



## **Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the CPA UK Branch Parliamentary Seminar**

### **Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

#### **London and Bristol, England, as well as Brussels, Belgium from June 10-22, 2007**

Member of Parliament, Dean Allison, of Niagara West-Glanbrook, represented the Canadian (Federal) Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the 2007 CPA UK Branch Parliamentary Seminar, London and Bristol, England, as well as Brussels, Belgium from June 10-22, 2007 pursuant to Standing Order 34 (1), has the honour to present the following report.

# Report

Member of Parliament, Dean Allison, of Niagara West-Glanbrook, represented the Canadian (Federal) Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the 2007 CPA UK Branch Parliamentary Seminar, London and Bristol, England, as well as Brussels, Belgium from June 10-22, 2007 pursuant to Standing Order 34 (1), has the honour to present the following:

I had the honour to represent the Government of Canada at the CPA UK Branch Seminar in the UK and Belgium. Mr. Denis Arthur Allchurch, MLA from Saskatchewan also participated as a representative of Canada.

The seminar was well attended with representatives from 19 countries including: Australia, Botswana, Canada, Cayman Islands, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Monserrat, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Saint Helena, Swaziland, and Uganda. The delegates were primarily Parliamentarians representing the federal, provincial or state governments. A number of the delegates held the position of Speaker or Deputy Speaker in their government.

The overarching theme of the 2007 Parliamentary Seminar was "Governance of the United Kingdom." The primary objective of the seminar was to give Commonwealth Parliamentarians a more complete understanding of governance in the United Kingdom as well as in the broader continental structure.

To this end, delegates learned about the parliamentary and political scene at Westminster. More specifically, we gained insight into devolution and local government in the UK, visited parliamentary constituencies, learned about supranational governance and its implications for the United Kingdom, discussed the contribution of the CPA within the Commonwealth, and liaised with colleagues in the CPA UK Branch.

Complementing the substantive depth of this seminar was the geographic breadth. The seminar was conducted in four locations: Bristol, Cardiff, London/Westminster and Brussels.

"Governance at a supranational level," was appropriately discussed in both Brussels and Westminster. In Westminster, the Right Honourable Geoff Hoon, MP, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provided delegates with a commonwealth perspective of the European Union. He is supportive of the EU as a forum in which Britain can enhance its voice in Europe. He highlighted how important it is for Britain to have a place at the EU table in order to ensure that policies, whether environmental, economic or otherwise, not only benefit Britain but also that they do not hurt Britain.

In preparation for our time in Brussels and at EU headquarters specifically, the Right Honourable Lord Anderson of Swansea chaired a multiparty session in which Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat MPs expressed their respective views on the challenges and issues at play for Britain in the EU, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of working within a supranational governance structure.

Following this meeting, we departed for Brussels on the Eurostar. Travelling on the Eurostar was a unique experience, and highlighted the opportunities that we have to improve the infrastructure in Canada.

Brussels provided the backdrop for several sessions that would be devoted to the discussion of issues of governance in the European Union. Upon our arrival in Brussels, we met with Mr. Michael O'Neill, Counsellor, Trade and Development, and Mr. Paul Heardman, Head of the European Parliament Section in the Office of United Kingdom Permanent Representation of the European Union. They provided us with a broad overview of the state of affairs between the EU and Britain. While overall there is support for British/EU relations, one also gets the impression that there are varying positions in reference to governance in the UK, and the UK within the construct of the European Union. Having listened to presentations in Westminster and listening to a continental perspective, one gets the sense that there is some dissonance between London and Brussels on the question of governance, broadly speaking. On the one hand, London recognizes that it is easier to influence EU policy by being at the table. On the other hand, there is an ostensible, albeit not necessarily palpable, concern among British parliamentarians that national power is gradually being relinquished to Brussels. Nowhere was this more clearly evidenced than by the British resistance to adopt the Euro as the form of currency. Beyond currency, differences were audible in the context of agricultural policy, human rights, immigration and trade.

Our visits to the European Commission and the European Parliament focused on the EU's trade policy, EU relations with the WTO, external relations policies of the EU, and the EU development policies. We also discussed opportunities and challenges and opportunities posed by both immigration and asylum in the European Union. Mr. Peter Bosch, head of Sector REFLEX and the Immigration and Asylum Unit provided a valuable perspective on this issue. In our discussions we explored the challenges and advantages that Britain faces as it becomes more deeply intertwined in the EU structure.

All of the sessions on EU were tremendously valuable; the session on immigration and asylum resonated with most delegates in one manner or another. For example, on the one hand, my colleagues from Australia, Britain, and New Zealand, among others, echoed my concern with the need to amend our respective immigration policies to compensate for the lack of skilled domestic professionals and unskilled domestic workers. On the other hand, delegates from India, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, among others, lamented that developed western states are draining their labour pool, which has contributed to slower rates of economic growth and lower productivity within these states.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, discussing the question of immigration in this forum, and hearing so many competing perspectives, made a profound impression on me. Our committee recently completed a study on employability. It brings into sharp focus the severe labour shortage problems confronting Canada. During discussions at the CPA UK Seminar, with colleagues on both sides of the labour debate, the magnitude of the challenges became plainly clear to me. We are not only competing with other industrialized countries for immigrants from a potentially shrinking global labour pool.

We are also competing with developing nations who are not necessarily eager to see potential emigrants leave their respective homelands. As the most desirable place to live in the world, Canada has a unique opportunity now to capitalize on all that our country can offer industrious and hard-working immigrants, if we develop a comprehensive and long term immigration strategy that can enable our country to remain highly competitive and productive in an ever-changing global economy, and global market.

Attention of the delegates then turned to another vital topic: trade. Mr. Jacques Wunnenburger, Head of the Economic Partnership Agreements 2 and Directorate-General for Trade, briefed delegates on progress being made by the EU as it works to in forge new agreements with global economic partners. As a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, and mindful of how few international trade agreements we concluded between 1995-2006, the method of successfully negotiating partnerships and trade agreements carried particular interest for me. It is both gratifying and reassuring to know though that we are no longer standing still as a trading nation, but instead that we are working to on a more dynamic international trade policy as evidenced by negotiations with the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean community. Mr. Patrick Child, Head of Cabinet to the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, provided delegates with an overview of relations within the EU more detailed briefing on this topic.

From the European Commission, our delegation moved to the European Parliament. There sessions were held to facilitate cursory discussions on a range of topics from regional politics to regional economies to regional security. These sessions rounded out our time in Brussels.

In London, our attention shifted to issues of devolution and the electoral commission.

A multiparty panel, chaired by Right Honourable John McFall, MP (Labour) focused on the question of devolution or home rule. We also explored the financial dimension of devolution. Opinions varied significantly among delegates regarding proposals and different forms of devolution. For example, Members of Parliament from Australia discussed devolution, and noted the comparative process in the United Kingdom. In 1979 proposals were put forward essentially to establish a Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, as currently exist. However, the initial proposals were defeated in qualified majority referenda in Wales and Scotland. Indeed, as Parliamentarians from Britain, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland assigned much weight to the demands of devolution as well as to demands for their own identities and decision making powers.

Through this discussion one has the impression that systems with a multitude of political parties are often intricate and that the complexities associated with proportional representation may not necessarily be the most effective approach to political systems for every state.

The subsequent session was on "The Electoral Commission." Delegates were impressed with Mr. James Younger, Chairman of the Electoral Commission. He provided a comprehensive overview of the independent body set up by the UK Parliament, which has as its expressed goal to ensure integrity and promote public

confidence in the democratic process. For example it registers political parties, ensures that the rules on party and election finance are understood and upheld, it publishes the sources of party and candidate funding, it establishes standards for running elections; and ensures the fairness of boundary arrangements for local government in England, among other things.

Since it serves as the conscience of the electoral system, the Electoral Commission has many responsibilities relating to the conduct of UK-wide, national and regional referendums held under the 2000 *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act*.

Upon this solid foundation, delegates exchanged views of what they had observed and raised questions about everything from as broad as the benefits of one system over another to more focused issues such as the value of policy approach over another to a shared issue. I had the honour to be elected by my colleagues to chair this session. Delegates from African member states raised the issue of foreign aid and development assistance programs. There were competing perspectives held by donor and recipient countries over issues such as recipients' perception of donor interference, the desire of donor countries to ensure that funds are indeed delivered and reach the intended recipients, etc.); we discussed challenges to the need to reconcile these positions, and to make foreign aid an instrument to advance the quality of life in recipient states, and to advance international peace and stability.

Our hosts superbly organized a seminar that allowed delegates to absorb both the political and physical majesty of the United Kingdom. After brief presentations in the Council House of Bristol, we were treated to a tour of the city, which included a unique harbour boat trip. Local government members shared their concerns about the challenges that municipalities face in gaining access to funding for various projects, among other issues. Britain's impressive history as a great world power truly came to life for me when we visited the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Dr. Gareth Griffiths, Director of the Museum, led an informal tour of the museum and the exhibition "Breaking the Chains." The exhibit highlighted the pioneering role of the UK in legislating against slavery. It was particularly interesting to witness the dynamic with many African colleagues present.

Our seminar shifted back in to high gear when we traveled to Cardiff, Wales. During our tour we visited the exquisite Opera House. We continued on a walking tour of the city, and visited the beautiful National Assembly of Wales that was opened on March 1, 2006. The complex is a grand architectural accomplishment in its own right but is also a grand reminder of the extraordinary natural assets that we possess as a country as the National Assembly is constructed of Canadian red wood.

On our return to Westminster, we continued the discussion on governance with a session on the "Role of the House of Lords." Baroness Hayman, Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, provided an interesting presentation on the role that the house plays in the British governance system. It was fascinating to learn of both the extent to which the House of Lords has not changed and at the same time the extent to which it has already evolved and continued to evolve. While some of the hereditary Lords remain, a new and more democratic selection process has been instituted, that is led by a non-partisan Commission. In effect, each party in the House of Commons submits

nominations for vacancies in the House of Lords as they arise. From these lists, the top tier candidates are interviewed and a final nomination is presented to the Prime Minister who accepts the decision of the Commission. The goal in part is that the House of Lords will become increasingly more representative of British society. Early results indicate these efforts are yielding some successes as the House of Lords is beginning to undertake local and national projects that reflect public views and invest in efforts that engage all aspects of society. Nevertheless, when one relates this to the issue of Senate reform in Canada, it brings into sharp focus how progressive our own system is, and how much more progressive Canada's system can be with an elected Senate.

The excitement of participating in the seminar and in discussing governance with commonwealth colleagues culminated with Question Period. It held a particular significance being Prime Minister Tony Blair's last Question Period as he left office the following week. Mr. Blair deftly fielded questions on everything from health care to immigration, from national security to the environment, and from income tax to the war in Iraq.

Listening to the line of questioning, it is plainly clear that democratic governance in the UK has not only endured but is indeed thriving. Westminster stands at the axis of a governance structure in which the Monarchy's presence can still be felt and which has an unwritten constitution as its defining quality. British democracy is buttressed by the role of common law, conventions, and consensus based on statutes. As with any democracy, there are advantages and disadvantages that emerge when a formal constitution is lacking, whether being the fact that government can suspend the rules virtually unencumbered by the weight of a Constitution, or being that governance can change to adapt to the emergence of a political and economic union across the Channel. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that democratic institutions remain strong.

In conclusion, discussions, observations, and individual exchanges, the CPA seminar, in my opinion, revealed the extent to which democratic governance in Britain that began two centuries ago carries significance in 2007 for me and my Commonwealth colleagues. Parliamentarians from Africa and developing countries shared their views on the social and economic gaps across Commonwealth states. The challenges that face emerging democracies, education, health, and poverty were regularly topics for conversation. In this context, the future of the Commonwealth also arose; overall, I am pleased to note that we share the view that the Commonwealth remains invaluable with an unparalleled capacity to provide vital ties for member states into the distant future.

I hope to keep in contact with other delegates to the CPA-UK seminar and I will do my part to work so that the seminar program endures. We all agreed that the CPA plays and can continue to perform an important role in encouraging the Commonwealth to become more vocal and active in international issues, speaking out about the importance of good governance through the role of parliamentary democracy, speaking about the about fundamental and shared values such as equality, human rights and tolerance.

Personally, it was a tremendous honour and privilege to represent the Canadian Parliament at this seminar. I hope to have opportunities to share my experiences with others who share my commitment to the policies and practices of good governance.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair for Mr. Dean Allison, M.P.  
Canadian Branch  
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	CPA UK Branch Seminar
<b>DESTINATION</b>	London and Bristol, England, as well as Brussels, Belgium
<b>DATES</b>	June 10-22, 2007
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Dean Allison, M.P.
STAFF	
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 2,814.00</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 487.12</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	
<b>MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 3,301.12</b>