

# S OF MONEY

over something that has been magnificently thrown up by the forces of nature and which seem to go beyond all reasonable sense of what the concept of ownership might be."

But to question the authenticity of MacLeod's title deeds may be in some sense to authenticate the concept of the 'ownership' of land. Still, the *West Highland Free Press* went on to quote Alasdair Morrison, the Scottish Executive's Highlands and Islands Minister: "The matter raises the wider issue of how some clan chiefs became private landowners. I hope that this episode can shed light on that great mystery."

But enough light has surely already been provided to answer that question. Professor Cosmo Innes – "a significant 19th century lawyer and specialist in feudal record" – had concluded: "I do not suppose that any cruelty or injustice was premeditated by the legislature or the Government – that there was any intention to favour the rich at the expense of the poor, but there are things in the history of our law that I cannot help censuring – the more because I believe the evil was for the most part attributable to the straining of the law by lawyers"

The "law" has been perverted by lawyers at the behest of the 'owners' of the planet earth. The law's roots have been wrenched from the soil of their sustenance; and their purpose has been denied – to guide and enlighten the common people. It must stop.

MacLeod's ancestors were never given the land. Rather, the land was granted to them *on condition*, with the conditions compensating the Crown for its loss. And, as everywhere else in Scotland, the landlords' side of the bargain has long since been argued away. It is time to argue it back, and to reassert the landlord's duty to the public interest.

Scotland is now making new law, and has the will and means to make good law. Our new law must be in the interest of the people of Scotland: law that must protect what is the public's to own, as well as the individual's.

And it must start the process of redefining exactly what those public rights and interests are in the land and our other natural resources. Then we can retrieve all those things annexed by our history, to private interests, in days when our enlightenment in such matters was less than it is today.

## The Will to Power?

Geoffrey Lee assesses a book about the land of Scotland

SCOTLAND is peculiar in that it is the last country in the developed world to have a feudal system of land tenure as well as having the most concentrated pattern of private ownership in Europe (and possibly in the world).

Of the privately owned rural land:

- ☒ One-quarter is owned by 66 landowners with estates of 30,700 acres or more;
- ☒ Half is owned by 343 landowners in estates of 7,500 acres or more; and
- ☒ Two-thirds is owned by 1,252 landowners in estates of 1,200 acres or more.

This means that in a country of 19 million acres and 5 million people, a mere 1,252 landowners (0.025% of the population) possess two-thirds of the privately owned rural land.

calls a "tangled web of power and influence".

Now that there is a Scottish Parliament surely reforms can be made? Westminster could never succeed in this task because the House of Lords blocked any such proposals. The new House of Lords will have no role in the enactment of legislation emanating from the Scottish Parliament. However, the question arises as to whether the Parliament has the political will to make radical changes.

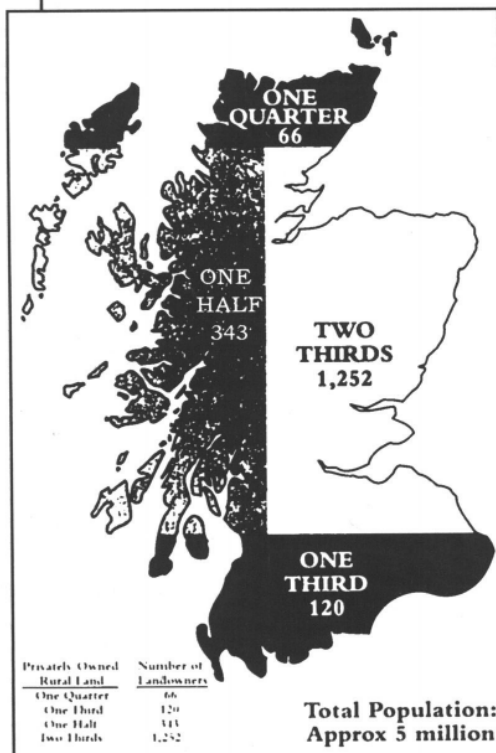
Andy Wightman feels that the government and opposition proposals for land reform so far, whilst of some utility, are based largely on flawed analyses, shallow, short-term politics, timidity and poverty of imagination. Not, he claims, wholly the fault of politicians, but because of the lack of informed debate and general ignorance of the land situation. This excellent book remedies the last point.

His 10 proposals include: a new land tenure system that acknowledges responsibilities as well as rights; land value taxation; national information on ownership and occupation; a ban on offshore trusts and companies and private trusts.

What Andy Wightman has not recognised is that if full 100% LVT was introduced many of his proposals would be redundant. Land owners could no longer afford to hold thousands of acres out of use so there would be a natural break-up of large estates. Off-shore trusts and absentee landlords would no longer be able to dodge payment of taxes because LVT is unavoidable.

LVT is a wonderful instrument for untangling the web of power and influence about which Wightman complains. This book itself is a wonderful instrument to place in the hands of the Scottish Parliament for them to see the light and hopefully to take action.

\* *Scotland: Land & Power*, Edinburgh: Luath Press, £5.



Andy Wightman makes this the central theme of his latest book.\* He lists the names of inter-related families, starting with the Queen Mother, whose land-holdings create what he