

Canada – United Kingdom
Inter-Parliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire
Canada – Royaume-Uni

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Bilateral Visit to Belfast, Northern Ireland and
Edinburgh, Scotland**

**Canada–United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary
Association**

March 14 – 21, 2009

Report

The delegation was led by the Hon. David Smith, Senator, Past Chair of the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-parliamentary Association and included the following members of the delegation: Hon. Mike Duffy, Senator; Hon. Geoff Regan, MP; Raynald Blais, MP; Dean Del Mastro, MP; Pat Martin, MP and Stephanie Bond, Acting Executive Secretary of the Association.

The objectives of the visit included to:

- exchange on subjects of interest stemming from shared membership in multilateral organizations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
- discuss the current political dynamic in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Canada
- compare and contrast parliamentary systems
- explore the functioning of minority parliaments
- discuss the relationship between the federal and provincial governments within Canada and the powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and Westminster
- discuss the role of party politics and the approval of the budget
- discuss devolution of powers and any future devolution in terms of education, languages and taxation
- discuss improvements to parliamentary infrastructure

Northern Ireland

The visit commenced in Belfast at Stormont the home of the Northern Ireland Assembly on the occasion of the annual St. Patrick's Day event. The evening, hosted by Mr. William Hay, MLA, Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, celebrated the common ground that citizens of Northern Ireland share. Distinguished guests included Mr. Alex Fergusson, MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament; Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas, Speaker of the Welsh Assembly, as well as MLAs, members of the leaders in the ethnic minority communities and organizations that support new immigrants.

The overarching theme of the evening centered on the importance of both diversity and unity in the country. During his closing remarks, the host Speaker thanked Canada for its continued support to the Assembly. It was noted that Canada has played an integral role in training Assembly staff and providing advice on procedure, infrastructure and programs. Canada has also played a critical role in assisting the peace process. Among the Canadians who have played prominent roles in supporting reconciliation are Judge William Hoyt who serves on the panel of enquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday; retired Supreme Court of Canada Judge Peter Cory who examined the involvement of security forces in sectarian murders; former RCMP Assistant

Commissioner Al Hutchinson who served as Police Oversight Commissioner and is currently Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland; and former Chief of Staff of the Canadian Armed Forces, General John de Chastelain, who has served as Chairman of the International Commission on Arms Decommissioning since 1997. In addition, Canada has played a major role in training police officers in both the new Northern Ireland police force and through contributions to the International Fund for Ireland.

The delegation was greeted at Stormont by Deputy Speaker Francie Molloy, MLA, Sinn Fein. Following this, John Stewart, Director of Clerking and Reporting, provided an overview on the background of the Assembly and how the Assembly functions. Mr. Stewart provided details on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of April 1998 and the first election of June 1998. He explained that the Assembly sat from 1999-2002 before it was suspended and a second election was held in November 2004. The St. Andrews Agreement was reached in October 2006. The third election took place in March 2007 with the Assembly's powers being restored in May 2007. Mr. Stewart commended the Parliament of Canada for the support it has offered the Assembly in terms of training and the sharing of best practices throughout the years.

A discussion ensued on the breakdown of constituencies as well as the benefits of proportional representation and the first past the post systems Northern Ireland elections are based on proportional representation while Westminster operates on the first past the post system. The Assembly's calendar, house proceedings, standing orders, question period, and the administration of the Assembly were also discussed.

The delegation met with Mr. Simon Hamilton, MLA; Mr. David McClarty, MLA; Mr. Nelson McCausland, MLA; Mr. Stephen Moutray, MLA; Mr. Sean Neeson, MLA, and Rev. Robert Coulter, MLA, during a luncheon hosted by the CPA Northern Ireland Branch Executive Committee. Following the CPA luncheon, the delegation observed the Assembly Plenary from the galleries of the Chamber. Questions for Oral Answer on Monday, March 16 were directed to the Minister of Education.

Dr. Gareth McGrath, Director of Engagement for the Assembly, presented the Engagement Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Assembly wishes to further its engagement with the general public and defines this engagement as the process of giving the public a voice and enabling them to contribute to the democratic process. Voter turnout has significantly reduced from the last election, from approximately 80% to 59%.

According to Dr. McGrath, the concept of parliamentary engagement is relatively new to Northern Ireland due to the legacy of direct rule. As a result, there is a perceived disconnect between politics, democracy and the public. Therefore the challenge is to help develop and strengthen a new democratic and political culture. The strategy is based around four principles which engage MLAs, committees, news media, youth and the general public through a series of outreach activities and communication strategies. The Canadian delegation shared their experiences in regards to model parliaments, youth engagement and outreach.

The delegation had an open and informative discussion with members of the main political parties of Northern Ireland. Mr. David McClarty, MLA (Ulster Unionist Party); Mr. Sean Neeson, MLA (Alliance); Mr. Alban Maginness, MLA (Social Democratic and

Labour Party) and Mr. Mitchel McLaughlin, MLA (Sinn Féin) provided a thorough explanation of the current political dynamic in Northern Ireland. Given the shocking killings in the preceding week of two soldiers and one police officer by splinter groups, specifically, Continuity IRA and Real IRA, it was not surprising that the discussion centred on these recent events and the Assembly's response to the murders.

Each MLA described their party, their constituency and the political reality within their electoral boundaries. Mr. Maginness of the Social Democratic and Labour Party spoke of the past violence in his North Belfast constituency. Mr. Maginness then described the rebirth of the Assembly in May 2007 where the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin were able to reach an agreement which provided stability to the Assembly.

Mr. McClarty, MLA, Ulster Unionist Party stated that his constituency fortunately escaped the worst of the troubles. He spoke of the cross-community nature of his riding. Given that the Giant's Causeway is within his riding, tourism is a major source of revenue. Mr. McClarty, who has been a MLA since 1998, is politically optimistic about the future and sensed a will amongst the parties to move forward.

Mr. Sean Neeson, MLA and Former leader of the Alliance party, spoke of his long parliamentary career. First elected in 1977, Mr. Neeson explained the significance of the signing of the Good Friday agreement. Mr. Neeson also spoke of the election of Ms. Anna Lo as a move forward towards multiculturalism in Northern Ireland. Ms. Lo is the first parliamentarian born in China to be elected in Europe. He explained the cross cultural votes that are common within the Northern Ireland parliamentary system and the exclusion of smaller parties from these votes. Mr. Neeson then spoke of the tragic murders of the soldiers and police officer. He stated that despite these attacks, the important thing is that the communities responded in unison in opposition against what happened. He shared Mr. McClarty's optimism that the Assembly will continue to move forward.

Mr. Mitchel McLaughlin, MLA and former Chairperson of Sinn Féin, explained the situation in his riding, which is predominantly nationalist. He also explained that the recent killings of the soldiers took place in his riding. Mr. McLaughlin is also optimistic for the future of the Assembly and expressed his admiration for the response of political leaders and the broad public display of support for continued peace. He stated that in the not so distant past, the murders would have caused the Assembly to collapse. He believes that the all citizens must keep faith.

Senator Smith commented on the unity of the citizens and political leaders who spoke with one voice with conviction that would not be diverted. Senator Smith asked about the status of the Bloody Sunday report and the predicted public reaction upon the future release of report findings. The high cost of the report is an issue of concern and criticisms on the collection of evidence were discussed. It was agreed that for many, the results of the report will likely be unsatisfactory. The Earnes Bradley report was also discussed. The recommendation to provide families financial compensation for family members lost during the troubles is very controversial as it also provides compensation for the families of individuals who committed the attacks.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro, MP, commended the politicians from all parties for their strength and the obvious growth in democracy in Northern Ireland. Mr. Del Mastro then

commented on the peace walls and inquired as to the public's perception of the walls which separate Belfast communities. Mr. Maginness, MLA, responded by stating that it is the political leadership that must bring the walls down and that the process begins with continual improvements to community policing that the citizens feel are working for them. Mr. Sean Neeson, MLA, feels that an integrated school system would lessen the culture of segregation and that things are changing for the better. Mr. McClarty, MLA, then remarked that segregation is more prominent in urban centres and that it is not as common in ridings, such as his, where students are educated together. Senator Mike Duffy spoke to young people's use of technology to connect with each other. Mr. Mclaughlin, MLA, stated that many citizens cling to the idea that a wall provides protection, however, he noted that it also consolidates divisions. He believes that the removal of the walls must come from a call from the communities and not be dictated by politicians.

The role of religion in education was also discussed. Senator Smith provided a historic overview of religion in the Canadian school systems in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. The importance of teaching about all religions was agreed upon.

Mr. Raynald Blais, MP, stated that addressing the economic crisis is the challenge of the future for all Assemblies. Mr. Neeson, MLA, agreed that high unemployment is a major challenge and he fears that the situation may get worse before it gets better. He also stated that Northern Ireland should have taxation responsibility and that political stability in Northern Ireland is integral to attracting investment. Mr. Mclaughlin, MLA, stated that the Assembly does not have enough autonomy when it comes to fiscal policy. The economy of Northern Ireland is dominated by small and medium businesses which will be negatively affected by the weak economy and the movement of the manufacturing sector to developing countries.

Mr. Pat Martin, MP, commended the parliamentarians on their courage to meet the challenges of both the past and the present. Mr. Martin, MP, inquired as to whether there is an aspiration to increase the powers of the Assembly following devolution. Mr. McClarty, MLA, spoke of the need for Northern Ireland to control policing and justice. This transfer of power should take place in the near future. Senator David Smith spoke to his past visits to Belfast and the changes and improvements that he has witnessed. It was agreed that the current atmosphere within the Assembly, and among the citizens in Northern Ireland, is very positive.

The delegation attended a dinner hosted by the Assembly Commission. Rev. Robert Coulter, MLA; Mr. Paul Butler, MLA; Mr. Alban Maginness, MLA; Mr. Stephen Moutray, MLA; Mr. Trevor Reaney, Director General of the Assembly; Mr. Tony Logue, Clerk to the Assembly Commission; and Mr. Stephen Graham, Committee Clerk were in attendance.

The delegation met with Dr. Tim Campbell, Director of the Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick in County Down. As a non-profit organisation, the Saint Patrick Centre provides reconciliation education programs to thousands of children in Northern Ireland every year as well as running cross border and international youth programs. The Friends of Saint Patrick is a support organisation which is growing around the world to make people aware of the Centre's work and the new Northern Ireland.

Scotland

The program commenced in Edinburgh with a briefing from the Canadian Honorary Consul to Scotland, Mr. John Rafferty. Mr. Rafferty spoke of recent developments in the Scottish Parliament, including the abolishment of tuition fees for Scottish students and free care for the elderly, two extremely popular measures brought forth since devolution. Mr. Rafferty explained the electoral system and the complexity of the ballot sheet in the last election. The current governing party, the Scottish National Party, plans to hold a referendum in 2010 on the independence of Scotland. Off-shore oil reserves and renewable energy projects were also discussed. Mr. Rafferty provided an overview of the economic situation of Scotland and the recent troubles of the Royal Bank of Scotland. The legal systems of Scotland and Canada were contrasted. Mr. Rafferty also stated that British military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan was unpopular with the Scottish public. The delegation discussed fisheries in Scotland as well as the proposed ban on seal products. It was also noted that the problem of overfishing by foreign vessels remains a challenge.

The delegation was greeted at the Scottish Parliament by Ms. Margaret Neal, Secretary, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch. Ms. Neal provided a comprehensive briefing on devolution, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. Legislative and ministerial devolution took place in 1999 which included primary law-making powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the creation of the Scottish Executive including the First Minister and Cabinet.

The Scottish Parliament is based on four founding principles: the principles are: the Scottish Parliament should embody and reflect the sharing of power between the people of Scotland, the legislators and the Scottish Executive;

- the Scottish Executive should be accountable to the Scottish Parliament and the Parliament and the Executive should be accountable to the people of Scotland;
- the Scottish Parliament should be accessible, open, responsive and develop procedures which make possible a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation;
- the Scottish Parliament in its operation and its appointments should recognise the need to promote equal opportunities for all.

The powers of the UK Parliament (Westminster) in Scotland, referred to as *reserved* powers, include: the UK Constitution; foreign policy; defence; national economic and monetary policy (tax, VAT, currency control); immigration and asylum; social security; trade and industry; employment law; broadcasting, energy; national security and certain justice issues (e.g.: laws on drugs; firearms; terrorism, etc).

The powers of the Scottish Parliament, referred to as *devolved* powers, include: health; education; enterprise and business support; civil and criminal justice and the courts; law and order; agriculture and fisheries; transport (surface); local government; housing and planning; tourism, culture and sport; environmental protection; community and social development; and the tax varying power (+/-three % on the basic rate of UK income tax).

Mr. Leon Thomson, Corporate Affairs Manager Event for Scotland provided an overview of the Year of Homecoming. Homecoming Scotland 2009 is an events programme celebrating Scotland's great contributions to the world. The objectives of the Year of Homecoming are to: deliver additional tourism visits and revenue; engage and mobilize the Scottish Diaspora; celebrate Scotland's outstanding contributions in the world, and promote pride in Scots at home and abroad. In 2009, Scotland is welcoming visitors to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns' birth, the Scottish contributions to both golf and whisky, great minds and innovations as well as rich culture and heritage.

The delegation attended a luncheon hosted by the CPA Scotland Branch. In attendance were Jim Tolson, MSP; Nanette Milne, MSP; James Kelly, MSP; and Dave Thomson, MSP. Following the luncheon, the delegation met with Irene Oldfather, MSP; Charlie Gordon, MSP, and Michael Matheson, MSP; who are Members of the Scottish Parliament and the European and External Relations Committee. Mr. Charlie Gordon, MSP, explained the structure of the committee and the role of the European and External Relations Committee. The mandate of the Committee is to consider and report on proposals for European Communities legislation; the implementation of European Communities legislation; any European Communities or European Union issue; the development and implementation of the Scottish Administration's links with countries and territories outside Scotland, the European Communities (and their institutions) and other international organisations; and the co-ordination of the international activities of the Scottish Administration.

The parliamentarians exchanged on the relationships between the Canadian provincial assemblies and the federal parliament and the relationship between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. European Parliament policies on farming, fisheries, climate change and the seal hunt were discussed. Addressing the financial crisis, trade challenges and rising unemployment are priorities for all European parliaments. NATO's present and future involvement in Afghanistan was also explored.

The delegation met with Mr. Alex Fergusson, MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. The Presiding Officer welcomed the delegation and discussed the St. Patrick's event hosted by Speaker Hay held in Belfast earlier in the week. Mr. Fergusson commended Speaker Hay on his commitment to bringing all communities within Northern Ireland together. He also remarked on the kind words of thanks that Mr. Hay conveyed to Canada for the country's assistance in setting up the Northern Ireland Assembly. Mr. Fergusson reiterated that despite the recent tragic killings, the citizens and parliamentarians of Northern Ireland are united in their desire for peace. The reactions of the political leaders and the reaction of communities in refusing the shelter criminals are very positive for sustainable calm in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Fergusson spoke to the interesting atmosphere in the Chamber during the first half of the minority government parliament. The high approval rating of the public for measures such as the elimination of toll fees and tuition fees has been replaced by more public opposition to other government policies. The potential referendum on independence was discussed but given the difficult economic times, independence does not appear to be a priority for many citizens in recent polls. The government has initiated a wide-ranging National Conversation aimed at engaging the people of Scotland to make an informed decision on their future. The government suggests that

there are three principal choices to be considered in the National Conversation. The choices are: continuing with the current constitutional settlement with no or minimal change; extending devolved power in Scotland in areas identified during the National Conversation; or taking steps towards Scotland becoming a fully independent country. The National Conversation is intended to provide a platform for debate on Scotland's future. There is also a constitutional commission underway led by the opposition parties looking at all possibilities for the constitutional future of Scotland with the exception of full independence.

Senator Smith inquired as to the perception towards MSPs who carry a double mandate both in Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament. It was agreed that the dual mandate is largely frowned upon by the general public. The delegation discussed their program and their attendance at Question Period. Comparisons were drawn between the structure of Question Period and decorum in Canada and Scotland.

The delegation then attended a dinner hosted by the Presiding Officer, Alex Fergusson MSP. In attendance were Sandra White, MSP; Jamie Stone, MSP; David McLetchie, MSP; Bill Butler, MSP; Frank McAveety, MSP; and Linda Fabiani, MSP.

At a meeting with members of the Scotland Branch, CPA, Senator David Smith gave a presentation on the Canadian experience of minority parliaments. Attendees included Tricia Marwick, MSP; Sandra White, MSP; Sarah Boyack, MSP; Pauline McNeill, MSP; David Whitton, MSP; Murdo Fraser, MSP and Assembly officials. Senator Smith provided an overview of the past four elections, the recent budget and the proposal for a coalition. Scotland is experiencing its first coalition government. During the discussions, it was noted that minority governments beg the question of whether an election should be called each time a government is defeated. It was proposed that a solution to threat of continual elections is to minimize the matters that fall under issues of confidence. It was agreed that the role of the opposition parties in minority governments is enhanced greatly. Geoff Regan, MP, explained the role of the Governor General in an election call and the requirements for a change in the constitution if the move to a fixed election date was approved. Mr. Raynald Blais, MP, spoke to the role of the Bloc Quebecois in representing the interests of Quebecers. Mr. Blais spoke to the consecutive minority governments as a failure of the federal system which must be adjusted to be more conducive to cooperation.

The benefits of proportional representation were debated. Mr. Dean Del Mastro, MP, spoke to the need for electoral reform in Canada and the redistribution of seats. Discussion ensued on Senate reform, fixed election dates and the increased partisanship in committees. The concept of independence for Scotland and Quebec was discussed.

The delegation observed First Minister's Question Time in the Chamber.

A working luncheon was hosted by Deputy Presiding Officer Alasdair Morgan, MSP. Attendees included: Frank McAveety, MSP; Ted Brocklebank, MSP; Linda Fabiani, MSP; and Jamie Stone, MSP and provided the delegates the opportunity to continue exchanges on the similarities and differences between the Canadian and Scottish Parliaments. Following the working luncheon, the delegation met with Gil Paterson, MSP, Dave Thompson, MSP and Nanette Milne, MSP, Members of the Standards

Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. The delegation discussed parliamentary appointments, the role of the ethics officer and the declaration of potential conflicts of interests. The Committee requires MSPs to register and declare their interests to ensure openness and transparency. The Committee members provided an explanation of the code of practice for ministerial appointments. The meeting was followed by a dinner hosted by the CPA, Scotland Branch members, Christine Grahame, MSP; Jamie McGrigor, MSP; and Tavish Scott, MSP where issues of concern regarding the future direction of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association were discussed.

On the last day of the program in Scotland, the delegation met with officials from the National Library of Scotland and received a short presentation on the links between Canada and Scotland. A luncheon was held with the Scottish North American Business Council. Mr. Brian Taylor, Political Editor, News and Current Affairs of the BBC provided a presentation on the Scottish political situation. Attendees included members of Scottish North American Business Council from CBI Scotland; BDO Stoy Hayward, Scottish Enterprise; Burness, Metis Partners; Marsh Ltd; BBC and IOD Scotland.

Following the luncheon, the delegation met with Dr. James Kennedy, Dr. Michael Rosie, Dr. Paddy Bort and students of the Centre of Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Dr. Paddy Bort provided a comprehensive historical explanation of devolution. Dr. Bort spoke to the initiatives of the National Conversation and the Constitutional Commission tasked with reviewing the powers of the Scottish parliament. Dr. Michael Rosie gave a presentation on national identity in Scotland. The importance of multiculturalism in Canada and the strong ties between Scotland and Canada were highlighted.

In conclusion, the delegation wishes to extend its gratitude to Mr. William Hay, Speaker of Northern Ireland; Mr. Alex Fergusson, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament; parliamentary staff and citizens for their warm welcome throughout the official visit. The delegation wishes to thank Canada's Honorary Consul to Scotland, Mr. John Rafferty, who accompanied the delegation and provided welcome and sage advice. The delegation also would like to thank Ms. Stephanie Bond, Acting Executive Secretary to the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-parliamentary Group for her support and assistance in organizing the visit and accompanying the delegation.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Dick Harris, MP, Chair for
Hon. David Smith, Senator,
Leader of the delegation
Canada–United Kingdom
Inter-Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada–United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to Belfast, Northern Ireland and Edinburgh, Scotland
DESTINATION	Belfast, Northern Ireland and Edinburgh, Scotland
DATES	March 14 – 21, 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. David Smith (Leader of delegation) Hon. Mike Duffy
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Geoff Regan, PC, MP Raynald Blais, MP Dean Del Mastro, MP Pat Martin, MP
STAFF	Stephanie Bond
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 44,851.59
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 9,115.49
HOSPITALITY	\$ 917.97
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,086.77
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 887.40
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 293.78
TOTAL	\$ 59,153.00