

make a revolutionary change for what they would think to be an infinitesimal gain."*

Imperial Federation on a Free Trade basis, conducted by an Imperial Council, which later on might grow into a Federal Parliament, was the conception which dominated Mr. Chamberlain's mind at the Colonial Conference of 1897. Such a Council, even in its earlier and merely consultative days, would become an organ of authoritative advice in Imperial concerns, and, in particular, an instrument for the preparation of a scheme of voluntary contribution to the cost of Imperial defence from the self-governing Colonies.

The Secretary for the Colonies was, however, a good deal in advance of the sentiments of the Premiers attending the first Conference of 1897. They were not able to accede either to the political or the commercial project, and upon both issues confined themselves to resolutions of a purely general character. Instead of adopting the proposal of an Imperial Council, they merely passed a resolution to the effect that "The Premiers are of opinion that it would be desirable to hold periodically Conferences of representatives of the Colonies and Great Britain for the discussion of matters of common interest." On the question of Commercial Union they contented themselves with passing two resolutions, one urging the early denunciation of any treaties which hampered the commercial relations between Great Britain and the Colonies, the other undertaking to confer with their colleagues with a view to considering whether a preference might not be given by the several Colonies to the products of the United Kingdom.†

It is quite evident that neither Canada nor Australia were prepared then seriously to consider entering any political or economic arrangement that would bind them in any way, or to entertain any proposal for Colonial contributions to Imperial defence on any basis

* Speech at Conference of Home and Colonial Chambers of Commerce, June 10, 1896.

† Cd. 1299, page 35.