

Common Market rights seen as first step to solution

All-party MPs urge Carrington to make new Gibraltar move

By Colin Brown,
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The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, was urged yesterday by an all-party group of MPs to take an important new initiative to solve the long-standing dispute with Spain over the sovereignty of Gibraltar.

He was unanimously recommended by the Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to offer Spain the same rights as Britain's Common Market partners as a first step to a settlement over the Rock.

The recommendations of such an influential committee will put enormous pressure on the Government to reach a settlement soon and there will be parallels drawn with Britain's position over Northern Ireland and its insistence that the majority should have the final say.

In Madrid, the Spanish government welcomed the MPs' report. The foreign ministry called the report "dispassionate and extensive" and said it reflected the Spanish position in many ways. He added that the Government read the report with "great satisfaction."

The committee sees Gibraltar, which first flew a British flag in 1711, eventually being handed over to Spain with guarantees of its own autonomy on similar lines to some of the Basque provinces, Catalonia, and other smaller areas of Spain.

The committee chairman, Sir Anthony Kershaw, said: "I think the Spanish must realise that we cannot sell Gibraltar down the river. On the other hand, Gibraltar must realise they have not got a permanent veto."

Sir Anthony, the Tory MP for Stroud, said: "We would like to see the restrictions on the border removed as soon as possible and, in order to do that, we think the British Gov-

ernment should make this gesture."

Spain is hoping to join the EEC by 1984, despite opposition in the past from France. But, by giving Spain the rights of EEC membership in advance Britain would effectively remove all trade and commercial barriers.

Britain would then expect the Spanish to reciprocate by removing the border restrictions which were imposed in the 1960s, culminating in the frontier closure by Spain in 1969. There has been speculation that because of Spain's intention to join NATO, the border is likely to be reopened in October this year. But the committee which took evidence from the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Ian Gilmour, has no evidence of this.

Sir Ian told the committee that when Spain joined the EEC it would be "inconceivable" that Spanish restrictions on Gibraltar should continue.

The committee concluded: "There is clearly no solution to a problem which has vexed relations between the UK and Spain for more than two centuries, but we believe that for a number of reasons the time is now ripe for some move forward."

In 1969 the Government gave Gibraltar an assurance that it would "never enter into arrangements under which the peoples of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes."

The Government was also urged to issue a formal assurance to the Spanish Government that on the same day that the border restrictions are lifted, negotiations on passing Gibraltar to Spain under the Lisbon agreement signed in 1980 will begin. The committee also wants to protect the military base and dockyards in Gibraltar