively in very important quarters where the tie of blood does not exist, by virtue of the local freedom they have obtained, by virtue of the autonomous growth of their nationalities, by virtue of the development, the peace, security and progress enjoyed under local self-government by these great communities within this Empire. Again, it is helpful to the disposition of the imperial problems between us and Australia, because the Commonwealth, with a greater area, larger and more varied interests, wider views, and unified political powers, will obviously deal with imperial matters in a higher and broader spirit than could be expected of smaller and separated States, and will thus greatly ease imperial negotiations. I would appeal only to successive Ministers concerned in this country as to whether that has not been the case with regard to Canada. I know it to have been the case from the Colonial side. I know the spirit that has pervaded when questions arose of this description, and I know how far that spirit was due to the consideration I have referred to. I have said imperial negotiations, because for many years, I, for my part, have looked to conference, to delegation, to correspondence, to negotiation, to quasi-diplomatic methods, subject always to the action of free Parliaments here and elsewhere, as the only feasible way of working the quasi-federal union between the Empire and sister-nations like Canada and Australia. A quarter of a century past I dreamed the dream of Imperial Parliamentary Federation, but many years ago I came to the conclusion that we had passed the turning that could lead to that terminus, if ever, indeed, there was a practicable road. We have too long and too extensively gone on the lines of separate action here and elsewhere to go back now. Never forget—you have the lesson here today—that the good-will on which you must depend is due to local freedom, and I would not survive its limitation. Never forget what has passed in the course of this brief controversy. It is another evidence that the real link is good-will, and that the root and foundation of that good-will is the local freedom which you give so freely everywhere except in one small part of the Empire. I do not think Pan-Imperial Parliamentary federation is within the bounds of possibility. And this conviction it was that made it impossible for me, with every sympathy, to join in the efforts of the late Imperial Federation League. I do not in the least degree think this Bill is a step towards Imperial Parliamentary Federation. On the contrary, I believe it is distinctly a step the other way. Because the greater the power, the larger the success, the higher the ambition of United Australia, the less the likelihood of her surrendering to a Parliament sitting on the other side of the globe in which her representation would now be scanty, the powers you give to her to wield at home. That great problem of finally reconciling the national aspirations, as they may develop, of these distinct communities with British connection, the great problem of reorganization remains inscrutable. Let us maintain, at any rate, the essential element of goodwill. I believe the condition to be not as the Colonial Secretary said in his speech on the first reading. I do not believe, as he said, that the links that bind you to your Colonies are slight and slender. I do not believe, as he said, that they could be snapped by a touch. I believe them to be strong and real. But I believe them to be absolutely impalpable, not founded on costly appeals, not on your clauses of reservation, not on your powers of disallowance, and not on the paramount legislative power of this Parliament. I am not complaining of these things; but they are not the real links that bind the whole. You frankly agree that if the great Colonies say "Let go"; you will let go. Thus your coercive powers, useful in their little measure, are useless here. What then, are these impalpable links on which alone you can depend? I want you once again, from the deepest conviction of my soul that while these links are strong and real they are links of good-will, founded on local freedoms. That this is so is exemplified today in the concessions you have freely made to the principle of nationality, the principle of self-government and of local freedom, which will enable this people, under the aegis of the Empire, to go their own way according to their own view in all those matters which concern their own interests."

THE RIGHT HON. SIR WILFRID LAURIER.

As Premier of Canada in the House of Commons, upon the eve of his departure for the Colonial Conference (15 April, 1902) Sir Wilfrid Laurier made one of the most important policy-making