

J. L. W. 9

12 April 1980

Agreement reached on Rock

Madrid, Apr 11.

Spanish officials today expressed satisfaction at the breakthrough in the long-standing Gibraltar dispute and indicated a quick end to restrictions placed on the British colony 11 years ago.

Following agreement with Britain yesterday to negotiate the future of the Rock, the officials predicted land and sea links between the Spanish mainland and the colony would be restored before the beginning of June.

The breakthrough followed talks in Lisbon between Spanish Foreign Minister

Marcelino Oreja Aguirre and British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington.

Official Spanish sources said a ferry service between Gibraltar and the southern Spanish port of Algeciras could be re-established within a fortnight.

The opening of the land frontier would follow later, perhaps initially for six hours a day, the sources said.

The late General Francisco Franco's Government sealed off the strategically situated colony to press its claim to the Rock, captured by the British in 1704 and ceded

"for ever" by Spain in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht.

The sources described Britain's agreement to negotiate the Rock's future in accordance with United Nations resolutions as a major development in the dispute.

But they said it was only the first of many steps towards settling the issue.

"We have not broken out the champagne but there is a feeling of great satisfaction that Britain has shown its willingness to negotiate," one official said.

Spanish reaction was tempered by the knowledge that

Britain inserted a clause in yesterday's joint declaration reaffirming its commitment to respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar.

In a referendum in 1967, the 25,000 Gibraltarians voted almost unanimously to stay British and anti-Spanish feeling has hardened with isolation.

In elections to the Rock's local Government in February last year, pro-British candidates swept the board and a party favouring accommodation with Spain failed to win a seat.

—Reuter.