



## EDINBURGH Taxing questions

The prospect of the devolution of political power to a Scottish Assembly after the next general election is raising questions about the future of property rights and fiscal policy.

Premier John Major claims that the Labour Party's plans to create an Assembly in Edinburgh would result in new taxes but the Tory leader has not recognised an even greater threat to his Conservative philosophy. For such a prospect raises the possibility of an entirely new kind of tax base - one that draws revenue from the rent of land.

This policy was advocated by Andy Wightman, author of *Who Owns Scotland* (Canongate) in an article in *Scotland on Sunday* (Nov. 24). He asked: "With high levels of unemployment why do we then continue to tax labour? Why indeed do we continue to tax capital when we need more investment? Why not tax land values instead?"

Mr Wightman noted that revenue from the rental value of land in Britain was sufficient to abolish income tax. "Economists, however, have routinely ignored land rental values as being a distinctive and measurable component of national income; and yet they are a potentially attractive source of taxation revenue."

Land rights have become a major social issue in Scotland, and the arguments for a review now extend beyond purely economic considerations.

☒ Loughborough University researcher Hayden Lorimer told the Royal Geographical Society on January 7 that Scottish landowners had created a myth about the history of deer stalking in order to justify the retention of 3.4m acres as a wild game reserve. Meanwhile, he said, people who needed jobs were excluded from this land in the Scottish highlands.

☒ Crofters who were driven by the highland clearances to the islands on the edge of the Scottish mainland now find themselves increasingly in conflict with their landlords. The latest case is now before the courts, in which James McKinnon is trying to retain his

farm on Arran against moves to evict him by Lady Jean Fforde. The owners of the 16,000 acre Arran estate have refused to disclose why they want to re-possess the land from their tenant, but it is assumed by the local community that the land would be turned into a stag shooting business.

## JOHANNESBURG Sue the Queen?

In other parts of the world - like Canada, Australia and New Zealand - indigenous peoples have begun to receive compensation for the colonial land grabs that destroyed their livelihoods and cultures. But the first initiative in South Africa is only now about to take place, with the mixed-blood Griqua claiming £1.4bn in damages from the Queen of England.

From the beginning of the 18th century the Griqua people were pushed from the Cape deeper into the hinterland, used by the British to clear the land before appropriating it for themselves. The Griqua also plan a £1.2bn law suit against De Beers, alleging that the company stole their diamonds.

The Griqua National Conference want the Mandela government to return vast tracts of land to them. But the government's reply is that, because the land grabs occurred before the 1913 Land Acts, the grievances cannot be dealt with under the constitution which the president signed in a Sharpeville ceremony in December.

## CARMEL Self-interest (1)

Hollywood hero Clint Eastwood has evicted a sculptor from land outside the small Californian coastal town where he was once mayor. Eastwood took Phil Shapter to court to evict him from land which the actor had bought for redevelopment. Shapter claimed that he owned the land, having bought it for \$1 ten years ago. He was arrested for trespass with intent

to live. His title to the land, and the claim to squatter's rights, were rejected and he was imprisoned. Said Shapter:

"He took the land because he wanted it for building permits and to use it for water rights for a housing development. I'm against it because we have a water shortage here".

## KARACHI Self-interest (2)

Pakistan's former international cricketer Imran Khan has no doubt about the roots of his country's political problems. The country is not poor, he claimed in an article published in the London *Daily Telegraph* on November 18; it was poorly managed. He then added:

"So why the present crisis? Our problems began almost immediately after independence in 1947, when feudal landlords obtained a stranglehold on Pakistani politics. They have consistently had only one ideology - self-interest. To protect their privileges, they have collaborated with military dictators, socialists, capitalists, even using Islam for their benefit".

## DARWIN Land battle (1)

Australia's Aboriginals plan to lodge a land claim which covers the city of Darwin in the Northern Territory. According to the Aboriginals' Northern Land Council this was the first such demand to encompass an Australian provincial capital. The Larrakia people have begun legal proceedings which involve claims to under-developed government land which includes beaches, parks, creeks and nature reserves. They plan to seek compensation for past and future development of their traditional lands.

## BELIZE Land battle (2)

Foreign aid from Britain to build a

road in this central American state threatens a large area of rain forest and may trigger a land battle with Maya Indians. Communal lands are to be taken over by loggers for use as banana and citrus plantations. The road is said to be necessary in order to "capitalise on the growth potential of the area", according to the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington. More than half Belize's 21,000 Maya Indians live in the Toledo district. The chairman of their Cultural Association said: "our Maya culture is tied in with the land and without our land our culture will be lost." He said that they did not want the money to be invested until their lands were secured. "There is no hurry for this road - we have survived here for centuries without it."

## LONDON Air Rents

A price for the right to temporarily occupy air-space over Heathrow Airport has been identified as a result of the plan by British Airways to form an alliance with American Airlines. To prevent monopoly influence over trans-Atlantic flights, BA is being told that one option would be for it to sell 168 landing slots. According to press reports, the figure of £180m for 98 movements has been mentioned as a likely price. BA would also receive money from leasing the remaining 70 slots.

## CALI Kingpin crisis

During their heyday, the Colombia drug cartels lavishly loaned money to businessmen at low rates of interest. That led to a property boom. And to launder their profits, the drug barons invested in real estate in Bogota and Medellin. But the government's tough anti-drugs campaign has resulted in the imprisonment of some of the drug kingpins. That has resulted in a cut-back in investments in enterprises such as construction, creating a recession: Cali has a 15% unemployment rate, one of the highest in the country.