

...Round the world...

EDINBURGH Scott's land

AN INDEPENDENT investigation into land tenure is to be chaired by Prof. Allan MacInnes, head of the history department at Aberdeen University. Academics, economists and environmentalists are joining crofters to probe Scotland's land tenure which, legally, is based on the feudal system.

The commission's clerk, Stephen Noon, says that "We're the only country in the world that still has a feudal land system. Our land law dates back 600 years. It's creaking and in radical need of reform. People don't realise that there is somebody who is their feudal superior who could repossess their house because they have breached some element of the feudal charter and duty".

The Scottish National Party, which wants independence from Britain, is backing the commission, which is to collate evidence during a country-side tour.

LONDON No vacancies!

IT HAS stood empty for nine years: a landmark property in the heart of London on the south side of the River Thames, opposite the House of Commons. The London School of Economics offered £65m for the building, but it was eventually sold to a Japanese property company for £50m!

The absence of fiscal pressure to use the headquarters of the defunct Greater London Council - closed down by Margaret Thatcher when she was Premier of Britain - has enabled Shirayama Shokusan Ltd. to announce that the building was bought

as an investment and may not be redeveloped for another 20 years.

LLUBLJANA Geopolitics

A TERRITORIAL dispute between Italy and Slovenia has been settled, but only after the Italians exercised its muscle - as a member of the European Economic Union - to extract concessions from the former Soviet republic. The Slovenes had a law that prohibited the sale of land to foreigners. The Italians strongly objected, and warned that it would block attempts to admit the Slovenes into membership of the EU if they did not change the land law - a concession to which they finally acceded, so that they could continue to sell goods to their European neighbours.

BRUSSELS Farm fraud

EUROPE'S farmland owners are ripping off taxpayers to the tune of about 10% of the £31 billion spent every year on the Common Agricultural Policy. Last year, the European Union uncovered more than £820m of fraud, which Members of the European Parliament say is just a fraction of the money siphoned off by farmers.

The rackets include:

- claiming subsidies for grubbing up olive trees in Italy. The farmers just moved their trees from one field to another.
- payments to Corsican farmers who had fewer cows than they claimed: they moved the cows from one farm to another.
- subsidies to farmers to stop growing grapes used for poor-quality table wine. The Court of Auditors says that farmers did not pull up their vineyards.

• subsidies to Italian farmers for 4.2m acres of durum wheat, when they planted only 1.9m acres.

Now satellites are being used to scan the European landscape to try and detect the frauds.

RICHMOND Giveaway land

PRIME building sites totalling 211 acres on the south-west fringe of London have been given away for a tenth of their value (£475,000), according to Twickenham Labour Party researchers. Richmond Council has granted a 999-year lease for a small payment and a peppercorn rent of £2 a year. One of the conditions was that the land should provide access to the public to a golf course, but a sign warns: "Private. No public right of Way".

• The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has compiled a report to warn the British government that its large-scale land privatisation programme threatens the property market. Sales are on such a massive scale that the government is not receiving the best possible prices.

DORCHESTER Princely song

THE TORY MP for Dorchester was furious when he heard that school children were staging a play on April 20 that satirised the heir to the throne. The improvised play by Dorchester Youth Theatre featured observations like "sit back and collect the rent" and lyrics by songwriter Peter Thorogood which asked: "Is HRH a hero, or is he off his trolley?"

The play, *An Order'd Estate*, poked fun at the prince's attempt to build a village on the edge of the Dorset town that conformed

to traditional architectural principles - culled mainly from a medieval agrarian milieu - and which offered homes for people of all income levels.

Controversy flared, however, when owners of high-priced homes on the estate, called Poundbury - built on land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall - found that their neighbours included one-parent families whose rents were subsidised by a charity.

SYDNEY Land rights

ON MARCH 27 the aboriginal peoples of Australia formally demanded compensation for the loss of their land and the dispersal of their people since the arrival of European colonists 200 years ago.

WASHINGTON Some joke!

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton has turned into a joke the Whitewater land scandal, for which he is being investigated. "The First Lady wishes she could be here tonight," he quipped at the annual Gridiron dinner for Washington's media, adding: "If you believe that, I've got some land in Arkansas to sell you."

LONDON Swings and roundabouts

PROPERTY developers Regalian paid a record £21.5m for two-thirds of an acre in Kensington at the height of the land boom in 1987. Regalian built a block of 16 apartments priced between £2m and £7.5m. Then the bottom fell out of the market, with land prices collapsing by 50%. But the market (in strategically located areas of the capital) has now recovered, and the first resale of one of the apartments has reaped a 40% profit for its owner.

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