

SCOTLAND'S LAND reform campaign has lost one of its colourful combatants. Andrew Dingwall-Fordyce, the owner of an estate in Aberdeenshire and convenor of the Scottish Landowners' Federation, has been convicted of assaulting his wife. As a result, he resigned as spokesman for landlords because he did not want to harm their Federation's reputation.

Mr. Dingwall-Fordyce admitted the assault and was admonished by the sheriff. His wife Lucinda said that if her husband had lived in a council house he would have gone to jail.

Mr. Dingwall-Fordyce is a strong opponent of proposals to shift the tax burden off people's wages and on to the rental value of land. In an angry letter published in *The Glasgow Herald* (Sept. 17) he declared: "It seems to be open season again for landowners as your

Wife-Assault Laird Quits

correspondents queue to accuse us of having too much land and demanding we pay a tax on it.

"This suggestion of a wealth tax would be all very well if it took account of the ability to pay and also encompassed all wealth from every citizen in Scotland.

"The bias shown towards landowners shows a complete lack of understanding of the financial implications involved. Envy and jealousy are poor reasons for introducing more layers of taxation on those who own land; your correspondents should look to the benefits landowners deliver to the

community and the country at large before they seek to dismantle a structure of ownership by means of the back door".

THE CROWN accepted not guilty pleas to two other charges which accused the millionaire laird who owns 2,000 acres, of stamping on his wife's chest and pinning her to the ground with his foot and assaulting a young child by pushing him to the ground.

After the case Mr. Dingwall-Fordyce claimed he was the victim. He said his wife became hysterical. "I have always understood that medical advice was to slap someone in those circumstances.

"Men have to be protected from violent wives too. There are cases of violence out there but I am not a wife beater. I am a victim here".

4-PAGE REPORT ON THE BATTLE FOR LEGAL RIGHTS

Clause 56: the legal threat to Scots' land rights

John Digney



THE PRIORITY given to land reform by the Scottish Parliament is illustrated by the fact that the Feudal Tenure Bill was published in early October.

Unfortunately, it appears to pose a serious threat to the principle of conditionality in the holding of land titles. Clause 56 proposes the abolition of the Crown's role as Paramount Superior along with all other superiorities. This would diminish the public interest in the land resource. As has been noted by Robin Callander, an adviser to the Scottish Land Reform Convention (SLRC), "The Crown's position can be represented as the source of all ownership" and the Crown holds all land "in trust for the public and on behalf of the overall public interest".

Instead, the Bill proposes a system of simple (i.e. outright) ownership of land. Section 56 is causing concern, and the accompanying memorandum perhaps gives insight into the thinking behind it by referring to "property"

when it clearly means "land". Failure to make the distinction between land and man-made wealth inevitably leads to flawed analyses.

These issues, together with the inadequacies of the Community Right-to-Buy and Access legislation, are being addressed by the SLRC. Meetings with politicians and civil servants are being sought. A major conference is arranged for November at Stirling University with Canon Kenyon Wright as Keynote Speaker. This will incorporate 13 workshops covering a wide range of land reform issues, rural and urban.

The SLRC is expected to operate for three years. It was formed over a year ago to provide a civic forum to interact with Parliament on land reform matters. Participants in the Convention represent a wide range of interests, but are united by the core principles of Sovereignty, Democracy, Social Justice and Stewardship.

The Convention meets every few weeks

under the Chairmanship of Alison Elliot from ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland), one of the four founding partners. The other three are COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), SCVO (Scottish Convention of Voluntary Organisations) and STUC (Scottish Trades Union Congress).

Comparisons have been made between the SLRC and the Constitutional Convention, which played a vital role in the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. However, land reform was already on the Government agenda when the SLRC was formed, and its role is therefore to expand and develop the debate.

John Digney is a Director of Land Reform Scotland. He is a member of the Steering Team of the Scottish Wild Land Group, which is a member of Scottish Environment Link (SEL), the liaison body for over 30 environmental and countryside recreation organisations. He represents SEL on the Scottish Executive's Consultative Panel on "Information about Land". Last September this panel met with Angus MacKay, the Deputy Justice Minister, to discuss the creation of a database on land ownership in Scotland.