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#### Submission in response to call for evidence by the Scottish Land Reform Review Group

**The Centre for Human Ecology is an independent academic institute, network and registered charity based in Glasgow, Scotland, with an international membership of graduates and fellows. It exists to stimulate and support fundamental change towards ecological and social justice through education, action and research, drawing on a holistic, multidisciplinary understanding of environmental and social systems.**

**The Centre has a long-standing interest in land reform in Scotland. CHE Fellow Alastair McIntosh was a founding member of the Isle of Eigg Trust which was influential in the process eventually leading to the community ownership of the island.**

#### SUBMISSION

Part of the case for land reform has to do with the need to cultivate the resilience, resourcefulness and character of the Scottish people. We do not mean that in any narrowly ethnic sense of what it means to be a Scottish people. We do mean it in the sense of a nation being community writ large, and Scotland as a community of place that is geographically constellated but not culturally limited.

The strength of a nation is a function not just of its natural resources, access to markets, or level of industrial organisation, but also the qualities inherent in its peoples. Traditionally the strength of Scottish people can be attributed in considerable measure to our connection with the land and sea. Not for nothing was it that throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Outer Hebrides was said to send more children to university per head of the population than any other part of the UK. Island people did well in the world because of the resilience, resourcefulness and character that were required for sheer survival, and then transmitted culturally. Connection with the land fosters this. Disconnection diminishes it. In the big picture this has to be a driver for land reform. It will give heart, head and backbone to the future nation.

Evidence for this is apparent in places like Eigg where reconnection with the land through community ownership has enable young people to come back and find a context in which their worth can be expressed in the community. Having their own land – both a building plot and roles to play in the wider structures of community self-management – gives them dignity, and raises their capacity for responsibility (the ability to respond).

Professor Donald Meek and Dr James Hunter have both drawn attention to the role of the church in 19<sup>th</sup> century land reform. That role has continued into the modern era, as Dr Alison Eliot knows from first hand contributions. We attach a paper written on this by a former student and a fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology (Henneman & McIntosh, *The Political Theology of Modern Scottish Land Reform*, 2009). This indicates the depth from which land reform comes, and by implication, suggests the depth to which it might influence the deeper formation of character.

Andy Wightman in *The Poor Have No Lawyers* devotes a chapter to the Reformation, pointing out that in 1560 half of Scottish land revenues were collected by the church. However, and he draws a lot here on the former Scottish Secretary Tom Johnston, Knox's hope that these revenues could be redirected towards funding a church of the people, a school in every parish, and relief for the poor and unemployed was subverted by our Scots "noble" families. The Reformation went through, but power took the land, and this continues today, with much of the benefit of renewable energy from the land being exported as power going elsewhere. A burning question must be how to redress this historical injustice, which is not just historical because it continues in the inequalities of the present day, limiting the ability of Scottish people to stand on our own feet.

Our suggestion is that Land Value Taxation should be introduced, but with democratic local community trusts made exempt. The proceeds of LVT would then be used for future buyouts, thereby taxing landlordism progressively to bring about its own clearance. Until their abolition in the 1990s sporting rates were in place and the records on these could offer a starting point for assessment.

Powerful voices will raise all manner of objection to this proposal. But these are precisely the voices that have historically kept our communities disempowered, thereby impoverishing the people. Land reform must tackle this injustice. As Lord Sewell said, it must be "a rolling process."

Alastair McIntosh

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