

BRITISH ST HELENA PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FORMED

by Trevor W. Hearl

An all-party St Helena group has been formed among Parliamentarians at Westminster. At its inaugural meeting, called by Michael Colvin, Conservation MP for Romsey on June 28, 1994, two of St Helena's Executive Councillors, Helen Thomas and John Newman, briefed members of Britain's three main political parties and of both Houses of Parliament on present concerns of St. Helenians.

Chief among the topics discussed was the question of citizenship, on which strong interest was expressed in the results of the Bishop's Commission. Other important subjects vigorously pressed included communications, the urgent need for a "shuttle-ship" and decision about an airport; the Constitution, to be reviewed to allow more democratic control over the executive; and a sustainable development program, ensuring resources to make St Helena more productive within the scope of its sustainable environment and development strategy, described by the Secretary-General of the Earth Summit as, "The first true plan for sustainable development anywhere in the world".

The formation of the British St Helena Parliamentary group was prompted, said Michael Colvin, after, "An impassioned plea for a greater understanding amongst Parliamentarians of the difficulties facing the Island" made by Councillor Helen Thomas at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in the Isle of Man recently for members of the British islands and Mediterranean group.

"St Helena's voice needs to be heard", was the message brought to Westminster by the two Councillors, where members of both Houses of Parliament deplored the lack of information from the Territory. Could they not be kept informed? The challenge was eagerly taken up by the Island's representatives, who looked forward to a CPA visit to St Helena with the hope that, given the Group's formation as a channel of communication with Westminster, St Helena's isolation would be effectively ended - at least from its homeland Parliament.

At the meeting, attended by over a score of members with as many more sending apologies, the officers elected were: Chairman, Michael Colvin (Cons. Romsey); Vice-Chairman, Gordon Oakes (Lab. Halton); Treasurer, Lord Beaumont of Whitley (Lib. Dem.); and Secretary, Sir David Mitchell (Cons. Hants NW), to whom all communications should be addressed at "House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA".

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